

# A Visit from the Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT)

Research in Midlands Prison, September 2019

## Introduction

Last September, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) visited Midlands Prison for a few days. During that time, a team of 4 researchers from the PRILA (Prisons: the Rule of Law Accountability and Rights) project, based at Trinity College Dublin, spent time in the prison to see how the CPT does its work. The PRILA project researches how people in prison and staff experience inspection and monitoring. When the researchers visited Midlands Prison, they wanted to learn from prisoners and staff what they think about groups like the CPT coming into the prison. The researchers gave out surveys to all prisoners, and also interviewed prisoners and staff to ask them about their thoughts on the impact of CPT prison monitoring. The CPT has visited prisons across Europe for 30 years, but ***no one knows what people in prison and staff think about them***. This research will be shared with the CPT so they can learn what prisoners and staff think about their work, and how to improve it. This handout is a summary of the research, and also provides more information about the CPT.

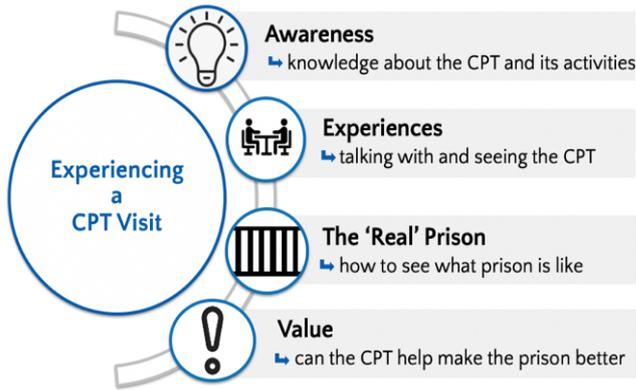
## What is the CPT?

The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) is an independent prison monitoring group. It examines the treatment and conditions in prisons by conducting visits to prisons either every 4 or 5 years, or as a surprise. The CPT worries about big picture issues in the prison, and doesn't handle individual complaints. For example, after its last visit to Ireland in 2014, the CPT recommended that slopping out be ended in Irish prisons. The CPT has 47 members, one person from each country in the Council of Europe. When the CPT visited the Midlands Prison, the group had members from Austria, the UK, Italy and Germany. After the CPT visited prisons across Ireland, they sat down with the Irish government and Irish Prison Service to tell them what problems they found. Soon the CPT will give the government specific recommendations, and the government will have to respond and tell the CPT what they are going to do to fix the problems. Even when the CPT is not in Ireland, prisoners can write to them confidentially under Rule 44 of the Irish Prison Rules.

The CPT was in Midlands Prison from September 23 - 26, 2019. The four researchers were in the prison beginning on 16 September and ending on 27 September, 2019. The researchers spent time on the landings speaking with prisoners and staff to learn about the prison. They also followed CPT members around to see how they do their work. On the last day of the CPT visit, the researchers worked with the Red Cross Volunteers to give a survey to every prisoner in the Midlands. After the CPT left, the researchers came back a month later to interview **23** prisoners and **25** members of staff, which is a sample of the large numbers of staff and people in prison.



# What We Learned



- Staff know more than prisoners do about the CPT and are more **aware** of CPT activities.
- Some people in prison enjoyed their **experience** talking with the CPT, and others did not know if they could trust them. Staff were not sure if the CPT cares about staff issues.
- Prisoners and staff think it is very difficult for the CPT to see **the 'real' prison**, but they think surprise visits, speaking to a lot of people and spending time on the landings are good ways to learn about the 'real' prison.
- People in prison and staff are not sure if the CPT can make the prison better. But, both groups think the CPT's work is **valuable**.

**This handout shares more information about these themes.**



**PRISONERS** are not given much

information about who visits the prison. People were confused about what the CPT is, and how it is different from other monitoring and inspection bodies. Some people said they wish they had more time to prepare before being interviewed by the CPT. **Not knowing about the CPT can make it hard for people to talk to the CPT.**

I mean we don't know anything about it, we don't know who they are,... And you're telling me like they come in and do all this stuff for us and it's like hold on - **you do all this stuff for us but I have no clue who you are.** -022 Prisoner

Yeah, everything is just deep down for so long that you just don't want to talk about anything, (...) when they do come in you're just not ready to talk. If you had more notice of people coming in you might have **time to think about what you want to talk about.** -028 Prisoner

**STAFF** know more about the CPT

and other monitoring and inspection bodies than prisoners do. This means they have more time to prepare to talk with the CPT members when they come to the prison. But, some staff think it is a **very good idea to share more information about the CPT so that prisoners and staff want to talk to them.**

At least this time in fairness we have been given a little bit of time to gather up the information. (...) And that means we're **probably able to present that information probably in a better way.** -071 Staff

You do need to **get the information out there** that they're coming, and what they're about, **so both staff and prisoners aren't afraid to engage with them.** -050 Staff



## Experience

In general, **PRISONERS** said they would like to speak with the CPT if they had the opportunity. People who did speak with the CPT had different feelings about the experience. It was **important for people to feel they could trust the CPT**. Some **prisoners wanted more information** because they were not sure what the CPT was doing in the prison.

Well on that day that they were here, yeah **I would speak to them if they came over to me**. It's kind of hard for a prisoner to go over to speak to them. -033 Prisoner

They put me at ease, **saying that they don't talk to the officers and the officers can't hear outside the door**. So that kind of put me at ease and **I felt comfortable talking to them**. -035 Prisoner

Like to explain first. **I didn't have a clue**, like I can't really read properly, you know, I can't. To **explain it first** like the way you explained to me. **I would have thought ahead and told her better things, you know? I didn't really know, all I knew was, all I seen was 'torture', so I said, 'it's not me!'** -029 Prisoner

Many of the **STAFF** interviewed by the researchers said they would talk to the CPT and **would share information with the CPT members**. But, **not all staff were sure if the CPT members wanted to know about staff issues or concerns**. They also said CPT monitoring is normal for their job and does not change their workday.

I hesitated initially and then **I felt that if I didn't say it, that I would probably regret it** and feel a bit guilty that I didn't say it.

-062 Staff

If I thought there was something underhand going on. **I would say it to them and mention it to them**. -056 Staff

They're coming in and interviewing prisoners, prisoners, prisoners. But, **I don't think they take into (account) how working here has an effect on prison staff**. -067 Staff

They have their job to do and we still have our job to do so **it doesn't really impact on us, we are still going to do our job**. -072 Staff



## 'Real' Prison

**PRISONERS** and **STAFF** agreed that it is a **challenge for the CPT to understand how the prison works** because the CPT is a European prison monitoring group that only visits the prison for a few days, every 4 or 5 years. Both agreed that **surprise visits to the prison are a good way to see what the prison is like** on a normal day.

Just surprising them and then you'd see something that's real rather than what they want you to see. - 034 Prisoner

**PRISONERS** and **STAFF** also said that CPT members should try to **speak with different types of people** when they are in the prison.

I suppose all they could do is randomly interview people that would be willing to talk from different wings but not just pick one wing. Go around and examine all the different wings because the different wings are different to each other. The situation in the cells are different. -026 Prisoner

I think (they) picked (their) prisoners for a purpose. (They were) picking quiet prisoners that have backgrounds in well to do society. (...) (They) interviewed very few people who were coming off the streets or who were homeless on the outside.

Some members of **STAFF** worried that the **CPT might not understand the culture in Ireland** and thought the CPT should take time to learn about the culture of the prison.

They should do their homework. (...) Understand the culture of where you're about to visit or investigate. -010 Staff





## Value of the CPT

**PRISONERS** did not think the CPT will be able to change the prison. But, they did say they value CPT because:

1. The prison changes when the CPT members are in the prison.
2. The CPT can try to persuade the government and the Prison Service to change the prison.
3. The CPT is a connection to the outside world.

**STAFF** were also not sure if the CPT is able to change the prison. But, like prisoners, staff did say they value the CPT. This is because:

1. The CPT acts as an outside check on the prison and helps to make sure the prison follows the rules.
2. The CPT makes recommendations that staff can use to improve the prison.

I don't think it is going to make a big change and I am just being honest (...) I don't think it is going to make big change because as I said, I have seen these bodies come in before in my time in prison and I think the issue is, as I said, the powers that be in the prison.

-031 Prisoner

I think (the CPT) are fairly good. Because when they came in here, **when we heard they were coming in, there was people that were sleeping on the floor and that was all done away with.** (...) So all that stopped when they got word that they were coming. -037 Prisoner

It was interesting to think that **someone out there is concerned at what is going on behind closed doors.** It is nice to feel that someone wants to know that everything is done correctly. -026 Prisoner

Ya know, like is it a **nice box-ticking exercise?** They've come, they've looked. Everyone gets a clap on the back that everything looks really well. -053 Staff

I think they are all good. I think we need to keep our house in order because if we are self-governed, it leads to chaos. So, it is **good that somebody from the outside can look in and say, 'no that is wrong.'** -062 Staff

There's **no sanction for us for not following up** on it. (...) How much weight does it actually have? -067 Staff

If they can influence that then that's a good thing, because obviously my nagging isn't working. **If an international body can help me influence that then that's great.** -051 Staff



# What's Next?

The PRILA research team has spent the last year reading and reviewing the more than 50 interviews carried out with prisoners and staff last September in the Midlands Prison. This handout shares our main ideas and conclusions. It is only because Midlands prisoners and staff shared their experiences with us that we are now able to write reports and articles to share this research with the CPT and other monitoring and inspection bodies. In fact, **the information you shared with us was recently presented to the Minister of Justice, the Inspector of Prisons and the Director General of the Irish Prison Service.** We told them what you think about the experience of being visited by the CPT and asked them to make sure that monitoring and inspection in Ireland is more focused on the following:

- 1. Provide prisoners with more information about monitoring and inspection and let them know how to write to or speak with monitoring and inspection groups, such as the Visiting Committees, the Inspector of Prisons and the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT).**
- 2. When inspecting a prison, spend more time on the landings to learn about the prison and talk to prisoners.**
- 3. Make a greater effort to ask staff about their issues and concerns in the prison.**
- 4. Speak with all types of prisoners, from different parts of the prison, and give people time to prepare to speak.**
- 5. Share reports and recommendations with prisoners and staff so they can see what changes are being suggested for the prison.**

The PRILA team would like to **thank all the Midlands staff and people in the prison** for making this research possible. The research we did together last September was the first time the CPT has allowed researchers to watch them do their work. But, we would not have been able to learn how you feel about the CPT visit to the Midlands without your help. For this, we thank you very much.

We hope this research project helps to improve how prison monitoring bodies do their work, so they can strengthen their efforts to improve treatment and conditions in prison.

**We thank you very much, and wish you all the best.**

The situation with Coronavirus has made it impossible to return to the prison this year to share this information with you in person. But, if you have any questions or comments you can contact the lead researcher by writing to the address below. If you need assistance with this, contact the Chaplain, who may be in a position to help.

### **Research Contact Information**

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## **How to Contact the CPT**

You can write to the CPT confidentially under Rule 44 of the Irish Prison Rules. The CPT welcomes information on the treatment and conditions of detention of persons deprived of their liberty. But remember, the CPT is focused on big picture issues, and won't be able to address individual complaints.

### **Address:**

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*This research report has been developed with assistance from the Prisoner Support Network.*



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