

**Cc:** Prison Services Legal Officers and Ministries of Education

**Concerning:** Plea to maintain education delivery in detention from a safe distance

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## **Letter to the Ministries of Justice and Interior**

Honourable Minister,

Please allow me to introduce myself and the organisation I represent. My name is Mrs Annet Bakker and I preside over the European Prison Education Association (EPEA).

The European Prison Education Association is an organisation made up of more than 650 prison educators, administrators, governors, researchers and other professionals whose interests lie in promoting and developing Education and related activities in prisons throughout Europe in accordance with the Recommendations of the Council of Europe [Rec(89)12].

EPEA is recognised by the Council of Europe (with which it has participatory status) as a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) and is committed to working with prison administrations in Europe to further its aims. However, it is totally free-standing and independent (cf. [www.epea.org](http://www.epea.org)).

In these difficult times we are living, the Coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) has posed extraordinary challenges, especially for prison institutions and their schools worldwide.

In many countries, prison teachers (and other staff) are sent home to minimize the risk of spreading the disease in the vulnerable prison environment and some prisoners are placed in quarantine.

We have received many messages from colleagues who tell us about what is happening in their countries and how they cope with this difficult situation. If, on the one hand, it is frightening to see how the virus has taken control of our lives, on the other hand, it is also

inspiring to acknowledge how creative solutions are being found to keep the teaching process alive.

EPEA has dedicated a special page on the website inviting prison teachers to tell us about their new Prison Education practices during this Corona pandemic. So, we know that many prison teachers are delivering work packages and exchanging material that is made ready for paper-based instruction or practice for their students to work with for the time being. Education from a safe distance is possible.

Some educators are even able to work from a distance delivering online courses. Nevertheless, these are a minority. In fact, as much as we find it interesting to hear about this, we think it can help others find ways to continue their work.

The EPEA is truly convinced that Education, in whatever form, is a way of maintaining normality in these hard times. More than ever, it will help distract the minds of so many in a positive way and, additionally, will relieve the stress for both *prisoners* and *staff*.

Therefore, and on behalf of the EPEA Steering Committee and all our members, I appeal to you to do everything in your power to ensure that Education programmes in your country's prisons do not stop during this health crisis. Allow me, also, to call on your good offices to ensure that all necessary protective measures do not exclude the provision of study materials for prisoners. And that together we find ways for teachers to communicate with prison learners.

To conclude, and in light of the Council of Europe's recommendations, that no prisoner be left behind, as far as Education matters are concerned, and that the necessary conditions be provided in the best possible way.

Let me express my sincere gratitude for your time and consideration. I wish you and the people in your country to stay safe and healthy.

Yours sincerely,

Annet Bakker

*EPEA Chair*

