

SUMMARY: EPTA Cross-Border Training on Interdisciplinary Practical Training – Solving Challenging Situations in Prison with the Concept of De-escalation

On 11–12 December 2025, the *EPTA Cross-Border Training on Interdisciplinary Practical Training – Solving Challenging Situations in Prison with the Concept of De-escalation* took place at the Berlin Penitentiary Training Academy (Bildungsakademie Justizvollzug), welcoming 19 participants from 12 jurisdictions. The training focused on the presentation of the **Interdisciplinary Practical Training (IPT)** as a simulation-based pedagogical approach with a strong emphasis on self-reflection, communication skills and interdisciplinary support, enabling prison officer trainees to better understand their own reactions and decision-making processes in challenging operational contexts. However, the IPT is not only part of the initial training, but also an important topic for regular further training for experienced personnel. Originally developed in 1998 **by practitioners for practitioners**, the IPT was conceived as an alternative to the use of physical force.

The IPT programme is delivered over two blocks of three days and is **coordinated by a dedicated IPT coordinator together with a team of “acting coaches”**. These acting coaches are prison staff members who are carefully selected and trained by a professional actress to perform roles within the simulations. To achieve a **high level of realism**, scenarios take place in former prison buildings or relevant public spaces. Sensory tools, (e.g. odour sprays, artificial wounds), are used to intensify the experience and expose trainees to complex situations in a controlled environment. Following each scenario, trainees take part in structured reflection sessions with an interdisciplinary team, making **use of video recordings to review their actions, communication and non-verbal behaviour**. Importantly, trainees are not graded during the IPT; instead, they receive detailed qualitative feedback aimed at fostering self-awareness and professional development. The training covers a **broad spectrum of operational situations relevant to prison work**, including escorting prisoners or managing prisoners with mental diseases. In total, around 100 scenarios are assigned to specific thematic areas, providing comprehensive and systematic preparation for a wide range of professional challenges.

During the event, participants from the attending jurisdictions actively engaged with the IPT methodology by assuming the role of trainees and practising several selected scenarios. These included managing a newly arrived inmate who was unkempt and smelled strongly and needed to be persuaded to shower before sharing a cell, responding to a disturbed inmate who emptied his cell due to the mistaken belief that he was being released, witnessing and addressing the abuse of power by a colleague, and convincing a group of inmates watching a football match to return to their cells earlier than expected. Simulations then were analysed with the IPT trainer, actors and observing participants.

Key takeaways from the exercise highlighted the value of **developing innovative pedagogical approaches** based on simulation and role play within prison officer training. The structured use of **standardised scenarios** with clearly defined learning objectives was seen as essential for ensuring consistency and transferability. Participants also emphasised the **effectiveness of video-based evaluation** as a powerful tool for reflection and professional learning, particularly in relation to communication and non-verbal behaviour. Finally, the event underlined the **importance of international exchange**, allowing participants to compare and discuss different approaches to managing complex and sensitive situations across diverse penitentiary systems.