

# **COVID -19: Challenges, lessons and strategies for the future**

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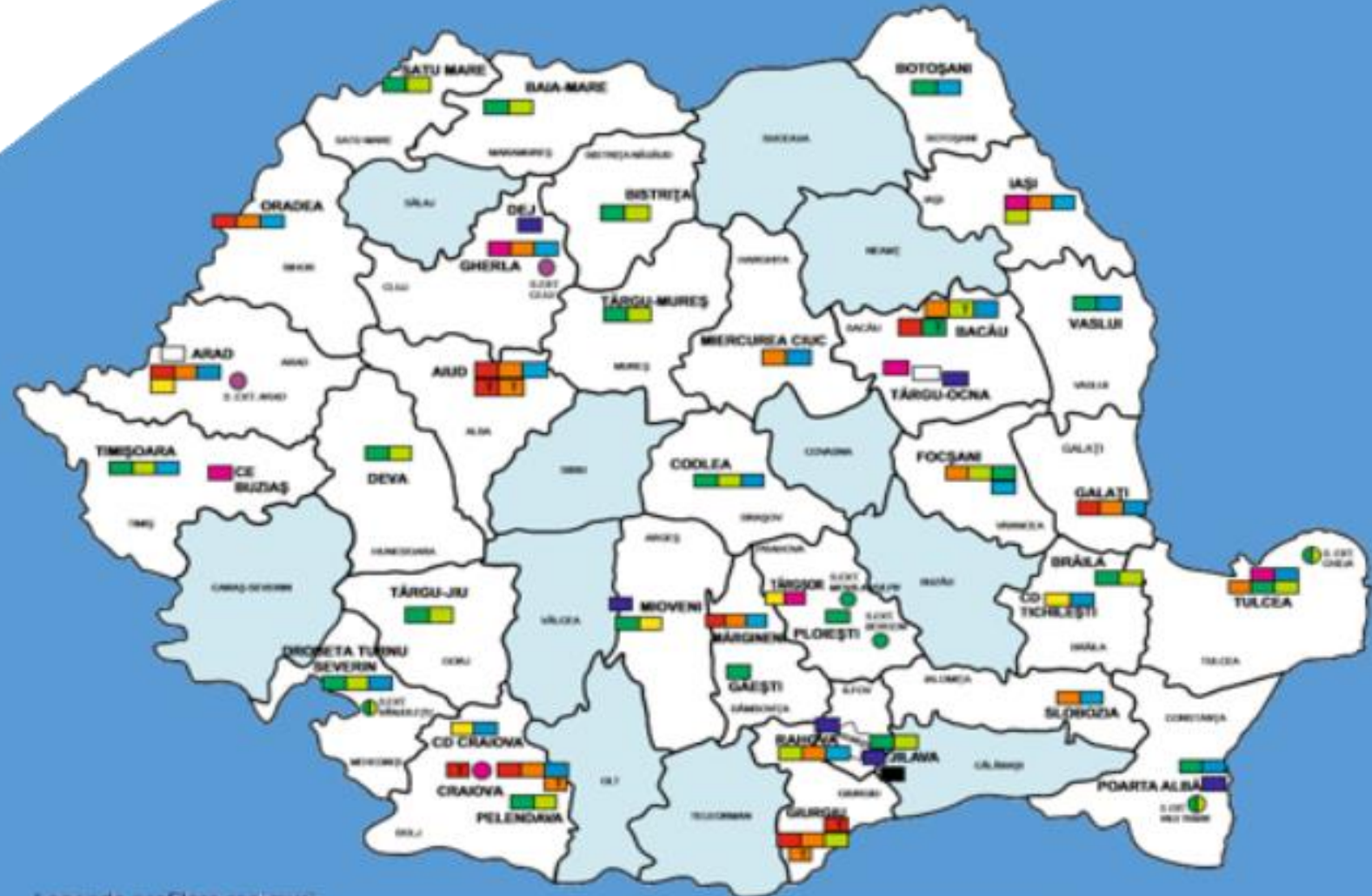
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## CONTEXT:

- The epidemiological events taking place since the outburst of the pandemic within the prison system have been limited to **sporadic cases of infection among the staff**, thus **being able to ensure continuity in the specific activities**.
- It is important to mention that, from the beginning of the epidemiological context, up to the end of September 2020, for approximately 7 months, **in the prison administration system there were no confirmed cases of COVID-19 among inmates** (*except 7 imported cases, brought in from the Pre-Trial Arrest and Detention Centers of the Ministry of Home Affairs, already confirmed with COVID-19 before entering the penitentiary system (i.e. București-Jilava Prison Hospital)*).
- Starting with the end of September, simultaneously with the dramatic increase in the COVID-19 cases at the national level, **the first confirmed COVID-19 cases were registered among the incarcerated population**, which created a challenge to the entire prison staff involved in the fight against COVID-19.

21,500 inmates  
11,949 staff (on 08.11.2020)

PENITENCIARE ROMÂNIA - PROFILARE REGIMURI



Legenda profilare regimuri

PENITENCIAR SPITAL	S.A.G.R.	REGIM ÎNCHIS	MĂSURĂ EDUCATIVĂ CU EXERCITIU SAU CONTINUAREA A EXERCITIULUI ÎN PENITENCIAR
CENTRU EDUCATIV	SECȚIE EXTERIOARĂ	REGIM MAXIMĂ SIGURANȚĂ	TINERI

### Early measures:

Since the very beginning of the SARS-CoV-2 epidemiological context in Romania, at the end of February 2020, a **Technical-Medical support group has been established**. It has been in charge with monitoring the situation in the subordinated facilities and proposing measures depending on the evolution of the epidemiological context.

**A Plan of Measures to prevent the contamination and the spread of COVID-19 infection among the staff and the inmates has been adopted and implemented at the prison system level:**

- *General prevention measures,*
- *Intervention measures,*
- *Crisis intervention measures.*



**Early measures (*end of February 2020*):**

- **As first measures for protecting inmates' health, the contact of the prison population with possible infection sources was limited, by suspending some of the activities taking place outside the units.**
  - **For the accommodation and medical monitoring of the inmates extradited to Romania by other states, at the prison system level, certain penitentiary units were specially designated for implementing quarantine in such circumstances.**
- **Measures were taken to careful monitor the health condition of all inmates who have returned from the prison furlough, within a 14-day interval.**
- **Another measure consisted in identifying of new spaces for quarantine, monitoring, respiratory isolation for the inmates who, after an epidemiological screening, would turn out to have symptoms specific to the new coronavirus infection.**
  - **Additional measures for maintaining the continuity of the activities and preventing the spread of the new coronavirus have been decided.**



### **Emergency state and alert state- Legal framework:**

- **Presidential Decree no. 195/16.03.2020 on declaring the state of emergency in Romania;**
- **Presidential Decree no. 240 dated 14 April 2020 on ordering the extension of the state of emergency in Romania;**
- **Law no. 55 dated May 15, 2020 on some measures on preventing and fighting the effects of COVID-19 pandemic.**



**01**

**Guidelines were provided for implementing social distancing measures and limiting the contact between prison officers and inmates.**

**02**

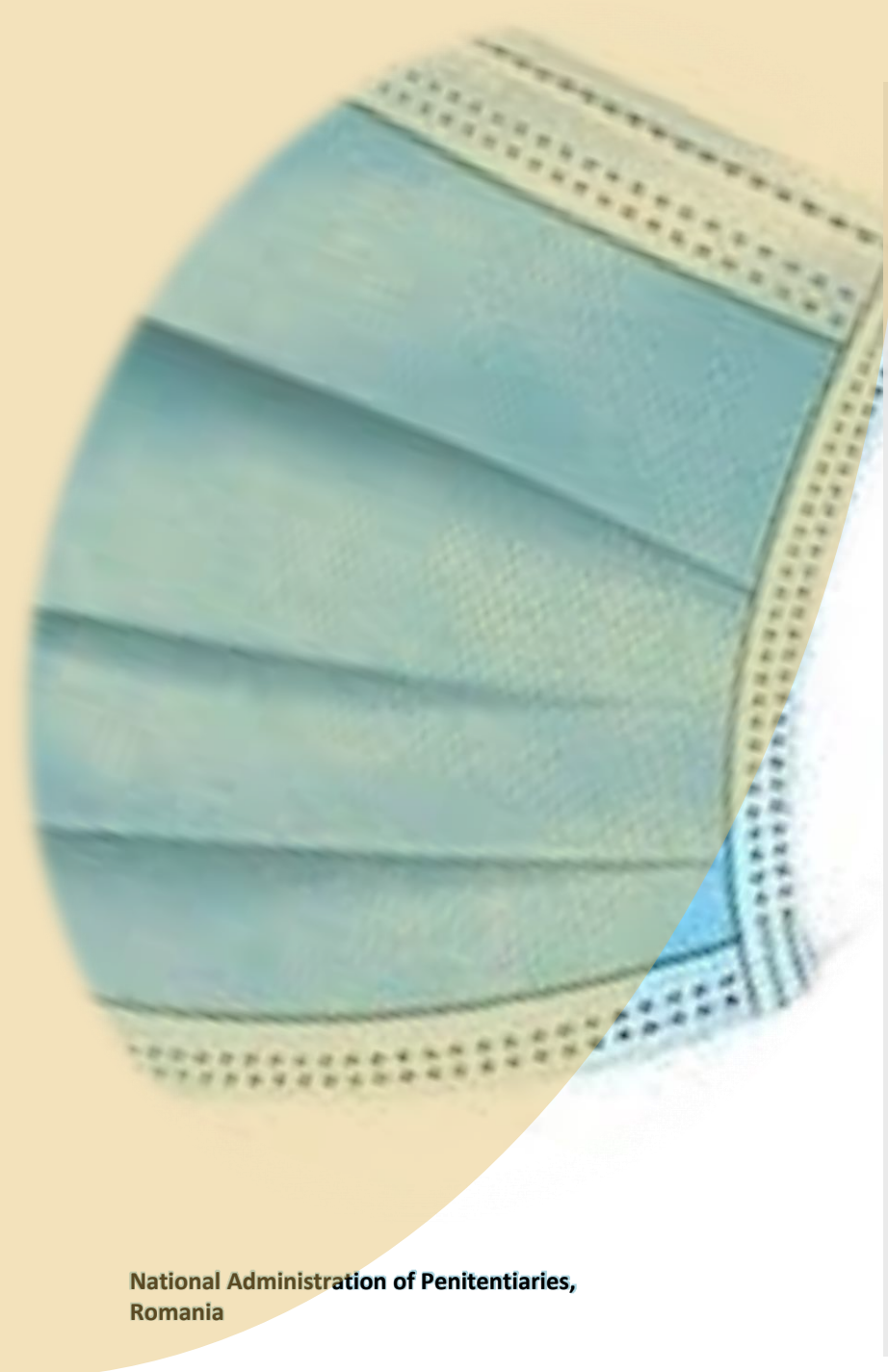
**Extending online communications for inmates.**

**03**

**All activities involving inmates/admitted persons (including sports) have been reassessed, so that they are performed in series, with small numbers of inmates/admitted persons, by limiting, as much as possible, grouping rooms for the same activity.**

**04**

**Interaction with inmates was limited, and access to the custodial divisions was granted only to the staff planned for the division surveillance service, management staff or the staff planned for the continuity and intervention structures, while additional safety measures were ordered for each maintenance administrative need.**



### Measures from the medical perspective:

- **Respiratory isolation areas, for the inmates considered as suspects of/suffering from COVID-19, have been established in 5 penitentiary units** (*Bucharest – Jilava Prison Hospital, Constanța – Poarta Albă Prison Hospital, Aiud, Drobeta Turnu Severin and Baia Mare Prisons*).
- Through the Order of the Minister of Health no. 489 dated 23 March 2020, **Bucharest – Jilava Prison Hospital was designated as a medical unit to carry out *Emergent and Re-Emergent Infectious Diseases***. At the same time, there are 2 prison hospitals provided with *Anesthesiology and Intensive care* units/departments.
- **All transfers among penitentiary units have been performed upon approval of the Medical Supervisory Directorate.**





- Considering the continuous dynamics of the evolution of the SARS-CoV-2 infection, as well as the constantly issued law amendments, **we have envisaged the possibility of gradually designating other respiratory isolation areas, in addition to the ones initially established, depending on the needs.**
- **Specific training** of the medical staff have been ensured; **written guidelines**, to complement the orders/instructions of the Minister of Health and of the National Committee for Special Emergency Situations, regarding the use of the protection equipment and increasing efficiency of using this equipment, which can be considered training even for the staff not qualified in the medical field; **informational video material** has been provided to the staff.
- **Instructions** have been elaborated and **training sessions** have been provided to **all the staff categories.**

### Measures from an educational perspective:

- **informing inmates of the need to prevent the contraction of SARS-CoV-2 and to understand the measures required in the epidemiological context.** Thus, information campaigns for inmates have been carried out in the penitentiary units, with distribution of information materials, (flyers and posters), and periodically producing and broadcasting announcements regarding SARS-CoV-2 through the system's closed circuit radio and TV;
- group activities have been interrupted and carried out individually; **individual counseling** (educational, social, psychological), in order to raise awareness and acceptance of strict hygiene measures and limit the spread of the virus, while also performing sanitation and disinfection activities in the accommodation spaces, as well as in the spaces intended for social reintegration activities.
- **the radio-TV studios have been intensively used to broadcast information of interest for inmates;** the penitentiary units have taken **measures to produce and broadcast their own shows** through their radio-TV studio, for **information, educational, moral and religious purposes, in order to compensate for the lack of other activities.**



measures

education

perspective



- During the emergency state, **the exercise of the right to receive visits, the right to receive conjugal visits, the right to receive goods through the visiting sector, as well as the rewards consisting of prison furlough, were suspended.**
- In order to maintain **the connection with the supporting environment, the duration and the number of conversations for the inmates have been increased.**
- **The right of the inmates to have online conversations, regardless of their disciplinary status and periodicity of contact with their family, was supplemented** according to the number of visits they are entitled to, based on their execution regime.

- Consequently, maintaining the connection with family members, next of kin, or other persons is ensured for the inmates, in this period, by **phone conversations and online communication**. In this respect, **the duration and the number of phone conversations have been increased**, and the **number of online communications that the inmates are entitled to**, have been supplemented.
- **The significance of preventing the spread of the new Corona Virus have been understood by the families of the incarcerated persons**, who during the emergency state appreciated the use of the Internet video communication system in order to maintain the good relationship with the close persons and offer the moral support they need during the incarceration.
- Since the resume of the visit programme, when the emergency state came to a halt and the alert state was installed, **the families of the inmates have obeyed the requests of the prison system to come to the prison units for the visits only wearing the individual protection means, as well as the protective breathing masks and gloves**.



## Conclusions:

- Stating such an epidemic worldwide **has stood for a factor affecting the ordinary rhythm in which the prison system used to work**, rapidly generating **changes of the working procedures**, in order to prevent the spread of this new virus inside the detention areas.
- **The complexity of the situation has been grasped since the very beginning at the level of all the detention places**, thus allowing the responsible implementation of the nationally adopted measures.
- **The prison system staff has understood the necessity of the measures for preventing and limiting the spread of the new Coronavirus** (the capacity of the staff to get adjusted as regards the totality of the current activities, in the light of managing an issue of novelty at the global level, in the sense of getting in line with the requirements on preventing, fighting and limiting the spread of SARS-CoV-2 prevention).
- **The already existing plans and measures for limiting and preventing the outbreaks of infectious diseases at the prison unit system have supported the elaboration of the new guidelines against COVID-19.**
- **New useful methodologies have been implemented in all epidemiological events, such as:** *establishing, delimiting and using the epidemiological routes correctly; drawing up working procedures and protocols specific to medical activities in the context; establishing long-term means of communication and collaboration with the public health institutions in the public health network (county public health directorates, public health network hospitals, profile testing laboratories, etc.*

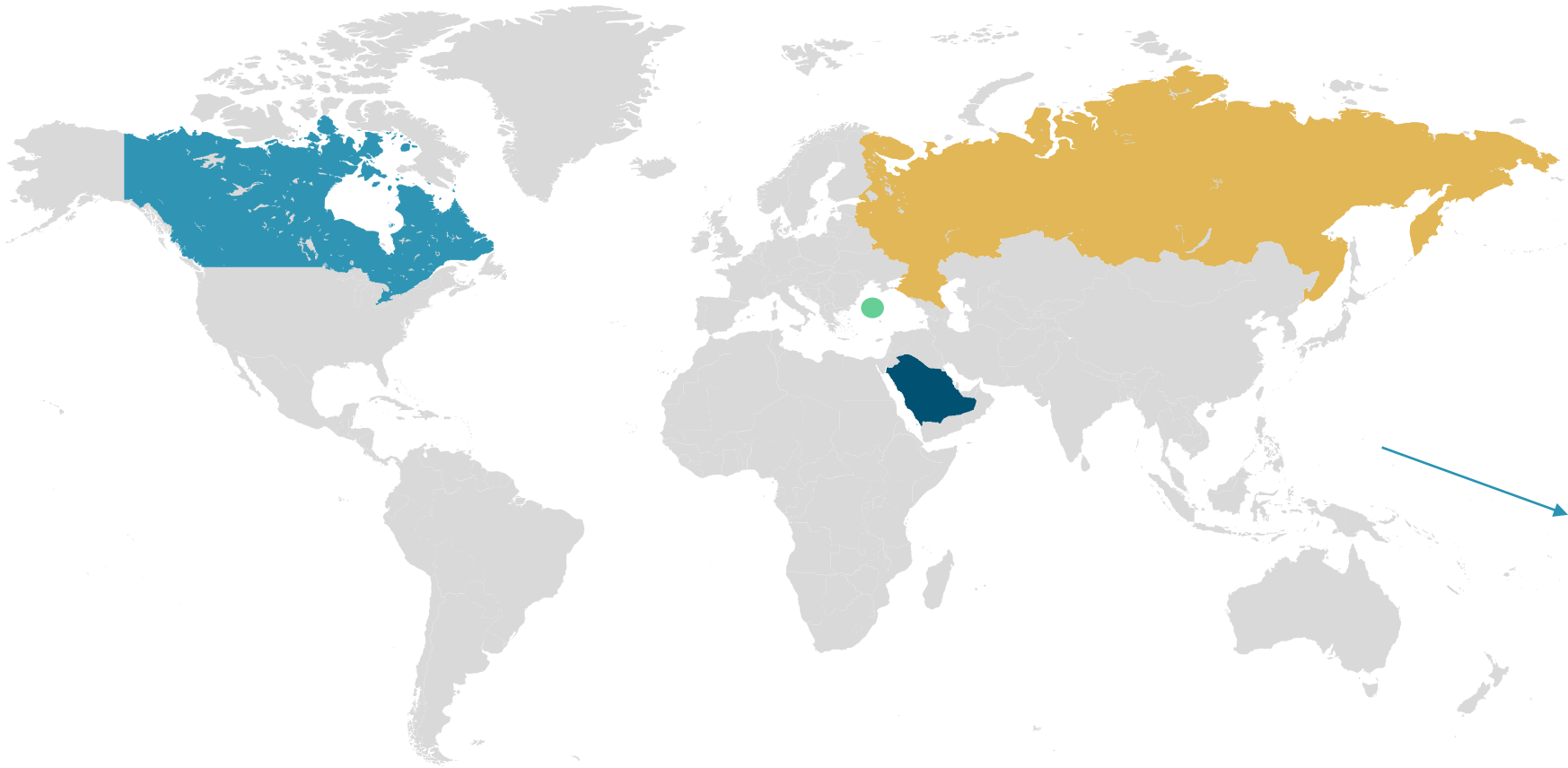




- The biggest challenge, caused by the prevention measures implemented since the beginning of the epidemiological period, has been to **restrict the physical contact of prisoners with family members and their beloved ones during the 60-day state of emergency decreed in the country.**
- However, the significance of protecting prisoners' health and that of those close to them by reducing the physical contact **has been understood and appreciated by both sides.**
- A significant factor for keeping a climate of order and discipline inside the prison during this period has been **the extension of the access to video communications between inmates and their families via internet connection.**
- Among the most useful undertakings in the pandemic context, there is the **extension of the technical support for online school and other educational activities, in order to ensure a broader range of activities for inmates.**
- It would be useful to explore the **psychological and experiential costs of the strict medical-custodial measures** for the inmates and their families during the emergency state, **in order to develop new strategies in this regards.**

### Lesson learned:

- Although the epidemiological context has been marked by the novelty brought about by the new Corona Virus in the health world, the first COVID-19 epidemic wave have been appropriately managed in the Romanian prison system: no COVID-19 cases among inmates for about first 7 months (*apart from seven inmates transferred from the police preventive detention centres for different periods of time*). Thus, at least from the health perspective, the administration plan was an efficient one during the first wave.
- In the general context of recording an **unfavourable evolution - wave 2, worldwide** and in Romania there has been a **dramatic increase in the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases: multiplying the confirmed cases from about 1,000 per day (06.09.2020) to over 10,000 per day (06.11.2020)**.
- Despite the strict measures to prevent and limit the new Corona Virus, this **steep increase in the community transmission of the new Corona Virus** has also had **negative implications for the population incarcerated by the Romanian prison system: outbreaks of COVID-19** (of various sizes, starting from End of September) in some prison units: Timisoara, Craiova, Galați, Bacau, Ploiesti Targisorul Nou.
- Having in mind the above mentioned information – we believe that anticipation is crucial in order to establish the adequate (next) preventive measures, in the following period.



*Thank  
You!*