

Harm Reduction International's Online Webinar

“Promoting Health and Rights: Prioritising People in Detention in the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond”

Wednesday, 8 March 2023 / 15.00-16.15 (GMT)

Introduction & background

The rapid spread of COVID-19 prompted governments around the world to adopt extraordinary measures, often by invoking emergency powers and/or introducing exceptional laws and policies. In many cases, this led to the adoption of highly restrictive measures which have had a particularly negative impact on vulnerable populations by exposing them to significantly greater health risks and human rights abuses.

One of these populations is people in detention. On the one hand, they are more likely to contract and become seriously ill from COVID-19 because of the disproportionately high burden of disease they carry, coupled with the poor and overcrowded conditions they are forced to live in. On the other hand, they have an increased vulnerability to human rights abuses because they are entirely dependent on the state for their health and wellbeing. While states have an obligation to prevent and control the spread of COVID-19 in prison settings, the extreme measures implemented to achieve these aims have often been disproportionate and unreasonable, not least because they have often been left in place for far longer than is necessary. Rather than enhancing safety, these measures appear to have made people in detention more vulnerable to health and human rights harms and abuses. At the same time, opportunities to carry out critical structural changes to prison systems worldwide have so far been largely squandered.

As the world marks three years since the pandemic began, we are at a critical juncture where the opportunity for contemplation and change is still possible. Reflecting on the proportionality, necessity, and effectiveness of responses to COVID-19 in prisons is essential not only to identify failures and best practices to address the current pandemic, but also to develop effective and rights-based strategies to confront other emergencies in prisons, both present and future. It is imperative that initiatives to set standards and policies for pandemic prevention, preparedness and responses at the international level pay specific attention to the unique needs of people deprived of their liberty.

Objectives & Key Issues

By bringing together civil society representatives, prison health and human rights experts, prison- based health and harm reduction service providers, and high-level individuals involved in the Pandemic treaty process, this session aims to:

- Present the main findings of the Harm Reduction International’s (HRI) report “More harm than good? The Impact of COVID-19 Responses in Prisons on Human Rights and the Provision of Health and Harm Reduction Services”
- Present and assess key issues around the COVID-19 measures implemented in prisons in France, Kenya, Mexico and Moldova, including their impact on the provision of health and harm reduction services, as well as human rights;
- Reflect on challenges, failings and/or best practices that emerged in the above mentioned countries;
- Identify lessons learned from COVID-19 responses in prisons and strategies to protect the health and rights of people in detention during the current pandemic and beyond;
- Promote the inclusion of people in detention, and of detention-related issues, in the Pandemic treaty draft by engaging members involved in its development; and
- Promote human rights-based responses to current and future health emergencies.

Format and Language

The event will be held online on 8 March at 15.00 GMT. Please adjust the time according to your time zone. The live session will be hosted by HRI in zoom, with technical support available at the time from HRI and Spanish/English interpretation.

The session will be recorded, and shared on HRI’s social media accounts. Further specifics about how to connect and technical support for the session will be shared by HRI’s team in due course. At the day of the event HRI’s report will be uploaded to the website and shared with all participants.

The session will be 75 minutes in total, and will be structured as follows:

Timing	Action/title/intervention/issue	Speaker/moderator
2 min	Introduction and objectives	Moderator – Ajeng Larasati Human Rights Lead-HRI
5 min	The Pandemic Treaty negotiation process and opportunities to promote the health and rights of vulnerable groups, including	Precious Matsoso, Chair of INB

	people in detention	
10 min	More harm than good? The human rights impact of COVID-19 prevention and control measures in prisons	Gen Sander- HRI
10 min	Lessons from the establishment of the first MAT clinic in the Shimo La Tewa prison in Mombasa, Kenya	Hussein A.Taib- MEWA
10 min	The impact of COVID-19 restrictions on people in detention in Mexico	Beatriz Maldonado- Mujeres Unidas x la Libertad
10 min	The Right to Health Care in Prison during the COVID-19 Pandemic - Republic of Moldova experience, Moldova	Svetlana Doltu- AFI
23 min	Q&A/Discussion	Ajeng Larasati- HRI