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## **The drug problem in Czech prisons and selected foreign prisons<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Extended summary**

The sharp rise in the number of drug users in the Czech population linked to the even sharper rise in the number of drug dealers and other persons living off drug addiction both locally, on the small territory of the Czech Republic, as well as on an international scale, has recently led, among other things, to a radicalisation of prosecution for drug criminality and its offenders (Czech citizens and foreigners living in the Czech Republic). As always, this socio-pathological phenomenon (and the judicial reaction to it) has to a large degree been reflected in the prisons, and particularly in the composition of those persons imprisoned. The marked increase in the proportion of people dependent on drugs among offenders and at the same time among prisoners, accompanied by a rise in the number of persons imprisoned for so-called drug criminality (relating directly or indirectly to the production, distribution or use of drugs) has required the prison services to adopt and put into practice consistent measures designed to minimise and prevent the incidence and use of drugs in prison institutions in order that Czech prisons do not become a “school” for drug addiction and drug criminality.

Prison staff realised relatively early the risks accompanying the increased incidence of drugs and drug-dependent prisoners in the prisons and as a result, before drug addiction became one of the priority problems to be resolved by prisons (as has happened for example in many neighbouring states), they turned to the experiences and information contained in research conducted in the 1970s into drug addiction in prisons and developed a set of anti-drug measures both for custodial and prison sentences.

The following **fundamental aims** were established for the anti-drug policy:

- 1) **as far as possible to prevent the entry of narcotic and psychotropic substances into prison buildings and as far as possible to eliminate their use by the prisoners.**
- 2) **to create a functional system for the treatment of drug-dependent persons who are serving their sentence in Czech prisons. Such a system should above all motivate drug-dependent prisoners to consciously rid themselves of their dependency on drugs.**
- 3) **to develop a system of prevention that during the serving of a sentence would prevent prisoners (who do not yet use drugs) from becoming dependent on drugs.**

In order to meet the above aims the General Directorship of the Prison Service developed a set of measures and tasks directed both at prisoners and at its own staff and the conditions for the serving of a sentence. As early as 1993, the Government asked the Minister of Justice to prepare a set of anti-drug measures for the needs of the prison service. At the time of its

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<sup>1</sup> Marešová, A. Sochůrek, J., Válková, J. The drug problem in Czech prisons and selected foreign prisons. Prague: ICSP, 2000. 122 pages. Summary.

preparation approximately 6 % of prisoners in Czech prisons were found to be dependent on drugs. Even then, experts assumed that in the following years there would be a multiple increase in the number of prisoners dependent on drugs and that the distribution of drugs into and inside the prisons would make the serving of a sentence more problematic. For this reason a succession of anti-drug measures was adopted between 1994 and 2003.

In addition to the tasks included in the sets of anti-drug measures, a number of other tasks have been developed whose aim is to make more effective those measures that have been enforced so far but also those in preparation. These are as follows:

- 1) to carry out deeper analyses into the world of the prison, both as concerns the environment in which the sentence is served (custody) and the possibilities of changing it (in order that the drug-related goals can be achieved),
- 2) to carry out analyses of the current composition of prisoners with regard to the incidence of drug addiction among them. Special attention should be paid to high-risk groups of prisoners, particularly young and first-time prisoners.

The study presented by ICSP researchers has also become a part of the above analyses planned. The study is the result of research on drug-dependent prisoners carried out by prison service staff under the leadership of PhDr Jan Sochůrek, as well as the other analyses charting the current state of the drug problem in Czech prisons and the methods of treating drug-dependent prisoners abroad, carried out by ICSP researchers PhDr A. Marešová and PhDr J. Valková.

The research on drug-dependent prisoners carried out in Czech prisons at intervals over many years has also helped to improve the efficiency of existing measures and develop new ones. In 1999 this research and surveys were supplemented by our own research into the drug addiction scene among the imprisoned criminal population.

The study “The Drug Problem in Czech Prisons...” is the fundamental outcome from the penological research into drug-dependent prisoners and the methods used to solve the drug problem in Czech prisons over several years up to the year 2000.

The study is composed of four relatively independent parts:

- 1) In the first part – the introduction and first part of the first chapter – there is a general treatment of the drug problem: the current drug scene in the Czech Republic, the relation of the illegal production, possession and distribution of drugs to criminal law and the penalties for so-called drug criminality.
- 2) The remainder of the first chapter is devoted to charting the drug problem in prisons – i.e. the institutions of the Prison Service, in which the prisoners have been given an unconditional prison sentence. There is a detailed treatment of the Set of Anti-Drug Measures and its fulfilment by the Prison Service up to September 2000. It also includes a brief description of the research carried out on addicts in prisons and the phenomena relating to drug abuse.
- 3) The next part of the study contains penological research on drug-dependent prisoners carried out in 1999 in selected Czech prisons. The research was conducted by Dr. Sochůrek, based on a modified version of the DROGAN SF-

3/K questionnaire on a sample of prisoners roughly corresponding to the external differentiation of prisoners in categories, i.e. groups according to sex, age (juveniles, adults), penological re-offences (first-time or repeat offenders). In total, 436 correctly completed questionnaires were processed. Of these, 93 were completed by juvenile boys, 98 by adult male first-time offenders, 137 by adult male repeat offenders and 108 by adult women, of which 8 were repeat offenders. The aim of the research, i.e. charting the current state and trends of the development of the drug problem among the imprisoned criminal population, was completely fulfilled.

- 4) The final part of the study contains almost all the available information on the methods of treating drug-dependent prisoners abroad, primarily in neighbouring European countries, the USA and Canada. This part was assigned with the intent to provide information on how the same problem is handled abroad and as a source of ideas for other potential anti-drug measures that may be applied in Czech prisons.

The most interesting data for further use in the prison service came, as planned, from the results of the extensive research into prisoners serving their sentence in Czech prisons in 1999. Its results can be summarised as follows:

- 1) In our estimation approximately 40 % of prisoners had experience of drugs; drugs had been a significant criminogenous factor in their previous life.
- 2) The largest increase in drug addiction is visible in the group of juveniles and the group of women. Drug addiction is also the prime factor among juvenile delinquents.
- 3) A comparison of research results from roughly twenty years ago shows up new trends primarily in the more frequent use of classical drugs (previously substitutes were more common).
- 4) The first experiments with drugs come at the age of 14 to 15.
- 5) The main source of information about drugs comes from people's peer groups. It is clear that a preventive campaign has to focus on this reality.
- 6) Curiosity is the main motive to experiment for the first time. This testifies to the generally favourable social climate for drug abuse, in which drugs are presented and perceived by some young people as a symbol of the times.
- 7) Drugs commonly penetrate prisons and 20 % to 30 % of the prisoners have access to them on a more or less regular basis.
- 8) The motivation for drug abuse differs greatly between juveniles and other groups of prisoners. There is also a difference in the approach to drugs of those who already have experience with drug addiction and other prisoners.
- 9) The research shows that the main ways by which drugs penetrate prisons are:
  - a) the passing of drugs to prisoners by further unspecified "employees" (other

research shows that these are chiefly employees from outside the prisons in common workplaces with the prisoners, rather than prison service staff directly in the prisons), b) deliveries “from outside” (packages, visits). The abuse of medications prescribed to the prisoners by doctors remains a prime source of drug abuse among prisoners.

The penological research carried out can in no way be regarded as comprehensive. It was conducted only in prisons and the basic information was obtained primarily from the questionnaires, which were correctly completed by 436 convicted prisoners. It rather represents a probe into the drug problem in prisons. Despite this fact, we believe that relevant information was obtained which provides a means of basic orientation in the problem. This can be confirmed by a comparison with the results of other research quoted in the study.