

Summary of the first working session Prisons of the Future

How does the prison of the future look like? That is the main question in the European project Prison of the Future. An additional question is to get insight into alternatives to regular imprisonment in different countries and to assess cross-national alternatives.

At 2 and 3 October 2014 the first working session of the project Prisons of the Future took place in The Hague. Project partners from Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Belgium and the Netherlands and the European Probation Organisation CEP were present, as well as Kirsten Hawlitschek from EuroPris. Also the project director Jacqueline Kuyvenhoven and the project manager Cisca Joldersma were present. The partners from Norway could not make it to be present in the first working session, but still participate in the project.

The participating teams presented developments in prison and probation practice since 2000. The following general trends are found:

- Increasing use of front door options to avoid imprisonment
- Increasing use of back door options that shorten the time of imprisonment.
- More focus on individualized trajectories to minimize negative effects of detention.
- Professionalization of the prison and probation services.

From the expert team of the project, consisting of Alison Liebling from UK, Bas Vogelvang from The Netherlands and Eric Maes from Belgium, it was learned that there are different angles to which can be looked at these trends. There are, e.g., the perspectives and experiences of prisoners, staff, scientists, policy makers, and society. From these perspectives different objectives or criteria can be derived to assess actual developments in prison and probation practice. Actual developments also have to be viewed in their changing and interactive environments. Prisoners or offenders influence and are influenced by direct relationships with family, work, education, religion, sports and prison or probation staff. These relationships are, on their turn, shaped by and can shape the institutional context of prisons of the future as well as alternatives to imprisonment. Additionally, future prison options and alternatives to imprisonment are influenced by and can influence the national penal system as well as the broader society and political system.

Conclusions of the first working session are:

- There are cross-national common guiding principles for prison and probation practice.
- Prison and probation practice evolves gradually.
- Current front door alternatives to imprisonment are contract care/conditional sentences, electronic monitoring, and community sanctions.
- Current back door options shorten time in prison and mostly combine electronic monitoring, supervision, and community care.
- Current prison options relate to individualized trajectories based on risk (need) analysis, prison regimes (open-closed, level of security) and use of technology

- Current improvements in prison and probation services relate to professionalization and focus on research & development.

The next working session will take place in one of the new prisons in Belgium. The theme will be the use of new technology in prisons (Prison Cloud) and electronic monitoring. The participants agreed on not only to discuss and reflect prison & probation practice, but also to set new developments in motion.

Do you want to know more about the project? Please contact the project manager, Cisca Joldersma, c.joldersma@dji.minjus.nl