

## Gomel Recommendations on Developing Education

### in Penitentiary Institutions of the Republic of Belarus

International conference “Educational, socio-correctional activities and psychological aid in the penitentiary system” organized by the Representative Office of the German Adult Education Association in the Republic of Belarus, Gomel regional public association “Community Development Projects”, Department of Penalty Execution of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, Directorate of the Department of Penalty Execution in Gomel Region was held on November 16-18 in Gomel, the Republic of Belarus within the framework of the project “Education Opens Doors”<sup>1</sup>.

The conference greeted more than 100 specialists and experts from 11 countries (Belarus, Bulgaria, UK, Germany, Ireland, Kyrgyz Republic, Moldova, the Netherlands, Russia, Uzbekistan and Ukraine), including representatives of ministries and departments, public administration and self-administration bodies, penitentiary system, educational and social institutions, civil society organizations and private training centers, mass media.

The participants discussed a wide range of issues and lines of education, training and psychological aid in penitentiary system.

Summing up the discussion the participants:

**Emphasize the commitment to international right to education standards**, including ensuring accessibility of education to the inmates which is outlined in the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (UNO, 1955, 2015), the Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners (UNO, 1990), the European Prison Rules (2006 г.), Recommendation No. R (89) 12 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on Education in Prison (1989), etc.;

**Support the principle of non-discrimination and equality of educational opportunities**, stipulated by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the UNESCO Convention and Recommendation against Discrimination in Education (1960);

**Propose to consider a set of recommendations** aimed at improving the legal and regulatory framework, the quality and efficiency of prison education, expanding and diversifying education offer, providing specialists with scientific and methodological support and training as well as strengthening international cooperation.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Improving legal and regulatory framework of prison education may include:

1.1 Adoption of norms and principles that stipulate the obligation of correctional and educational institutions to provide opportunities for prisoners to get education in different forms and broaden their involvement in educational processes at different levels, namely general and special secondary education, vocational training, higher and additional education for children and youth, adult education;

1.2 Providing prisoners with a possibility to get specialized secondary or higher education in extramural (distance) form, including on a budgetary basis; development and adoption of legal instruments for getting education in prison in extramural (distance) form, including development of a mechanism that would allow participation in centralized testing for prisoners willing to get higher education;

1.3 Including programs of supplementary adult education important for social rehabilitation of prisoners, among them training courses in professional and social skills development, into the list of educational programs provided on a budgetary basis and confirmation by the issuance of a corresponding document;

1.4 Including vocational education programs culminating in the qualification of manual worker with a certificate issuance into the list of types of education provided to prisoners on a budgetary basis;

1.5 Amending the regulatory and legal framework with provisions that promote cooperation between penitentiary institutions and public and private organizations, public associations on matters of expanding and diversifying education offer for prisoners;

1.6 Defining the provision and use of equipped venues for self-study of prisoners and the time for such study in Internal Regulations of Correctional Facilities;

1.7 Defining the use of electronic books by prisoners for educational purposes and their inclusion into the List of Personal Property of Inmates in Internal Regulations of Correctional Facilities;

1.8 More effective consideration of educational experience of prisoners and its results in incentive system of a correctional institution;

1.9 Consideration of a possibility for prisoners to be enrolled in educational institutions to get specialized secondary and vocational education on the basis of copies (duplicates, extracts) of educational certificates and amending the rules of admission;

1.10 Consideration of a possibility for prisoners and detainees to transfer from full-time learning to distance learning without expulsion from educational institution and introduction of the relevant amendments to the Education Code of the Republic of Belarus;

1.11 Consideration of a possibility of recognizing prisoners as a specific category of learners and introduction of the relevant amendments to the Education Code of the Republic of Belarus;

1.12 Initiating establishment of Inter-Ministerial Council including representatives of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus, the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Belarus, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus in order to improve prison education management and allocate duties and responsibilities among the parties.

## 2. Improving provision of education in penitentiary institutions requires:

2.1 Widening the network of general education and vocational education institutions, educational centers providing specialized secondary and higher education in extramural (distance) form, additional education for children and youth, adult education in correctional institutions;

2.2 Enhancing cooperation with partner organizations (educational, cultural and social institutions, commercial organizations and NGOs) for diversifying training programs and improving material-technical infrastructure of penitentiary institutions;

2.3 Raising awareness among prisoners of their right to education, their possibilities and conditions for the exercise of this right, as well as promoting prisoners' participation in education;

2.4 Developing training courses in subjects important for social rehabilitation of prisoners after release, including training in legal issues related to employment, housing, family, social security as well as building up knowledge and skills in self-support, moral and psychological preparedness to social interaction and autonomy;

2.5 Developing recommendations for prison staff on assisting prisoners in their education and increasing their involvement in educational processes;

2.6 Complementing educational and correctional programs with video courses to use as part of organized social training courses. Developing video courses contents as well as validating their efficiency within the framework of a special project;

2.7 Facilitating implementation of elements of distance learning in theoretical part of vocational education programs;

2.8 Improving technical capacities of prison education including ICT allowing for self-study of prisoners. Initiating a project on using electronic books with information useful for self-study, social and cultural development;

2.9 Encouraging students of the Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus and other educational institutions to prepare (including on a competitive basis) methodological materials on work with prisoners and their further scientific expertise in the Department of Penalty Execution of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus;

2.10 Testing the mechanism of online tournaments between different correctional institutions.

### **3. Improving scientific methodological provisions of prisoners' educational activities includes:**

3.1 Developing Professional Development Program for prison staff engaged in correctional work that includes international legal standards on safeguarding prisoners' right to education, examples of best practices in provision of prison education, the basics of andragogy;

3.2 Considering establishment of Scientific and Methodological Council within the Department of Penalty Execution of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus in order to develop suggestions on improving the organization and methodology of work with prisoners with the prospect of establishing a Research Centre within the Department of Penalty Execution of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus occupied with methodological scientific support of penal system institutions' activities in the sphere of improving legal regulation, provision and contents of education for prisoners and detainees, teaching methods as well as psychological and educational support of the above mentioned persons;

3.3 Teaching educators and psychologists in correctional institutions as well as educational institutions and partner organizations effective forms of educational work during short-term courses in areas important for social rehabilitation of prisoners after release;

3.4 Developing competence building training programs (in penal enforcement law, corrective pedagogy and psychology) for representatives of educational institutions, public associations working with prison learners;

3.5 Regular research in the sphere of prison education including analysis of educational needs of prisoners and their attitude towards educational programs; consequential identification of areas for improvements in this sphere;

3.6 Promoting research activities of the Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, other higher education institutions and research organizations of the country in the sphere of improving legal regulation, provision and contents of education for prisoners and detainees, teaching methods as well as psychological and educational support of the above mentioned persons;

3.7 Adapting the development of educational programs for penitentiary institutions to specific needs of prisoners and duration of their detention;

3.8 Initiating development of educational programs consisting of modules with no fixed deadlines and based on self-study, which enables prisoners to learn at their own pace.

### **4. Promoting the exchange of experience and strengthening international cooperation requires:**

4.1 Encouraging mutual visits, workshops and seminars, sessions, description of experience in peer-reviewed literature;

4.2 Learning from international experience in prison education and correction and implementation of best practices;

4.3 Strengthening cooperation with representatives of penal correction system from abroad including studying the experience of the State Penitentiary Service of Ukraine and charitable organization “Light of Hope” (Ukraine);

4.4 Expansion of contacts between experts and professional organizations such as European Prison Education Association, etc.;

4.5 Initiating an international project on building a scientific-methodological team (laboratory) developing educational and correctional programs aimed at preparation of prisoners for social rehabilitation;

4.6 Organizing a permanent working group/expert network on the issues of prison education within DVV International office.

The above mentioned recommendations precondition making relevant amendments and additions to the Education Code of the Republic of Belarus and other regulations that relate to provision of education in penitentiary institutions of the Republic of Belarus.

It is suggested to establish an interdepartmental working group charged with development of draft amendments and additions that would include representatives of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus, the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Belarus, Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus and other organizations and agencies.

*November 18, 2016*

*Gomel City*