



# **PRISON SECURITY HANDBOOK:** **STRENGTHENING RESPONSES TO ORGANISED CRIME WITHIN EUROPEAN PRISONS**

## **PRODUCED BY:**

**THE EUROPRIS PRISON SECURITY EXPERT GROUP:** Fiona Cruickshanks (Scotland), a representative from the Dutch Custodial Institutions Agency (the Netherlands), Antti Kanerva (Finland), Angel Vicente Lope Muriel (Spain), Daniela Caputo (Italy), Nerea Ansa Zaragoza (Catalonia-Spain), Martin Saam (Austria), Rudolf Masa (Czech Republic), Joakim Righammar / Josefin Skoglund (Sweden), and Guy Van Riel (Belgium).

## **COORDINATED BY:**

EuroPris' Deputy Director, Justina Dzienko.

**FEBRUARY 2026**

## ABOUT EUROPRIS

The European Organisation of Prison and Correctional Services (EuroPris) is a membership association founded in 2011. The initiative to establish EuroPris was taken during the Swedish EU Presidency in 2009 and was brought forward by the European countries of the International Roundtable for Correctional Excellence.

Membership is open to those European national Prison and Correctional Administrations who are able and willing to support the agreed aims and objectives of EuroPris. Public institutions or organisations in the Council of Europe region, which provide prison or correctional services on a legal or statutory basis can become members of EuroPris.

EuroPris brings together practitioners in the prisons' arena with the specific intention of promoting ethical and rights-based imprisonment, exchanging information and providing expert assistance to support this agenda. The organisation exists to improve cooperation among European Prison and Correctional Services, to improve the lives of prisoners and their families, enhancing public safety and security; reducing re-offending; and advancing professionalism in the prisons' field.



Application to reuse, reproduce or republish material in this publication should be sent to EuroPris.

The opinions expressed in this paper have been prepared in good faith and do not necessarily represent the views of the European Commission.

EuroPris  
Bezuidenhoutseweg 20  
2594 AV, The Hague  
Netherlands  
[www.europris.org](http://www.europris.org)  
[secretariat@europris.org](mailto:secretariat@europris.org)

# TABLE OF CONTENT

<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>BACKGROUND</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Chapter 1 - Strategic Foundations of Prisons Security in Europe</b> .....	<b>3</b>
1.1 The Evolving Security Landscape.....	<b>3</b>
1.2 Strategic Context: European Prison Security.....	<b>4</b>
1.3 Core Objectives and Pillars of Effective Security.....	<b>5</b>
1.4 Strategic Context: European Prison Security.....	<b>6</b>
1.5 Towards a Coordinated, Risk-Informed Security Culture.....	<b>8</b>
<b>Chapter 2 - Organised Crime and its Impact on Prison Security</b> .....	<b>8</b>
2.1 Overview and Risk Technology.....	<b>8</b>
2.2 General Impact.....	<b>9</b>
2.3 Illicit Economies: Drugs, Contraband and Digital Transactions .....	<b>16</b>
2.4 Future Challenges.....	<b>18</b>
2.5 Key Findings.....	<b>18</b>
<b>Chapter 3 - Management of High-Risk Prisoners</b> .....	<b>19</b>
3.1 Identification.....	<b>19</b>
3.2 Classifications.....	<b>20</b>
3.3 Risk Assessment and Behavioural Indicators.....	<b>22</b>
3.4 Regime Management: Allocation, Communications and Control.....	<b>23</b>
3.5 Intervention, Rehabilitation and Exit Strategies.....	<b>24</b>
<b>Chapter 4 - Prison Intelligence and Interagency Cooperation</b> .....	<b>25</b>
4.1 Background.....	<b>25</b>
4.2 Intelligence Systems: Structures, Commonalities and Differences.....	<b>26</b>
4.3 Structures and Challenges of Intelligence Organisations.....	<b>28</b>
4.4 Key Findings.....	<b>31</b>
<b>Chapter 5 - Integrating the Framework: Case Study and Final Reflections</b> .....	<b>32</b>
5.1 From Theory to Practice.....	<b>32</b>
5.2 Case Study: Prison Journey - Managing an Organised Crime Prisoner.....	<b>33</b>
5.3 Prison Intelligence - Intelligence Integration.....	<b>35</b>
5.4 General Overview.....	<b>37</b>
5.5 European Practices and Transferable Insights.....	<b>38</b>
5.6 Strategic Proposal on Managing Organised Crime in Prisons.....	<b>39</b>
5.7 Key Findings.....	<b>39</b>

## INTRODUCTION

In 2023, EuroPris established a new Expert Group on Prison Security – for the first time addressing this highly relevant and pressing topic for the prison sector in such a focused and comprehensive way. The group was created to advance the exchange of current issues and good practices in Europe, and to promote possible solutions in the area of prison security for the benefit of the wider EuroPris membership. The Expert Group is composed of experts on practitioner/manager level from 10 European national agencies, coming from different regions of Europe, nominated by EuroPris members for the period 2023 – 2025.

This paper is published by EuroPris – the European Organisation of Prison and Correctional Services. It was written by EuroPris' Prison Security Expert Group: Fiona Cruickshanks (Scotland), a representative from the Dutch Custodial Institutions Agency (the Netherlands), Antti Kanerva (Finland), Angel Vicente Lope Muriel (Spain), Daniela Caputo (Italy), Nerea Ansa Zaragoza (Catalonia-Spain), Martin Saam (Austria), Rudolf Masa (Czech Republic), Joakim Righammar / Josefin Skoglund (Sweden), and Guy Van Riel (Belgium). This Expert Group is also coordinated by EuroPris' Deputy Director, Justina Dzienko.

At the first face-to-face meeting of the group in September 2023, each member presented the key security risks facing their organisation. Organised crime was identified as a common threat in Europe. This resulted in impact assessments being completed by each member, identifying key challenges and mitigations currently in place to combat the threat from organised crime in prisons.

In May 2024, the Prison Security Expert Group facilitated a European roundtable with further countries and stakeholders focusing on the use of intelligence to manage those involved in organised crime. Key outcomes and summaries from this discussion can be found [here](#). Other areas explored include the impact of organised crime on general security objectives, risk assessment and management approaches.

The EuroPris Prison Security Expert Group worked jointly on this handbook, which is informed by the following key outcomes produced during their term:

- Serious and Organised Crime Impact Assessment ([Annex A](#))
- European Approaches to Managing High-Risk Prisoners ([Annex B](#))
- Penitentiary Intelligence: Identify and share best practice relating to the management of individuals involved in organised crime within prisons (Brussels roundtable May 2024) ([Annex C](#))
- Assessment of General Threats to Prison Security Objectives
- Organised Crime in Prisons Conference OCP (Rome, 2025)

## BACKGROUND

Over the past two decades, organised crime within European prisons has shifted from loosely connected prisoner groups to highly structured, transnational networks. Initially, prison-based criminal activity was largely opportunistic, focused on contraband smuggling and informal hierarchies among prisoners. However, recent years have seen a marked transformation driven by globalisation, technological advances, and systemic vulnerabilities within correctional systems.

Organised crime groups such as the Italian Mafia, Western Centrism, Eastern European gangs, and Balkan drug cartels have adapted to incarceration by replicating their external structures inside prison walls. These groups exert control through violence, intimidation, and economic influence, creating parallel governance systems that challenge official authority. The rise of encrypted communication and contraband mobile phones has enabled these networks to maintain operational continuity, coordinating drug trafficking, extortion, and money laundering from behind bars.

This evolution is compounded by structural weaknesses in prison systems, including overcrowding, understaffing, and corruption, which provide fertile ground for criminal influence. Prisons have become recruitment hubs, where vulnerable individuals are drawn into organised crime, reinforcing cycles of offending and undermining rehabilitation efforts. As a result, the modern prison environment is not merely a site of containment but a strategic node in Europe's criminal economy.

Understanding this progression is critical for policymakers and practitioners seeking to disrupt organised crime's grip on correctional institutions. It highlights the need for coordinated strategies that combine robust security measures, technological solutions, and international cooperation to counteract the growing sophistication of prison-based criminal networks.

This handbook—**Prison Security Handbook: Organised Crime in Prisons**—is a culmination of the work carried out by the EuroPris Prison Security Expert Group and supports prison professionals, administrators, policymakers, and security stakeholders in addressing the multifaceted challenges that prisons face in relation to the threat posed by organised crime.

It offers foundational principles and advanced strategies, drawing on European best practices, interagency cooperation models, and actionable intelligence frameworks. Its purpose is to foster secure, lawful, and resilient detention environments that are ethically sound and operationally robust.

# 1. STRATEGIC FOUNDATIONS OF PRISONS SECURITY IN EUROPE

## 1.1 The Evolving Security Landscape

The security landscape in Europe—and beyond—is increasingly shaped by complex, overlapping phenomena such as organised crime, radicalisation, hybrid threats, and technological developments. These dynamics transcend national borders, adapt rapidly to institutional countermeasures, and do not stop at the gates of correctional facilities. On the contrary, they often manifest within prison environments, testing the resilience, adaptability, and strategic foresight of correctional systems across the continent. The following two real case scenarios demonstrate the need for action in Europe:

### High-Stakes Prison Security - Comparisons

To immediately illustrate the complexity and urgency of modern prison security, consider two contrasting cases that underscore the necessity of comprehensive, intelligence-led, and coordinated measures:

#### Comparison 1: The Prevented Helicopter Escape

A high-ranking member of a criminal organisation—at the top of a powerful European clan involved in contract killings, drug and human trafficking, and organised violence—was being held in a high-security facility. Thanks to tight monitoring, meticulous planning, and cross-border interagency cooperation, authorities successfully thwarted an audacious escape attempt: a helicopter, rented from abroad, was ready to extract the prisoner from the prison grounds. This case highlights the effectiveness of management, intelligence sharing, and advanced operational preparedness in preventing even the most extreme and technically sophisticated escape attempts.

#### Comparison 2: The Realised Escape of an Operational-Level Offender

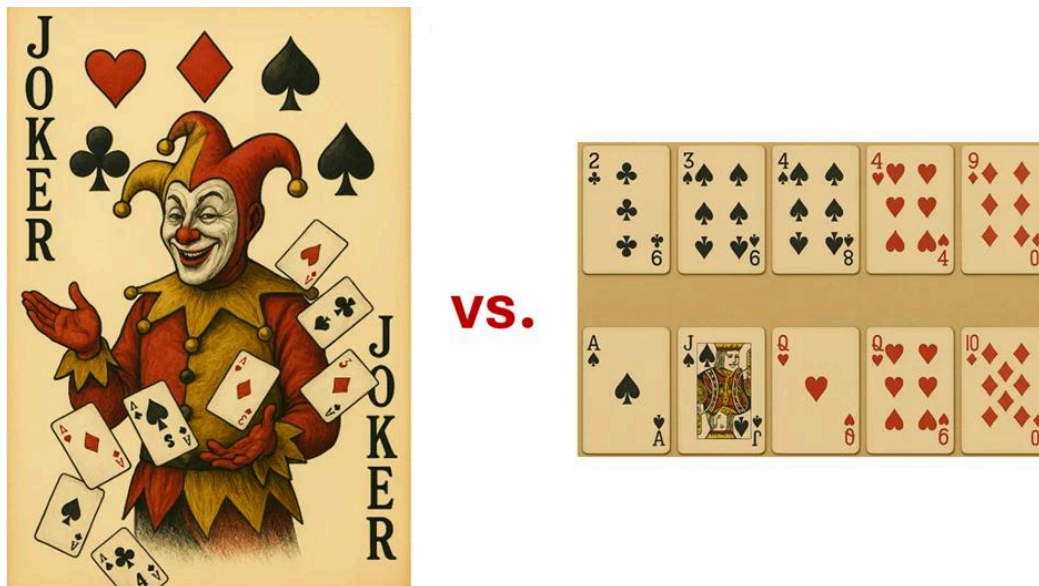
In contrast, a convicted—but not yet final—member of a criminal organisation, responsible for a small operational cell, was detained in a smaller regional detention facility. This individual possessed specialised skills in metalworking and explosives. Despite generally compliant behaviour, he identified a structural vulnerability during routine movements. With the guided support of the psychological service, he was relocated to a section of the facility that allowed him access to a roof area. Exploiting this weak point, he successfully escaped, despite the immediate activation of alarm protocols and interagency response. This case underscores that operational risks are not limited to high-profile prisoners or sophisticated plots; even lower-level offenders can exploit procedural or infrastructural gaps.

Together, these examples illustrate the range of challenges prison authorities face, from highly public, externally coordinated threats to more subtle, opportunistic risks within the facility. They demonstrate the essential need for:

- Integrated risk assessment and management systems,
- Close coordination across jurisdictions and agencies,
- Dynamic security measures combining human and technical elements,
- Flexible organisational structures capable of responding to unexpected behaviours,
- Continuous monitoring and adaptation to evolving threats.

These cases set the stage for this handbook, emphasising that modern prison security is a multifaceted, high-stakes endeavour, requiring constant vigilance, strategic foresight, and operational excellence. To highlight the complexity of security, **the EuroPris Prison Security Expert Group** refers to the following:

### From Practice to Principle: The Joker Paradox



The mentioned cases above also reveal a fundamental paradox in prison security:

- **Attackers (prisoners, disruptors, external actors)** operate flexibly, adaptively, and without fixed constraints. They need only a single breakthrough to succeed. Like a Joker in a card game, they can assume any role, adopt any tactic, and exploit any vulnerability to their advantage.
- **Defenders (correctional staff, institutional security apparatus)** must maintain comprehensive protection at all times, constrained by legal, organisational, and resource frameworks. Each available resource is like a regular card—limited in suit and value, and only effective within defined roles and scenarios.

The Joker Paradox thus captures the fundamental asymmetry of prison security: attackers are flexible and unpredictable, while defenders must plan strategically, coordinate resources, and maintain vigilance across multiple objectives simultaneously. Security is not merely the presence of measures—it is the product of foresight, adaptability, and disciplined execution in a high-stakes environment.

### 1.2 Strategic Context: European Prison Security

In recent years, European prison services have faced a convergence of structural and operational challenges: rising prisoner populations, infiltration by criminal networks, ideologically motivated radicalisation, the emergence of new behavioural tactics by high-risk prisoners, regional differences in crime patterns, and variations in legal frameworks. These factors collectively compromise institutional integrity, place increasing demands on staff, infrastructure, and governance, and require an understanding that trends in law enforcement and prosecution are reflected in penitentiary operations.

## 1.3 Core Objectives and Pillars of Effective Security

### 1.3.1 A Holistic Understanding

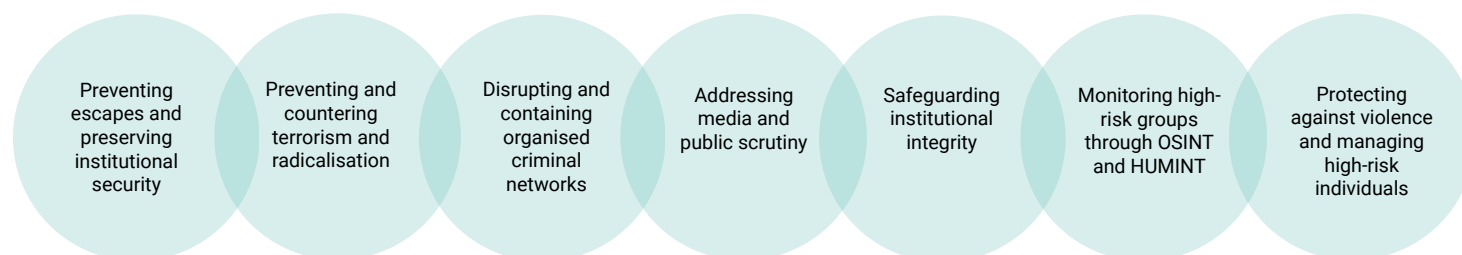
Modern prison security must be approached as an integrated system built on core dimensions of protection:

- **External Security:** Preventing escapes and unauthorised entries or exits to maintain institutional integrity and public safety.
- **Internal Security:** Minimising threats to infrastructure, operational continuity, and institutional stability through structured control mechanisms.
- **Personal Safety:** Ensuring the physical and psychological well-being of all individuals within the institution—staff, prisoners, service providers, and visitors alike.
- **Media and Public Interest Dimension:** Recognising that incidents attract public and media attention, influencing policy, reputation, and the legitimacy of operational measures.

These dimensions form the backbone of a resilient prison security system, balancing control and care, discipline and dignity, transparency and operational discretion.

### 1.3.2 Strategic Objectives

Key strategic priorities respond to the evolving threat landscape in European prisons and acknowledge the growing complexity of criminal activity within custodial settings. They reflect a commitment to human rights, legal certainty, and institutional professionalism:



Together, these objectives emphasise the need for coordinated action, shared methodologies, and consistent standards across jurisdictions. They also reflect a rights-based, intelligence-led approach that strengthens operational capabilities and institutional legitimacy.

Such strategic goals form the foundation for understanding how security must be structured and implemented in practice. Security depends on the integration of three interdependent pillars, which should be balanced:

- **Physical Security:** Infrastructure and technologies to prevent escape and control movement.
- **Procedural Security:** Formalised routines and responsibilities governing daily life.
- **Dynamic Security:** Continuous staff-prisoner engagement to build trust, gather intelligence, and detect early warning signs.

These pillars create a holistic security framework that links technology, human behaviour, and organisational processes into a coherent system of prevention and response. Each pillar reinforces the others and must be aligned through professional training, leadership commitment, and ongoing evaluation.

Effective prison security also requires adapting measures to the diverse risks present within prison populations, ensuring that security responses remain proportionate, targeted, and operationally feasible. Security solutions must be dynamic, context-specific, and flexible, in order to face prison populations with widely varying risk profiles, like:

- Tailored operational protocols for high-risk prisoners
- Enhanced monitoring and specialised staff
- Safeguards for vulnerable individuals
- Organisational structures and IT applications to support decision-making and information flow
- Resilience of prison organisations to absorb shocks, maintain operational capability, and meet legal and ethical obligations.

#### 1.4 Integrating Risk Management: ISO 31000 and Horizon Scanning

ISO 31000 is an international standard that provides guidelines and principles for effective risk management across organisations, enhancing decision-making and strategic planning. Structured risk management provides an integrated framework for correctional security:

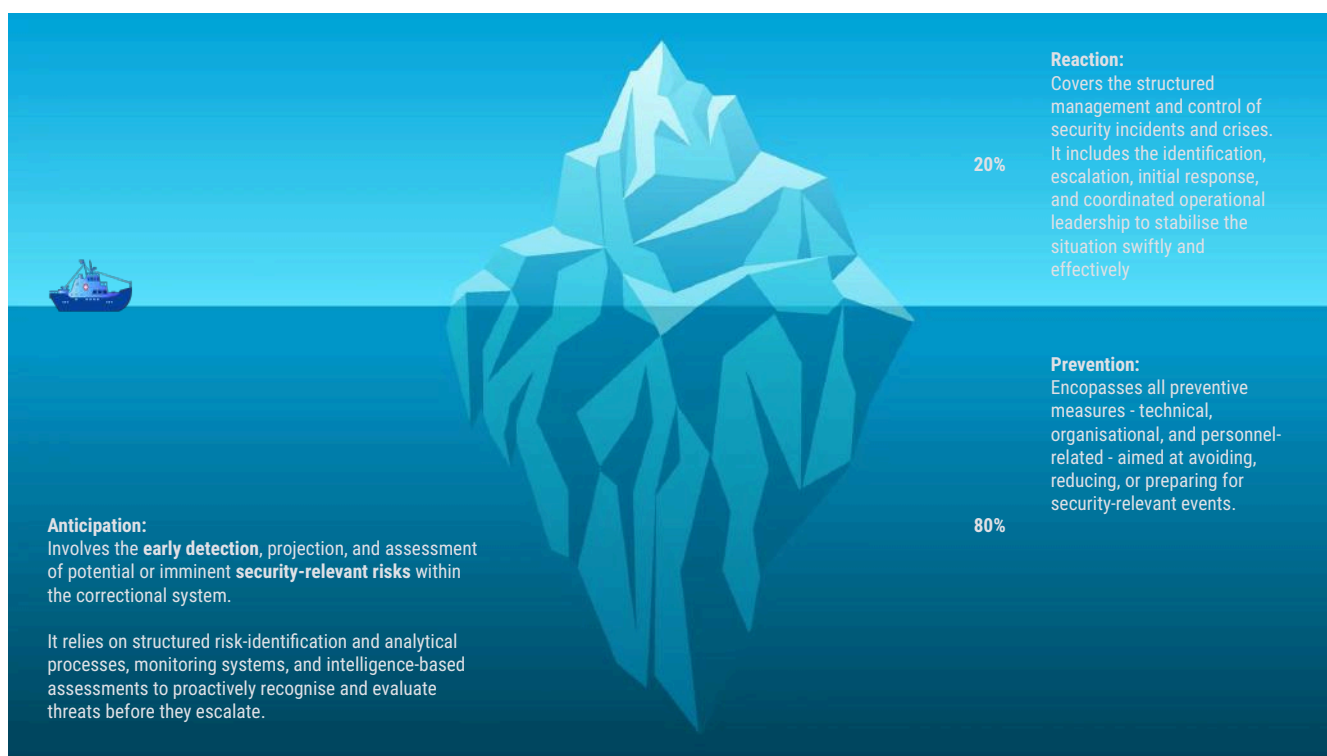
1. Identification: Recognising operational, structural, and security risks.
2. Assessment: Evaluating likelihood and impact to prioritise interventions.
3. Mitigation: Implementing procedural, technical, and training measures.
4. Monitoring and Controlling: Continuous oversight to ensure responsiveness and accountability.
5. Organisational Commitment: Embedding risk management in culture, leadership, and resources.

Horizon Scanning complements structured risk management by introducing a forward-looking, intelligence-led layer:

- Anticipation: Early identification and assessment of potential disruptive events.
- Prevention: Technical and organisational actions to mitigate, avoid, or prepare for incidents.
- Reaction: Structured response to critical events, ensuring coordinated and rapid action.

Together, these approaches reinforce physical, procedural, and dynamic security measures, enabling early threat detection, proactive strategy adaptation, and interdepartmental coordination.

The following iceberg metaphor underscores that sustainable prison security is achieved primarily through anticipation and prevention below the surface—enabled by Prison Intelligence, sensor-based early indicators, and structured risk analysis—while reactive measures, as visible part of the iceberg, remain necessary but are inherently focused on resource-intensive incident response and impact mitigation.



## 1.5 Towards a Coordinated, Risk-Informed Security Culture

Different recent events in Europe –riots, escapes, and criminal infiltration– highlight the need for holistic, intelligence-led approaches:

- Interinstitutional cooperation across justice, police, and intelligence agencies
- Structured information flows and timely reporting
- Workforce resilience through training and leadership
- Technology integration via monitoring systems and analytical tools

These developments demonstrate that risks are increasingly interconnected and can rapidly escalate if not anticipated and managed collaboratively. Implementing coordinated, intelligence-driven strategies ensures that prison security contributes to broader societal safety while upholding legal and ethical standards. Security is no longer purely operational; it is a strategic function intersecting national security, public policy, legal compliance, and human rights obligations.

## 2. ORGANISED CRIME AND ITS IMPACT ON PRISON SECURITY

Building on the strategic principles outlined in the previous chapter, it becomes evident that the effectiveness of any security framework depends largely on its ability to withstand internal and external pressures. Among these, the pervasive influence of organised crime within prisons represents one of the most significant and complex challenges faced by European correctional systems.

### 2.1 Overview and Risk Typology

Organised crime within prisons has a profound impact, shaping perceptions of power, control and vulnerability that extend far beyond the prison walls. Those involved in Organised Crime Group's (OCG's) often try to maintain their criminal networks whilst in custody in order to continue to run their illegitimate businesses within the community. By embedding themselves in prisoner hierarchies, criminal networks exploit fear, loyalty and coercion to establish alternative systems of authority, undermining good order and security. This not only places prisoners at heightened risk of violence, extortion and forced participation in illegal activities, but it also endangers staff through manipulation, intimidation and corruption. This in turn, destabilises the overall aim of rehabilitation and safety as the prison environment becomes a contested space where the credibility of lawful authority is persistently challenged.

The aim of this chapter is to highlight the most important threats or risks associated with Organised Crime and the current impact on good order and security within prisons. We will consider the impact that organised crime has on staff, prisoners and the overall security of the prison and the similarities and differences between countries. [Annex A - Serious and Organised Crime Impact Assessment](#) provides a summary of key threats and mitigations.

Risk assessment in prisons is critical for identifying, evaluating, and managing the potential threats posed by prisoners, staff, and the environment. Risk assessment, when done correctly, is the key to managing these threats. It allows prisons to identify high-risk individuals (especially those involved in Organised Crime) and allocate resources efficiently to maintain order and reduce violence.

In the early stages of the detention, the prison system is dependent on partners such as the police to provide relevant information. Receiving this information at the beginning is essential to determine whom should receive additional monitoring. There is also a lot of information to gather from court reports, judicial decisions and other documents from partners. However, it is also important to collect information during detention and make an independent assessment, such as information about visitors, phone calls, money transfers and reports about behaviour.

In most of the countries, this is a periodic assessment, and, in the early stages, it is the Police or the National Security and Intelligence Services who identify and decide if someone is regarded as being involved in SOC. In others, it is the Prison Service who decide, however, this is normally based on information received from other organisations such as the Police and Public Prosecution Services.

To strengthen cooperation between the police and the prison system and facilitate the exchange of relevant information, some countries have designated individuals or units that act as liaisons between the two agencies.

Some countries are particularly affected by members of outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMG's). These members are easier to identify because of their physical characteristics, such as tattoos and clothing. Most countries are faced with members of organised drug crime. These members are more difficult to identify because they operate more under the radar. The networks are very fluid, and there is often no fixed hierarchy. Members are quickly recruited during detention but are also quickly released. This is a major challenge for the prison system because these types of prisoners have a high risk of continued criminal activity while in detention.

**A good practice** in this area is structured scoring methodologies like Organised Crime Group Mapping, used by some law enforcement agencies in Scotland. This involves assessing individuals' details, their criminal activity, their range of geographical impact, their network and its characteristics. This generates a numerical threat score reflecting the range and severity of its crimes and its level of capability and sophistication. This assessment helps professionals make informed decisions about how to prioritise activity against these groups and/or individuals.

Some member states reported challenges around the sharing of information with other government agencies and highlighted that a lack of any legitimate legal basis for this makes it extremely challenging. There is also no legal basis for exchanging information between the various European prison systems. Members of **the Prison Security Expert Group** recommend that these are elements to further explore and improve.

## 2.2 General Impact

**The Prison Security Expert Group identified** the following common challenges in relation to the impact of organised crime within the represented European jurisdictions:

- An increase in violence and threats across the prisoner group and towards staff;
- Respect for staff and authority is decreasing;
- Staff are becoming more reluctant to challenge those involved in organised crime for fear of repercussions both to them and their families;
- Corruption is a growing problem and is perhaps more widespread than is currently known;
- Organised crime within prisons is a very lucrative business, meaning available deterrents and sanctions are often futile;
- Progressive increase in the amount of drugs being seized in prisons;
- The number of individuals within prisons who are linked to organised crime continues to increase.
- The use of drones for the introduction of contraband into prisons is a growing problem and can quickly destabilise the prison environment due to the amount of contraband that can be introduced;
- Current security systems do not always provide the level of protection required to detect or deter the introduction of contraband into prisons and more investment is required;
- The use of illicit mobile phones within prisons is widespread and have been linked to the commission of various crimes. This includes threats to persons involved in judicial investigations, passing of information about prison staff, directing drone flights and bypassing restraining orders;
- The use of encrypted communications and untraceable networks make it extremely challenging for law enforcement agencies to monitor or intercept communications;

- Rapid technological adaptation by criminal networks means that authorities are constantly playing ‘catch-up’ with security protocols often reactive rather than preventative;
- It is becoming more difficult to balance security with prisoner rights and rehabilitation. Measures such as signal blockers or digital monitoring can interfere with legitimate communications and educational and rehabilitation programmes.

Prison staff occupy a uniquely vulnerable position in environments where organised crime exerts influence, as they represent both the frontline of institutional authority and potential gateways for illicit activity. Organised crime groups strategically target prison officers through mechanisms of corruption, intimidation and manipulation, undermining both professional integrity and the credibility of the prison system as a whole. In environments where organised crime controls illicit economies, such as drugs, mobile phones, weapons,, etc., staff become potential obstacles, heightening their risk of targeted coercion. This can result in prisons becoming a marketplace where power is constantly negotiated and contested.

When prisoners perceive prison officers as vulnerable to manipulation, the authority of the institution itself is weakened. This not only impacts the wider reputation of the institution, but it can also create distrust amongst prison staff. Whilst prisons are designed as places where prisoners are rehabilitated and deterred from further crime, they can often become training grounds for further criminal activity. Prisoners themselves can often get caught in the crossfire of organised criminal activity and are vulnerable to threats and intimidation. Some prisoners are knowingly drawn into further criminality within prisons, whilst others can be unwittingly seduced and groomed and then exploited. Involvement with organised crime groups in prison can often provide prisoners with the criminal skills and networks to engage in more serious and organised crime in prison and upon release. Individuals with specialist skills or access to specific information or services may be targeted, or, more simply, vulnerable individuals are targeted and forced to carry out criminal acts on behalf of others. Some prisoners attempt to ingratiate themselves into a criminal group for the purpose of ‘belonging’ or to provide themselves with a level of protection whilst in prison.

The following parts go on to look at some of the challenges in more detail:

### 2.2.1 Violence

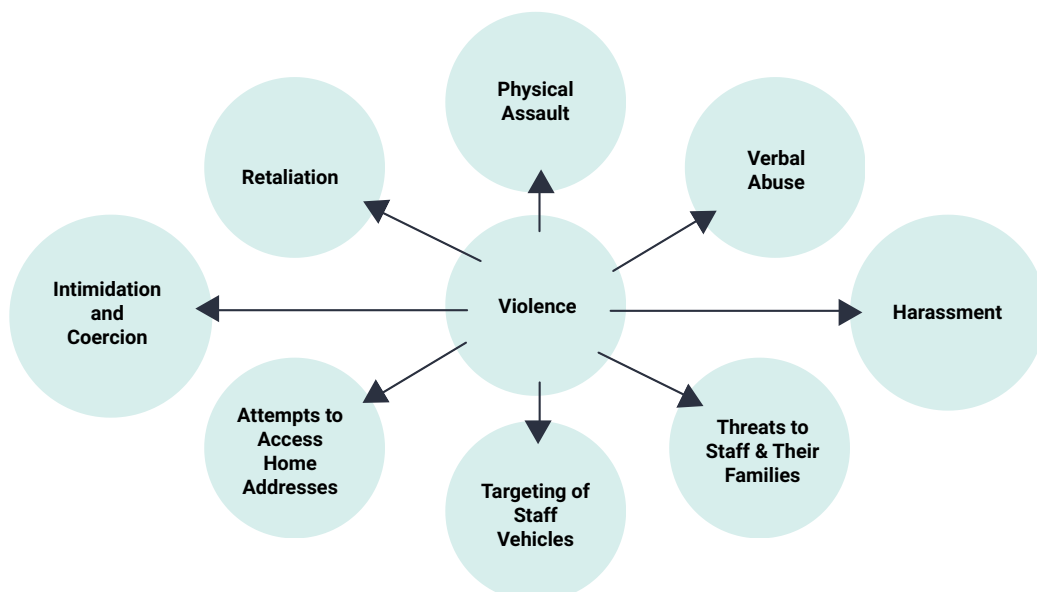
**The Prison Security Expert Group reported** a rise in violence/use of force and similar crimes against staff, visitors, other prisoners or prisoners’ families. Increased violence amongst prisoners poses a significant safety and security concern for both prisoners and staff. Overcrowding and insufficient staff-to-prisoner ratios in prisons also heighten the risk of violence between prisoners.

Amongst reported prisoner violent incidents, some countries identified a link to OC. Individuals related to OCG’s use violence against other prisoners (rival groups, illegal debt collection, controlling illegal business, suspected informers, etc.). Prisoners may be targeted for assault, intimidation or retaliatory attacks by gang members enforcing control or punishing resistance.

The presence of organised crime networks and gang-related affiliations among prisoners can exacerbate the risk of inter-prisoner violence, with rivalries and power struggles contributing to physical altercations and conflicts. Those linked to OC feel the need to protect themselves and often arm themselves with bladed weapons. Those who want to collaborate with courts feel afraid and want to protect themselves, either by arming themselves or asking for protection from the prison itself (or from the police). This creates a climate of fear, limiting freedom of movement and associations, which can have a detrimental effect on a prisoner's progress in prison. Some identified characteristics of these types of incidents include:

- ⚠️ Violence that is more serious in nature is planned and happens in areas where staff don't have control.
- 💰 Monetary contracts issued to cause significant harm to individuals. These contracts are either issued by or against members of OCGs.
- 🔥 Distraction manoeuvres, causing fights, incidents or riots;
- 📦 Pressure to do business for prisoners linked to criminal organisations. This includes storing contraband and passing on messages.

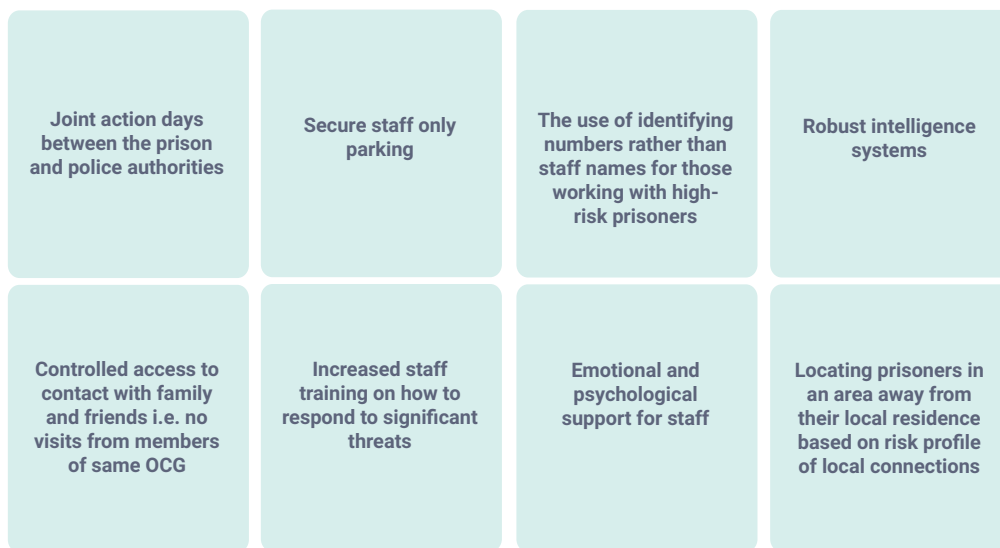
Staff face elevated risks of assault or targeted violence, especially in facilities where organised crime groups contest authority or dominate illicit markets. This type of violence from OCG's is typically expressed through:



Continuous exposure to violence can have a detrimental impact on the morale and psychological well-being of prison personnel. Violence against staff destabilises morale, increases turnover and absenteeism, and undermines perceptions of safety within the workforce. It can lead to increased stress, burnout, and a sense of insecurity in the workplace. This can result in disengagement and disbelief in the institution and a feeling of impunity. An increase in injuries, sick leave and trade union pressure are typical symptoms of this problem. This has a financial cost for the organisation.

Many members of the Prison Security Expert Group reported increasing challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified individuals in the prison service due to an increase in violence and threats of violence towards staff. High turnover rates can further strain the system and compromise overall security. Staff become apprehensive about challenging those involved in OC, become reluctant to report issues with OC, work in wings where OCG's are allocated and report threats to police and prison authorities for fear of repercussions.

Good practices identified by the expert group in managing these risks include as follows:



### 2.2.2 Staff Corruption

Corruption is not always directly related to OC. It is difficult to objectify cases of corruption, since it normally does not end in an arrest. Nevertheless, reported incidents of corruption are increasing, and it can be assumed that this has a direct link to the increase in the number of OCG's within prisons. Members of OCG's have significant resources available to them and offer staff financial rewards for becoming involved in corrupt activities.

Staff may be bribed or coerced into smuggling contraband, providing privileged access within the prison, allowing illegal activities to go unchallenged or providing access to sensitive information (e.g. other prisoners' details, times of searches). OCG's use intimidation, coercion and blackmail - direct or implicit – against officers or their families in order to pressure staff into becoming involved in corrupt activities related to drugs, mobile phones, information and special privileges for prisoners. Coercion and intimidation are significant tools of organised crime within prisons. Fear undermines staff confidence, creates reluctance to enforce rules or challenge inappropriate behaviours or activities, and destabilises the perceived neutrality of prison authority.

Staff involvement is not always the result of external pressure. A notable risk arises from officers who willingly participate in criminal activities, driven by personal motivations such as financial gain, debt or substance dependency. Prisons provide fertile ground for such collusion, given the profitability of contraband markets and the access staff have to secure areas and restricted materials.

Financial incentives are particularly powerful. Prison officers are often not highly paid, and in some jurisdictions, wages are disproportionately low relative to the risks and responsibilities of the role. This creates opportunities for organised crime groups to exploit economic vulnerabilities, offering significant financial rewards for smuggling illegal contraband into prisons. Once staff engage in such activities, they become trapped in a cycle of dependency and complicity, as criminal networks use both reward and the threat of exposure to ensure continued cooperation.

Personal vulnerabilities, such as addiction problems, can also be leveraged by organised crime. Staff struggling with substance misuse may find themselves coerced into illicit activity as a means of sustaining their habit or deliberately targeted by prisoner groups aware of their weaknesses. In such cases, the line between victimisation and voluntary participation becomes blurred: staff are both exploited by organised crime and complicit in its operation.

Prisoners linked to organised crime exploit emotional vulnerabilities, building inappropriate relationships with staff that can lead to compromised decision-making. This undermines professional boundaries and can entangle staff in criminal conspiracies, weakening institutional cohesion. Constant exposure to manipulation, threats and coercion creates chaotic stress and mental health challenges. High levels of burnout reduce performance, increase absenteeism and make staff more vulnerable to mistakes or compromise.

When staff are perceived to engage willingly in illicit activities, institutional legitimacy suffers more profoundly than when officers are coerced. Even without direct corruption, the perception that officers are corruptible weakens their authority in the eyes of prisoners, undermining their professional legitimacy. Prisoners interpret such behaviour as evidence of systemic corruption, reinforcing the narrative that prison authority is compromised and porous.

This perception extends beyond the prison walls, eroding public trust in the penal system and framing the prison not as a space of lawful control but as an extension of criminal enterprise. Once compromised, prison officers' risk disciplinary consequences, criminal charges and reputational damage. Such incidents erode trust in staff integrity and weaken the prison's authority and public perception. When staff members are compromised, others may mistrust colleagues, fracturing solidarity among officers. Organised crime exploits these divisions, weakening the collective resilience of staff teams and undermining the prison's security culture.

Infiltration of the organisation by criminal networks is also a risk. Members of OCG's will actively pursue a career within the prison service to have access to information, prisoners and/or critical operational processes. Attempts are made to recruit vulnerable people (financial constraints, precarious living conditions, e.g. end of a relationship, etc.), same cultural group/origin, religious affiliation. The increase in staff turnover in turn increases the risk of infiltration.

Corruption can have severe consequences, compromising the integrity of the entire system. It can erode public trust, undermine security, and lead to unequal treatment of prisoners, ultimately affecting the effectiveness of rehabilitation and prisoner reintegration programs. It can result in an increase in illicit items being introduced into prisons. It causes reputational damage and problems between staff. Corruption by OC impacts overall safety within the prison both for staff and prisoners.

**Good practice** was identified by the experts in some countries who had clear professional standards and anti-corruption frameworks in place. In addition to this, national anti-corruption units supported local teams to investigate instances of alleged corruption, and e.g. Scotland reported good inter-agency partnership working between local prisons and Police Scotland resulting in criminal convictions for corrupt staff. Other areas of good practice included in the following graphic:



**The expert group also identified** that appropriate and robust recruitment, vetting and training was critical in minimising the risk of staff corruption in several countries.

### 2.2.3 Exploitation of Other Prisoners

Whilst prisons are designed as places where prisoners are rehabilitated and deterred from further crime, they can often become training grounds for further criminal activity. Some prisoners are knowingly drawn into further criminality within prisons, whilst others can be unwittingly seduced and groomed and then exploited. Involvement with organised crime groups in prison can often provide prisoners with the criminal skills and networks to engage in more serious and organised crime in prison and upon release.

Individuals with specialist skills or access to specific information or services may be targeted, or, more simply, vulnerable individuals are targeted and forced to carry out criminal acts on behalf of others.

Some prisoners attempt to ingratiate themselves into a criminal group for the purpose of 'belonging' or to provide themselves with a level of protection whilst in prison.

Exploitation of vulnerable prisoners has the potential to increase self-harm incidents and prisoner requests for replacement. Targeting of vulnerable prisoners, socially isolated, new, young or those with mental health problems are at higher risk of recruitment, exploitation or violence and are often targeted by criminal groups within prison. Vulnerable populations often experience disproportionate harm and are forced into criminal activity for survival.

Coerced participation in criminal activity may force prisoners to smuggle contraband into prison, traffic drugs, or commit acts of violence on behalf of others. Participation increases the risk of legal consequences and long-term criminalisation. Organised crime networks impose fees for 'protection' or demand payments from prisoners or their families. This can often be through contraband sales, prisoner earnings or canteen purchases. Refusal can result in physical harm to the individual or their family members, while compliance entrenches financial dependency.

Exploitation of other prisoners can result in:

- Psychological and emotional harm. Constant exposure to threats, coercion and intimidation produces stress, anxiety, depression and trauma. Mental health can deteriorate, and this can be long-lasting even after release from prison.
- Erosion of autonomy and social control: Organised Crime Groups establish parallel hierarchies, controlling access to resources, social networks and daily routines. Prisoners lose independence, with decisions often dictated by criminal power rather than institutional rules.
- Reinforcement of criminal identity: involvement in organised crime activities or illicit economies entrenches criminal identities and can make it harder for those who want to distance themselves from a life of crime.
- Recidivism complicates reintegration after release.

**The expert group reported** that the complexity of organised crime within prison, including the number of different and opposing organised crime groups can make it difficult to place individuals.

The necessity to keep rival gangs apart often means that members of the same organised crime group are located together making it easier for them to maintain their criminal networks.

**The group also identified** the following measures as being particularly helpful in mitigating against exploitation of others:

- Robust risk assessment and classification, allowing vulnerable prisoners to be housed separately from those involved in OC;
- Dynamic security assessments to regularly review prisoner placements, adapting to changing relationships, threats and behaviours;
- Vulnerability screenings to identify those who may be more susceptible to exploitation;
- Training for staff to detect signs of gang influence, coercion and exploitation within the prisoner population;
- Education and vocational training that help prisoners focus on future goals and reduce dependency on prison hierarchies.
- Interventions utilising de-radicalisation and gang-exit strategies to help prisoners disengage from OC.

**Good practice** was identified by experts for example in Sweden who offered the Entry Programme to individuals who wished to move away from involvement in organised crime.

## 2.3 Illicit Economies: Drugs, Contraband, and Digital Transactions

### 2.3.1 Drugs

One of the key emerging threats **identified by the expert group** is the use of psychoactive substances, with members reporting a progressive increase in the amount of drugs seized across most, if not all, jurisdictions represented in the expert group.

OCG's inside prisons often use drug trafficking as a way to gain and maintain control over other prisoners, as having control of the drug market gives them influence, loyalty and fear-based authority. Drugs also function as a form of currency in prisons, especially where access to money is limited.

OCG's often run sophisticated smuggling networks, bringing drugs into prisons through visitors, corrupt staff, concealed mail and property, perimeter throw-overs and, more recently, by drones whereby large quantities of drugs can be delivered directly to cell windows. Through the use of intimidation, coercion and blackmail, OCGs also pressure prisoners to smuggle drugs into prisons on arrival.

The impact of the drugs in prison is wide-ranging and affects individual prisoners, the prison environment, the staff and the wider criminal justice system. Key issues **identified by the expert group** include:



There are some common general measures that are in place across jurisdictions including:

- Drug detection by dogs or devices (packages, visitors, staff, traces detection);
- Counter drones systems;
- Internal control and surveillance (searches, monitoring, prison intelligence);
- Technological measures (body scanners);
- Homogeneous response to drug seizures: disciplinary response (limitation of communications, isolation regime, inform the court, change of prison, etc.);
- Analysis and police investigation of prisoners who are introducing drugs;

- Staff training - security personnel must stay informed about new drugs and methods of distribution within the prison population;
- Cooperation/training with police;

One of the current key issues identified by the Prison Security Expert Group is the use of drones to deliver contraband into prisons. This method bypasses traditional security measures, challenging staff capacity to control the perimeter and highlighting the adaptability of criminal groups in exploiting new technology. It also allows them to deliver contraband in much higher quantities than traditional smuggling methods. Whilst some jurisdictions had piloted or were using drone detection technology, prisoners were routinely adapting frequencies to overcome detection systems, making the use of drones within prisons a real challenge.

The expert group recognises the ongoing EU projects for drug detection through the [European Union Drugs Agency \(EUDA\)](#), such as Odysseus and IFlows, whilst most of the focus relates to border control, horizon scanning and the identification and testing of new technology is critical in continuing to combat drug introduction within prisons. More pertinent is the new [EU Drug Strategy and action plan](#), which also has a section on prisons.

### 2.3.2 Illicit Mobile Phones, Communication Encryption, and Social Media

Mobile phones are among the most sought-after forms of contraband within prisons. Organised crime groups use them to coordinate operations, manage illicit markets and intimidate witnesses or victims beyond the prison walls. Phones facilitate uninterrupted leadership of criminal enterprises, allowing criminal groups to orchestrate drug trafficking, extortion and even contract killings from behind bars. Prisons cease to function as isolating institutions and are instead reconfigured as command centres for organised crime.

Encrypted messaging apps and covert use of social media enable organised crime to maintain secrecy and coordination. Prisoners may also use social platforms to glorify criminal activity, intimidate rivals or radicalise others. The digital sphere amplifies the power of organised crime, extending its reach beyond the prison walls and undermining the intended isolation of incarceration.

Whilst the use of signal blocking technology was **identified as best practice by the expert group**, some other jurisdictions were unable to utilise such technology due to constraints within their current legal framework or financial resourcing pressures.

### 2.3.3 Digital Financial Transactions

The growth of electronic payments, cryptocurrencies and online banking enables prisoners to launder money, manage extortion rackets and sustain external networks. Staff corruption may also be facilitated through discreet online transfers. Such technologies obscure financial trails, making detection more complex and further embedding organised crime within transnational financial systems.

This was a challenge faced by all jurisdictions, and whilst no best practice to highlight was identified, **the expert group acknowledged** the work currently being undertaken by Italy to enhance information gathering through financial flow analysis.

## 2.4 Future Challenges

Technological advances have extended the reach and adaptability of organised crime within prisons. Mobile phones, digital payments, drones and encrypted communications enable criminal networks to not only continue but expand their criminal enterprise from behind the prison walls. The continued development of digital and communications technologies has transformed the nature of organised crime in prisons, creating new risks that extend beyond traditional contraband markets and physical violence. Organised crime exploits technology to circumvent barriers, extend influence and undermine institutional control. This poses a significant risk to current security systems and processes and leaves them vulnerable to infiltration.

These challenges are not unique to one jurisdiction but are shared across Europe, reflecting the adaptability of organised crime and the structural vulnerabilities of penal systems in the digital age. Addressing them requires both technical solutions – such as signal blocking technology and drone detection – and cultural strategies that reinforce institutional legitimacy, ensuring that prisons do not create an environment for the growth of organised criminal activity.

Increasing reliance on digital prison management systems (e.g. prisoner record systems, surveillance, electronic gate controls) creates vulnerabilities to hacking, manipulation, or insider compromise. Organised crime may exploit these systems to access sensitive data or disrupt prison security. Breaches undermine trust in prison technologies, compromise staff and prisoner safety and expose institutions to reputational harm.

## 2.5 Key Findings

The risks faced by prison staff extend beyond physical safety to encompass corruption, reputational harm, psychological strain and the erosion of institutional legitimacy. These dynamics not only compromise individual officers but also undermine the stability of the prison as a whole, reinforcing the rhetorical dominance of organised crime over formal authority.

Despite differences in legal systems, cultural contexts and penal policies, the **Prison Security Expert Group identified** that prisons across Europe exhibit strikingly similar challenges in relation to organised crime. A recurring theme across jurisdictions is the persistence of illicit economies inside prison walls. Contraband markets for drugs, mobile phones and weapons flourish, providing organised crime groups with both profit and power.

The use of prisons as hubs of criminal activity is a shared phenomenon. Organised crime groups exert control over drug distribution both inside and outside prison, and incarceration fails to neutralise criminal leadership and instead provides an opportunity for consolidation and networking.

The vulnerability of staff to corruption and coercion is evident across jurisdictions. Whether motivated by financial gain, personal vulnerabilities or intimidation, prison officers are frequently targeted as gateways to illicit trade. This creates risks in reputational damage, compromised security and the erosion of institutional legitimacy.

Technological risks significantly amplify the power of organised crime in prisons by extending the reach of organised crime beyond the prison walls. It allows prisoners to maintain external networks and continue directing criminal activities. Over recent years, technological advancements have exposed staff and prisoners to new risks. Addressing these challenges requires not only investment in detection and cybersecurity technologies but also comprehensive staff training, robust integrity protocols and policies that balance security with rehabilitative objectives.

In summary, organised crime in prisons poses significant risks across multiple levels. Technology aids prisoners to smuggle contraband and coordinate criminal activity both inside and outside the prison, while corrupt or coerced staff can facilitate the introduction of illicit items, communications or provide access to sensitive information. Within the prisoner population, organised crime groups exert influence through recruitment, extortion and violence, destabilising prison safety and culture. Collectively, these factors create security vulnerabilities, enable criminal networks to operate beyond the prison and threaten the integrity of the correctional system.

Understanding the scale and dynamics of organised crime inside prisons naturally leads to the question of how such risks can be effectively managed on an operational level. The next chapter, therefore, examines the management of high-risk prisoners, highlighting classification, placement, and interagency coordination as critical components of a coherent security strategy.

## **3. MANAGEMENT OF HIGH-RISK PRISONERS**

### **3.1 Identification**

Effectively managing prisoners involved in organised crime begins with accurate identification and classification, which form the foundation for all subsequent risk assessment and management strategies. It is essential to adopt a multifaceted approach that addresses both the risks posed by prisoners and the broader dynamics of prison security. This requires comprehensive background checks, structured interviews and strong inter-agency co-operation. A multi-agency approach and improved legislation for information sharing – especially across borders – are essential to address the evolving nature of organised crime and ensure prison safety.

The enforcement of prison sentences and the implementation of pre-trial detention must take place under safe conditions from the perspective of prisoners, staff, and society at large. It is very important that a prisoner or remand prisoner is placed in the most appropriate prison and prison wing or cellblock, considering institutional safety. Prisons can have wings with different levels of supervision, and choosing the right one is essential for maintaining order and security. Placement decisions involve many criteria, but safety remains one of the key factors. To make the best possible decision, prison authorities must have a thorough understanding of the prisoner and their background. This is why identifying the prisoner correctly is extremely important.

One key starting point is the comprehensive collection of background information on incoming prisoners, whether they are serving a sentence or held in pre-trial detention. This identification-related process can be integrated into the risk assessment, or it can also be a separate process altogether.

European countries have different operational models for the classification and identification of high-risk prisoners. Nevertheless, these models and criteria share many common elements. **The Prison Security Expert Group** has collaborated with other European countries in order to find similarities and differences in definition of high-risk prisoners (e.g. in the Brussels roundtable 2024).

Key findings regarding the main risk considerations are:

- Posing a threat to the life or physical integrity of others
- Continuation of criminal activities
- Risk of escape or attempted jailbreak
- Unlawful interference with the legal process
- Significant threat to public safety and order
- Sentenced to an exceptional or particularly severe punishment
- Sentenced for a particularly serious offense committed during detention or while serving a sentence
- Reasonable grounds to believe the individual poses a threat to the safety of others
- Convicted and assessed as repeatedly dangerous (e.g., due to a pattern of serious offenses)
- Likely to be involved in serious institutional or regimental disturbances
- Involvement in terrorist activities

**According to the findings of the expert group**, several groups of prisoners have been identified as posing a higher risk of disrupting institutional order compared to other prisoners. These include radicalised individuals, prisoners with mental health issues, and those affiliated with organised crime.

In particular, prisoners directly or indirectly connected to organised crime are often behind a wide range of security-related problems. This is a significant issue, and there are no signs of it diminishing.

Since the year 2000, the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime has provided an internationally shared definition of an organised criminal group as “a group of three or more persons existing over a period of time acting in concert to commit crimes for financial or material benefit”. However, according to Europol, this definition does not adequately describe the complex and flexible nature of modern organised crime networks.

It is crucial that prison authorities can identify prisoners affiliated with organised crime. There are certain differences in how organised crime is defined across European countries, but the main principles are largely similar. From the perspective of prison authorities, it is nevertheless important that organised crime is examined and assessed comprehensively.

### 3.2 Classifications

What methods can prison authorities use to effectively determine whether a newly arrived prisoner has a status within a gang or a loosely structured criminal network? How can prison authorities ensure that housing decisions do not lead to conflicts with other prisoners? **The expert group identified** that, in general, identifying persons who belong to organised crime at the time of admission is a major challenge for prison staff.

Clearly, identifying all incoming prisoners from this large perspective is not easy. Some actors within organised crime are well known, but the criminal subculture can change rapidly. We have also learned that new networks can emerge during detention. Some countries are particularly affected by members of outlaw motorcycle gangs. These members are easier to identify than, for example, members of drug crime. These members of drug crime are more difficult to identify because they operate more under the radar. The networks are very fluid, and there is often no fixed hierarchy. The same logic applies to loosely structured networks or street gangs, which can be highly flexible. Changes and developments outside the prison quickly reflect inside, so prison authorities must have a clear understanding of the current security situation inside the prison, including tensions between diverse groups and criminal networks.

**According to the findings of the EuroPris expert group**, different countries also have varying operational models regarding who determines an individual's involvement in organised crime. In some countries, this identification is made by the police, while in others, it is decided by a court of law. In many countries, however, prison authorities are responsible for this identification, either independently or in cooperation with other authorities. There are also countries which do not have a clear strategy for identifying people in organised crime.

European countries have developed different procedures to support the effective identification of prisoners affiliated with organised crime. One important method is conducting interviews with prisoners upon arrival using carefully selected techniques. Not all prisoners are willing to openly share their background, but some are. Prior to the interview, background information must be thoroughly reviewed. This includes court records, details related to the crime, information on previous offences and sentences, registry data, and intelligence obtained through inter-agency cooperation. An effective prison intelligence system can provide substantial added value to this process.

International organised crime and criminal networks move very flexibly from one country to another. Broad and efficient collaboration between authorities is a crucial cornerstone in this demanding process. It is also very important to monitor and assess a prisoner's activities in prison in a broad and comprehensive manner. This is essential both for prison safety and for effective inter-agency cooperation. **An example from the expert group** refers to a layered system used in the Netherlands with regard to prison intelligence. Every prison has a local intelligence unit. Their focus is to build and maintain a good information position within the prison in question on (high) risk prisoners. To monitor whether risks arise regarding high-risk prisoners at a national level, a national intelligence unit has been established.

This enables the Dutch Custodial Institutions Agency to conduct a substantiated examination of the placement of prisoners, determine the appropriate method of transport and monitor how criminal networks develop during detention. Finally, the national intelligence unit collaborates with the Dutch national police and the Dutch public prosecution service in the Detention Intelligence Unit. This is a relatively new unit to enrich the information position of the three organisations and to maintain the best possible control over continued criminal activity from detention.

It is often said that organised crime is growing, becoming more severe, and increasingly international. The identification of these prisoners is important, and the same applies to other high-risk prisoners. It is important to note that prison authorities cannot tackle this problem alone.

**The expert group considers** that to truly make an impact on the ongoing organised crime that is orchestrated from within prisons or find sustainable solutions for planning the future steps of high-risk prisoners, a multi-agency approach is required. Therefore, it is also crucial that the identification of individuals is carried out in close cooperation with other authorities. By doing so, we ensure the highest possible quality and promote broad-based inter-agency collaboration.

Through effective cooperation, we are best equipped to respond to the challenges posed by rapidly evolving international organised crime. On the other hand, one clearly identified area for development is that the legal framework should provide better grounds for authorities to share information quickly and efficiently. In particular, the exchange of information between different countries should be made more flexible.

### 3.3 Risk Assessment and Behavioural Indicators

Structured risk assessment is one of the cornerstones of the management of high-risk prisoners and organised crime. Based on risk assessment, it is possible to plan and target appropriate measures as efficiently as possible. **The expert group identified** some differences in risk assessment practices between countries, but the fundamental principles and methods are generally very consistent.

Prison risk assessment is a process for systematically gathering and interpreting information to predict an individual's likelihood of reoffending or engaging in other behaviours of concern. Assessments focus on static risk factors (like criminal history) and dynamic risk factors (like substance use or lack of education) to inform decision-making, such as the need for specific programs, interventions, and the overall management of the prisoner. Based on risk assessment for high-risk prisoners or prisoners linked to organised crime, some European countries classify prisoners into different categories.

Classification is also a cornerstone of risk management in prison. However, the overall classification systems vary significantly between countries. In any case, it is up to the prison authorities to decide on what basis prisoners are allocated to different prisons and wards.

Is it appropriate to concentrate prisoners belonging to the same group in the same prison, or should they be separated? From the perspective of preventing criminal activity, it is appropriate to separate prisoners belonging to the same group. On the other hand, placing rival groups in the same unit is likely to create immediate security risks.

The availability of prison places is often also a concern. If prisons are overcrowded, there is less room for discretion and fewer possibilities regarding the placement of prisoners. **According to the findings of the EuroPris expert group**, there is no specific risk assessment method tailored for organised crime. The question that arises is whether a specific instrument is needed to measure the risk posed by a prisoner who belongs to organised crime or a loosely organised criminal network, and whether this instrument should be the same for all countries within the EuroPris community.

A comprehensive and high-quality risk assessment of prisoners provides the foundation for sustainable operations. The assessment should be repeated regularly so that issues related to dynamic security are also properly considered. Broad-based inter-agency cooperation is essential to ensure that all relevant issues and information are considered in the assessment.

Due to the rapidly evolving and mobile nature of international organised crime, authorities must also be able to operate efficiently and across borders. Information exchange must be fast and smooth, which in principle requires legislative changes in several European countries. At present, there is no specific risk assessment for prisoners involved in organised crime, as said, but some promising models are under development. This is a significant issue, so obtaining scientific research data would be highly desirable.

### 3.4 Regime Management: Allocation, Communications and Control

**The expert group identified** two clear positions among member states in relation to the regime applied to high-risk prisoners involved in organised crime. One advocates a more severe regime, in special units with very strict surveillance. In some countries, the application of this regime is reviewed periodically.

Examples of such regimes operate in the Netherlands and Italy. In the Netherlands, two specific regimes are created for high-risk prisoners. Prisoners at risk of continued criminal activity, while being incarcerated, are placed in these regimes to ensure maximum monitoring of all contact with the outside world. This also ensures that more vulnerable prisoners are not pressured into undertaking activities for members of criminal organisations, such as storing contraband. In the coming years, the number of places for these regimes will be expanded in the Netherlands.

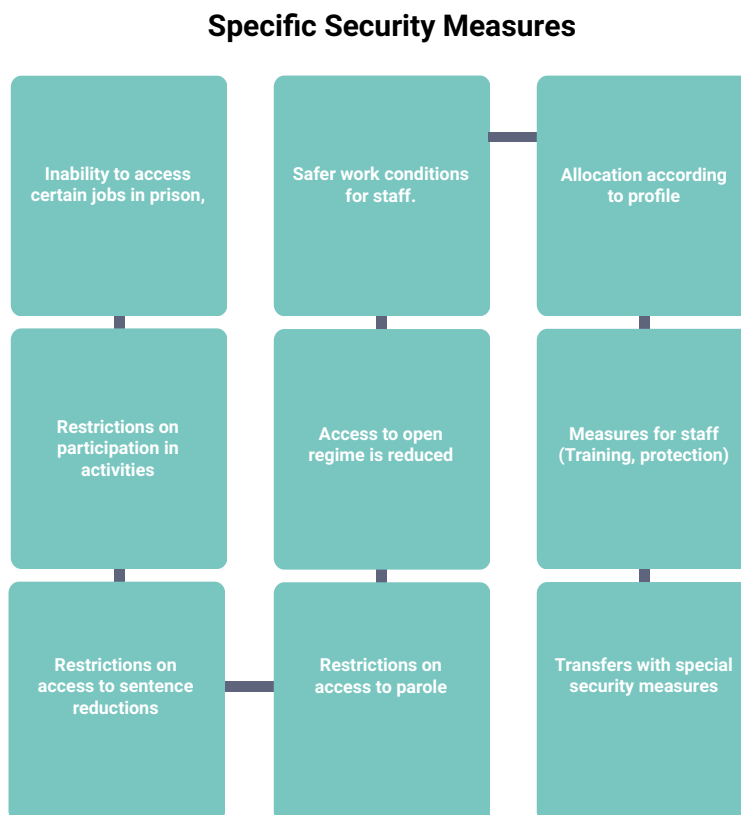
In Italy, the "41-bis" regime, introduced in 1992 as an emergency measure following the assassination of Judge Giovanni Falcone, is a special "hard prison" regime used for prisoners convicted of serious crimes, particularly organised crime like the Mafia, terrorism, and other high-security offences.

It involves a near-complete isolation of prisoners from the outside world to prevent them from directing criminal activities from prison. This includes heavily restricting contact with family and monitoring all correspondence and visits.

The 41-bis regime applies to individuals considered particularly dangerous in the field of organised crime and is characterised by its strict isolation regime and control of communications. Its primary goal is to stop prisoners from coordinating or promoting criminal activities outside of prison. A prisoner can be removed from the 41-bis regime if they cooperate with authorities.

Others choose more standardised processes that are common to all prisoners. However, this does not mean that surveillance is reduced, but rather that it is adapted to each case depending on the risk they present. Depending on the level of danger, measures such as communication interception and special security arrangements for transfers for health reasons are implemented.

Other measures worth noting are:



More examples and details of the regimes and restrictions imposed by the expert group member countries can be found at [Annex B - European Approaches to Managing High-Risk Prisoners](#).

### 3.5 Intervention, Rehabilitation, and Exit Strategies

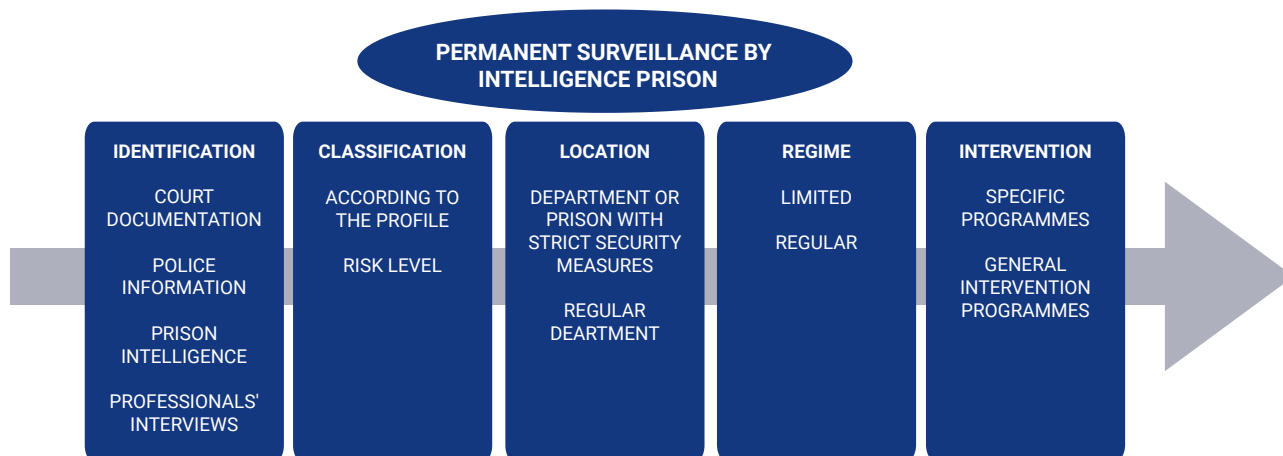
The aim of prison sentences is to rehabilitate prisoners and achieve their full reintegration into society. To this end, prisons have a range of programmes that allow them to address the root causes of crime with sufficient flexibility to adapt them to the characteristics of individuals.

However, with regard to organised crime, **the expert group identified** a few bespoke intervention programmes. Most member jurisdictions use other existing programmes, adapting them to each case.

**Good practice was identified by the expert group** in relation to Institutions that do have such programmes:

- **Finland:** The exit programme is aimed at those who are motivated to withdraw from a criminal organisation. Participation in the Exit programme is highly confidential, and it is not expressed in the sentence plan.
- **Sweden:** The Entry Programme (Entré). Entré is an individual treatment programme for clients who want and need help in leaving organised crime. It was developed by the Swedish Prison & Probation Service. The programme is cognitive behavioural therapy with a functional approach to problem behaviour related to organised crime.

While effective classification and management of high-risk prisoners form the operational foundation of secure detention, these measures must be complemented by intelligence-led systems that anticipate, detect, and disrupt criminal activities within prisons. The following chapter explores how prison intelligence and interagency collaboration contribute to a proactive and integrated approach to security across Europe.



## 4. PRISON INTELLIGENCE AND INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

### 4.1 Background

In [2025, Europol reported](#) that Europe’s most threatening criminal networks can continue operating while key figures are imprisoned. Leaders often still coordinate their networks from behind bars, ensuring that criminal activities persist on the outside. Additionally, prisons provide fertile grounds to create new criminal contacts and extend criminal networks.

The notion that crime does not end behind bars is not new, however, it has become a focal point in recent years as the increasingly violent and undermining nature of organised crime groups has made evident that what happens inside prisons affects what happens outside. This tension highlights a central dilemma: while prisons are meant to be places of rehabilitation, they also risk functioning as hubs that sustain and strengthen organised crime.

The prison sector has responded in kind by investing in prison intelligence in order to keep staff, prisoners, and society safe. Prison intelligence is comparable to any other form of intelligence, just focused on information procured from prisons to the benefit of the prison service and law enforcement. While intelligence gathering has been commonplace for law enforcement, the military and even commercial businesses, prisons were often overlooked. This is despite playing an essential role in combating organised crime. The time spent in prison is frequently a blind spot for investigative authorities, leading to incomplete intelligence.

As a result, information crucial to a criminal investigation may be lost. Therefore, prison intelligence not only pertains to what happens inside prison walls but can also be a valuable resource for agencies investigating criminal networks. Several European prison services have made strides in developing robust prison intelligence services and systems.

For this reason, **the EuroPris Prison Security Expert Group has collaborated** with practitioners from several European countries in order to evaluate the current state of affairs in Europe with regard to prison intelligence (roundtable Brussels 2024) and a summary of this can be found at [Annex C – Penitentiary Intelligence: Identify and share best practice relating to the management of individuals involved in organised crime within prisons.](#)

This chapter will outline the similarities and differences seen across European prisons in the types of criminality they deal with and the intelligence structures that have been set up. It will then highlight some challenges that European prison services currently face and the best practices that are used to combat them. Finally, based on the expertise gathered by the Expert Group, recommendations will be given on implementing and improving prison intelligence capabilities.

## 4.2 Intelligence Systems: Structures, Commonalities, and Differences

The types of criminality differ to some extent throughout Europe, depending on different approaches to security measures and the forms of criminality prevalent within the country. The types of criminality can be divided into two main groups: crimes committed within prison against staff or other prisoners, for example, assault, theft, sexual abuse/rape and threats to commit such crimes.

This type directly challenges the security measures implemented within the prison to protect prisoners and staff, as well as relatives and others temporarily visiting the prison.

The other type is the criminal acts that are committed from prison or other institutions related to society outside. This includes using available means of legitimate or illegitimate communication to order assaults towards enemies as well as keep control and coordinate narcotic networks and smuggling.

### 4.2.1 Commonalities between Countries

The countries within the EuroPris community share a lot of common ground related to criminality within and from prisons. All countries have prisoners attempting to conduct criminal activities from detention, regardless of if they are classified as low or high-security. Furthermore, it is not uncommon to have prisoners of foreign nationality serving time in prison, largely due to criminal organisations moving relatively freely across European borders.

This means that the countries within the EuroPris community face new behaviours and risks, such as intentions and modus operandi of prisoners with unknown backgrounds. The threat posed by an OCG in one country may quickly migrate to another. This makes security cooperation and intelligence sharing important. In all countries, regardless of preventive measures, criminal organisations will attempt to continue illicit activities while incarcerated.

## 4.2.2 Differences between Countries

The main reason for differences between countries can be explained by the differences in types of criminality and the differences in organisation within criminal networks. For example, in some respects, a loosely organised street gang can pose a greater threat to prison security than more well organised networks. In some countries, for instance, loosely organised street gangs are composed of younger individuals that are typically more eager to put effort into maintaining their criminal status since they are not connected to a well-organised network with more fixed positions. They might also pose a bigger threat towards staff and other prisoners due to their status-seeking and position-maintaining behaviour. This means a higher risk of impulsive violence and explicit threats, but also an intention to manipulate staff by undue influence.

On the other hand, well-organised networks, such as Mafia groups, outlaw motorcycle gangs and certain violent extremist organisations (which may overlap with each other), tend to rely on a more fixed structure in their organisations. This means that they can count on more support and do not need constant contact to maintain awareness of shifting alliances outside. Typically, these organisations use more sophisticated illicit communication methods, such as extensive use of lawyers or access to corrupt staff. In summary, the wider social context deeply influences what happens inside prisons. As a result, the threats faced by security and intelligence organisations differ across countries. Factors such as geography, history, migration, and national approaches to crime all play a role.

Regardless of the types of criminality in a country, intelligence work tends to follow the same principles. The differences lie mainly in the type of data that is collected which can be used to support the security organisation as threats typically change over time. A robust intelligence organisation is therefore able to handle those changes. For example, loosely organised gangs might require prisons to focus on daily safety and conflict management. Impulsive and status-driven behaviour increases the risk of sudden violence against staff and other prisoner, which calls for strong dynamic security, close staff–prisoner interaction, and strict monitoring of basic communication channels such as phones, visits, and mail.

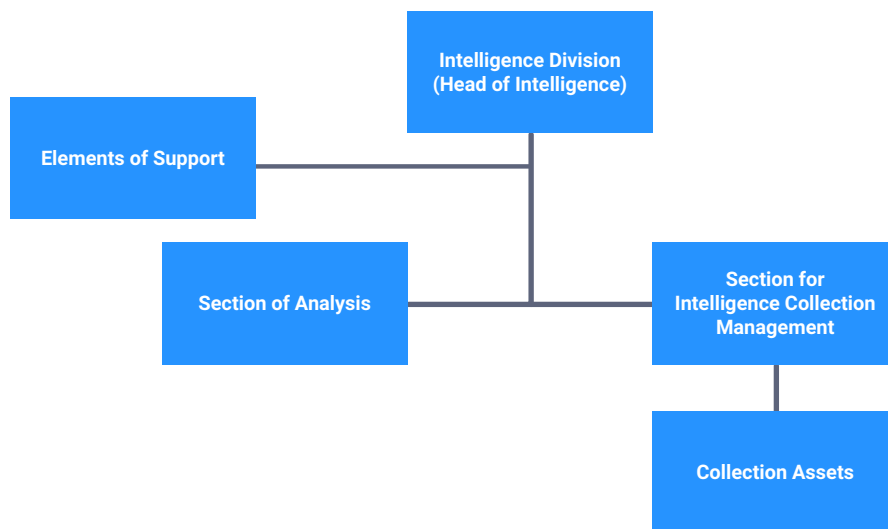
On the other hand, organised networks can present a more covert but long-term threat. Their structured hierarchy allows them to maintain influence without constant visible disruptions inside prison. Management therefore needs to prioritise intelligence-led approaches, advanced technical monitoring of illicit communication, and measures to prevent corruption or infiltration of prison staff. It is also important to mention that there exists a wide variety of criminals beyond the examples painted in this chapter. Such as the rise of “crime for hire”, which has produced criminals that are loosely connected to greater criminal organisations. The extent of the affiliation with said organisation, and therefore the resources available to these individuals, is difficult to assess due to the nature of their recruitment.

In short, different types of criminal organisations or gangs pose different types of threats to the security inside prisons. Some pose an immediate threat towards staff and other prisoners while others primarily challenge strategic intelligence and integrity of the prison system. The intelligence organisation needs to be resilient while also remaining fluid and adapting to the changing landscape of organised crime. Particularly, regarding directing and managing the collection of intelligence and through that supporting the security organisation as well as other agencies in combatting organised crime.

### 4.3 Structures and Challenges of Intelligence Organisations

Prison intelligence organisations share a lot with intelligence organisations in other agencies, especially within law enforcement. Typically, an organisation consists of an headquarter with a head of intelligence, two or more groups or divisions responsible for planning data collection or analysing collected data. The organisation usually also has its own resources for collecting information, such as personnel working in prisons or remand centres, gathering intelligence through staff, prisoners, phone monitoring, or mail inspection. Other types of specialised collection assets may consist of, for example, specially trained Human intelligence (HUMINT) - operators.

In addition to their own intelligence units, agencies may participate in interagency intelligence collaboration to more effectively combat the threats posed to the prisons and remand centres, sharing and receiving intelligence from society at large.



*Example of organisational hierarchy of an intelligence organisation*

One of the greatest challenges facing prisons is the persistent illicit behaviour of prisoners during detention. These prisoners use a myriad of methods to commit various crimes, ranging from escape attempts, to importing contraband such as drugs and phones, coordinating a criminal network beyond prison walls, and even ordering assassinations. Additionally, prisoners can expand or even create new criminal networks within prison walls.

These challenges require prison services to evolve and adapt to the continuously changing landscape of crime in detention. Consequently, prison services across Europe have developed methods and tools in order to best mitigate the risk of crime and maintain security both inside and outside the prison. These best practices range from interagency collaborations to developments in prison intelligence, and technological advancements.

### 4.3.1 Intelligence Units

To combat the issue of criminal behaviour during detention, it is essential for prison services to be fully aware of what happens inside their prisons. Not only must there be monitoring, but there must also be a central point where all observations by various types of prison staff are collected and combined to create a complete picture of a prisoner or network. The expert group identified that several countries such as Italy, Sweden, France, Finland, Scotland and the Netherlands, have set up local and sometimes national intelligence units. These units are the central hub in prisons where all observations by staff and monitoring through various means combine to reflect the risks associated with certain prisoners or incidents. Thus, allowing the large amount of information in prison to effectively be turned into actionable intelligence for the prisons, and at times law enforcement.

On the local level, these units allow the prison to identify illicit activities and act accordingly. The intelligence gathered on the local level can benefit the prison on both the operational and tactical level. By having a solid information position, the intelligence unit can actively advise the operational staff in the prison relating to topics of allowing freedoms, implementing measures, and the daily activities of prisoners. Whereas on a tactical level, the intelligence units play a pivotal role in the occurrence of an incident: For example, in the case of a hostage situation or a riot.

The existence of intelligence provides prison management with a greater wealth of knowledge to base decisions on and accurately assess threats as they occur. Without effective intelligence, prisons risk being unaware of critical threats, which can lead to incidents both inside and outside the facility. Criminal networks may continue operating beyond prison walls, compromising overall security and resulting in inefficient use of resources as measures are implemented reactively rather than proactively.

While it is of great importance to have local intelligence units, there are phenomena that can only be observed on a national level. National prison intelligence units are able to use the intelligence gathered by the local units to see illicit activities that span several prisons. In the same way, crime does not stop during detention; criminal behaviour in detention does not have to be limited to a single prison.

Think of an individual who smuggles contraband as a visitor at several different prisons. On a local level, the individual may be identified and denied future entry. The visitor is then still able to attempt the same crime at a different prison. On a national scale, however, when a suspicious individual is identified, all prisons could be warned beforehand. Therefore, allowing the local prisons to take pre-emptive measures to ensure the visitor will not be permitted entry. If national intelligence units fail to function effectively, patterns of illicit activity spanning multiple prisons may go unnoticed.

This can enable criminal networks to exploit gaps between facilities, increasing the risk of coordinated crime, undermining overall prison security, and forcing authorities to respond reactively rather than deliberately. Furthermore, national intelligence units can analyse national trends and phenomena, which can be used on a strategic level by policymakers, ensuring future policies align with the needs of the prison landscape.

### 4.3.2 Interagency Collaboration

Setting up prison intelligence units not only benefits the prison service but also provides the basis for interagency collaboration with law enforcement. Depending on the country, law enforcement and the prison service can be (purposefully) separated into entities. When investigating a criminal, their time spent in prison can often be a blind spot for law enforcement. Similarly, prison services may lack the in-depth information police has which is needed to accurately assess a prisoner's risks. If the legislation allows it, it can be beneficial to both law enforcement and the prison services to collaborate in intelligence gathering and sharing.

Collaboration does not have to be limited to law enforcement; however, there are a plethora of agencies that may be relevant in intelligence sharing. This can range from the public prosecutor's office to intelligence agencies, and even international partners. In cases that involve individuals prosecuted for terroristic offences for example, national intelligence agencies may be very interested in the behaviour and contacts of this individual while in detention. Especially in the fight against serious organised crime, interagency collaboration can play an essential role as criminal networks have been shown to remain active and coordinated even when key figures are detained.

**An example of a best practice in interagency collaboration** can be found in The Netherlands. To combat the criminal networks in their country, three government agencies in the Netherlands have started an interagency effort focused on prison intelligence. The Detention Intelligence Unit (DIU) consists of parties from the Dutch Custodial Institutions Agency, the National Police organisation, and the Public Prosecutors Office. The aim of the DIU is to share information between the three parties regarding prolific prisoners and criminal networks and to create shared intelligence analyses based on combined information.

The DIU marks a shift toward including prison services as integral actors in the greater intelligence community of the Netherlands. Sweden also has a similar interagency best practice involving several agencies (including the Police, the Tax Agency, Social Insurance Agency, and several more) cooperating against organised crime as a phenomenon. Prison intelligence is part of the ongoing operations on both regional and national level, with intelligence personnel participating in national and regional intelligence centres together.

### 4.3.3 Human Intelligence (HUMINT)

Human intelligence (HUMINT) is the collection of information from Human sources. It can be divided into two main categories: passive HUMINT and active HUMINT. Passive HUMINT refers to asking prisoners questions about subjects he or she has knowledge of. Active HUMINT, on the other hand, involves recruiting and tasking a source to collect information. Usually, all intelligence personnel can to some extent and with complementary training perform passive HUMINT. Active HUMINT is defined as working with sources that are recruited and tasked with getting information, usually with a long process of selecting, recruiting, and maintaining them. Typically, specially trained intelligence personnel handle this since the risk for the prisoners, as well as the HUMINT-operator, increases, especially when working against organised crime. Generally, active HUMINT is used where other means of intelligence collection are too time-consuming or difficult to implement. HUMINT can also be used to speed up analyses by testing the validity of a story directly, rather than only relying on data that may eventually reveal how something was done or who was involved.

Prison Intelligence has a lot to gain from intelligence personnel with knowledge of both kinds of HUMINT. Information used in the intelligence process is often collected from prisoners reporting what they see, hear, and do. Specially trained HUMINT-operators provide an extra edge to the intelligence collection. The unique environment in the detention systems creates opportunities not usually available to other agencies' HUMINT-assets. Since prisoners are locked up, their whereabouts are always known, contrary to human sources in an open society. This means time spent locating the source is minimised. Additionally, since the prison controls the placement of prisoners, prisoners who are of interest to the security or intelligence organisation can be put together with a recruited source.

Therefore, the prison intelligence HUMINT-operators do not have to spend weeks or months infiltrating organisations to get close to a target-person, as is often the case working against criminal organisations. Instead, they can work with strategic placement and reliable, known sources. A well-functioning organisation can also cooperate with other agencies, taking over sources as they begin serving time, and handing over sources to, for example, the police, once they are released.

#### 4.3.4 Technological Advancements

It should be noted that advancements in technology also support the intelligence efforts in prison. Many countries face an increasing number of issues with drones, for example. Prisoners coordinate with individuals outside to drop off contraband via drones. Additionally, criminal networks can use drones to monitor movements in a prison in preparation of a planned escape, for instance. Therefore, the implementation of sophisticated drone detection systems can be crucial in the assessment and prevention of threats. Furthermore, advancements in scanning technology, internal systems, and cameras can all benefit the intelligence gathering process and provide further data for the intelligence units to analyse. As such, technological advancements within prisons can be seen as a best practice that supports the functioning of the intelligence structures.

#### 4.4 Key Findings

In summary, regardless of the differences between countries in Europe, the fact remains that every country deals with persistent criminal activity during detention. This commonality unites all prison services and highlights the importance of developing and sustaining prison intelligence services. In particular, it is essential for prison services to be aware of the activity within prisons on both a local and national level to ensure the safety of staff, fellow prisoners, and society as a whole. These intelligence units provide prison management with advice on the operational, tactical, and strategic levels. Additionally, a strong prison intelligence apparatus may aid in the greater battle against organised crime.

Actionable prison intelligence may provide law enforcement with information that would otherwise be lost, which can then be used in criminal investigations. Furthermore, intelligence sharing with law enforcement can lay the foundation of more coordinated interagency collaborations. Collaboration does not have to be limited to law enforcement, however, as can extend to other national and international partners as well. Finally, various factors may aid in the realm of prison intelligence such as the creation of HUMINT-units and technological advancements that expand the range of data intelligence units can use to analyse threats.

Based on these findings, **the expert group recommends** for prison services to invest in the following points:

- The creation of their own intelligence units that are not reliant on any other agency, such as law enforcement.
- The creation of not only local, but also national intelligence structures, as illicit activities are not limited to a single prison but may span across several institutions.
- Interagency collaboration between various partners, particularly law enforcement, to aid in the broader approach against organised crime. This includes international organisations like Europol, with the goal of developing a more integrated approach and information position regarding crime from detention.
- Collaboration with fellow prison services on an international level, as the transnational nature of crime in Europe causes overlap in the individuals and organisations that are detained across the continent.

The analysis of prison intelligence and interagency collaboration underscores that sustainable security cannot rely solely on operational measures but must be rooted in shared information, strategic foresight, and institutional learning. To illustrate how these principles operate in practice, the final chapter presents a comprehensive case study that brings together the key themes explored throughout the handbook – from risk management and organised crime prevention to intelligence integration and interagency cooperation – offering a practical demonstration of how theory translates into real-world application.

## 5. INTEGRATING THE FRAMEWORK: CASE STUDY AND FINAL REFLECTIONS

### 5.1 From Theory to Practice

Throughout the preceding chapters, the multifaceted challenges and strategic responses involved in managing prisoners were explored, linked to Organised Crime (OC) across European prison systems. From understanding the nature and risks of OC involvement, to examining existing legal frameworks, operational practices, and interagency coordination, a clear picture has emerged: effective management of OC prisoners requires not only robust national systems, but also close international cooperation.

The cooperation and global practices examined reveal that European countries are increasingly aligning their efforts to monitor, manage, and rehabilitate high-risk OC prisoners, while also disrupting their criminal networks –both within and beyond prison walls. **A consistent theme for the experts across all chapters** has been the importance of structured collaboration, timely communication, and the strategic use of shared platforms and frameworks to foster mutual learning and enhance collective security.

This handbook, therefore, has been designed not only as a reference, but as a practical tool for harmonising approaches, improving institutional security, and strengthening the effective management of OC prisoners. The main objectives are:

- Provide a common framework and standardisation
- Enhance security and safety
- Facilitate knowledge sharing
- Promote cooperation and interoperability

A handbook on OC prisoners is an essential tool for European countries because it promotes unified standards, improves prison security, supports staff training, facilitates rehabilitation, strengthens cooperation, ensures legal compliance, and adapts to emerging threats. It empowers prison systems across Europe to manage OC prisoners effectively and safely, ultimately contributing to stronger public security and justice.

However, **challenges identified by the expert group** such as legal diversity, resource gaps, cultural differences, resistance to change, evolving threats, and data privacy must be acknowledged and proactively managed. Addressing these challenges ensures the handbook remains practical, relevant, and effective across different European contexts.

To better illustrate the practical application of the principles and strategies discussed in the previous chapters, this case study follows the prison journey of a prisoner affiliated with an organised crime group. It offers an examination of how correctional services respond to the unique risks and challenges posed by such individuals, particularly in the areas of security management, risk assessment, regime planning, and targeted interventions.

## 5.2 Case Study: Prison Journey - Managing an Organised Crime Prisoner

The incarceration of individuals involved in organised crime presents unique and significant challenges for prison management. These high-risk prisoners often possess extensive criminal networks, leadership roles, and a history of violence, making them a persistent threat to prison security and order. This case study follows the prison journey of M.T.S., a convicted member of a transnational organised crime group involved in narcotics trafficking, firearms smuggling, and money laundering.

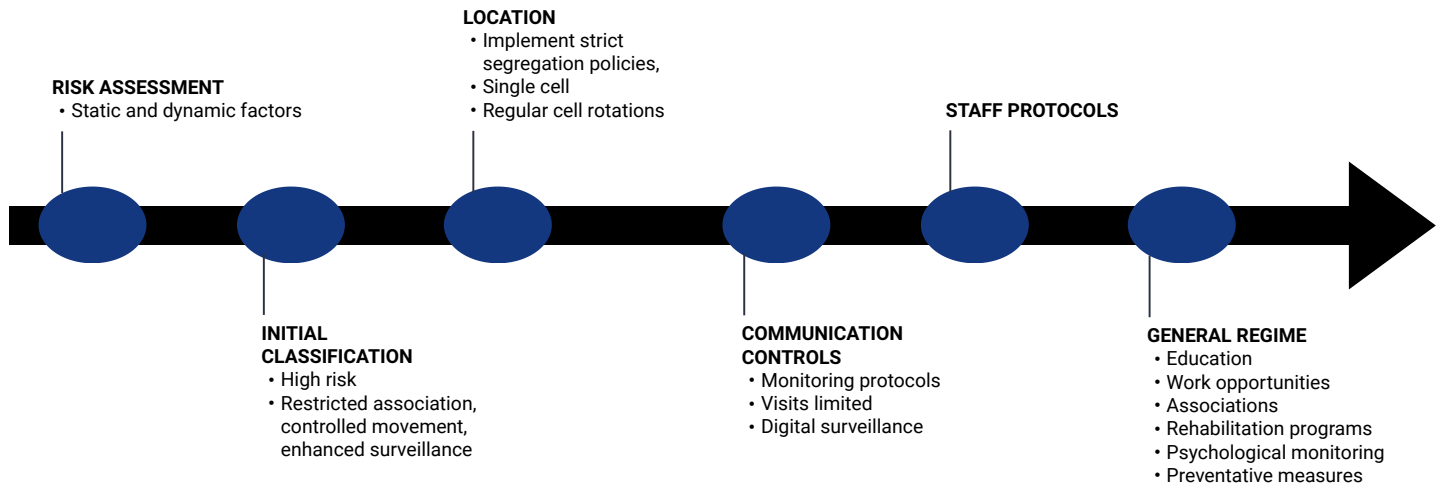
### Offender profile

- Name: M.T.S
- Age at admission: 42
- Affiliation: a transnational organised crime group involved in narcotics, firearms trafficking, and money laundering
- Conviction: Conspiracy to commit murder, organised crime, money laundering, drug trafficking
- Sentence: Life imprisonment (25 years minimum before parole eligibility)

### Security management approach: General Impact of Organised Crime and Risk Assessment

In the case of M.T.S., risk assessment played a pivotal role in managing the complex threats he posed as a high-risk prisoner involved in organised crime. Within the prison environment, organised crime exerts a powerful and destabilising influence, threatening security, order, and rehabilitation efforts. Gangs and criminal networks linked to prisoners like M.T.S. introduce violence, corruption, and operational disruptions that complicate prison management significantly. Conducting a thorough and dynamic risk assessment upon M.T.S.'s admission enabled prison authorities to accurately identify his threat level, considering his leadership role, history of violent offences, and ongoing connections to external criminal groups, to implement the most effective security measures.

Upon arrival in custody, M.T.S. underwent a thorough risk assessment to guide evidence-based decision-making. However, some elements require more time and ongoing observation during incarceration to be fully assessed and confirmed, often relying on prior records if available or continuous intelligence updates.



### Risk assessment (static and dynamic factors)

- Seriousness of the current offence
- Leadership role in organised crime
- History of corruption of public officials (assessed over time, including during incarceration or via previous records if available)
- Previous escape attempt (while awaiting trial)
- Manipulative behaviour (monitored continuously during imprisonment)
- Continued contact with external criminal networks (assessed via ongoing intelligence and communication monitoring).
- Risk assessment should include contraband monitoring, assessing both the likelihood of smuggling activity and the potential criminal networks behind it.
- Implement comprehensive, multi-layered assessment tools that integrate psychological, behavioural, and intelligence data to form a complete risk profile for M.T.S.
- Regularly update these profiles to respond to evolving risks.

### Initial classification outcome

- Security category: High risk
- Initial regime: Restricted association, controlled movement, enhanced surveillance

### Location

- Implement strict segregation policies, keeping M.T.S in separate units or specialised high-security wings, minimising interaction with the general prisoner population.
- Single cell
- Regular cell rotations to prevent relationship-building or planning

## Communication controls

- Establish robust communication monitoring protocols, including intercepting phone calls and analysing mail for coded messages.
- Visits limited to vetted individuals; all non-legal visits supervised
- Digital surveillance team assigned to monitor encrypted communication attempts

## Staff protocols to manage M.T.S

- Only experienced senior officers assigned to direct supervision
- Regular briefings to avoid staff manipulation
- Staff rotation to prevent familiarity and corruption risk
- Potential influence over staff and other prisoners
  - Training prison staff to recognise and report signs of gang influence or corruption is crucial to maintaining order. Periodic security audits and integrity tests of staff can also help mitigate the risk of corruption.
- Train staff in de-escalation techniques and crisis intervention to handle violent or disruptive behaviour more effectively and safely.

## General Regime

Due to his status as a high-risk organised crime prisoner, M.T.S regime was customised as follows:

- Education: limited to in-cell distance learning; staff escorted to classes
- Work opportunities: Not eligible for positions with access to goods, movement, or staff areas
- Associations: highly restricted; tiered system based on ongoing risk review
- Rehabilitation programs: Use individualised intervention plans that consider the specific personality, criminal history, and motivations of M.T.S
- Psychological monitoring: monthly case reviews
- Prison management should focus on high-risk prisoner segregation and restrictive measures for suspected members of organised crime, to avoid contact with M.T.S
- Establish preventative measures to reduce gang recruitment. Regularly assess gang dynamics within the prison and provide psychological interventions for at-risk prisoners in contact with M.T.S

## 5.3 Prison Intelligence - Intelligence Integration

Challenges in prison intelligence are particularly significant in the case of M.T.S. due to his extensive connections to transnational organised crime networks. Effective intelligence gathering and analysis are crucial for monitoring his communication attempts, preventing the orchestration of violence or escape plans, disrupting his influence over other prisoners, and ultimately maintaining prison security and order.

Effective intelligence requires:



Managing high-risk prisoners involved in organised crime, such as M.T.S., requires a multifaceted and dynamic security approach tailored to their unique risks and behaviours. Effective risk assessment, strict segregation policies, rigorous communication controls, and specialised staff training are essential to maintaining order and minimising the prisoner’s influence within the prison environment.

Furthermore, integrating robust intelligence capabilities and fostering collaboration between correctional facilities and external agencies are critical for anticipating threats and disrupting criminal networks. Ultimately, a comprehensive, adaptive strategy that combines security measures with psychological and rehabilitative interventions offers the best chance of ensuring prison safety while addressing the challenges posed by organised crime prisoners.

## 5.4 General Overview

In the light of the previous chapters, the following table provides a concise overview of the critical aspects of managing the high-risk organised crime prisoner, M.T.S. It highlights the offender profile, risk assessment outcomes, security measures implemented, and intelligence management protocols. This summary serves to encapsulate the comprehensive approach required for effective prison security and prisoner management in high-risk environments.

Chapter	Challenges	Recommendations	Conclusions
One - Strategic Foundations of Prison Security in Europe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resource intensive</li> <li>• Real-time decision making</li> <li>• Miscommunication</li> <li>• Overcrowded prisons</li> <li>• Organised crime groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrated monitoring tools               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexible protocols</li> <li>• Feedback loops</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Conduct intelligence-led assessments to identify gang affiliation and involvement in               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organised crime</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Security in Europe is increasingly challenged by organised crime, which cross borders, evolve quickly, and often emerge inside prisons, testing the adaptability and resilience of correctional systems.
Two - Organised Crime and its Impact on Prison Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smuggling of contraband</li> <li>• High-ranking gang members' threats               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Escape plans</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Influence on other prisoners</li> <li>• Complexity of assessing risk</li> <li>• Communication monitoring</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement advanced surveillance and smuggling detection</li> <li>• Monitor staff vulnerabilities               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish preventative measures to reduce gang recruitment</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Implement multi-layered assessment tools</li> <li>• Robust communication monitoring protocols</li> </ul>	Risk assessment should be dynamic, comprehensive, and data-driven to reduce the impact of high-risk prisoners. Utilising specialised tools and systems can minimise the influence of organised crime, reduce violence, and ensure safety.
Three – Management of High-Risk Prisoners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intelligence collection</li> <li>• Disruption of criminal networks</li> <li>• Resistance to rehabilitation</li> <li>• Lack of post-release support               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff training gaps</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Legal and ethical boundaries               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active networks outside prison</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use individualised intervention plans               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply motivational interviewing techniques</li> <li>• Develop gang-specific programs</li> <li>• Partner with mentoring organisations for post-release support</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Specialised staff training</li> <li>• Implement security measures and tailored regimes</li> </ul>	Managing high-risk prisoners requires psychological understanding, gang dynamics knowledge, security measures and post-release support. Targeted strategies improve intervention effectiveness and reduce recidivism.
Four – Prison Intelligence and Interagency Cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited access to reliable information               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understaffing</li> <li>• Data overload</li> <li>• Poor interagency communication</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Rapidly changing dynamics               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal and surveillance restrictions</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop anonymous reporting systems</li> <li>• Increase funding and staffing</li> <li>• Equip intelligence units with advanced tools</li> <li>• Strengthen collaboration with external law enforcement</li> <li>• Frequent intelligence briefings               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use real-time monitoring technologies</li> <li>• Respect legal boundaries</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Overcoming intelligence challenges involves technology, interagency cooperation, and legal compliance. Strengthening communication and adapting to changing conditions will improve security and safety in prisons.

## 5.5 European Practices and Transferable Insights

The case of M.T.S. reflects the real-world approaches that several European countries have adopted to manage prisoners linked to organised crime.

For instance, Italy has developed the “41-bis regime,” which enforces strict isolation, controlled communications, and continuous monitoring for prisoners involved in mafia-type organisations. This model has significantly reduced the capacity of organised crime leaders to issue orders from prison, though it requires high staff integrity and psychological support mechanisms for prisoners under long-term restrictions. The Netherlands operates specialised “Extra Secure Units” for high-risk prisoners, integrating behavioural monitoring, advanced digital surveillance, and staff rotation policies to prevent corruption and manipulation. Similarly, Sweden has introduced dynamic security models where staff engagement and rehabilitation programs coexist with strict intelligence controls—proving that security and reintegration can be pursued simultaneously.

These examples demonstrate that the effective management of organised crime prisoners depends on balancing security, intelligence, and rehabilitation, and on continuous knowledge sharing across European prison administrations. The approach outlined in the M.T.S. case study reflects these European experiences, showing that cooperation, adaptability, and innovation remain central to tackling the evolving threat of organised crime inside prisons.

## 5.6 Strategic Proposal on Managing Organised Crime in Prisons

**The EuroPris Expert Group has identified** common challenges and best practices across jurisdictions, emphasising the need for intelligence-led, multi-agency, and ethically grounded responses. This proposal outlines strategic recommendations to enhance prison security and disrupt criminal networks operating within and beyond prison walls.

### Key challenges identified:

- Persistent criminal activity during detention, including coordination of external networks.
- Staff vulnerability to corruption, coercion, and manipulation.
- Technological threats, including drones, encrypted communications, and digital financial transactions.
- Exploitation of vulnerable prisoners, leading to violence, radicalisation, and recidivism.
- Inadequate intelligence structures and interagency collaboration.

### Strategic Objectives:

1. Disrupt and contain organised criminal networks.
2. Protect staff and prisoners from violence and coercion.
3. Strengthen institutional integrity and public trust.
4. Balance security with rehabilitation and human rights.
5. Enhance intelligence capabilities and interagency cooperation.

## 5.6.1 Recommendations

The following graphic illustrates core recommendations **identified by the Prison Security Expert Group** – spanning intelligence, risk assessment, staff protection, technology, rehabilitation, and implementation. By translating the themes explored in the previous chapters into a visual format, it highlights the essential areas that require consideration.

Establish Dedicated Prison Intelligence	Implement structured risk assessment frameworks	Strengthen staff protection and integrity protocols	Enhance technological defenses	Promote interagency and international collaboration	Develop targeted rehabilitation and Exit programs	Implementation Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create local and national intelligence units to monitor, analyse, and respond to organised crime.</li> <li>• Integrate HUMINT capabilities for proactive intelligence gathering.</li> <li>• Use data analytics and surveillance technologies to detect patterns and threats.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopt dynamic multi-layered risk.</li> <li>• Regularly reassess prisoner profiles, especially those linked to organised crime.</li> <li>• Develop standardised classification systems across jurisdictions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce staff vetting, rotation, and anonymous reporting systems.</li> <li>• Provide training on ethics, stress management, and threat response.</li> <li>• Establish secure staff-only zones and anonymised staff identifiers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deploy drone detection systems, signal blockers, and body scanners.</li> <li>• Monitor digital communications and financial transactions.</li> <li>• Secure prison management systems against cybersecurity threats.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formalise information-sharing agreements with police, intelligence, and judicial bodies.</li> <li>• Participate in joint intelligence centers and cross-border initiatives.</li> <li>• Align with European best practices (e.g., Italy's 41-bis, Netherlands' EBI, Sweden's Entre).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support individualised intervention plans for disengagement from organised crime.</li> <li>• Expand vocational and educational programs to reduce dependency on prison hierarchies.</li> <li>• Collaborate with community organisations for post-release reintegration.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal frameworks: review and amend legislation and support intelligence sharing and surveillance.</li> <li>• Resource allocation: invest in staff training, technology and infrastructure.</li> <li>• Monitoring &amp; evaluation: establish KPIs and feedback loops to assess policy effectiveness.</li> <li>• Ethical oversight: ensure compliance with human rights and data protection standards.</li> </ul>

## 5.7 Key Findings

Managing prisoners involved in organised crime in prisons is highly complex due to the need to balance security, rehabilitation and legal rights while preventing organised crime from flourishing within the prison environment. This presents a continuous and evolving challenge for prison authorities.

**The work of the EuroPris Prison Security Expert Group** highlights a real need for an integrated and strategic approach to deal with the challenges posed by organised crime in prisons. From security management to handling high-risk prisoners and strengthening prison intelligence, coordinated and coherent responses are essential. The recommendations cover both practical aspects (like training and digital tools) and systemic ones (like international cooperation and monitoring of best practices). Only a European, better global, and cross-cutting vision can ensure an effective, humane, and sustainable approach to managing OC prisoners – with benefits for internal security and the justice system as a whole.

Overall, a shared vision would support a more resilient, coordinated and ethical framework for tackling the multifaceted challenge of organised crime in prisons, recognising that such criminal activity is a shared international concern requiring collaboration, cross-sectoral efforts and adaptive capacity.



**EuroPris**  
**Bezuidenhoutseweg 20**  
**2594 AV, The Hague**  
**Netherlands**  
**[secretariat@europris.org](mailto:secretariat@europris.org)**

Application to reuse, reproduce or republish material in this publication should be sent to EuroPris.

The opinions expressed by the expert group do not necessarily represent the views of the European Commission.