



FOLKETINGETS  
OMBUDSMAND

21 June 2025

**Thematic report 2024**

# **Inmates' access to visits and occupation**

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## **1. Introduction**

The theme of the Ombudsman's monitoring visits (adults) in 2024 was inmates' access to visits and occupation in the Prison and Probation Service. The monitoring visits were carried out in cooperation with the Danish Institute for Human Rights and DIGNITY – Danish Institute Against Torture.

During the year, the Ombudsman visited seven local prisons, including Western Prison, and three state prisons to elucidate the theme. During those monitoring visits, the Ombudsman especially focused on:

- Inmates' visits from relatives and network, including especially booking of visits, frequency and duration of visits, the setting for visits from children and the Prison and Probation Service's attention to inmates with limited contact with the outside world.
- Inmates' access to occupation, particularly the availability and nature of the offered work and the education programmes.

## **2. Result of the thematic visits**

### **2.1. Main conclusions**

- It is the Ombudsman's overall impression that the Prison and Probation Service, within the existing framework, organised the visits in a satisfactory and appropriate manner.
- The Prison and Probation Service generally took care to ensure that it was possible for inmates to receive visits every week and that the visiting setting was satisfactory, including for visits from the inmates' children. There was generally a flexible approach to visits and attention to prolonging the duration of visits, when possible.
- However, some of the visiting rooms used for visits from children were not inviting, comfortable and child friendly.
- The Prison and Probation Service generally paid attention to whether there were inmates with only little contact with the outside world and focused on contributing as much as possible to increasing those inmates' contact with the outside world, for instance by informing about or arranging contact with a volunteer visitor.
- The Prison and Probation Service generally focused on being able to offer occupation to the inmates.

- The state prisons generally had a wider availability of work than the local prisons, where the work offered primarily consisted of cell work. Some local prisons primarily offered cell work in the form of production of items that were not used for anything afterwards.
- Some local prisons were not aware that foreign nationals who have not been ordered to be deported have a right to occupation through, for instance, education and formal education on an equal footing with other inmates.

## **2.2. General recommendations**

With respect to visits, the Ombudsman generally recommends that

- the Prison and Probation Service – in accordance with the Department of Prisons and Probation’s standard for visiting rooms – ensure that visiting rooms where visits with children are held are inviting and comfortable and allow for activities between incarcerated parents and children of all ages
- the Prison and Probation Service ensure on an ongoing basis that there is attention on inmates with only little contact with the outside world and that state and local prisons contribute as much as possible to increasing those inmates’ contact with the outside world

With respect to occupation, the Ombudsman generally recommends that

- local prisons on an ongoing basis take care to procure cell work and shopwork and that they focus on the nature of such work
- the Prison and Probation Service ensure that all institutions are aware that foreign nationals who have not been ordered to be deported have a right to – and when serving in state prisons also a duty of – occupation through, for instance, education, formal education or programme activities on an equal footing with other inmates, and that foreign nationals who have been ordered to be deported can be occupied with education, formal education or programme activities if special circumstances apply

The Ombudsman will discuss the follow-up on the general recommendations and a number of other matters and observations from the monitoring visits with the Prison and Probation Service. The Ombudsman will also follow up on the general recommendations during future monitoring visits.

For particulars on the follow-up on the monitoring visit to Western Prison, read item 3.7 as regards visits.

### **2.3. Background for choice of theme and focus areas**

Visits and occupation are matters of great significance for inmates' wellbeing, rehabilitation and resocialisation. This applies to both remand prisoners and inmates serving a sentence.

The rules on inmates' right to visits are meant to ensure that inmates, during their stay in Prison and Probation Service institutions, can retain and possibly expand on the connection to the outside world, including not least their families. During the monitoring visits, there was therefore focus on both access to visits and their setting, including processing times in connection with processing of visiting permit applications, whether booking of visits took place properly, conditions in connection with visits from children and the visiting facilities themselves.

The purpose of the rules on inmates' occupation, including education, is, among other things, to ensure that the inmates' working ability and skills are not reduced during their stay in Prison and Probation Service institutions and, as far as possible, to make the inmates more capable of getting and holding down a job after their sentence is served. At the same time, occupation can also contribute to giving the inmates structure and substance in their everyday lives. During the monitoring visits, there was therefore focus on, among other things, what types of work inmates in state and local prisons are offered and to what extent inmates are offered education and formal education, including the nature of the education programmes.

Currently, the conditions in the Prison and Probation Service are generally characterised by high occupancy and shortage of staff. With the theme for 2024, the Ombudsman therefore also wanted to investigate if – and if so how – those conditions affected the inmates' access to visits and occupation.

The special conditions that otherwise regulate remand prisoners' access to visits due to police control etc. were not part of the theme for 2024.

### **2.4. How did the Ombudsman proceed?**

#### ***2.4.1. Material and information in connection with the visits***

Prior to each monitoring visit, the Ombudsman received some information and material from the visited institutions for elucidation of, among other things, the organisation of visits and the availability of occupation – such as guidelines and leaflets on visits and inmates' occupation options.

During the monitoring visits, the visiting teams received more details on the written information during interviews with management and staff, including foremen, teachers and staff responsible for children. In addition, the visiting

team spoke with 115 inmates and a number of volunteer visitors, priests and defence lawyers.

The visiting teams were also shown relevant parts of the facilities, including visiting rooms, teaching rooms and workshops.

For particulars on the monitoring visit to Western Prison, read item 3.7 below.

#### *2.4.2. The legal basis for monitoring visits*

The monitoring visits were carried out as part of the Ombudsman's general monitoring activities pursuant to the Parliamentary Ombudsman Act and as part of the Ombudsman's task of preventing that persons who are or who can be deprived of their liberty are exposed to for instance inhuman or degrading treatment; cf. the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT).

The Ombudsman's work to prevent degrading treatment etc. pursuant to the OPCAT is carried out in cooperation with the Danish Institute for Human Rights and with DIGNITY – Danish Institute Against Torture. The Institute for Human Rights contributes with human rights expertise. DIGNITY contributes to the cooperation with medical expertise. Among other things, this means that staff with expertise in those fields from the two institutes participate in the planning and execution of and follow-up on monitoring visits.

#### *2.4.3. List of visits in 2024*

On the Ombudsman's website, there is a list of monitoring visits to institutions for adults in 2024, including the thematic visits, and the recommendations given to the individual institutions ([www.en.ombudsmanden.dk](http://www.en.ombudsmanden.dk), under About the Ombudsman, Monitoring activities, Monitoring visits to institutions where citizens live, Monitoring visits according to UN rules, Monitoring visits to institutions for adults in 2024).

### **3. Visits in the Prison and Probation Service**

#### **3.1. The rules**

Remand prisoners' right to visits is regulated in the Administration of Justice Act (now Consolidation Act No. 1160 of 5 November 2024), in the Executive Order on Remand Custody (now Executive Order No. 1099 of 16 October 2024) and in the Remand Guidance Notes (now Guidance Notes No. 9901 of 23 October 2024).

The right to visits of inmates serving a sentence is regulated in the Sentence Enforcement Act (Consolidation Act No. 201 of 28 February 2023), in the



Executive Order on Visits (Executive Order No. 1022 of 28 June 2022) and in the Guidance Notes on Visits (Guidance Notes No. 9735 of 28 June 2022).

### **3.2. Visiting permits**

A visiting permit is required before you can visit an inmate in Prison and Probation Service institutions. The institutions can set limits for the number of people that can be approved visitors at the same time.

Based on the visiting teams' interviews with managements, staff and inmates, it is the Ombudsman's impression that there is generally focus on quick processing of visiting permit applications. This also applies in relation to new inmates in Prison and Probation Service institutions, who may have a particular need for receiving visits from their relatives.

Several visited institutions had local rules that contained a limit for the number of people that could be approved visitors at the same time. For instance, one state prison had set a limit of 30 people. In three of the seven local prisons, there were local rules that one inmate could have no more than seven people approved as (possible) visitors at the same time for the inmate in question. This was generally not something that caused dissatisfaction among the inmates in the local prisons. However, it could mean in practice that inmates had to reject the possibility of receiving visits from some family members or friends. The background for the limit in the number of people that could be approved for visits at the same time was therefore discussed with the managements of the relevant local prisons, who stated that they would consider if the considerations behind the limit could still justify a limit of a maximum of seven people.

### **3.3. Booking of visits**

The Prison and Probation Service has not set rules or guidelines for booking of visits.

In two of the visited state prisons, the inmates booked visits with the staff. During their interviews with the visiting team, the inmates expressed great satisfaction with the arrangement.

In the third of the visited state prisons and in six local prisons, the booking of visits took place by the relatives telephoning the state or local prison and booking the visit. The time frame when visits could be booked varied from half an hour a day to ten hours a day. Based on the visiting teams' interviews with managements, staff, inmates and volunteer visitors, it is the Ombudsman's impression that the relatives' telephone booking of visits to the state prison and the six local prisons was generally working satisfactorily.

For booking of visits in Western Prison, read item 3.7 below.

### **3.4. Volume of visits**

As a rule, remand prisoners are entitled to visits as often as conditions allow. Visits for remand prisoners cannot last less than half an hour. Longer visits must be permitted as often as conditions allow.

Inmates serving a sentence are entitled to at least one weekly visit lasting at least one hour and, as far as possible, two hours. The individual institutions can permit an expansion of the above rules for visits.

In the three visited state prisons and six of the local prisons, the inmates had access to at least one weekly visit lasting at least one hour. In several institutions, inmates had access to more weekly visits and visits of longer duration than one hour, including in cases where the visitors had a long transportation time or when children were visiting. At the same time, there was generally a flexible approach to visits, not least in relation to extending the duration of visits where possible.

Based on the visiting teams' interviews with inmates, staff and managements, it is the Ombudsman's impression that the state and local prisons in question generally did not cancel visits, including due to shortage of staff, occupancy in the visiting rooms or similar.

For inmates' access to visits in Western Prison, read item 3.7 below.

### **3.5. Visiting facilities etc. during visits from children**

#### ***3.5.1. Setting for visits from children***

Inmates can normally only receive visits from children if the child is accompanied by an adult and there is consent to the visit from the parental custodian. According to the rules, visiting permit applications for children should, as far as possible, be accommodated if the children are closely related to the inmate (such as children or grandchildren), and the possibility of permitting extended visits should be considered – and as far as possible accommodated – in such cases.

The Prison and Probation Service has a scheme whereby, among the staff in state and local prisons, there is at least one person responsible for children, whose task it is to create good conditions for child visits and to implement activities that may support the relation between inmates and their children.

Thus, there was also staff responsible for children in all the visited state and local prisons, and there was generally attention on conducting child visits gently and, as far as possible, on creating a safe setting for children visiting. For example, one of the state prisons had a hopscotch court by the body scanner, and it was possible to borrow prams that young children could sleep



in during the visit. In another state prison, there was a waiting room with toys in reception, and there was a separate child visiting unit with a playground. In most of the institutions, the children could receive a small present in connection with the visit, such as a stuffed animal from Red Cross.

The visiting teams' interviews with management and staff also showed that the state and local prison staff were generally aware of public staff's increased duty to notify the municipality of any concern for a child's development or wellbeing.

### *3.5.2. Visiting facilities*

The Prison and Probation Service's visiting rooms must, to the extent possible, be designed in a way that creates a natural and friendly visiting atmosphere.

In October 2023, the Department of Prisons and Probation issued a standard for visiting rooms used for visits from children. According to the standard, the visiting rooms must, to the extent possible, be made inviting and comfortable, for instance by hanging up child-friendly pictures or by decorating the walls. Furthermore, the visiting rooms must encourage activity and play between adults and children of different age groups. Therefore, it should be possible to borrow, for instance, card games, board games, toys, drawing utensils or similar.

The visiting rooms in the visited state and local prisons generally appeared to be inviting and comfortable. However, the visiting rooms in the local prisons did reflect that the physical setting in the local prisons is limited, and the visiting rooms were therefore small.

In two of the visited state prisons and two local prisons, the Ombudsman found that some or all of the visiting rooms used for visits from children did not appear inviting and comfortable.

The availability of card games, board games, toys, drawing utensils etc. varied. Some places had a very limited selection of toys – or no toys, for instance if ordinary visiting rooms were used for visits from children because several inmates received visits from children at the same time.

The Ombudsman recommended that two state and two local prisons ensure that the visiting rooms be made more inviting and comfortable. The Ombudsman also recommended that the two state prisons and one local prison ensure that activities between incarcerated parents and children of all ages be made possible.

In the light of this, the Ombudsman generally recommends that the Prison and Probation Service – in accordance with the Department of Prisons and Probation's standard for visiting rooms – ensure that visiting rooms where visits with children are held are inviting and comfortable and allow for activities between incarcerated parents and children of all ages.

### **3.6. Inmates with limited contact with the outside world**

It is the ongoing responsibility of the Prison and Probation Service to be aware of any inmates with only little contact with the outside world. If that is the case, the Prison and Probation Service must contribute to increasing the inmate's contact with the outside world as much as possible.

This could be by arranging contact with a volunteer visitor through, for instance, Red Cross or DanChurchSocial (Kirkens Korshær). Volunteer visitors are private individuals without any affiliation to the Prison and Probation Service, who can visit inmates and speak with them about general topics as well as personal and social matters.

Most of the visited state and local prisons stated that they had a number of inmates who either rarely or never received visits.

By far most of the visited state and local prisons cooperated with Red Cross about arranging contact with volunteer visitors, and several also cooperated with DanChurchSocial. One local prison did not cooperate with either Red Cross or DanChurchSocial.

The Ombudsman recommended that two state prisons ensure ongoing attention to inmates with only little contact with the outside world. The Ombudsman also recommended that one of those state prisons, to the extent possible, contribute to increasing the inmates' contact with the outside world, for instance by offering a volunteer visitor.

In the light of this, the Ombudsman generally recommends that the Prison and Probation Service ensure on an ongoing basis that there is attention on inmates with only little contact with the outside world and that state and local prisons contribute as much as possible to increasing those inmates' contact with the outside world

### **3.7. Particulars on the monitoring visit to Western Prison**

Western Prison is a local prison. The monitoring visit to Western Prison was – contrary to the other thematic visits of 2024 – an unannounced visit. This means that Western Prison had not prior to the monitoring visit been informed that a monitoring visit would take place. As a result, the monitoring visit had also been organised in a different way than the other thematic visits. For example, the Ombudsman did not until the monitoring visit itself ask

Western Prison for information and material for elucidation of the focus areas (visits and occupation).

In Western Prison, booking of visits took place by the relatives telephoning the local prison and booking the visit. Most of the inmates that the visiting team spoke with complained about the visit booking system. Among other things, the inmates stated that their relatives were in a call queue for several hours during their working hours, and not enough consideration was given for the inmates' individual circumstances, such as if the inmate had children.

Many of the inmates serving a sentence in Western Prison with whom the visiting team spoke also stated that it was very difficult to receive visits. The remand prisoners that the visiting team spoke with gave very different information about how often they could get visits. In this connection, it was stated that it could be difficult to receive visits from children attending school who lived far away from Western Prison, as there was no access to visits on Saturdays, and at the same time Sunday was the most requested visiting day.

The monitoring visit, including the discussions of the mentioned issues with the management of Western Prison, led the Ombudsman to recommend, among other things, *that* management ensure the right of inmates serving a sentence to at least one weekly visit, *that* management consider changing the visiting times so that there are more available times when it is possible to have visits from children attending school, and *that* management organise the visit booking system in a way that ensures, partly, that the distribution of visits takes place according to objective and relevant criteria, partly reasonable waiting times for the relatives in a possible call queue.

The Ombudsman also followed up on the monitoring visit by conducting an own-initiative investigation of Western Prison's visiting conditions. The investigation was concluded with the Ombudsman's statement of 2 June 2025 and a subsequent news item on the case. The result of the investigation can be found on the Ombudsman's website ([www.en.ombudsmanden.dk](http://www.en.ombudsmanden.dk), under News archive, 2025).

In that connection, the Ombudsman noted that, after the monitoring visit, a new visiting model has been implemented in the local prison, which allows for 64 additional visits from relatives every month.

During the processing of the case, the Department of Prisons and Probation stated that there is not currently a sufficient data basis for determining if all inmates who want visits can get them in accordance with the applicable rules. On that background, it was the Ombudsman's opinion that there is a need for the Prison and Probation Service to create a better data basis for visits. A

better data basis would first and foremost ensure the necessary basis for assessing if the rules on inmates' right to visits are met, but it would also otherwise strengthen the Prison and Probation Service's possibility of supporting visits, including the assessment of the current capacity need.

In relation to this, the Ombudsman stated that, in his opinion, follow-up should take place as soon as possible on the recommendation given by a Prison and Probation Service working group on visits from lawyers and relatives that the Prison and Probation Service's data basis for visits should be optimised.

In that connection, the Ombudsman has recommended that the Prison and Probation Service consider expediting its decision on the working group's recommendation.

In regard to Western Prison's visit booking system by telephone, the Ombudsman noted that the local prison has extended telephone hours so that relatives can call on two days a week outside normal working hours to book visits.

At the same time, the Ombudsman asked the Prison and Probation Service to give more information on a pilot project concerning a digital platform for booking visits and to state what additional deliberations the Prison and Probation Service has made on improvement of the telephone service in Western Prison.

## **4. Occupation in the Prison and Probation Service**

### **4.1. The rules**

The rules on occupation in the Prison and Probation Service are set out in the Sentence Enforcement Act (Consolidation Act No. 201 of 28 February 2023), in the Executive Order on Occupation (Executive Order No. 1016 of 28 June 2022) and in the Guidance Notes on Occupation (Guidance Notes No. 9734 of 28 June 2022).

The Prison and Probation Service must, to the extent possible, offer occupation to both inmates serving a sentence and to remand prisoners. Inmates serving a sentence in state prisons have both a right to and a duty of occupation corresponding to a normal working week of 37 hours. However, the duty of occupation does not apply to remand prisoners or to inmates serving a sentence in a local prison.

Occupation comprises:

- Work, such as cleaning and maintenance of the institutions and prison production.
- Education, such as general adult education (AVU), higher preparatory examination remotely (HF) and vocational education and training (EUD).
- Other approved activity, such as substance abuse treatment or participation in programme activities, including behavioural programmes.

Inmates who have been ordered to be deported cannot be occupied with education, formal education or programme activities unless special circumstances apply.

#### **4.2. Guidance on occupation**

Inmates must be given guidance on the occupation options in the institution they are staying in.

Most of the visited state and local prisons stated that the inmates were informed of the occupation options on arrival. Based on the visiting teams' interviews with inmates, staff and managements, it is the Ombudsman's impression that the Prison and Probation Service generally focuses on guiding inmates, including new inmates, on the possibilities of occupation.

#### **4.3. Work**

##### *4.3.1. Work availability in state prisons*

The monitoring visits showed that – compared with the visited local prisons; cf. item 4.3.2 below – there is generally a wider availability of work in the state prisons. The work in the visited state prisons mainly consisted of production and maintenance of the institutions and outdoor grounds. Depending on the specific prison, this included work in production kitchen, smithery, paint shop, carpenter's shop, metal workshop, assembly shop, farming or gardening.

One state prison stated that large jobs from external collaborators where one or more items are to be mass-produced were few and far between. Another state prison stated that it can be difficult to procure work for the prison, as the tasks must be suitable for inmates who do not have a skilled background. A third state prison stated that, for a period of time, there had been problems recruiting foremen, which could lead to a lack of orders since it was the foremen who contacted businesses in order to procure work for the prison. The prison in question also stated that the recruitment problems had now been solved and that the prison would soon have a number of foremen corresponding to the full staffing level. It is the Ombudsman's impression that the visited state prisons generally focused on procuring work for the inmates.

Based on the visiting teams' interviews with the inmates, it is also the Ombudsman's impression that the inmates in the state prisons were overall satisfied with the availability of work, but they would like some production activity that could improve their skills to a greater extent.

#### *4.3.2. Work availability in local prisons*

In the visited local prisons, the work offered was primarily cell work. The availability and nature of the cell work varied between local prisons. For example, the cell work consisted in folding Christmas decorations or making gift tags and assembling hinges, Rawlplugs or cable clamps. In two local prisons, the cell work primarily consisted in folding Christmas stars.

During the visiting team's interviews with the inmates, they generally expressed dissatisfaction with the nature of the offered cell work. The inmates wanted to produce items with actual utility value that did not end up being thrown away, as often happened with Christmas decorations.

Other than cell work, it was possible to work in the local prisons' workshops or with operational or maintenance tasks, such as an inmate orderly, laundry orderly or yard orderly. The possibility of shopwork and the nature thereof varied between local prisons. Three local prisons stated that they generally did not have problems offering shopwork. However, several other local prisons stated that it could be difficult or resource-demanding to procure sufficient shopwork. In this connection, one local prison stated that for a period it had been difficult to procure work, but at the time of the visit the situation had improved. Another local prison stated that there was often a lack of work, and a third local prison stated that there was not enough work in the workshop for a full working day. Lastly, a fourth local prison stated that the fact that the multipurpose room, which was also used as a workshop, was sometimes used briefly for occupancy made it difficult to find shopwork tasks.

The managements generally stated that a number of issues affected the possibility of procuring shopwork and cell work, including the physical setting where the size of the cells limits the size of the products that can be worked with as part of cell work. The fact that large vehicles could not deliver materials and that there was limited room for storage of materials and completed products as well as high shipping prices also constituted a limitation in some local prisons. In addition to this, there was the inmates' lack of skills since some had never had a job.

The Ombudsman recommended that three local prisons continue on an ongoing basis to pay attention to the possibilities of procuring cell work and to the nature of such work.

The Ombudsman also recommended that two of those local prisons continue on an ongoing basis to pay attention to the possibilities of procuring sufficient shopwork.

In the light of this, the Ombudsman generally recommends that local prisons on an ongoing basis take care to procure cell work and shopwork and that they focus on the nature of such work.

#### **4.4. Education**

In most of the visited state and local prisons, education on a primary and lower secondary level was offered, primarily in Danish and mathematics. There was generally access to education for people with dyslexia and the possibility of taking exams.

Most prisons also offered adult vocational training courses (AMU) and higher preparatory examination (HF). However, as of 1 January 2024, the Department of Prisons and Probation stopped all education on HF level in closed state and local prisons.

In one of the state prisons, it was possible to complete the basic programme of the vocational training to become a painter, smith or carpenter, and it was possible to complete full vocational training to become a chef.

In an open unit in one of the state prisons, inmates had access to day release to attend HF, vocational training and higher education.

In several prisons, it was stated that the teachers were proactive in relation to the inmates, and it is the Ombudsman's impression that the visited state and local prisons generally focused on offering education.

Based on the visiting teams' interviews with the inmates, it is also the Ombudsman's impression that the inmates were overall satisfied with the offered education, but that the inmates who were taking HF or considered starting HF were dissatisfied that the Department of Prisons and Probation had in the first half of 2024 decided to temporarily stop offering HF in closed units in the state and local prisons. The Department's decision was made after the Department had become aware that the HF education did not fully meet the requirements of the teaching plans for the individual HF subjects.

The prospect of reopening HF education in the Prison and Probation Service was discussed at a meeting between the Department and the Ombudsman in September 2024. The Department subsequently confirmed to the Ombudsman that HF education would again be offered in closed units in state and local prisons from the autumn semester of 2024.



#### **4.5. Foreign nationals**

Foreign nationals have a right to – and when serving a sentence in a prison also a duty of – occupation like other inmates. However, as mentioned under item 4.1, inmates who have been ordered to be deported cannot be occupied with education, formal education or programme activities unless special circumstances apply.

Three of the visited local prisons were not aware that foreign nationals who have not been ordered to be deported have a right to occupation through, for instance, education and formal education on an equal footing with other inmates.

Therefore, the Ombudsman recommended that the three local prisons ensure that foreign nationals' access to education is managed in accordance with the relevant rules.

In the light of this, the Ombudsman generally recommends that the Prison and Probation Service ensure that all institutions are aware that foreign nationals who have not been ordered to be deported have a right to – and when serving in state prisons also a duty of – occupation through, for instance, education, formal education or programme activities on an equal footing with other inmates, and that foreign nationals who have been ordered to be deported can be occupied with education, formal education or programme activities if special circumstances apply.

Sincerely,



Christian Britten Lundblad