



JUSTIITSMINISTEERIUM

Importance of living group climate in closed institutions. Example of Estonia.

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About Estonia

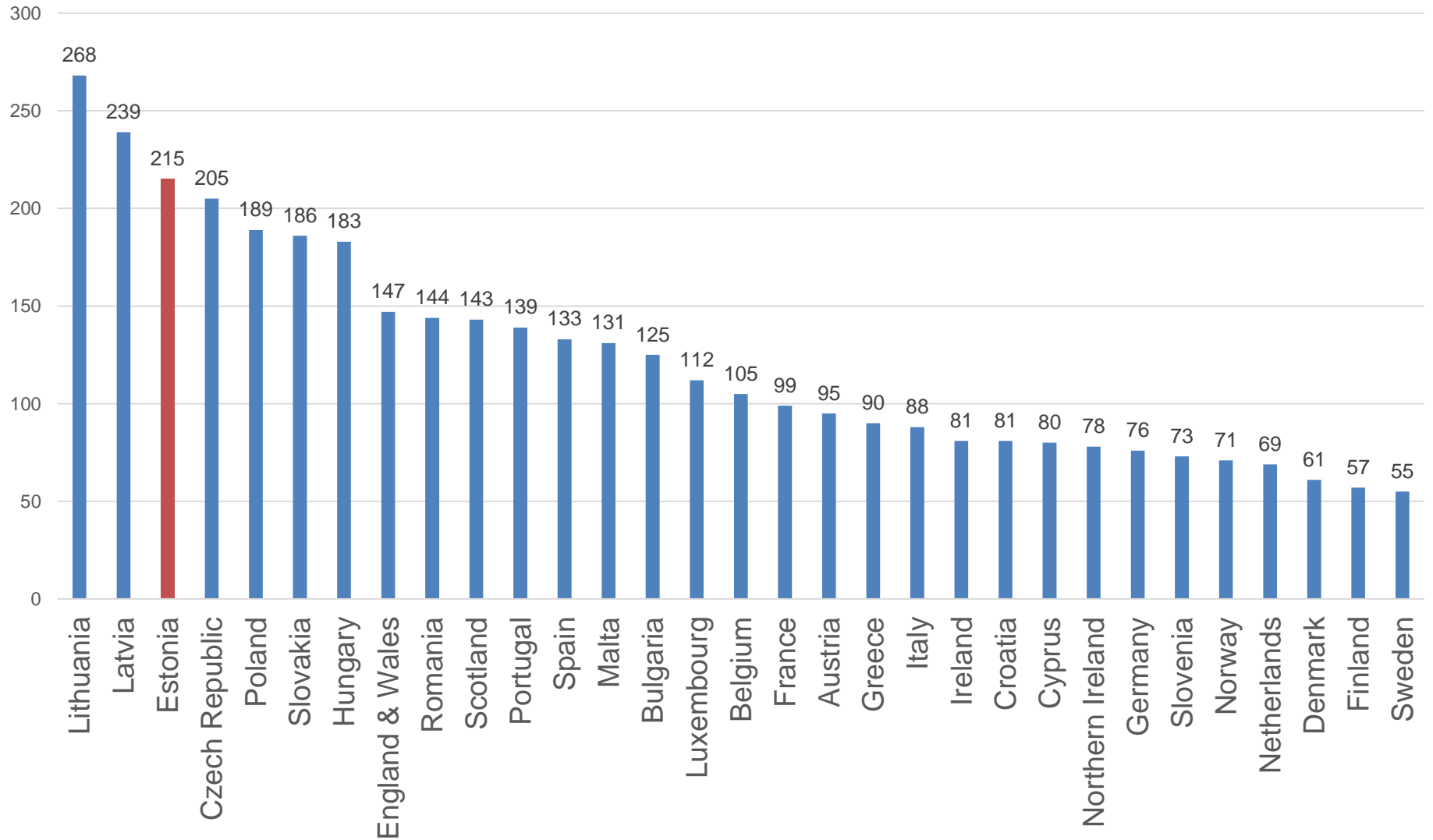
- Population 1.3 million
 - Fast population decline
 - 1/3 of population Russian-speaking
 - Ethnically clustered
- In the EU from 2004
 - Crime import/export
 - Immigration
- Alcohol and drugs



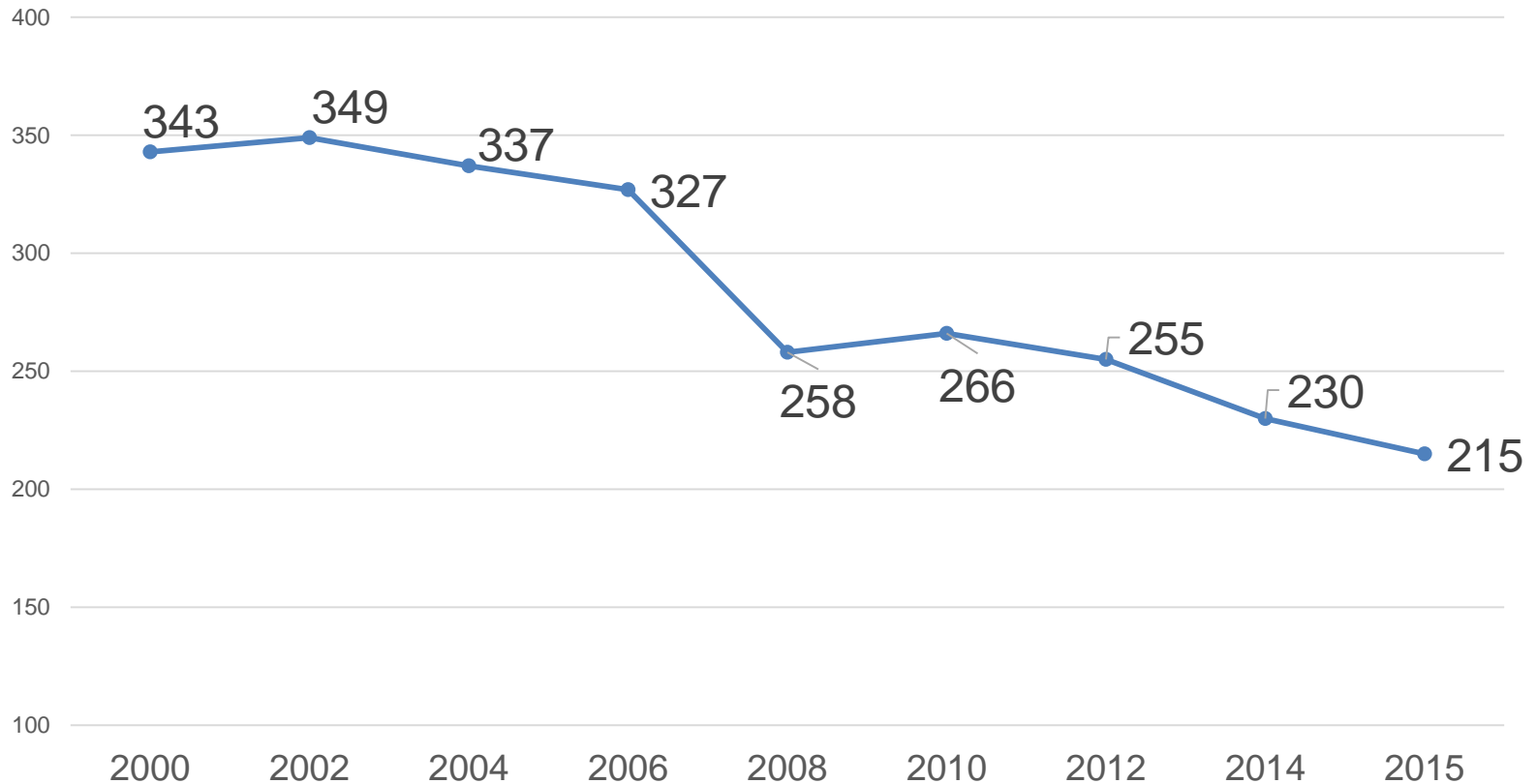
Crime in Estonia

- Victimization data shows slow decline in recent years.
- EU 2nd/3rd highest homicide rate.
- Decline in juvenile crime but still more violence and bullying than in most of the EU.
- At any given moment there are around 100 juveniles in closed institutions, including 20-30 in prison.

Prison population rate



Fast decline of prison population (rate per 100 000)



Juvenile justice

Currently:

- No juvenile criminal law, but some special measures.
- No young adult offenders notion in penal law.
- Young adults (until 21) in probation and prison.

Juvenile justice reform going on:

- Mainstreaming special measures
- Restorative justice
- Possibility to treat young adults as juveniles

Context 1

- Lack of public/professional discussion on crime, causes of crime and ways to responding to it.
- Support for imprisonment but at the same time belief in educational and work related measures.
- In closed institutions for youth there has been and still is primary reintegrative focus on school and curriculum and less on social-emotional and personality development.



Context 2

- The discussion on closed youth institutions has focused on „keeping order“ and rights of the staff to restrict and control the behaviour of youngsters.
- Practical focus has been on new buildings and smaller groups, cells/rooms for one. Therapeutic programs.
- There is a lack of (qualified) staff in all institutions.
- Reoffending!



What to do?

- Netherlands experience.

- 1. Scientific knowledge on human motivation.
- 2. Tools for evaluation – validated questionnaire/research instrument.
- 3. Feedback/recommendations.
- 4. Change?

- **Living group climate** research.
- Prof Peer van der Helm, Leiden University of Applied Sciences

Why does living group climate matter?

What we know?

- Stressful environment makes people more impulsive, less able to control behavior and less susceptible for punishment.
- By normalizing everyday lives, increasing human contact and using sociotherapy in prison...
 - Self-control will increase
 - Ability to learn and change increase (school and programs!)
 - Aggression decreases
 - (Also punishment works better but there is less use)
- **Prison experience influences reoffending.**

What is important?

1. Balance between flexibility and control
2. Open climate vs closed climate

CLOSED CLIMATE:

- Great power distance and misuse of power
- Humiliation, shouting
- Fear
- Fires/fighting/self harm
- Staff burnout and sick leaves
- Frequent lock downs
- Many self-made rules
- No talking but frequent commanding
- Frequent use of punishment

OPEN CLIMATE

4 dimensions of research/climate

1. More **contact**
2. Opportunities for **growth**
3. Relaxed **atmosphere**
4. Less **repression**

Questionnaire translated and validated 12 languages.

The way to do it:

Measure – Give feedback – Discuss – Change

Treatment can work but contact must become before.

Sites of living group climate research



Sites of living group climate research



Sites of living group climate research



Living group climate research

- 2 Prisons (sections for youngsters)
- 2 closed educational institutions for juveniles, 1 therapeutic institution.
- Questionnaire, interviews, observation
- 1st wave in May 2015
- 2nd wave in December 2015
- Analysis done by Peer van der Helm and his team
- Feedback meetings in September and February.

What we found in May?

2 out of 3 educational institutions doing fairly good job, open climate, good results on growth.

One school on facing big changes but at the same time at the edge of breakdown.

One prison in poor material conditions doing well, good support and growth indicators, fairly open climate.

Other, quite new prison with closed climate, lack of staff, no contact, tensions building.

What we found in December?

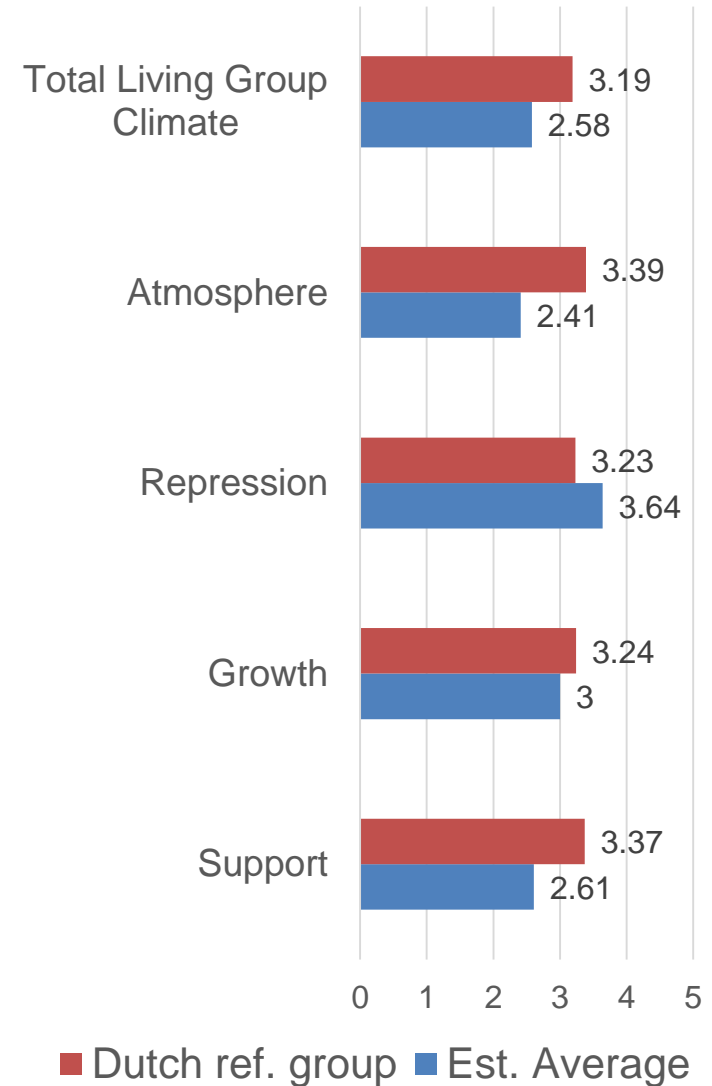
Educational institutions

- Those that did well in May, got better. They showed an interest to the research and used it for their benefit.
- The one that was *on the edge* got a new building, smaller groups, more routine and got therefore a lot better results. All institutions are heading towards right direction but could give more slack on repression.
- Staff has experience and is quite skillful, they have a good *gut feeling* but lack professional knowledge.

What we found in December?

Prisons

- Situation got worse in both prisons. One got a notice of closure, resulted in more repression, less support and growth.
- The other tried some good measures but these were taken back. Riots, burning etc. Lack of staff, lack of communication. Staff feels research makes things worse. Attitude and training of guards.



Conclusion

- Education/programs/treatment do not work in a closed environment. Professional staff tends not to work (well) as well.
- Climate-research helps to make sense on what is going on in an institution.
- Frequent and positive contact is important. People who work are most important part of an institution (number of staff, values and professionalism).
- Closed institutions need attention and support to make changes. New buildings are not enough to make a change.



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Thank you!

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