

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the 2025 ad hoc visit to Hungary, the CPT delegation examine the treatment and detention conditions of persons held at Tiszalök and Szombathely National Prisons. The cooperation received by the delegation throughout the visit, both from the national authorities and staff in the establishments visited, was excellent.

The CPT notes that as a result of the growing prison population and a decrease in the capacity of the prison estate, the occupancy rate of the prison estate stood at approximately 116%, with the vast majority of prisons in the country operating either above or very close to their official capacity.

It should be recalled that during the 2023 visit, the CPT received numerous credible allegations of physical ill-treatment of prisoners by staff at Tiszalök Prison. It is a matter of grave concern that a number of prisoners interviewed by the Committee during the 2025 ad hoc visit alleged that physical ill treatment had continued (and was a regular occurrence) even after the 2023 visit.

However, according to the prisoners interviewed at Tiszalök Prison during this visit, the situation had considerably improved recently, which was attributed to the change in the management of the establishment in November 2024.

Nevertheless, the delegation still received a few allegations of physical ill-treatment of prisoners by staff which concerned the end of 2024 and the beginning of 2025, such as a punch to the ribs and kicks to various parts of the body by prison officers. It also heard several allegations of verbal abuse of prisoners by staff.

The CPT fully understands that changing the culture in an establishment and ensuring that all staff, including frontline staff, fully comply with the new approach in their daily operation takes time. At the same time, there is a high risk of relapsing to the deeply entrenched attitudes, which would appear to have existed for several years. Consequently, the Committee recommends that the Hungarian authorities build on the recent promising developments at Tiszalök Prison and provide full support to the management of the establishment in their efforts to eradicate ill-treatment of prisoners by staff.

As regards Szombathely Prison, the majority of prisoners with whom the delegation spoke during the 2025 visit made no complaints about staff. Nevertheless, the delegation did receive a few allegations of physical ill-treatment (such as pushing, slaps, kicks and a blow with a hard object). Further, it heard a number of allegations of disrespectful behaviour and verbal abuse, including of a racist and homophobic nature.

As regards investigations into allegations of ill-treatment, the majority of cases of alleged ill treatment of prisoners by staff reported from Tiszalök Prison between 2018 and 2024 were either terminated as no criminal offence could be established on the basis of the available evidence or because the act did not constitute a criminal offence. Moreover, investigations into several cases which dated back to 2020 or 2021 were still pending at the pre-trial stage of the proceedings. This raises concerns as to the effectiveness and expeditiousness of the investigations.

Moreover, some persons met during the visit who alleged to the delegation that they had been ill-treated by prison officers stated that the presence of prison officers during their medical examination in an outside hospital had prevented them from indicating the cause of their injuries to the medical professionals. They also claimed that their injuries had not been recorded. In addition, in particular at Szombathely Prison, the medical records maintained by the establishment's healthcare staff did not contain an adequately detailed description of injuries.

The Hungarian authorities should take the necessary steps to ensure that investigations into allegations of ill-treatment of prisoners by staff are carried out effectively and, in particular, comply with the requirements of thoroughness, comprehensiveness, promptness and expeditiousness. Most notably, this will imply

timely gathering of the necessary evidence, including properly recorded medical evidence (under conditions guaranteeing medical confidentiality), CCTV and body-worn cameras footage, and witnesses statements.

The findings at Tiszalök Prison indicate that there used to be a practice of placing violent, agitated or recalcitrant prisoners in padded cells for up to eight hours. Throughout that time, their hands were restrained behind their back with metal handcuffs attached to a belt, and they were also ankle-cuffed. They were lying in a prone position in only their underwear, with their knees bent and the hand- and ankle-cuffs connected by a chain behind their back.

The CPT considers that such use of padded cells and hand- and ankle-cuffs is totally unacceptable and it formulates a series of principled measures which should be respected. In particular, the placement in isolation should always be for the shortest possible time (usually minutes rather than hours) and the prisoners concerned should be offered regular and frequent human contact by staff supervising them. Further, the CPT considers that there is no justification for additional means of restraint, such as hand- and ankle-cuffs, to be applied to a violent or agitated prisoner isolated in a padded cell. By no means should prisoners be restrained in a hyper-extended position, with hand- and ankle-cuffs linked behind their back with a chain and their knees bent.

At Szombathely Prison, violent or agitated prisoners were hand- and ankle-cuffed to a bed with metal cuffs. The CPT considers that, as a matter of principle, the persons concerned should never be shackled to a bed or any other fixed object. Instead, they should be kept under close supervision in an appropriate setting.

Material conditions in both establishments were satisfactory in many respects and most premises seen by the delegation were in a good state of repair. However, at Tiszalök Prison, some double-occupancy cells were accommodating three persons due to the exceeded capacity of the establishment; the conditions in these cells were somewhat cramped because of the need to put a third bed in the cell.

On 1 March 2024, a new classification system of sentenced prisoners into categories I to V was introduced in Hungarian prisons. The classification into a category determines many areas of life in prison, including possibilities to participate in education and other activities, unlocking and locking up of cells and the amount of out-of-cell time.

In both establishments visited, efforts were made to provide prisoners with activities, such as work, education, vocational training, and various reintegration programmes. However, due to the lack of opportunities, a number of prisoners were not provided with work or did not regularly participate in any organised activity. Moreover, in both establishments visited, the ratio of women engaged in work was lower than the ratio for men. In addition, in both establishments, many prisoners in categories IV and V neither worked nor participated in education. This fact, in combination with the restrictive daily regime applied to them meant that they were locked up in their cells for up to 23 hours per day. The Hungarian authorities should continue their efforts to develop further the programme of activities offered to prisoners.

As regards prisoners placed in the HSR unit at Tiszalök Prison, the CPT notes with satisfaction that prisoners who presented challenging or dangerous behaviour, or who needed protection from others, were no longer placed in this unit; the unit was now accommodating prisoners with long sentences, in line with its original purpose.

Although material conditions in the unit were mostly acceptable, several shortcomings identified during previous visits persisted: the windows were fitted with opaque plexiglass panes, preventing an outside view, and transparent plexiglass panels were still mounted to the inner bars in the cells. Further, all cells in the HSR units were equipped with CCTV cameras, the regime provided to HSR prisoners remained impoverished and the outdoor exercise yards were small and oppressive. Moreover, HSR prisoners were still systematically handcuffed whenever they left their cell. The Committee reiterates several recommendations to the Hungarian authorities to remedy these shortcomings.