

“Health crisis”: Marie-Claude Salignat-Plumasseau, advisor at the French Villepinte prison.

Since March 18 our prison has implemented a business continuity plan (BCP) and measures to adapt our practice in order to avoid the spread of COVID-19. The organization of the service has therefore been re-designed to best meet the requirements of the official governmental note of March 16 and 17 of this health crisis.

In the pandemic context that we are in now, our role within the prison administration remains essential and we have changed our working habits as well as adapted ourselves to the new measures.

New arrivals and interviews

When someone new comes in, we must make sure that this person has first been seen by the health unit and that there is no visible risk for the prison personnel. Likewise, during our interviews, we must systematically equip ourselves with a mask and apply all other security protocols. As for the other people under justice care, we only meet them for emergency purposes.

Maintaining family ties

We are listening to families wishing to hear from their imprisoned loved ones, and we relay messages by mail to the inmates when necessary.

Arrangement of sentences and preparation for discharge

Within the framework of the PCA, we focus in particular on detainees identified as vulnerable, those who have been sentenced for acts of domestic or spousal violence and are in the last phase of their sentence, and those who are imprisoned for acts of terrorism or likely to be radicalized.

For vulnerable people, the aim is to use all relevant legal measures to adjust the penalties and to react quickly in the event of infection with COVID 19.

For people who are at the end of their sentence or detained for only a short period, i.e. people who should be released at the end of May 2020, we offer early releases if they have a stable and safe place to go to. A telephone verification with the host of this accommodation place is essential.

For those convicted of acts of domestic and conjugal violence, the aim is to distance the offender from his victim. We know that in a period of confinement, the promiscuity of the closed door can generate tensions and the risks of violence in the family or between the couple can grow... Hence the interest to be very vigilant regarding the exit address and to expressly alert our hierarchy.

For people imprisoned for acts of terrorism or likely to be radicalized, we also remain alert when they get a sentence adjustment, additional sentence reductions or a release. We need to alert our hierarchy quickly.

We must take into account the health emergency but also public security during our interventions for a possible release. Therefore quick assessments are necessary in all cases.

Treatment of emergencies

Thus, since this confinement, our days have been punctuated by the treatment of emergencies, ie by several files combined (for example adjustment of sentence in adversarial debate and outside debate, or early release), new inmates arriving, interviews with people with psychological fragility, handling letters and telephone calls. It's a fairly stressful time for each of us, but we continue to give our best to meet the official demands of the Justice department.

Faced with the COVID-19 epidemic which also affects prisons, and in this context of restrictions, we remain however committed to our profession and mobilized to ensure the continuity of public service in both face-to-face and teleworking.