

Press release - DC033(2014)

Council of Europe anti-torture committee calls on Croatia to reduce prison overcrowding

Strasbourg, 18.03.2014 – In a [report](#) published today on its last visit to Croatia, the Council of Europe's anti-torture committee (CPT) has called on the authorities to improve material conditions in prisons and to reduce overcrowding, notably at the Zagreb County Prison, which was 225% over its 400 bed capacity.

In the course of the visit, carried out in September 2012, the great majority of inmates met by the CPT's delegation indicated that they had been treated in a correct manner by custodial staff. However, the delegation received some allegations of physical ill-treatment of inmates by prison officers. The allegations consisted primarily of slaps and punches, often when inmates were being placed in padded cells (known also as "rubber rooms") as a temporary security measure.

The CPT criticises the procedures in place for the placement of inmates in padded cells, as well as the safeguards surrounding disciplinary proceedings and the confidentiality of prisoners' complaints. In their [response](#), the Croatian authorities provide information on the measures taken to improve material conditions in the prisons visited and on the steps taken to ensure a strict application of the security measures rules such as the placement of inmates in padded cells.

The Committee received only a few allegations of physical ill-treatment and verbal harassment by law enforcement officials either at the time of apprehension or during questioning at police stations. The report examines the application of the procedural guarantees contained in the 2009 Code of Criminal Procedure and recommends strengthening safeguards such as access to a lawyer and to a doctor.

At the psychiatric hospital and two social care homes visited, the report states that staff-resident relations were positive and the atmosphere in the institutions was relaxed. However, the living conditions in all three institutions were cramped, with beds in many dormitories touching one another.

The report is critical of the use of means of restraint at Rab Psychiatric Hospital and at the Stančić Centre for Rehabilitation. In the latter, the CPT's delegation observed a clear overuse of mechanical restraint, with approximately 40 residents, including children, fixed to beds and furniture for hours on end during the day and systematically at night without continuous monitoring. The isolation rooms were also totally unsuitable.

The CPT recommends the adoption of a multifaceted strategy to substantially reduce or eradicate the use of means of restraint and isolation at the Stančić Centre for Rehabilitation. In their response, the Croatian authorities provide information on the plans for the de-institutionalization and transformation of the social welfare institutions visited and state that a comprehensive policy on the use of means of restraint at Stančić Centre for Rehabilitation would be developed in the course of 2014.

The visit report and government response have been made public at the request of the Croatian authorities.

The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) organises visits to places of detention in the 47 Council of Europe member states in order to assess how persons deprived of their liberty are treated. These places include prisons, juvenile detention centres, police stations, holding centres for immigration detainees, psychiatric hospitals and social care homes. After each visit, the CPT prepares a report containing its findings and recommendations. Further information on: www.cpt.coe.int