

Regional meeting on the structural and strategic development of penitentiary staff

Towards a Safe, Stimulating and Rehabilitative Prison Environment for Children and Juveniles in Conflict with the Law in Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia
Tuesday 13 April, 09:00-13:30 CEST



Meeting report

The regional meeting was opened by NHC Executive Director Pepijn Gerrits and Venera Ramaj, Senior Officer/Policy Advisor Rule of Law at the Embassy of the Netherlands in Pristina, who emphasized the successful cooperation established between the Netherlands, the NHC and its partners in Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia over the last years. Ramaj and Gerrits illustrated the need for different criminal justice chain partners to cooperate and the crucial role that all actors within this system play – **from international and governmental agencies to civil society and the correctional staff members themselves** – in strengthening rule of law and, more specifically, stimulate successful reintegration of juveniles in conflict with the law.

Strategic and evidence-based development of correctional staff competences

Peer van der Helm, from the University of Applied Sciences Leiden, presented the Group Climate Instrument that his team, together with the University of Pristina, have been using to conduct climate measurements in the juvenile institutions QKL and QEKL Lipjan, Kosovo. By measuring the living, learning and working climate within institutions, staff and management gain more insight into what practices work well and what can be improved. This, in turn, also informs training needs of staff and illustrates **how academia, juvenile institutions and training academies can cooperate to improve the rehabilitation and reintegration of juveniles**. However, it requires continuous effort by all parties involved to ensure that practices and training are implemented consistently while also making use of new insights from academia.

As has been key in the approach by the NHC-led project, Van der Helm emphasized also the need to adopt a multidisciplinary approach. For example, raising awareness among security staff members about the specific needs of juveniles and effective communication techniques will not only improve relational security in the institution but also support rehabilitation.

International and interagency cooperation in developing training curricula

During the second session, two training academies from the region, Kosovo Academy for Public Safety (KAPS) and the Croatian Training Centre for the Prison Staff, shared their experience with developing training curricula for staff working with juveniles. As Avni Istrefi from KAPS explained, their **curricula and yearly training plans are developed in close cooperation with the Kosovo Correctional Service**. Moreover, both KAPS and the Croatian Training Academy emphasized their active involvement in several international networks, such as the European Penitentiary Training Academies Network (EPTA) and projects and the benefits gained. Istrefi furthermore affirmed its openness towards internationalization and collaboration with other countries in the region and the European Union. Cooperation between KAPS and the NHC has resulted in the development and structural implementation of multiple trainings for staff working with juveniles. Smiljka Barančec and Iva Prskalo experienced a similar process while developing their youth curriculum in an international twinning project. Though international projects can be limited in their scope and duration, it provided a good opportunity to kick start the development of their curriculum, which they have since been fine-tuning to meet the needs of their interdisciplinary teams. The experts explained, for example, how

training aimed at stimulating empathy helped both treatment and security staff deal with the specific challenges encountered with juveniles.

Both training centers also touched upon **the need for cooperation with other (criminal justice) agencies**, such as the probation service, in reintegrating juveniles successfully. While this does pose certain challenges – for example taking into consideration each institution’s specific needs and requirements – the benefits of fostering this cooperation were significant to all present.

Continuous training & sustainable transfer of methodologies, knowledge and skills to the work place

The third and final session presented a Dutch perspective on the transferability of staff skills and competences. Rik Koot and Christa Schrier from the Educational Institute of the Custodial Institutions Agency in the Netherlands explained how **social constructivism and continuous learning are central to their training policy**. As Koot and Schrier explained in their presentation:

Information does not become knowledge until it acquires meaning in the real world.

In practice, this results in a continuous learning cycle that provides penitentiary staff, from all backgrounds, with various training opportunities, such as refresh courses and customized programs.

Patricia Meijer furthermore explained how all juvenile institutions in the Netherlands employ **methodology coaches who guide the individual development of penitentiary staff** but also advise managers on the development and learning needs in the institution. The methodology coaches do so by different forms of guidance, such as training, participatory coaching, intervision and individual coaching.

Lessons learned

The presentations and responses from participants clearly identified some of the **main challenges and opportunities faced by penitentiary training academies in training staff working with juveniles**. The successful rehabilitation and reintegration of juveniles requires strong interdisciplinary teams that are able to establish safe and stimulating pedagogical climates in juvenile institutions. This interdisciplinary approach must be reflected in training practices as well by ensuring the training curricula sufficiently meet the specific needs of each staff category. Methodology coaches and continuous learning cycles can bridge gaps between training and professional practice and monitor the actual transfer of competences of individual staff members. At the same time, tailored staff training can bring different staff categories and even criminal justice chain partners together in common goals. In sum, training academies need to cooperate with and be supported by various actors in the juvenile justice field, including correctional institutions, civil society and international networks and bodies, in order to support correctional staff in the rehabilitation and reintegration of juveniles.

About the event

This regional meeting on the structural and strategic development of penitentiary staff working with juveniles was organized by the Netherlands Helsinki Committee (NHC) as part of the project ‘Towards a Safe, Stimulating and Rehabilitative Prison Environment for Children and Juveniles in Conflict with the Law in Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia’, funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During the last years, the NHC and the Dutch Custodial Institutions Agency have been cooperating successfully with the Albanian General Directorate of Prisons, the Kosovo Correctional Service and the Directorate for Execution of Sanctions in North Macedonia to implement effective working methods in the juvenile correctional and educational centres Kavaja, Lipjan and Tetovo. Part of this cooperation have been efforts to further develop training curricula for penitentiary staff working with juveniles. The aim of this regional meeting was to stimulate mutual exchange on key questions of sustainable learning and staff development by approaching these questions from different perspectives and forms of cooperation.