

Inspection visit Viru Prison

The advisers to the Chancellor of Justice made an unannounced visit to Viru Prison from 12 to 14 September 2018. The objective of the inspection visit was to get an overview of the detention conditions at the prison and to monitor how the rights of the detained and arrested persons are guaranteed. The living arrangements and conditions at detention facilities must, among other things, help guarantee that the persons who have served their punishment will start abiding the law. Therefore, the role of the prison in the reduction of recidivism and the costs of imprisonment is big.

During the visit, the advisers to the Chancellor of Justice had confidential conversations with the detained and arrested persons (in smaller and larger groups), talked to the prison officers and took a tour of the prison's territory and premises. They also conducted random checks of documents. A medic also participated in the inspection visit. The Chancellor of Justice last visited Viru Prison in 2014 and before that in 2011.

It is positive that the possibilities of the detained and arrested persons to make phone calls have improved in comparison with the previous inspection visit. A lot of work has been done with unit III, which is responsible for detaining minors and adolescents. The number of offences in unit III has decreased and the atmosphere in the unit has improved considerably in comparison with 2016. The good practice of including the detained and arrested persons in unit III in decision-making that concerns them must be continued.

Regrettably, the Chancellor of Justice has to repeat many of the recommendations made before. There were no call buttons in all courtyards and the advisers to the Chancellor of Justice noticed cells with dangerously cracked windows. The prison also used solitary confinement for long periods of time, including to punish minors. The prison must find meaningful ways for the detainees to spend time (especially female ones). They should also be allowed to communicate with their friends and family at short meetings without separating them with a glass wall.

The main problem of the hospital is the lack of officers that deal directly with the detained and arrested persons. This affects the mood of the officers as well as the ability of the prison to deal with the detained and arrested persons, and guaranteeing the prison's security in this manner is also difficult. Viru Prison and the Ministry of Justice must continue trying to fill in the vacant positions of prison guards, senior guards and inspector contact persons. The training system and opportunities should also be analysed and the attractiveness of the wages offered should be assessed.

It is also necessary to consider whether the staff of unit III could be offered an opportunity to gain experience from the practice of the prison officers of another country in dealing with minors and adolescents or participate in training organised by experts who deal with adolescents and minors in the prisons of other countries. The common rooms of the living departments of Building R should be refurbished and more furnishings should be acquired. The detained and arrested persons in the department could be included in the refurbishment of the rooms.

The detained and arrested persons should be informed of their rights as soon as possible after their arrival to the prison.