

# CoE anti-torture committee raises concerns over Romania's prison abuse

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EU TODAY (20.03.2019) – <https://bit.ly/20snQn6>– The Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) has published its *report* on its visit to Romania carried out from 7 to 19 February 2018. The report highlighted abuse of Romanian prisoners by staff, inter-prisoner violence and allegations of police ill-treatment.

The report states that a considerable number of allegations of physical ill-treatment of prisoners by prison staff were received, notably by members of the masked intervention groups based in four of the five prisons visited. They reported that situation was particularly alarming at Galați Prison where a climate of fear was evident. The report details several allegations of ill-treatment by staff corroborated by medical evidence, and raises serious concerns over the lack of recording of injuries by the health care service and failures to investigate allegations effectively. In the light of the grave findings, the CPT once again questioned the *raison d'être* and *modus operandi* of the masked intervention groups.

In the report the CPT calls on the Romanian authorities to reconsider their continued existence. Instead, it proposes that a system of first-responders could be established, combined with an increase in the staffing complement on the

maximum-security regime wings and the adoption of a dynamic security approach.

The report also documents several cases of severe beatings and sexual abuse by prisoners in their cells, notably among young adult prisoners at Bacău Prison. The CPT urged the authorities to put in place a cell-share risk assessment process for each person entering prison before they are placed in an admission cell, followed by drawing up and implementing an individual risk and needs assessment. As part of the strategy to combat inter-prisoner violence, the CPT recommended that the authorities invest far more resources in recruiting additional staff and developing their professionalism and training. The CPT argued that such an approach would also enhance the efforts underway to offer prisoners purposeful activities to prepare them for reintegrating into the community.

The CPT's findings of the 2018 visit showed that the health care services in the prisons visited were in many instances not providing an adequate standard of care. Conflicts of interest of health care staff represented a major underlying problem which eroded the patients' trust in their clinicians.

The CPT recommended that the Romanian authorities ensure that clinical staff are truly independent of prison staff. The report also highlights the lack of psychiatric input evident in all the prisons visited, and that inmates suffering from a mental health illness had to cope with conditions of detention which impaired their mental and physical health.

A number of allegations of physical ill-treatment (many of which corroborated by medical evidence) by police officers were received from detained persons. The allegations consisted primarily of slaps, punches, kicks and baton blows inflicted by police officers against criminal suspects either at the time of the arrest or during questioning at a police station, apparently for the primary purpose of coercing a confession. The CPT also commented on the investigation into allegations

of police ill-treatment and recommends that prosecutors strictly apply the criteria of effectiveness.

The CPT criticised again the holding of criminal suspects and remand prisoners in police arrest detention centres for up to two months or more, where they are exposed to a greater risk of intimidation and pressure. It explained these concerns are accentuated by the poor material conditions, inadequate health care and impoverished regime for persons held in arrest detention centres. Based on this, the CPT urged the Romanian authorities to consider converting arrest detention centres into proper pre-trial detention facilities and placing them under the authority of the Ministry of Justice and the National Prison Administration.