

Prison Reform and Rehabilitation in Ethiopia

June 2021

Brief chronology of support by UNODC

- 2018**
Government: Legal reforms initiated to strengthen the criminal justice system including the prison system
- 2019**
Technical expertise provided in the drafting of the New Prison Proclamation and associated regulations
- Dec 2019**
UNODC Prison Needs Assessment conducted to identify priority areas of improvement in training and equipment
- May 2020**
1st batch of COVID-19 medical supplies delivered to the Federal Prison Commission
- Global Webinar on COVID-19 in prisons in partnership with UNDP, WHO, UNAIDS and OHCHR**
- August 2020**
2nd batch of COVID-19 medical supplies delivered to the Federal Prison Hospital
- Translation of the Nelson Mandela and Bangkok Rules into Amharic
- Dissemination of Amharic translated information, communication and education materials and infographics translated to help mitigate impact of COVID-19
- Dec 2020**
30 prison personnel from the Prison Training Centre trained to deliver trainings to prison staff on international standards in prison management, including on Nelson Mandela Rules and Bangkok Rules
- 250 junior prison officials trained on Nelson Mandela Rules
- Feb 2021**
UNODC-supported Prison Training Curriculum adopted and shared at the Annual Federal and Regional Prisons Joint Consultation Forum
- UNODC Training Needs Assessment in line with the New Proclamation finalized and validated by national stakeholders
- June-Dec 2021**
ICT Procurement and specialized trainings to be continued



What is needed to strengthen rehabilitation and modern prison management?

1. Harmonizing and implementing laws

Enacted in 2019, a new Prison Proclamation No. 1174 is expected to overhaul regulations, directives and help in the restructuring of the federal penitentiary system and for regional correctional administrations to replicate. New legislation includes measures to ensure the dignity of prisoners, their rehabilitation, reintegration, and security. Harmonization and implementation of laws, across regions and within all works and procedures, will help to address the current diversity in rules and practices.

2. Developing data management systems

UNODC identified that the Prison Commission needs to consider a data management system that can be linked to other databases developed by other criminal justice organs. Data management and sharing are an important component of prison management to ensure efficient sentence planning, rehabilitation and reform, security management or policy making.

3. Delivering prison curricula with a focus on joint trainings

A comprehensive training curriculum was developed and endorsed in January 2021 through the technical support of UNODC. This will ensure that prison officials can access standardized, human rights-based training material. The curriculum consists of 50 training courses for both beginners and in-service officers, with 10 modules already developed. The new Prison Curriculum includes modules on prison management in security, rehabilitation, and protection of the rights of prisoners and is aligned with the new Proclamation. It has incorporated the Nelson Mandela Rules as a key component of the training curricula.

4. Strengthening rehabilitation efforts

UNODC in previous assessments identified that the rate of recidivism, evidenced by former prisoners who came back to prison facilities, is indicative of the low levels of success in rehabilitating offenders. UNODC capacity-building activities include guidance on programmes to prevent recidivism and to reintegrated offenders into society.

5. Facilitating online learning

Greater access to more eLearning modules could empower officers in their own professional development. A total of 250 junior prison officials were trained on Nelson Mandela Rules in 2020 and 29 senior officials have already completed the related UNODC eLearning courses. UNODC is working to provide the necessary ICT equipment to help enhance online capabilities and access to online trainings.

6. Addressing the needs of vulnerable groups in prisons

Several gaps were identified in addressing the unique needs of special categories of prisoners, including women with children and inmates with physical and mental disability. The special condition of children between 15-18 should be given a strong focus starting with separation of these detained children from adult inmates. More efforts should be made to address special needs, ensuring equal access to education, training and health services provided in the facilities.

7. Strengthening coordination and cooperation with partners

Coordination and cooperation with partners, including other criminal justice organs and civil society organizations will be key to strengthening modern prison management that strives to achieve community-based reintegration.

Current situation in Ethiopian prisons



The prison system in Ethiopia is organized in one federal prison system and 10 regional prisons systems. The Aleltu Training Centre trains prison officers for both federal and regional prisons.



There are approximately between 100,000 and 120,000 inmates in Ethiopia, with approximately 4,800 (4%) female inmates.



The new Prison Proclamation No. 1174/2019 indicates a positive shift towards rehabilitation, reintegration, and protection of human rights.



Approximately 40,000 inmates were released as part of the government's large-scale pardons in 2020 to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 in places of detention.



Gaps in data management systems were identified in the overall criminal justice system with no adequate sentence planning system in place in prisons.



Despite progress, further improvements are needed in the treatment of prisoners in prisons including in the provision of basic services (rehabilitation support, health, education, food).

Training needs identified

Special Categories of Prisoners

- Children deprived of liberties
- Women in prisons with children
- Managing mental health in prisons
- Elderly, people living with HIV/AIDS in prisons

Security and Safety

- Security and safety related activities
- Promoting rehabilitation
- Managing stress and depression
- Management of violent and extreme prisoners, best practices

Rehabilitation and Reform

- Criminal Justice System and recent legislations
- Rehabilitation and reform standards
- Prison file management and sentence planning
- Role of community-based arrangements
- Legal aid, appeal, parole

Human Rights

- International Human Rights Law and Practice and Code of Conduct

Modern Prison Management

- Role of prison managers
- Change management and leadership
- Nelson Mandela and Bangkok Rules