



Cross border training programme

Hostage taking situations in penitentiary environment

National Correctional Officers Training School Târgu Ocna (SNPAP)

22nd – 26th of May 2023

Speakers	Vasile Scutaru – director of the National Correctional Officers Training School Ioana Carp – Communication teacher Flavia Ciurbea – Penitentiary Psychology teacher		
Abbreviations	SNPAP: Școala Națională de Pregătire a Agenților de Penitenciare		
Report writers	Barclay Wohlstetter, Netherlands Helsinki Committee		
Programme	<p>Hostage taking methodical approach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why “hostage taking”? • “Hostage taking” – training programme for penitentiary staff <p>Hostage taking situations in penitentiary environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does hostage taking in penitentiary environment mean? • Which are the causes that lead to/favor hostage taking situations? • Which are the types of persons that can be subject to being taken hostages in penitentiaries? • Which are the typical actions of the inmates when taking hostages? • How should a person taken hostage behave in such a situation? • How should a hostage act during the saving intervention of the specialized team? • How should the person that has been through such an experience be approached ? 		
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Summary of the training content

Overall, the three-day training program aimed to equip participants with the necessary knowledge, skills, and practical experience to effectively handle hostage taking situations in a penitentiary environment. Through presentations, discussions, and practical drills, participants engaged in a comprehensive learning experience that enhanced their professional capabilities.

The first day of the training program started with an official opening, bringing together all participants for introductions. Subsequently, the participants were acquainted with the SNPAP educational offer. Following that, a presentation was conducted regarding the educational infrastructure, providing an overview of the resources and facilities available. Moreover, there was an exchange of information among participants concerning the training programs related to the proposed subject within their respective institutions. While Belgium and Slovakia mentioned they have a similar training, Spain and Portugal both mentioned they do not have something like this in place. However, regardless of if a formal training was in place or not, most countries agreed that they emphasize to students/prison staff "not to be a hero" in crises. The focus is really on survival and getting the aggressor to see you (the hostage) as a human. Later in the day, the structure of the "Hostage Taking Situations in Penitentiary Environment" training program was introduced. This presentation outlined the key components and objectives of the program. A question and answer session followed, allowing participants to seek clarification and address any queries they had about the training program or related topics. For example, participants discussed what the requirements are to enter the training academy and to become a prison officer in their respective countries.

The second day of the training, started with a presentation of the methodical approach of the "Hostage Taking Situations in Penitentiary Environment" training program. The principles associated with experimental learning were discussed, as well as the roles and competencies of staff helping to implement the training. It is of utmost importance to ensure students know they can always stop the simulation themselves by informing the coordinating teacher. Additionally, a risk analysis was conducted, regarding the practical activities within the "Hostage taking situations in penitentiary environment" training programme. The participants discussed the risks associated with conducting such simulations, namely accidental asphyxiation, loss of consciousness, and similar effects as from



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the Stanford Prison Experiment. The day also covered aspects related to the theoretical aspects of the training programme. Participants learned how to apply the theoretical knowledge acquired in practical scenarios to handle effectively hostage situations in a penitentiary environment. The ways in which hostages should behave in different situations was a focus. The most emphasized point was, “do not try to be a hero”. Additionally, it is important to learn how to control one’s emotions, move your body when possible to keep blood circulating, and try to make aggressors see you (hostage) as human.

On the third day of training, participants engaged in practical drill of a simulation of a hostage taking situation. The drill did not actively involved the participants to the training programme; students played the roles. This hands-on exercise provided students with an opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge and skills acquired in a realistic scenario. Some students were hostages, and some were aggressors. The aggressors were reminded how to handle the hostages to ensure the hostage has access to air during the whole time (i.e. making sure there is a gap between the pillowcase on the hostage’s head and their neck/shoulders so they can access fresh air). After the simulation, participants sat with the students and listened to their reflections. Students that were the hostages were also asked to identify their hostages, and give them either a handshake or a hug so they know this was only a simulation, and that there are no lasting negative feelings between them.

The participants then went back to the classroom and the day discussions were divided into two parts. In the first part, participants shared their opinions, ideas, and provided feedback for the "hostage taking" practical activity conducted earlier. Overall, the participants were able to share their impressions about the experience had during the hostage-taking practical activity, lessons learned and to express the emotions they experimented during the drill. It was important that the participants took time to debrief and regulate their emotions, as some individuals were very worried and upset by the intensity of the simulation. Many participants felt as though the simulation was so realistic that there had to be a negative impact on the wellbeing of the students. However, they were reassured that psychological support is available for all students who want it, and that many students actually feel proud of themselves after the simulation. Additionally, there is a psychologist and nurse present in the simulation that was checking in on students that seemed to be suffering. Participants discussed the importance of psychological assessments after a situation like this, and discussed why the benefits outweigh the risks of the training. In the second part of the discussions, participants expressed their opinions, ideas, and provided feedback regarding the organization of the practical activity and risk management.

Hostage taking methodical approach

Why “hostage taking”?

Hostage taking is a complex, active-participative training programme designed for the training of the prison staff to manage effectively the critical situation in which they would find themselves as hostages, in order to increase the chances for survival and rescue. Some of the didactic methods used include lecture, conversation, role-play, observation, personal reflection, and socio-drama.

The Hostage Taking training programme is based on the principles of experiential learning. Psychological reasons:

- After an event that endangers their own existence, people become emotionally stronger.



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- Such experiences, beyond the negative emotions they cause, also make people aware of an inner strength, that they had not previously known they had.
- A negative experience once lived will not be perceived as strongly the second time.

Number of students	Staff involved	Required locations	Required materials
-maximum 40 students/trainees	-minimum 3 teachers; -minimum 1 psychologist; -minimum 1 doctor/nurse.	-room for theoretical class and debate (with a minimum of 40 seats) /hostage preparation; -room for training the "aggressors"; -room for immobilization of the "hostages" (dark room); -room for training "observers" / practical activity.	-10 - 15 handcuffs (or rope); -rope (in order to tie the legs); -10 - 15 black hoods (for aggressors); -video projector and projection screen; -laptop; -mobile video camera; -loudspeaker.

Stages of the training programme:

-Lecture: In this stage, the teacher tackles the theoretical aspects of hostage taking and the right way to react in such a situation. Duration: 100 minutes.

-Debate: Through the conversation method (mainly heuristic), the students debate upon the aspect regarding hostage situations, from both perspectives: the hostages and the aggressors. Duration: 100 minutes.

-Practical activity: In this stage the students start the practical exercise, and each of them could be either the "aggressor", the "hostage" or the "observer" in the room, followed by a stage of analysis and debate upon the experience that they lived and the emotions they felt during the activity. Duration: 100 minutes.

Some of the expected results at the end training programme are that prison officers will be able to:

- Know the right way to react in case of being taken hostage;
- Know, evaluate and effectively control their emotional and psychological resources in crisis situations;
- Interpret and manage, correctly and effectively, the aggressive potential of the attackers in crisis situations;



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- Accept and effectively manage humiliating situations, in crisis situations;
- Accept and endure situations of prolonged stress;
- Become aware of the fact that the pieces of information they acquired during the training will help them survive in crises situations.

Risks involved in the training programme:

- Accidents and minor traumas, accidental asphyxiation, loss of consciousness;
- Psychological traumas (phobias, agitation, mental discomfort, excessive crying, panic attacks, insomnia);
- Aggressive/abusive/exaggerated behavior of "aggressors";
- Violent or exaggerated reactions of the "hostages".

Hostage taking situations in penitentiary environment

- International context of radicalization and terrorism
- National context regarding organized crime
- Specific aspects of the penitentiary police job
- Preparing population for crisis situations

What does hostage taking in penitentiary environment mean?

- A hostage taking event is a very serious incident inside the penitentiary environment :
 - It affects the life or the integrity of a/some persons.
 - it endangers the safety of the penitentiary;
 - it affects the state of mind of the inmates and the staff;
- According to the "Incidents management manual", a hostage taking event is a critical incident.
- Taking hostages inside the penitentiary: apprehending a person under threat or by violent actions by an inmate or group of inmates as a warranty or pressure towards the penitentiary management in order to have their claims or requests solved in favor of the inmate or of the aggressors.

Which are the causes that lead to/favor hostage taking situations?

- Causes that are linked to a weak authority.
- Causes that are linked to the abusive/harsh detention regime.
- Causes that are linked to a permissive disciplinary environment.

Which are the types of persons that can be subject to being taken hostages in penitentiaries?

- Penitentiary staff;
- Visitors;
- Inmates.

Which are the typical actions of the inmates when taking hostages?

- At the beginning, the safety of the hostages represents an important issue for the inmates;
- The inmates will take the keys and the communication devices from the hostages;
- The inmates might exchange clothes with the hostages;
- The inmates might use the hostages as a way to communicate with other persons;
- The inmates might proceed to setting up barricades ;
- The hostages will be closed, usually, in a cell or in another place that is hard to get to;
- If the situation lingers or the leader is changed, the safety of the hostages might be endangered;
- The inmates might threaten with the use of violence or might even use it.



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How should a person taken hostage behave in such a situation?

- Keep calm and regain control of yourself.
- Prepare mentally and emotionally for a long strain.
- Try to make the aggressors perceive you as a human being.
- Accept the rules imposed by the aggressors.
- Let the aggressors know as few details as possible when they ask questions.
- Gain the respect of the aggressors.
- Try to understand the aggressors.
- Remain as mentally active as possible/keep hoping.
- Eat and exercise.
- Accept your failure.
- Be tolerant with the other hostages.

How should a hostage act during the saving intervention of the specialized team?

- To take a safe position (in a safe, remote place);
- Lie on the ground and try to protect yourself in case of an abrupt intervention;
- If you receive any instruction from the interventional team, move quickly
- Keep your hands at sight, above your head and do not make any sudden movement;
- Be prepared to be taken as an aggressor during the first stage of the intervention;
- If you see fire or smoke, try to get to an emergency exit or to identify a way of getting out.

How should the person that has been through such an experience be approached ?

- Avoid criticism, even if you believe you are right.
- If the one who was involved in such a traumatic situation tends to feel guilty, try to make him/her leave that feeling away.
- If you notice irritation or aggressiveness in his/her behavior, do not answer back abruptly and do not feel offended.
- Be compassionate about your traumatized colleague, but without exaggerating.
- Stay kind and available.

Training materials

The participants received the handbook that was produced for this cross border training, which can be used whenever organizing a training program on this topic. It contains all the necessary pieces of information which the trainer can use during the training process. All the presentations which were used during the training were included on memory sticks for all participants to be able to review, if need be, the information presented during the training.



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