



Using Training to Improve Prison Staff Wellbeing: Recommendations following the EPTA 2025 Conference

Introduction

The good practices presented below stem from the discussions and conclusions of the EPTA Annual Conference 2025, held in Samoranovo, Bulgaria, on the theme “How to use training to improve prison staff wellbeing? Building a stable workforce with effective leadership for a safer tomorrow.” This event gathered representatives from 24 countries and highlighted the urgent need to address prison staff wellbeing through structured, evidence-based training strategies. The recommendations were validated by the EPTA Coordination Committee and aim to improve staff retention and support prison administrations in creating safer, healthier, and more resilient work environments. These recommendations are targeted at Prison staff at all levels, mentors, training academies and HR departments, as well as policy-makers within prison administrations.

1. Defining and Embedding Wellbeing

In addition to European standards fixed by the Council of Europe, each country should define prison staff wellbeing within its national context, based on identified challenges and psychosocial risks. This definition should reflect a balance between mental and physical health, professional and personal life, and be embedded in the organisational culture through training and leadership practices. Academies should adopt a clear and shared reference framework for staff wellbeing around key drivers such as health, leadership, work environment, relationships and purpose.

2. Design a Wellbeing-Oriented Training Strategy

Training should aim to normalise wellbeing, reduce stigma around mental health, and promote open dialogue. A hybrid pedagogical model is recommended, combining:

- Real-life learning scenarios,
- In-person and online modules,
- Self-directed learning,
- Mentoring and peer support.

Training formats should ensure physical and psychological safety, and promote emotional intelligence, stress management, and trauma awareness.

Training contents should be linked with practical implementation, customising training based on a needs-based approach, through assessment tools to help identify priority areas for training.

3. Strengthening Leadership Capacities

Prison managers should be equipped to foster wellbeing in their teams. Leadership training should focus on:

- Identifying and managing psychosocial risks,
- Supporting mental health and work-life balance,
- Promoting trust, recognition, and respectful communication,
- Applying coaching, empathy, and proximity management,
- Balance institutional requirements with human-centred leadership.

4. Grounding Training in Evidence-Based Practices

Training content should be informed by national and European research, including contributions from the EuroPris expert group on Wellbeing. Key evidence-based themes include the:

- Implementation of trauma-informed and relational approaches, to reduce its impact on staff and inmates
- Reduction in the use of force,
- Increase the emotional intelligence and personal development.

Additionally, the systematic use of concrete European examples of good practice as training material can be used to help translate concepts into actionable learning. These practices should be adapted to local contexts and integrated into continuous professional development.

5. Ensure Comprehensive and Relevant Training Content for Prison Staff

Training programmes should include:

- Relational approaches to inmate management,
- Trauma-informed care,
- Emotional regulation and stress management,
- Mentoring systems and psychological support from onboarding onwards,
- Digital tools for wellbeing monitoring and continuous learning,
- Reflective and creative methods (e.g. coaching, writing, peer learning).