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CORRECTIONAL SERVICE OF FRANCE

The French prison system falls under the Ministry of Justice. It is governed by an Act of 1987, amended in November 2009. Before the reform, most of the rules for prisoners and operation of prisons

were of lower level regulations. By law, the enforcement of sentences should enhance "integration or reintegration of prisoners and the prevention of recidivism, in due respect of the interests of society and the rights of victims". The system of prisons should be turned towards reintegration. However, the guarding mission entrusted to the prison administration still takes precedence over this. The external contacts are considered a source of danger, as well as any form of collective expression of detainees [1].

There are 190 correctional facilities and 103 probation and reentry offices (services pénitentiaires d'insertion et de probation, otherwise known as SPIP) across the country [3]. There are five general types of correctional facilities in France: maison d'arrêt (for sentences less than 2 years), maison centrale, centre de détention, centre de semi-liberté and centre pour peines aménagées, and juvenile facilities. The French system also includes 40 correctional centers (centres pénitentiaires), which combine different types of facilities in one complex. For instance, a correctional center can include both a maison centrale and a maison d'arrêt. These facilities are widely dispersed in communities across the country [1].

The size of prisons varies considerably. The smallest has an accommodation capacity of 10, the largest 3.000. And, on average, they vary between 100 and 600 places, depending on their construction year. About half of the institutions dates from the 19th or the beginning of the century. It is sometimes former religious premises (convents, abbeys, etc.) that have been converted in prison. These facilities are generally located in the heart of cities. The others were built at the end of 1980's or more recently (2000s to present). These prisons are larger (300-400 places for those constructed in the 80's and 500-600 places for the most recent) and usually located on the outskirts of cities (industrial zones, etc.) with poor access by public transportation. They are also designed so as to limit contact between inmates, but also between inmates and prison staff in a security perspective. Any movement within the prison implies crossing a multitude of gates and locks. These new buildings are decried by all (prisoners, prison staff, external stakeholders, etc.) To prevent any form of social life and thus causing tensions and violence [1].

These prisons built since the late 80s also fall under the "joint management": services such as laundry, food, work, vocational

training, etc. are delegated to private companies. More recently, the delegations also extended to the construction and maintenance of buildings. The private companies own the buildings for a 27 years period, during which the government pays rent. Since the early 2000s, there is also a change of the daily regime in institutions reserved for medium and long terms prisoners. The common regime used to be an "open (cell) doors" system, being replaced by a "closed system" as in remand prisons. Inmates cannot leave the cell unless accompanied by a member of staff and to attend a scheduled activity. The "open" systems are tolerance granted to those who demonstrate what the administration deems a "good behavior". Finally, only two prisons are entirely reserved for women. In other cases, women are placed in specific unit within men prisons (about 50 institutions concerned) [1].

All prison staff is subject to rigorous safety training in fire and first aid response. The National School for Correctional Administration in France (École nationale d'administration pénitentiaire, or Énap), a division of the Ministry of Justice, is responsible for training all correctional staff in the country. One distinctive feature of the French system is that all correctional employees are subject to the same comprehensive training at Énap. This centralized training creates a sense of solidarity among staff from different correctional agencies and facilities. About 3,440 new staff members were trained in 2010 (Énap, 2011). There are two types of training courses: initial training, which covers courses pertaining to administration and management, law, security, and reentry, and continuing training, which includes a wide range of specialized courses addressing particular issues relevant to work with the prison population (e.g., criminal psychology, neighborhoods and crime, understanding Islam, etc.) [2].

Staff members who are responsible for the direct supervision of inmates (i.e., prison guards) must complete eight months of fulltime training. All training includes theoretical and practical components, the former taking place at Énap and the latter in correctional facilities. Throughout its duration, the training curriculum alternates between theoretical and practical skills. Administrative and managerial staff members (i.e., prison directors) are subject to two years of training. During the two-year course, students receive one full year of training in a correctional facility, where they work closely with a more experienced prison director. At

the end of the training, they are not assigned immediately to head a facility on their own. They work instead as part of a management team, ranging from two to five people in most facilities but sometimes including up to 15 individuals in larger facilities. The management team includes a director, a deputy director, and other management staff, all of whom have been subject to the same training but have varying levels of experience [2].

Reference list

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