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EUROPEAN COMMITTEE ON CRIME PROBLEMS
(CDPC)

COUNCIL FOR PENOLOGICAL CO-OPERATION
(PC-CP)

Analysis of CPT reports on prison education
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This document contains an analysis of references in general reports of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) to the role of education in prisons. This analysis has been undertaken to support the update of Recommendation (89)12 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on education in prison.

The CPT's general reports from the years 2000 to 2023 have been used to compile this analysis.

Importance of education

The CPT has recognised the value of education opportunities as not only preserving prisoners' "humanity" during their sentences but also preparing them for release (25th report, page 35). When setting out the "benchmarks" that it uses to monitor the "basic requirements to enable prisoners to live decently in a prison", the CPT has emphasised that "a satisfactory programme of purposeful activities" including work, education, sport and training, is "of crucial importance for the well-being of prisoners" (30th report, page 36, 39).

Improving opportunities

The CPT has repeatedly called for the improvement of education opportunities in prisons. This is often in the context of developing a meaningful range of out-of-cell activities for prisoners (32nd report, page 15; 21st report page 32), although the importance of education has also been referred to in the context of tackling the phenomenon of informal prisoner hierarchy (33rd report, page 25) and countering the "deleterious effects" of high security units (11th report, page 17). In the context of prison overcrowding, the CPT has linked the lack of access to out-of-cell opportunities including education as negatively impacting day-to-day lives of prisoners and, alongside other the other compounding factors related to prison overcrowding, increasing the risk of inhuman and degrading treatment (31st report, page 5).

Greater access to education

The CPT has called for wide access to education opportunities. The CPT has specifically called for out-of-cell educational opportunities to be provided to remand prisoners, as part of a comprehensive and purposeful regime of activities, which should be "more varied" in nature the longer the period of detention is (26th report, page 34). The CPT has also recognised the value of providing meaningful educational opportunities to life-sentenced prisoners (25th report, page 35, 40), stating that educational activities are "crucial in promoting social and mental health well-being and imparting transferable skills which will be useful during and after the custodial part of the sentence" (25th report, page 40). The CPT has also emphasised that women in prison should enjoy access to meaningful activities including education on an "equal footing" with male prisoners.

Other references

The CPT has criticised where prisoners have been required to pay fees for access to educational or vocational training (25th report, page 72).

The CPT has acknowledged that "the provision of health education about transmissible diseases is ...[an] important element of a preventive health-care programme" (24th report, page 54).

The CPT also emphasised the importance of education on women's health care (24th report, page 54).