



THE EUROPEAN ORGANISATION OF
PRISONS AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

EUROPRIS INTERVIEW

Peter Hennephof

EuroPris talks with Peter Hennephof, General Director of the Dutch Custodial Institutions Agency

Peter Hennephof is General Director of the Dutch Custodial Institutions Agency (DJI). As the detention specialist, DJI has various types of institutions for different categories of inmates and patients. Before becoming General Director at DJI in 2011, Peter Hennephof served as Deputy Secretary General at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. Previously he was managing partner with Twijnstra Gudde Consultancy.



EuroPris: Could you tell us about your career path? Why have you chosen to work in the prison and correctional field?

Peter Hennephof I am person of the public domain, even in my time as a consultant I was working for the public good. This is also why I re-entered the Dutch government in the Ministry of Social Affairs. I am interested in people organisations, and this only increased since I started working at the Dutch Custodial Institutions Agency (DJI). As a sector, there is relatively little known about the prison and correctional field. My aim is to help put in the spotlight the case which we stand for.

How many Prison establishments do you oversee?

DJI has 59 establishments in total. There are 4 different groups of inmates in these institutions: adult inmates in a remand centre (pre-trial detention or short-term sentence) or prison (convicted of offence), juvenile offenders in a correctional institution for juvenile offenders, patients in for example a Forensic Psychiatric Clinic because of a forensic measure and lastly, detention centres for a small group of foreign nationals living illegally in the Netherlands or who were refused access at the border. As General Director I am also responsible for the correctional facility in the Caribbean Netherlands, located on the island of Bonaire.

How many prisoners are in prison at the moment in Netherlands?

The total occupation of inmates since 2011 decreased from 15.170 to 11.005 (number is based on average number of detainees in detention on a single day. Every year over 42.000 new detainees are admitted), a drop of 27%. On the other hand, the additional forensic care has increased considerably. Also, every year there are less juvenile offenders that are detained.



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Because of a dropping number of inmates, the demand for capacity declined, which has led to the closure of several of our institutions and the concentration of current capacity. So actually, the Dutch prison system has to deal with the unique situation of under-crowding, contrary to many of our neighbouring countries.

How many staff do you manage?

DJI currently has more than 14.000 employees. Even with a number of closing institutions in the past years, with decreasing numbers of employees as a result, DJI is still one of the largest employers in the Netherlands. For our personnel that we are forced to let go, systems are in place to assist them in finding a new position. We have multiple cooperation agreements with other executive organisations within the Dutch government, where DJI personnel can continue their career. This is especially important for DJI as a 'people-people's organisation' with highly qualified staff that is truly dedicated to their job, sometimes for decades within the same institution.

What are in your opinion the required attributes and qualifications of someone wanting to be a prison officer?

In general, and this counts for all layers within our organisation, I would say that having a sharp eye is very important. Not only for executive personnel, but also for our staff working at headquarters. Guidance, security, treatment and care are provided 24 hours a day and seven days a week, and they ask for vigilant attitude. A second very important qualification is integrity, an important condition for your work as a prison officer. Thirdly I think the job as prison officer asks for confidence; you need to stand your ground in all kinds of unexpected situations. In the Netherlands we pay a lot of attention to motivational treatment of our prisoners. It makes a big difference in the way inmates experience their prison sentence and we highly value that in our institutions. From our experience with Belgian and Norwegian inmates that reside in facilities in the Netherlands (because of limited capacity in both Belgium and Norway) and research that has been done on their experiences in the Dutch setting, this is one of the striking points that come across; they all speak highly of the way they are treated by our Dutch personnel.

What is your opinion on the role of women in the European correctional field?

I highly value the role of women in our field of work. Units with a high number of female personnel know considerably less incidents. Women tend to have a better eye for the social aspects of their job and are more caring, qualities that whole teams benefit from. Of course we see that historically this field tends to have a predominantly male staff, but in the Netherlands we have women working in the institutions, both as staff 'on the ground', as well as in management positions. From our staff working in the correctional field 31% is female; this ranges from women working with inmates, but also women in more administrative functions within our institutions. I can only encourage that these numbers will increase in the coming years, so that it will be more evenly distributed. I am convinced this is a trend that will also spread within the European correctional field, although as with all changes, this will take some time.

What is the biggest concern with regards to security in prisons in your country?

The main security challenges that we are facing in the Dutch prisons have a direct connection with new technological developments in society. Security systems are nowadays more and more IT-driven and we are aware of the risks this entails. Also, the virtual world becomes more and more part of our daily life. How do we incorporate this in a prison setting, since we cannot and do not want to keep it



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outside? DJI's challenge is to incorporate these technological innovations in our institutions, with the purpose of enhancing self-sufficiency and resocialization for our population. For example by allowing inmates use of internet by means of a 'white list' with approved websites. A relatively new development in security issues concerns transport drones. We are exploring the possible implications for prisons from this new means of air-transport. Think of the prevention of dropping drugs and fire arms within the perimeters of a prison. These and more security issues are addressed within both the facilities of the Dutch Custodial Agency and in the headquarters. Policy makers and executive personnel are working closely together to make risk inventories and to take measures to decrease the risks. We recently even assigned one of our directors with the security portfolio, to ensure broad implementation of security related issues through all divisions.

What do you consider to be the biggest achievements for your service in 2015? What challenges you had to overcome?

In 2015 the Dutch Custodial Institutions Agency was, as in the previous years, faced with the closure of multiple of our locations, due to a decrease in the need for capacity. This has a large impact on many aspects of our work, not in the least on our personnel, that is faced with uncertainty regarding being able to keep their job. As I stated, before this decrease in the number of correctional institutions in the Netherlands while at the same time maintaining the high levels of quality within our facilities is obviously our biggest challenge. A complicating factor is the increasing complexity of our inmate population. I am proud that we remain a successful detention specialist, regardless of so much change in so little time. We keep up the high quality, with increasing attention to victims and recidivism and low suicide and withdrawal rates.

What are the challenges for your service this year?

This continues to be our challenge for this year; to shape the declining capacity while keeping up the quality of our work. We ensure this by creating a flexible shell in our capacity: locations that can be put to use for other organisations, such as the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers, either temporary or long term. For this purpose they lose their prison function; gates and locks are removed to create temporary housing institutions. But also keeping locations in a 'stand by' modus where, if need be, business can restart easily. We are also working on a similar flexible shell for our personnel, so they can work in different locations and for different target groups.

Apart from these, more politically driven, developments, we see it as our challenge to constantly improve our detention climate. The coming year, for example, a number of locations will start a pilot with self-sufficiency of our inmates, where they will be able to have more individual access to internet, but also increase their movement within a location.

In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges for the European prison and correctional services at the moment?

I think the biggest challenge for the European prisons and correctional services is to work together and to exchange information and best practices. Though we are not facing the exact same challenges (for example overcrowding vs. a decreasing need for capacity) I think we can learn a lot from each other on subjects such as new technological developments and transboundary criminality. I also think we need to constantly encourage each other to improve our detention climate by sharing best practices and implementing them in our own national settings.



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What benefits do you see being linked to an organisation such as EuroPris?

For us it is very important to exchange information regarding working methods and best practices in prisons in other European countries. We would like to learn from experiences from other countries and share our experiences and best practices with them in order to reduce the risk of relapse in criminal behaviour. By joining Europris we have the opportunity to exchange information with a wide range of countries.

Do your prisons engage with NGO's / Charities?

Yes, our prisons engage with the Netherlands Helsinki Committee and in European and United Nations projects. This is a great way for us to use our knowledge and experience to help prisons in other countries to develop and improve the conditions in their prisons for the inmates as well as the people that are working in the prisons. We also believe that for our staff working in international surroundings it is a great way to grow both personally and professionally. On a national level all our institutions work together with different charities aimed at, for example, resocialisation in society of former inmates, helping them in finding a job and a place to live.

What are the most important personal satisfactions and dissatisfactions connected with your occupation? What part of this job do you personally find most satisfying? Most challenging? What do you like and not like about working in the correctional field?

I really enjoy that I have a job which has an impact on people (not only our population, but also our staff). I gain a lot of satisfaction in the fact that we succeed to decrease recidivism numbers. A downside of working in the correctional field is that it can be frustrating that a small group of people does not let themselves be improved.

If you could be remembered for one thing whilst being in charge, what would it be?

Looking back while still on the job seems somewhat contradictory. That said, I hope my time as General Director of DJI will be remembered for keeping up the commitment, professionalism and solidarity within our organisation despite the decrease in capacity and the challenges that poses to our daily work.