

# ANNUAL REPORT 2024



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# OUR MISSION AND PRIORITIES OF INTERVENTION

For more than a decade, **the European Prison Litigation Network** has been engaged alongside its member organisations in reinforcing the judicial protection of prisoners across Europe. As a collective of former prisoners, law practitioners, researchers and active militants of the cause of prisoners, we act to uphold European and International human rights law in detention and promote the greater involvement of prisoners in the elaboration of public policies that affect them.

Our network gathers over thirty civil society organisations from twenty European countries recognised by national public authorities in their respective countries and European bodies as major actors of the defence of prisoners' rights and of the rule of law. Eight of our member organisations were founded or are partly constituted by former prisoners or relatives of prisoners. These are represented and actively participating in the governance bodies of the network.

We comparatively analyse prisons' systemic problems and research the determinants and obstacles to effectively accessing rights in detention. We also scrutinise the evolution of criminal policies, in particular the length of sentences and sociodemographic categories of incarcerated people, in order to address fundamental rights in detention through the question of the social functions of prison. Through this analytical work, we develop strategic litigation and advocacy to inform and influence European normative developments in prison issues and enhance the protection of detainees' fundamental rights.

## Access to justice

We campaign for access to justice, the right of people in prison to access legal information, legal representation and free legal aid, and strive to protect prisoners from reprisal for engaging in litigation. These rights are essential for prisoners' judicial protection, having practical impacts on accessing other rights in detention.

## Prison systems & penal policies

EPLN strives as a network of civil society actors and representatives of citizens with experience of incarceration for an increased participation of civil society in the elaboration of penal and prison policies that shape prison systems. We do this by researching and analysing the evolution of criminal and prison policies across Europe. We engage in dialogue with European and national bodies to address the central role played by penal policies in the perpetuation of structural problems in prison.

## Access to health care

Prisons are overrepresented by people with poor health, with the prevalence of infectious diseases and mental health disorders among prisoners being several times higher than in the general population. We advocate for detainees' right to healthcare by campaigning for the integration of prison healthcare provision to general health systems and access to release for prisoners who health condition is not compatible with detention. We also advocate for access to harm reduction services for people who use drugs in detention.

## Eliminating Torture in Prison

EPLN addresses the question of prison violence by documenting cases of torture and ill-treatment and defending the victims before domestic and international courts. In countries where the practice of torture is endemic, we campaign in particular for the fight against the impunity of perpetrators of torture acts and advocate for transparent and effective state investigation of torture cases.

## Accountability for War Crimes Committed Against Prisoners

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, EPLN works alongside Ukrainian NGOs to document crimes committed against Ukrainian prisoners under Russian occupation. Taking legal action to establish the violations committed in the context of the war of aggression involves establishing the facts, raising public awareness on them, and supporting victims in legal proceedings and their rehabilitation process.

# Member and Partner Organisations

## **APADOR-CH**

Romania

## **Asociacion de derecho penitenciario Rebeca Santamalia**

Spain

## **Avocats.be**

Belgium

## **Ban Public**

France

## **Bulgarian Helsinki Committee**

Bulgaria

## **Bulgarian Prisoners' Association**

Bulgaria

## **Centre for European Constitutional Law**

Greece

## **Forum Penal**

Portugal

## **Georgian Young Lawyers' Association**

Georgia

## **Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights**

Poland

## **HIV AIDS Legal Network**

Ukraine

## **Hungarian Helsinki Committee**

Hungary

## **Human Rights Monitoring Institute**

Lithuania

## **Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group**

Ukraine

## **Kosova Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims**

Kosovo

## **L'Altro Diritto**

Italy

## **League for Human Rights**

Czech Republic

## **Prisoner's Advice Service**

United Kindgom

## **Prisoners'Union**

Lithuania

## **Promo LEX**

Moldova

## **Protection for Prisoners of Ukraine**

Ukraine

## **Strafvollzugsarchiv**

Germany

## **StraLi**

Italy

## **Tatort Zukunft e.V.**

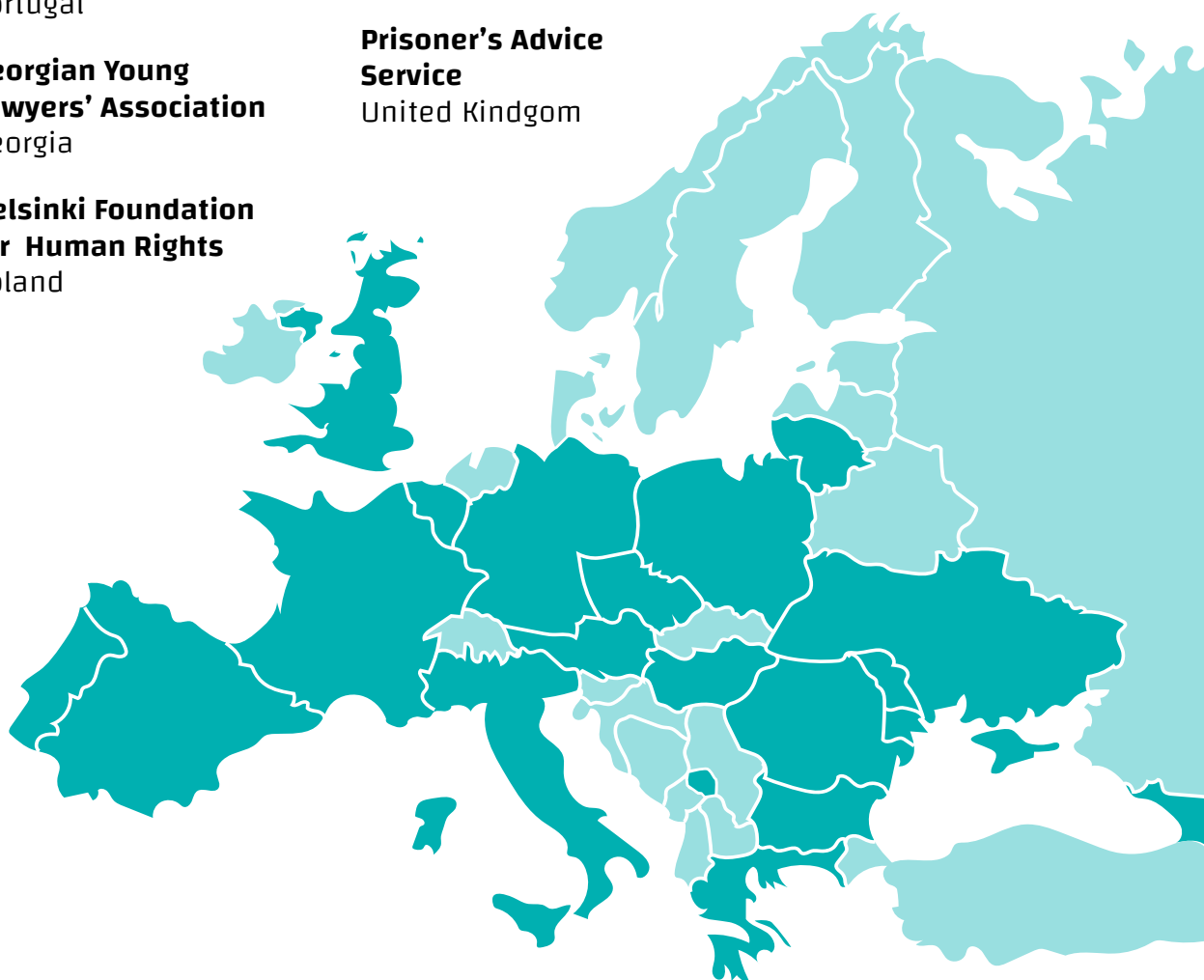
Germany

## **Ukraine without Torture**

Ukraine

## **Vereinigung Österreichischer StrafverteidigerInnen**

Austria





# OUR ACTION IN 2024

In 2024, EPLN continued to work at the transformation of European prison systems for ensuring greater respect for fundamental rights. Whether working at combatting ill-treatment and torture in detention, at integrating prison healthcare to general healthcare systems, or at addressing the harshness reserved to prisoners detained under special regimes, EPLN's action in 2024 further approached the protection of fundamental rights in prison through the pivotal question of the empowerment of prisoners to exercise their rights and access to court. In a context of toughening of prison and criminal policies and of a deterioration of the rule of law across Europe, enhancing respect for access to justice in detention has further become in 2024 a critical issue for upholding all fundamental rights in prison.

2024 was also marked by the further installation of a long term war of aggression in Ukraine. EPLN reaffirmed in 2024 its strong commitment alongside its Ukrainian partners to establish the truth on war crimes and other violations of international humanitarian law committed by Russian military and law enforcement forces against Ukrainian prisoners and assist the victims in their rehabilitation through justice.

## Accessing Remedies and Legal Aid in Detention

In continuation with a research conducted by EPLN in nine European countries **ON MECHANISMS OF ACCESS TO REMEDIES AND SYSTEMS OF LEGAL AID IN EUROPE AND THE FOLLOWING PUBLICATION IN 2019 OF A [White Paper on access to justice for pre-trial detainees](#)**, EPLN initiated in 2024 a new research associating the [Center for European and Constitutional Law](#), the [Human Rights Center ZMINA](#) and the [Criminal Lawyers' Association Forum Penal](#) to investigate the barriers that pre-trial detainees face in accessing justice to challenge their conditions of detention, and the extent to which existing legal frameworks, remedies, and support mechanisms make such litigation effective in practice. Focusing on Greece, Portugal, and Ukraine, the study situates national experiences within broader international and regional standards, with a view to **advancing both European and global protections for one of the most vulnerable groups in the criminal justice system.**

In line with an [advocacy campaign launched in 2019 at the EU level](#) to promote the adoption of legal instruments that safeguard prisoners' procedural rights, the present research aims to inform the network's advocacy and litigation campaigns at the European Level.

In **PORTUGAL**, following a [Rule 9 communication](#) submitted to the Committee of Ministers on the implementation of the **quasi-pilot judgment Petrescu v. Portugal** (Case No. 23190/17) in July 2024, EPLN and the [Criminal Lawyers' Association Forum Penal](#) participated in the [Civil Society Briefing](#) organised by [European Implementation Network](#) on 6 September 2024 **with state delegations prior to the Committee of Ministers' human rights meeting.**

[In its decision](#), the Committee of Ministers urged the authorities to develop a “**comprehensive strategy [...] embedded in a rational and coherent penal policy, to identify and address the different root causes of overcrowding and achieve long lasting solutions**”, and to establish a system of remedies for prisoners wishing to complain about their conditions of detention, in line with the requirements of the Court.

In 2024, EPLN and the Criminal Lawyers’ Association Forum Penal also continued their monitoring of the **REVISION OF THE EU VICTIMS’ RIGHTS DIRECTIVE**. After having sent an [extensive feedback on the Commission’s proposal for a revised directive](#) back in September 2023, amendments proposals were submitted to selected MEPs. EPLN and its Portuguese partner aimed to influence the LIBE Committee’s draft report on the issue (January 2024, non-public) to push for a stronger position of NGOs and lawyers’ associations in the institutional partnerships to be established at national level for ensuring that **victims of crimes in detention receive adequate support and legal information to enable them to seek justice**, and for improving the collection of data on crimes committed against prisoners in detention.

## Fighting against ill-treatment and torture, dismantling inhumane detention regimes

EPLN’s theory of action posits that structural changes in a prison environment that is by nature resistant to the law can not result from internal persuasion through transfer of best practices or staff training only, but requires the convergence of external pressures, stemming from legal action and advocacy with public decision-makers, carried out and relayed by specialized and, as such, legitimate civil society actors.

### **PUTTING THE FIGHT AGAINST TORTURE IN PRISON ON THE POLITICAL AGENDA FOR ACCESSION OF UKRAINE AND THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA TO THE EUROPEAN UNION**

The process of accession to the European Union initiated in Ukraine and in the Republic of Moldova in 2022 opened a unique opportunity to elevate prison issues to the status of a genuine political challenge, capable of overcoming the inertia of the prison institution and eliminating the root causes of systemic ill-treatment and torture in both countries.

In **UKRAINE**, EPLN had succeeded already in 2023 in having prisons included in the monitoring mechanism associated with the EU accession process. Initially limited to issues relating to material conditions of detention with ill-treatment considered as belonging to the past, the Ukraine Report 2023 on EU enlargement had eventually largely reflected the [analysis and recommendations made by EPLN](#), which put the focus on the recurring use of torture in the penitentiary system. EPLN continued in 2024 its advocacy campaign and [the Ukraine Report 2024 on EU enlargement](#) maintained the issue high in the priorities of reforms in Ukraine.

EPLN also acted in 2024 at mobilising the main international partners of Ukraine for the establishment of a working group to support and advise the Ukrainian government in effectively addressing torture in prison. These preliminary steps led to a kick-off meeting

in December 2024 with representatives of the UNODC, the Council of Europe, the International Committee of the Red Cross, EU DG NEAR, Delegation of the European Union to Ukraine, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the EU Project Pravo-Justice, and DIGNITY – Danish Institute Against Torture. Participants stressed the importance of aligning efforts to tackle systemic issues such as corruption and impunity while promoting accountability and sustainable reforms.

As regard the **REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA**, EPLN was as well consulted in 2024 by the European Union's DG ENEST in view of the preparation of the internal report of the EU mapping the pre-conditions for the accession of the country to the European Union. During this consultation EPLN reported on the systemic problems of the Moldovan prison system as reported at several occasions with its partner PromoLEX in litigation and communications to the Council of Europe. EPLN advocates in particular for the EU Report on Moldova to clearly address the problem of the prison subculture and the role played by the prison administration in its perpetuation, through the delegation of responsibility for maintaining order to "duty prisoners". EPLN also advocates for the EU to address shortcomings in investigating violence suffered in detention and the lack of independence of prison healthcare staff leading to systemic failures in healthcare provision to detainees. This advocacy continues as these issues still lack proper reflection in the Moldova Report of 2024.

### **LEGAL ACTION FOR ESTABLISHING FACTS OF ILL-TREATMENT AND TORTURE BEFORE COURTS AND PROTECTING PRISONERS FROM REPRISALS**

In **UKRAINE**, EPLN and its partners the [Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group](#), [Protection for Prisoners of Ukraine](#), and the [Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union](#) pursued in 2024 their legal actions aimed to establish facts of ill-treatment and torture before domestic and international courts and protect the victims. This work combines regular visits of places of detention, the identification of «torture factories» and the legal assistance to victims in legal proceedings.

EPLN and its partners initiated in particular a litigation campaign aimed at Article 391 of the Ukrainian Criminal Code. This provision, remnant of the Soviet penal system has been widely condemned by [human rights bodies and organisations](#) for eroding **“basic democratic principles and principles of criminal law” and for being used “in most cases as a tool of pressure and repression against recalcitrant convicts”**. In December 2024 EPLN submitted a petition to the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention against Ukraine to challenge this provision of the Ukrainian Criminal Code. The victim was subjected to torture and ill-treatment by the prison administration and eventually spoke out about the systemic use of torture in the penitentiary colony to human rights activists. Following his revelations, the victim was subjected to increased disciplinary sanctions by the administration and eventually convicted in 2022 under Article 391 of the Criminal Code for his “persistent disobedience to authorities of a correctional institution” and sentenced to one year imprisonment. The petition argues that Article 391 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine fails to meet international law requirements as denounced already at several occasions by national and international bodies, and cannot constitute a legitimate legal basis for detention. This petition, as part of the broader legal campaign, has been further continued since then to repeal this article from the Ukrainian Criminal Code.



## LEGAL ACTION TO ERADICATE PRACTICES OF SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

In **FRANCE**, EPLN and the [Observatoire International des Prisons](#) have been working in 2024 on the submission of a **third-party intervention to the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Faid v. France** (no. [316/24](#)).

The case concerns a prisoner whose conditions of detention include isolation, night waking, frequent body searches and strip searches before and after each visit, access to visits only through a hygiaphone, limited access to a telephone, and increased security measures when he is escorted out of prison (including being handcuffed and hooded and the presence of armed officers wearing balaclavas). The applicant was placed in solitary confinement in 2018 by the investigating judge in charge of the case, and in 2021 under administrative solitary confinement.

[In our submission of March 2025](#), we review extensive scientific research demonstrating the severe and irreversible psychological and physiological effects of solitary confinement and underline the urgency for the European Court to clarify its approach to such practices. This urgency is all the more pressing in light of the French Ministry of Justice's recent introduction of a special detention regime targeting prisoners deemed "most dangerous" and "linked to drug-related organised crime", which involve total isolation and heightened security measures, including permanent surveillance.

## War Crimes against Ukrainian Prisoners

Taking legal action to establish the violations of fundamental rights committed in the context of the war of aggression of Russia against Ukraine involves establishing the facts of torture committed against prisoners,, giving them public resonance, and supporting victims in legal proceedings and their rehabilitation process.

EPLN pursued in 2024 its work along its Ukrainian member organisations Protection for Prisoners of Ukraine and the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group aimed at providing a holistic assistance to prisoners victims of war crimes and other violations of international humanitarian law. This work combines a material support component aimed to provide for the immediate needs of detainees who found themselves caught up in the fighting or victims of occupation and were then evacuated by the Ukrainian authorities to facilities in safer regions, and repatriate prisoners who were deported and then released from Russia. The action of EPLN also responds to the victims' urgent need for justice by accurately documenting the crimes committed in prison and assisting them in domestic and international proceedings.

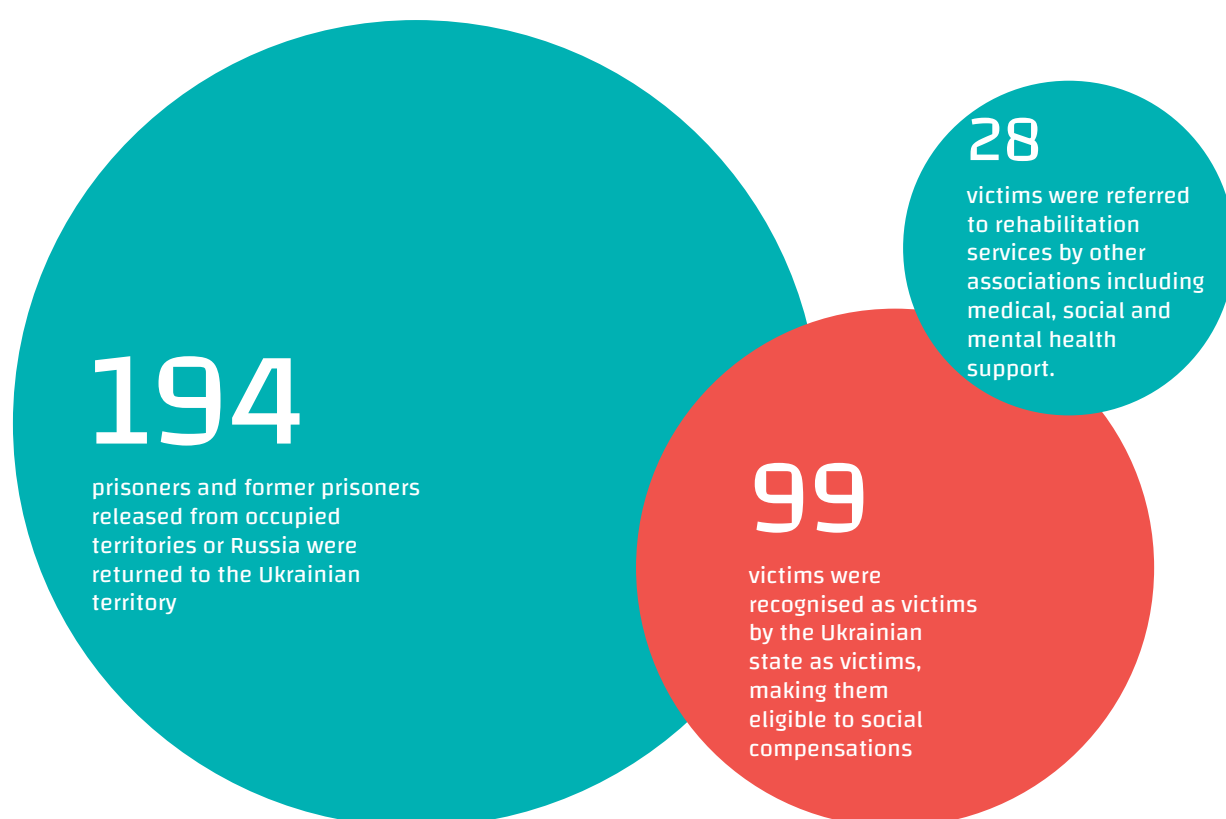
### DOCUMENTING WAR CRIMES AND PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO VICTIMS IN THEIR REHABILITATION PROCESS

Thanks to the transnational cooperation of EPLN, [Protection for Prisoners of Ukraine](#) and [Tbilisi Volunteers](#) in Georgia, the partners supported and provided protection in 2024 to a total of 194 Ukrainian civilian prisoners victims of war crimes who were released from

facilities in the occupied areas of Ukraine or from Russia. This cooperation enabled to coordinate a holistic support to victims involving their identification and their physical evacuation to the Georgian border, the provision of humanitarian aid and administrative support for the issuing of travel documents during their stay in Georgia and eventually their rehabilitation in Ukrainian society through the recognition of their status of victim by Ukrainian authorities upon their return in Ukraine.

In view of the excessive vulnerability of the released Ukrainian prisoners, and their documented revictimization throughout their journey back to Ukraine, in particular during their stay in Georgia, EPLN and PPU called on international bodies, Ukrainian and Georgian authorities to enhance their coordination and actually facilitate the return of released Ukrainian prisoners to Ukraine. As a result of these collective efforts, several European stakeholders increased their pressure on European Member States to facilitate the return of Ukrainian prisoners who are facing great difficulties in leaving the Russian territory after serving their sentences.

The PACE emphasized in its Resolution 2573 (2024),<sup>25</sup> from October 2024 the importance of keeping the issue of prisoners of war and civilian captives held in Russia or in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, high on the agenda of all member states. The PACE has noted that the international community had not given enough attention to the topic of Ukrainian prisoners of war and civilian captives, despite the massive violations of IHL and international human rights law involved. The Assembly called on the CoE member and observer States **“to spare no efforts to ensure the release of all Ukrainian prisoners of war and civilians from Russian captivity and accountability for those responsible for any crimes and violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law committed against these persons.”**



## COMBATting THE IMPUNITY OF PERPETRATORS OF VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

Since 2022, [Protection for Prisoners of Ukraine](#) (PPU) collected with the support of EPLN over 400 testimonies prisoners victims of war crime, from which 163 new testimonies collected in 2024. EPLN worked on their systematic review in view of the initiation of investigation by Ukrainian investigation bodies, as well as the preparation of legal proceedings at international level.

**At the domestic level**, the systematic submission by EPLN and PPU of information and materials to the Office of the Prosecutor General (OPG) of Ukraine providing evidence of violations of international law by the occupier's prison system, i.e the submission of nearly a hundred individual statements about war crimes committed in penitentiary institutions occupied in 2022, led to criminal **proceedings being instituted against the pro-Russian leadership of Kherson prisons, namely Yevhen Sobolev and Oleksiy Soroka, heads of Darivska (No. 90) and Holoprystan (No. 7) Correctional Colonies**. On 19 October 2023, Yevhen Sobolev was convicted in absentia of defection, and on 20 February 2024, he was additionally [convicted of high treason](#). On 22 July 2024, Yevhen Sobolev was [designated under the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime](#). On 13 June 2025, Oleksiy Soroka was convicted, in absentia, by the Kherson City Court of Ukraine of "violations of rules of warfare" (Article 438 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine). Over 150 prisoners have been formally recognised as victims in these criminal proceedings.

**At the UN level**, EPLN and PPU submission in 2024 before the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention concerning nine Ukrainian nationals – former Ukrainian prisoners deported to Russia., led to a [landmark opinion](#) by the UN WGAD (Opinion no. 34/2025) rendered on 28 April 2025. The UN WGAD concluded that the detention of the victims lacked a legal basis and was based on discriminatory grounds. The Working Group emphasised that the victims were detained incommunicado, that their transfer to Russia ran contrary to IHL and IHRL and had a deleterious impact on their rights, that their sentences were converted under Russian law in breach of the principle of non-retroactivity, and that their detention was discriminatory, based on their nationality. The Working Group called for the immediate release of the individuals still in detention, requested that Russia ensure an enforceable right to compensation for all victims, urged Russia to conduct a full and independent investigation into the victims' detention and to take appropriate measures against those responsible.

In October 2024, the **UN Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine** published its report, strongly resonated with the submissions by EPLN and its partner CSOs regarding the role of the Russian penitentiary system in crimes committed against the civilian population of Ukraine. In its statement, the Chair of the Commission of Inquiry underlined that **"the use of violent practices by Russian authorities against detainees (...) have been transposed to detention facilities run by Russian authorities in areas they occupied in Ukraine. Another common element concerns the recurrent use of sexual violence as a form of torture. Moreover, the Commission has found that personnel deployed by Russian authorities to detention facilities acted in a coordinated manner and according to a division of labour in perpetrating torture.**

At the OSCE level, in the framework of the call for submissions made by the **Moscow Mechanism of the OSCE** invoked on 29 February 2024 in relation to the arbitrary deprivation of liberty of Ukrainian civilians by the Russian Federation, EPLN submitted, on 31 March 2024, an extensive updated report covering the situation of the deportation of prisoners from Kherson.

163

testimonies of victims  
of war crimes victims  
collected

80

victims' information  
submitted to  
the Office of the  
Prosecutor General of  
Ukraine

## Reporting on the genealogy and patterns of use of torture in the Russian penitentiary system

EPLN contributed in 2024 to the report of **Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Russia**, and thereby to the **process of the drafting of the 2024 Human Rights Council Resolution on the situation of human rights in Russia**, proposing to include several specific points related to the deterioration of the human rights situation in the Russian penitentiary. In her report, published in October, the Special Rapporteur addressed the widespread and systematic use of torture and ill-treatment by the Russian Federation, a [“tool for repression at home and aggression abroad”](#).

[In its resolution, ultimately adopted on 10 October 2024, the Human Rights Council](#) integrated the recommendations proposed by EPLN and OVD-Info, by **“expressing concern at the torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment of**

**detainees, including acts involving the denial of access to adequate medical care, and their arbitrary placement in punitive solitary isolation cells or solitary confinement; at the unwillingness of the authorities to investigate allegations of enforced disappearances, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, as well as of sexual and gender-based violence against persons in detention”**

EPLN participated in 2024 in a research into enforced disappearances in Russia and the role played by **prisoner transfers** in this phenomenon. Together with [International Partnership for Human Rights](#) and [State Capture](#), EPLN highlighted that deficiencies in the Russian legal framework allow the authorities to keep convicts incommunicado during prison transfers for weeks or even months, effectively placing prisoners outside the protection of the law. The report was ultimately presented on 26 September 2024 at a parallel event organised at the UN Human Rights Council 57th session.

Earlier in March 2024, EPLN had already published in the [French newspaper “Le Monde” an Op-Ed](#) to highlight the significance of the death of Alexei Navalny as regard the role played by the Russian penitentiary system in the country's repression machinery and use of mass violence. The article was also [published in English on our website](#).

## **The Event : “Structural Problems in Prisons: Prospects for European Intervention”**

EPLN organised on 18 and 19 November 2024 the **conference “Structural Problems in Prisons: Prospects for European Intervention”** jointly with the [European Implementation Network](#) at the Palais de l’Europe in Strasbourg (France).

This conference followed a study conducted by EPLN and its partners in nine countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal and Romania) to assess the **effectiveness of European interventions in addressing systemic problems in prison systems**.

### **ADVOCACY**

This conference brought together 33 speakers, representatives of European and national institutions involved in penal and prison policy, academics, lawyers, judges and representatives of civil society and a total of 90 participants from 15 European countries to discuss the key challenges for tackling structural problems in prisons. [The conference addressed in particular the central role of penal policies in their persistence](#), and invited European and national authorities and civil society actors engaged in the defence of detainees’ fundamental rights to dialogue on the prospects for reinforced European interventions in the prison field more consistent with the state of knowledge on the root causes of overcrowding and persisting systemic violations of fundamental rights in detention.

## REAFFIRMING THE CRITICAL ROLE OF PRISONERS AND THEIR DEFENDERS IN UPHOLDING RIGHTS IN DETENTION

In times of shrinking civic spaces for human rights defenders and communities hindering their participation in penal and prison policy making, the conference was also a place to recall the critical role of prisoners and their defenders in upholding rights in detention.

The conference gave the floor to Volodymyr Panasenko, a former life-prisoner from Ukraine, who was recently released from prison due to his health condition.



"Generally speaking, the conditions of detention for most life prisoners can be described as inhumane and degrading. Do you think it is possible for a person to survive in such conditions for 30-35-40 years? If the majority of prisoners serving life sentences are destined to die in prison, it is difficult to speak of humanity, respect for human dignity, and strict observance of human rights."

M. Panasenko, an active litigant before the European Court of Human Rights at the origin of an important case law of the Court on access to release of life-sentenced prisoners in Ukraine, shared his experience as a litigant and his analysis for an effective dismantling of the system of inhumane and degrading special regimes imposed to lifers in Ukraine.

## Acting for the social reintegration of prisoners through enhancing access to sentence adjustments

While international and European standards on prisons have attached increasing importance to the principle of social reintegration of prisoners, prisoners executing their sentence benefit from only poor guarantees as regard their access to mechanisms of adjustment or reduction of their sentences, .

In particular, the multiplication of special regimes of detention subjecting certain categories of prisoners to harsher discipline makes it in practice impossible to prepare any rehabilitation plan. Beyond the actual regime of sentence enforcement, the dissemination in detention of actuarial risk assessment instruments, supposed to objectify the assessments provided



by prison staff in the frame of sentence adjustment procedures, also requires particular attention. The biases introduced by such tools, as well as their role in the bureaucratisation of rehabilitation work need to be apprehended to ensure the respect of procedural rights, the protection of personal data and the protection from discrimination.

## **RESEARCHING THE DETERMINANTS OF ACCESS TO SENTENCE ADJUSTMENTS**

In 2024, to address this gap in European safeguards for the protection of fundamental rights of prisoners, EPLN launched a comparative research project in seven European countries (Poland, Germany, France, Belgium, Portugal, Spain, Italy) aimed at analysing sentence adjustment mechanisms and identifying factors impeding or contributing to prisoners' access to sentence adjustment or reduction. The first phased of the research revealed several key dynamics with sentence adjustment mechanisms situated at the intersection of security-driven and managerial approaches to detention. A recurring pattern is the division between high-risk/serious and lower-risk/ordinary prisoners with long-termers and lifers often facing tightened restrictions while adjustments are mobilized more actively for short-term or lower-risk groups. The research also underscored weak adversarial and procedural safeguards as well as heavy reliance on prison/probation service assessment reports. This research, to be completed in 2025, aims at informing advocacy and litigation actions at domestic and European level.

## **LEGAL ACTION TO ADVANCE THE RIGHTS OF PRISONERS SERVING LIFE SENTENCES**

In Ukraine, EPLN and its partner the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union pursued in 2024 their legal campaign before the Constitutional Court of Ukraine and the European Court of Human Rights to push for a reform of detention regimes (ECtHR, [case Ivan Karpenko v. Ukraine no. 45397/13](#)) and mechanisms of access to parole for lifers (ECtHR, [case Medvid v. Ukraine no. 7453/23](#)). Indeed, Ukraine stands out within the Council of Europe due to the high number of prisoners service life sentences (1579 persons, including 30 women) and their detention apart from the rest of the prison population, in particularly harsh conditions.

# **Access to Healthcare in Prison**

## **LEGAL ACTION FOR THE INDEPENDENCY OF MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS IN DETENTION AND TRANSFER OF PRISON HEALTHCARE UNDER THE RESPONSIBILITY OF MINISTRIES OF HEALTH**

In a [joint third party intervention before the ECtHR \(February 2024\) in the case P.S. v. Greece \(no. 2500/22\)](#), EPLN and its Greek partner Centre for European Constitutional Law (CECL) highlighted the lack of consistency of the Court's approach to prisoners' rights and advocated for a firmer affirmation of the principle of equivalence of care. In this submission, EPLN and CECL also underlined the need to reinforce prisoners' procedural rights as a means to strengthen compliance with their substantive rights at national level (see also below, EU submissions).

In this same area, EPLN, together with its Moldovan partner Promo-LEX Association and the People's Advocate Office of the Republic of Moldova, sent a [joint submission to the CMCE \(October 2024\) on the execution of the group of cases I.D. v. Moldova \(no. 47203/06\)](#), point-

ed to a number of actions required to effectively protect prisoners' health in Moldovan prisons. A constant line of advocacy of EPLN in this respect is the need to transfer responsibility for prison health from the Ministry of Justice to the Ministry of Health. The joint submission also highlighted the fact that the remedy available to prisoners to complain about their conditions of detention does not meet the standards of the ECHR case law and cannot be deemed effective.

## LEGAL ACTION AND ADVOCACY FOR ENSURING ACCESS TO RELEASE ON MEDICAL GROUNDS

Within the **Prison Health & Rights Consortium** initiated by EPLN to bring together people with experience of incarceration and people who use drugs, prisoners' rights defenders, prison health caregivers and harm reduction activists, EPLN pursued in 2024 its litigation campaign aimed at advancing the right of prisoners to access release on medical grounds.

EPLN submitted in 2024 an application to the European Court of Human Rights on behalf of Mr. Shlyugin (**Shlyugin vs. Ukraine**, [26764/24](#)), relating to procedural issues regarding release on medical grounds in Ukraine, as well as the compatibility of his continued detention with requirements of Article 3 considering his state of health. For about two years, the national court could not consider the merits of the applicant's application for release from further serving his sentence due to his serious illness. In mid-2024 the applicant was released at the end of his sentence. The case was communicated by the Court in February 2025.

In October 2024, the ECtHR had already communicated the case **Panasenko and others v. Ukraine** ([27445/22](#)) concerning a possible violation of Article 3 of the Convention due to problems in the procedure for release on medical grounds. The Court was informed that in the case of the applicant and in general, the procedure was unduly lengthy, failed to meet the requisite quality standards, lacked clarity and predictability, and did not guarantee the release of seriously ill convicts. These issues had been repeatedly highlighted by EPLN, as well as reported by the CPT. Two of the applicants are represented by lawyers of EPLN and the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group.

EPLN further addressed the issue of access to release on medical grounds at the European Conference on Health Care in Prison in Lisbon organised by the NGO Health Without Barriers in October 2025 as a side event at Lisbon Addictions 2024. The conference was attended by UN and EU representatives, state officials, NGOs and academics specialised on prison health issues. EPLN's intervention gave an account of the failures of existing mechanisms of transfer of ill prisoners to civilian hospitals and of mechanisms of release on medical grounds and their impact on premature death in detention. The intervention was based on EPLN's litigation experience with partners in Ukraine, Moldova and Russia. The intervention draw some avenues for advancing at the international and European level guarantees for prisoners with severe pathologies, including the elderly, to access release on medical grounds, taking the opportunity of major European stakeholders involved in the elaboration of prison health policies being present at this conference

# Knowledge building and resources on prison law

In 2024, EPLN pursued its efforts to support CSO and law practitioners engaged in the field by producing legal resources to support their legal and advocacy work.

Monthly reviews of [ECtHR and CJEU prison case law](#) as well as four newsletters on [domestic prison legal news](#) covering 18 European countries were disseminated to over 30,000 law practitioners and prisoners' rights defenders from 200 key institutions and organisations (prison administrations, courts, universities/research centres, Bar associations, CSOs) in 20 European countries. These compilations enable practitioners to keep track of the most important developments in prison case law at European and domestic level, as well as provides a unique overview of the main political and legal changes on prison/penal issues in countries of Europe.

EPLN also strengthened in 2024 the capacity of its member organisations in using **UN individual complaints and advocacy mechanisms**. During an in-person workshop with Helene Tigroudja expert at the UN Human Rights Committee, and Human Rights Officers at the UN OHCHR Petitions Unit, prisoners' rights defenders from 11 partner organisations of EPLN shared and analysed their practices of litigation before the UN treaty bodies and special procedures. The UN experts clarified the **general approach of the Human Rights Committee as regard individual complaints**, and advised the CSOs to **approach UN bodies as an ecosystem, with the impact of decisions by the Committee needing to be amplified through other UN mechanisms**, including special procedures reports, human rights council resolutions etc.



# FUNDING

The total income in 2024 amounted to 889 831 € from which 39% originated from public subsidies and 59% from private foundations.

## 2024 Revenue (EURO)

Earmarked public subsidies	350 366
Earmarked funding from private foundations	521 052
Manual donations	149
Currency exchange gain	16 791
Other diverse operating income	4
Financial income	1 469
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>889 831</b>

The total expenses in 2024 amounted to 887 651 €. 28% of the total expenses were funding re-granted to partner civil society organisations of the network for the implementation of its social missions. 43% of total expenses were payment of staff and consultants assimilated to staff and 12% were payments to project consultants (lawyers, researchers, legal monitors etc) to implement the activities of the association in the respective project countries.

## 2024 Income per type of expenses (EURO)

Personal costs	350 065	39 %
Consultants assimilated to staff	38 600	4 %
Project consultants	105 613	12 %
Re-granted funds to partner organisations	251 943	28 %
Travel costs & meetings, seminars	75 296	8 %
Translation costs	16 043	2 %
Comms	1 147	0 %
Accountant, payroll & audit costs	21 803	3 %
Office, equipment, admin costs, softwares	20 352	3 %
Bank costs	3 603	1 %
Other operating costs	475	0 %
Depreciations and provisions	446	0 %
Taxes and assimilated	1 765	0 %
Other costs	500	0 %
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>887 651</b>	<b>100 %</b>

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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UnMode – Community Movement for Access to Justice  
European Federation for Prison Health – Health without Barriers  
Harm Reduction International  
Human Rights Center SICH  
MANGUST Kherson Regional Charity Foundation  
Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union  
Human Rights Center ZMINA  
DIGNITY Danish Institute against Torture

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