



EuroPris Interview



EuroPris talks to Gerard Bakker on how COVID-19 affected the Dutch Custodial Institutions Agency (DJI)

What is the current situation regarding Covid-19 in the Dutch prisons?

During the second wave, an increase in the number of coronavirus infections also occurred at DJI. However, the number of infections among detainees has remained relatively limited due to the current measures and the situation in the institutions is stable and manageable.

What were the biggest challenges you had to face since the crisis began in March?

The corona crisis faces our society with major challenges and requires a special effort from all of us. This also applies to employees of DJI. Their efforts are deeply appreciated, the way they have adapted to this difficult situation in recent months. The coronavirus obviously has also affected them and their family members. At the height of the crisis, about 10% of DJI's staff were unavailable due to illness, special leave and / or quarantine and pending test results. Staffing levels are still sufficient in all establishments to guarantee continuity in a safe and responsible manner, but it requires a lot of them to manage the difficult situation within the establishments.

That is why DJI is working on a stable staffing to guarantee the safety of employees and detainees. For example, in consultation with the Municipal Health Service (GGD), DJI has made agreements to offer employees in vital



functions the opportunity to have a quick test via the employer with a short waiting time for the result. It also remains important to recruit new employees. That is why recruitment (digitally) is being continued actively.

Which of the measures you introduced you would consider as the most important ones for keeping staff and prisoners safe?

At DJI, the safety of employees and detainees comes first. The guidelines of the RIVM (National Institute for Public Health and the Environment) are the starting point. We have taken national measures to keep the number of infections as low as possible among detainees and employees. Think of limiting the incoming and outgoing movements; A procedure in which detainees are held for the first eight days from the other detainees and are monitored for complaints; Equipping the visiting rooms with plexiglass and expanding the digital visiting options. Moreover, in addition to the national measures, the director of the establishment can take local measures in the context of safety and order in the establishment, in case of infections within the establishment and / or high number of absences in staff. When quarantining detainees, it is necessary to adjust parts of the day program, or temporarily preventing visits and limiting leave.

Currently facing the second wave, is there anything you are doing different now compared to the start of the crisis in March?

At the beginning of the crisis in March, several national measures were taken to limit incoming and outgoing movements as much as possible. For example, the influx was temporarily limited, engagements were suspended, and visiting was not allowed. In the following months, according to the guidelines of the RIVM, hygienic measures were implemented, the income procedure was started, and an action framework was developed, so that the directors, in addition to the applicable national measures, can take local measures within the framework of order and security of the establishment. The national measures taken in March were then gradually minimized from July onwards.

If at all, is there anything positive that you take out of the crisis? Any positive learning for you as a Director General and/or for the Custodial Institutions Agency as a whole?

The challenge DJI faces demands a great deal of cohesion, cooperation, and solidarity to win the fight against the corona virus.

Innovations have come about much faster due to the crisis. A few examples are conducting legal cases remotely (tele-hearing), but also digital recruitment and selection. During the first lockdown, approximately 60/70 percent of the training courses of the DJI training institute were developed digitally so that (new) colleagues can follow a large part of the training courses digitally. Working from home for office employees has also made a big leap forward.

How important was sharing of international experiences for you during the crisis? Any information or practice from other countries that was valuable for you during the crisis?

The coronavirus has caused a global crisis. We all face major challenges in fighting the coronavirus and protecting our employees and detainees. That is why it is important that we act together in this battle and learn from each other.

During the crisis, DJI monitored the work methods and situation of establishments from the European Member States. We have also been using information from our international counterparts in determining our policy. As an example, DJI developed a roadmap like the one used in Ireland. The roadmap provides insight into which scenario DJI is operating at a national level and provides an overview of measures to be considered. Depending on the scenario, the measures can be deployed separately and locally or nationally.

Any other personal remarks that you would like to make?

“International cooperation is the key to success”

I notice that EuroPris really operates as an important partner and think tank. The lines between the partners are short. In a few days, I was able to give my minister a complete overview of measures on the corona crisis in the other countries.

As far as I am concerned, the corona crisis has once again proven how important international cooperation is.