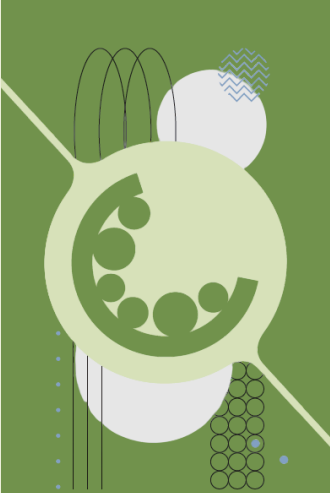




REPORT

FROM THE MONITORING VISIT

*Educational Correctional
Institution Tetovo – Volkovija*



REPORT FROM THE MONITORING VISIT TO THE EDUCATIONAL CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION TETOVO – VOLKOVIIJA

Publisher:

Helsinki Committee for Human Rights

Authors:

Tona Kareva Taleska and Aleksandra Trajanovska

Graphic design:

Hamid Arif

Number of pages: 18

Printing: 15

Skopje, 2026

This publication was funded by the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights Skopje and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.



**Funded by
the European Union**



CONTENTS

01	Introduction	01
02	General Information	02
	Staff	04
	Violence	05
	Disciplinary measures and privileges	05
	Nutrition	06

	Health care	07
	visits and communication	08
	Material conditions	09
	Material conditions – female ward	11
	Education	11
	Preparation for release	13
03	Conclusions	15
04	Recommendations	16

Introduction

This report was prepared within the framework of the project “Strengthening human rights and services for children and vulnerable persons at risk in closed institutions”. The main objective of the project is to contribute to improving services for target groups through a human rights-based approach. The specific objectives are aimed at improving conditions and protecting human rights, strengthening the capacities of staff and encouraging cooperation between institutions and the community.

Within the framework of the project activities, a monitoring visit was conducted to the Educational Correctional Institution Tetovo – Volkovija on August 5, 2025. The monitoring was conducted by a team consisting of: Tona Kareva Taleska, Aleksandra Trajanovska, Liljana Ignjatova, Ivana Kostovska, Tatjana Doneska and Elena Georgievska.

During the visit, discussions were held with the management and staff of the institution, including representatives of the prison police, the expert team and the administrative staff, as well as with children serving educational and correctional measures.

The visit was conducted based on a previously developed methodology, and the purpose of the monitoring was to obtain a comprehensive picture of the accommodation conditions, treatment and care for the children, health care, access to education, communication with the outside world, as well as respect for their rights. In addition, the monitoring aimed to identify challenges in the functioning of the institution and to provide recommendations for improving the conditions and services in accordance with national and international standards.

General information

The Educational Correctional Institution Tetovo – Volkovija is located in the village of Volkovija and was opened in November 2020. The total capacity of the facility is 110 people, and at the time of the visit, there were 24 children accommodated in the institution, 1 child had absconded from the institution (a classic escape from the facility, in June 2024. The facility was notified by the court, after which a warrant was issued, but the person has not been found) and 2 people in the Ohrid Juvenile Prison, i.e. a total of 27 people. It was emphasized that for the two people who are in the Ohrid Juvenile Prison, the measures for serving an educational measure in the correctional facility have not been terminated, although requests for review of the measures have been sent to the court, to which there is no response, which practically means that after the expiration of the prison sentence, the two people will have to be returned to Educational Correctional Institution Tetovo – Volkovija. In one year, the number of people in the Educational Correctional Institution Tetovo – Volkovija has increased by 50%. Also, there is currently one girl serving an educational measure, and she is currently in the Idrizovo Prison, given that the Educational Correctional Institution Tetovo – Volkovija needs to adapt a space, which is not yet ready. The re-adaptation is necessary because the girl needs to be physically separated from the other male residents in accordance with the standards. One building will be converted into a female ward. One prison officer has already been employed for this purpose, and two more are on a contract basis. It is expected that the girl will be transferred to the Educational Correctional Institution Tetovo – Volkovija in the coming months, after the space where she would stay has been arranged. In addition, if the amendments to the Law on the Execution of Sanctions are adopted it is planned that the juvenile prison will be moved to this section of the Tetovo Prison, so that both the prison and the correctional institution will be in one institution, which should really be considered, given the different needs, methods and standards of dealing with children serving educational measures and prison sentences.

Currently, there are 2 groups - an open department and one group of a closed department. There is no group in a semi-open department, given that there is not a sufficient number of educators.

Staff

The total number of employees in the institution, in addition to the director is 41. Of these, 24 are in the prison police (1 commander, 1 female officer) (1 on unpaid leave, 1 reassigned to work in the kitchen); the treatment department has 7 staff members (1 head of the treatment department – psychologist), 4 educators (1 social worker, 1 special education teacher, 1 mathematics teacher and 1 chemistry teacher); 2 participants in the expert team (psychologist and social worker, while there is no pedagogue); 2 instructors (economics and catering) and 6 people in the administration (1 head of general legal affairs, 1 person responsible for public procurement, 1 person responsible for human resources and 3 people in accounting). One of the instructors is expected to retire soon. The employees indicate that there is a shortage of staff, and they also have challenges regarding the suitability of some of the existing staff. In this regard, a request to overcome these situations has been submitted to the Sanctions Enforcement Administration, but so far no positive response has been received. The employees regularly attend training and continuous education by the Sanctions Enforcement Administration, but they still highlighted the lack of training upon employment as a problem. The prison police employees work in shifts, i.e. they work for 12 hours and rest after 24 hours. The prison police emphasized that it is necessary to organize so that there are at least 4 people in one shift, but due to a shortage of staff, they leave 3 people per shift, which is below the minimum. They believe that a total of 24 prison officers is too few to organize, given the ongoing annual vacations, shift work, prisoner escorts, sick leave, and the number of children. The educators work in a single shift, from Monday to Friday.

Violence

Regarding violence, it was emphasized that violence between children occurs, but it is rarely physical, mainly verbal provocations and disobedience of orders from officials. Regarding violence against staff, they said that it rarely occurs. There was one case last year, when a person attacked a prison police officer. Regarding the case in question, the person confirmed the event related to the attack on a police officer, stating that the act occurred at a time when he was returned after an escape, and according to his statement, he had previously been subjected to torture, as well as physical and verbal treatment by the prison officer. In the meantime, the person has been disciplinary sanctioned and is still in the institution, with no new incidents recorded since then. It should be borne in mind that some of the allegations have been assessed as unfounded. They also emphasized that since the institution has been in this facility, the number of escapes has decreased. The prison police provide constant security, 24-hour monitoring, there are cameras in the facilities, but not in the bedrooms and toilets, and they do not carry batons/weapons with them, but keep them locked in a cupboard.

Disciplinary measures and privileges

Disciplinary measures are applied in accordance with the law and if residents commit a disciplinary offense. They are a warning, a reduction or reduction of privileges, a return from a semi-open to a closed unit and a measure of placement in a separate room.

Sometimes they also perform a 24-hour placement in a separate room, until a Decision on a disciplinary measure is adopted, which is issued by the director, in which time the one-day placement in a separate room is then also included. The placement in a separate room lasts from 5 to 7 days, depending on the disciplinary offense. In these rooms, individuals do not have a television and are accommodated separately from other individuals in the institution. Children stated that they have strong negative feelings towards these isolation rooms. Children do not have the practice of filing complaints against decisions on disciplinary measures and the procedures for complaints are not clear to them, although there is legal instruction and such a possibility in the Decision.

The facilities that the children use are in accordance with the law, i.e. 72 hours of leave, 3 days of absence, annual leave of 20, i.e. 10 days. The institution keeps proper records in written registers for all matters (disciplinary offenses, progress...).

Nutrition

The food is prepared in the kitchen of the institution, which is clean and new. Every two weeks, the doctor, the cook and an educator make a menu. During the weekends (Saturday and Sunday), the hygiene check in the kitchen and the dining room is done by the instructor and the children themselves. The menu is designed to provide a daily nutritional value of 14,600 kilojoules, especially since we are talking about young people. There are 3 meals every day, without additional snacks. The children are satisfied with the lunch meal, but not with breakfast and dinner, which are often cold cuts, cottage cheese, canned fish, which they do not like. Some of the people in the institution are employed in the kitchen.

Health care

The institution has a fully equipped outpatient clinic for examining children and a medical technician who is employed by the Tetovo Health Center, and provides services in the institution and works in a single shift from Monday to Friday, while a doctor and a dentist come once a week. The doctor (a general practitioner) is employed by the Tetovo Health Center and works in the Tetovo prison, and only comes to the Educational Correctional Institution Tetovo – Volkovija on Thursdays. The institution has concluded a work contract with a psychiatrist from Tetovo and he comes occasionally, on call. On days when there is no doctor, in the afternoon, evening, on weekends and holidays, an ambulance also intervenes on call, and the prison police emphasized that in the afternoons and on weekends they cannot always assess whether they really need to call an ambulance or whether the children are trying to manipulate them. It was emphasized that there is still a question about the competence of the ambulance doctors to offer assistance to these children. Also, the institution is 32 km away from Tetovo, which may still affect the quality of healthcare that would be and is provided to the children. Not all people have health insurance and at the time of the visit some of them had a problem with health insurance. The medical technician shares the children's therapy, which is kept locked. Since 2020, there has been no case of self-harm, and there has been no case of death or suicide. The employees of the institution monitor the children, including the prison police. There is a separate medical file for each child. The lack of a child psychiatrist was highlighted as one of the biggest problems, as well as the difficulties in scheduling an appointment on the "MojTermin" platform for the examination and treatment of children with mental disorders. Among the children, the number of those who use psychoactive substances is not small; 4 months ago, 5 children were caught taking drugs through foil. Some of the children interviewed confirmed that they had taken heroin, and the results of rapid tests for opiates were positive.

Health records exist for each child and are kept in the outpatient clinic. The health records record diagnoses for the use of psychoactive substances, including a diagnosis of alcohol use in one child. The records also record hepatitis C, for which two children tested positive, but it is not noted that additional research and possible treatment and immunization for hepatitis B have been undertaken. Some of the children have tattoos that they did not do at home, but they still need to be tested for blood-borne infections, from a possible unsterile tattoo, and to be possibly immunized for hepatitis B. No injection equipment was ever found in the home. In the medical records, there is a prescription for therapy with minor and major tranquilizers (neuroleptics and sedatives), sometimes even two benzodiazepine preparations. Information was received that the children themselves mainly seek sedatives, some of them want to sleep all the time, both in the morning and in the afternoon, and some seek them, but then do not take the medication, and there is also a case when they noticed that a child was hiding the pill. There are no medications for opiate overdose in the outpatient clinic, because even if there is a case of overdose, there is usually no one to administer the medication, i.e. they have to call an ambulance.

Visits and communication

Children have the right to an unlimited number of visits and regular communication with the outside world. If the child is asked for, he or she can talk at any time. On the other hand, each child has the right to telephone calls twice a week, as well as to use a tablet for video communication. The telephones and the tablet are located with the educators and the educator is present during the telephone calls. This is not the case with children in the closed group – they have the right to a 10-minute conversation every 10 days. The children do not have written correspondence, but they have the right to unlimited mail and visits.

They pointed out that some of them do not have contact with their families and that this negatively affects their mental health, which the children themselves complained about. The institution takes steps to establish contact with the families, as well as by contacting and reporting to the competent social work centers, but this is not always successful.

The institution has a register of disciplinary measures: separate room, conditional warning, restriction of privileges (absence of 3 days, annual vacation 2 x 10 days). The children interviewed most negatively perceive the experience of isolation in a separate room, as well as the stay in the closed ward.

There is a complaints notebook in the institution, but the children interviewed were not informed about this possibility and it is not used. In addition, there are also boxes for complaints and appeals to the Ombudsman, about which the children inform that, although they know that such boxes are placed in the duty room and in other places, they are afraid to put a complaint/appeal in them, because they will be seen doing so.

Material conditions

The facility is new and for now preserved, and the conditions are constantly being improved. It is surrounded by a fence and has bars, which the staff considers necessary for the safety of the children. The institution has a reception department, where there is an isolation room in which a child with a disability is currently accommodated separately so that he does not attack other children; however, during the day, he is accompanied by a prison officer, and he is together with the other children.

One facility accommodates children in a closed ward, and one facility accommodates children in an open ward. All rooms are equipped with beds on 2 floors, a table, lockers, a TV and a toilet. The rooms have enough natural and artificial light, there is no humidity and there is good ventilation and hygiene. The institution has special rooms for children's group work, 2 classrooms, music room and classrooms for attending classes. Computer literacy is organized once a week, as well as general literacy for children who have no education and are illiterate. The institution also has a fully equipped barbershop, and in 2023 training was conducted and now the children provide barbering services to one another. The yard of the institution is equipped with a playground with a basketball hoop and goal, a church, gazebos, a barbecue and a fountain that were made by the children, with the help of the institution's employees, as well as a garden in which potatoes, tomatoes, plums, etc. are planted. The children also have access to a kitchen for tea and coffee, a prayer room, and a laundry room, in which one child is engaged for work training, in order to acquire certain habits. The facility also has an equipped barbershop and a fitness room. The fitness room can be used by 4 children at the same time and is open from 12 to 1 pm and from 4 to 5 pm. Children from the closed ward do not have the right to use the fitness room. The facility also has a workshop, in which the children are currently engaged in the production of insect-proof curtains, for which a socially responsible company provides the material. For their work engagement, they receive compensation for each curtain produced, which is kept by their educators. The amount of compensation depends on the performance. Children who are engaged in the kitchen and the economy do not receive compensation - they receive it if they produce plastic curtains.

Material conditions – female ward

Within the framework of the project "Strengthening human rights and services for children and vulnerable persons at risk in closed institutions", funded by the European Union, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights assisted in equipping the female ward in the Educational Correctional Institution Tetovo – Volkovija. The unit has been equipped with new furniture, basic equipment, recreational facilities, and additional resources that contribute to a safer, more dignified, and more stimulating environment for female prisoners serving correctional measures. This significantly improves the quality of daily life and opportunities for personal development. There is currently one user in the female ward who shared her views on the improvements made:

"I spent 9 months in Idrizovo, 22 hours a day in a room. I feel better here, because I'm not locked up, I have other activities, like sports, ping - pong, Pilates, and I have more space to move around. I can use the living room, which has nice furniture and a TV."

Education

The number of children who are illiterate and have not completed primary education is high (20). Formal education that was implemented in the Educational Correctional Institution Tetovo – Volkovija was suspended from September 2021 to July 2022, with the completion of the project between UNDP and the Ministry of Education and Science.

Thus, children serving an educational and correctional measure were deprived of the right to education, which is of essential importance for their resocialization process. The educational process then continued to be implemented in the institution, but this time with a project supported by UNDP. Children who have already completed a higher level of education attend about a dozen school subjects, while other children attend 3 school subjects, namely Macedonian language, English language and mathematics. Teaching is conducted within the institution through hired teachers from the "Makarenko" adult school in the Municipality of Chair, Skopje. Unfortunately, the educational process is only informal, that is, children who attend classes are awarded certificates at the end of the school year, and not a formal certificate, which should not differ from what children receive outside of school. In this way, the education that children receive in the institution is not equal to the education that children receive outside, which is why they have difficulties in employment, taking a driver's license exam, etc. It is expected that this problem will be resolved from this school year, in accordance with the legal amendments of 2025, which provide that primary education in the institution will be implemented according to a separate curriculum and curricula, from a primary school that has verification for primary education for adults and children in correctional institutions and that conducts classes in the student's native language in correctional institutions. Also, with the amendments of January 2025 to the Law on Primary Education, a new article was added, which reads:

Article 15-a

(1) Children in educational and correctional institutions have the right to primary education under equal conditions, in accordance with this law.

(2) For children referred to in paragraph (1) of this Article, who have not been included in education and are under the age of 16, their prior knowledge shall be checked for inclusion in an appropriate grade of primary education.

(3) The knowledge of the children referred to in paragraph (2) of this Article shall be tested by the primary school for education of adults and children in correctional institutions, with tests and oral examinations determined by the Bureau. After the knowledge test has been carried out, the primary school shall issue a certificate by which the child is enrolled in the appropriate grade of primary education.

(4) Children referred to in paragraph (1) of this Article, who were previously enrolled in education and are under the age of 16, shall be enrolled in the appropriate grade of primary education based on the last issued certificate for the completed grade.

(5) The form and content of the certificate referred to in paragraph (3) of this Article shall be prescribed by the Minister, upon the proposal of the Bureau.

Also, in accordance with the Law on Secondary Education, Secondary education is organized and provided in health care institutions, penal and correctional institutions, as well as in home conditions, and is implemented by a regional center for vocational education and training. Additionally, through informal methods and projects, more children have received certificates for craftsmen, for which they need to have 18 months of residence and be employed. Also, in the past, they had several activities for vocational training - carpenter, tailor, beautician, etc. In 2025, the education process was successfully started and is being implemented.

Preparation for release

When preparing for release, the competent social work center is notified in order to exercise some social rights - one-time assistance, but they are not helped with finding a job or housing. Sometimes, work and housing are provided for the children through personal connections. The employees also emphasized that it is particularly important to revive the social service "Halfway House", in order to provide assistance for the reintegration of these children into society.

Also, increased work is needed with the families both during the period of serving the measure, but also before release, because there is a risk of the child returning to the same negative environment and repeating the negative action. Currently, only an advisory conversation is conducted with the families. In addition, it is necessary to establish an efficient system for finding a job and larger funds for helping children after their release, and of course, more efficient and effective involvement of the Center for Social Work.

Conclusions

The monitoring visit to the Educational Correctional Institution Tetovo – Volkovija showed that the institution has relatively good material conditions and infrastructure, which enable a dignified stay for children. However, significant systemic shortcomings were identified that affect the quality of treatment and the protection of children's rights.

A key challenge is the lack of professional and security staff, which directly affects the organization of work, safety and the ability to provide an individualized approach to children. Additionally, there is insufficient access to health services, especially for mental health, as well as the absence of continuous psychiatric support.

Although the educational process has been re-established, its temporary interruption has negatively affected the further resocialization and integration of the children. There are also challenges in terms of disciplinary measures, especially the application of isolation, which the children experience as particularly difficult. (According to the LES, Article 363, the measure of solitary confinement is not applied to children, but rather isolation in a separate room, for a period of 5 to 7 days, during which period the expert team undertakes special corrective activities with the children, and for each child who is sent to a separate room, a Work Program is prepared with planned re-educational activities for each day of the stay. Also, during the stay, the children attend classes and all other forms of project activities, and receive visits.)

Additionally, there is insufficient information and trust among children in the mechanisms for protecting their rights, especially for filing complaints. Preparation for leaving the institution is limited and does not provide systemic support for reintegration into the community.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the report, the following recommendations are made:

REGARDING STAFF AND ORGANIZATION:

- *To increase the number of employees, especially in the prison police and professional staff (pedagogues, psychologists and social workers). In addition, it is urgent and necessary to hire instructors, considering that none are currently hired, which is why educators are forced to take on their role, although this does not correspond to their responsibilities, nor to their professional competencies and skills.*
- *Establish mandatory initial training for newly hired staff in addition to continuing education.*
- *To ensure an adequate number of personnel per shift in accordance with safety standards.*

REGARDING HEALTHCARE:

- *To ensure the regular presence of a child psychiatrist and improve mental health services.*
- *To improve access to health insurance for all children.*
- *To introduce protocols for addiction treatment and regular screening for infectious diseases.*
- *Provide appropriate therapy and equipment for emergencies (including overdose).*

REGARDING DISCIPLINARY MEASURES:

- *The application of isolation in a separate room is legally regulated and appropriately organized according to the Law on the Execution of Sanctions and the relevant standards. In accordance with Article 363, the measure of solitary confinement is not applied to children, but isolation in a separate room for a period of 5 to 7 days, which provides for the active involvement of the professional team through individualized programs with re-educational activities.*
- *However, it is necessary to consistently apply this measure only as a last resort, in cases where other educational and corrective approaches have not yielded results, while ensuring its proportionality and justification in each individual case.*
- *To improve children's awareness of their right to appeal and the available legal mechanisms, whereby this activity should be continuously implemented by the competent legal service in the institution, within the framework of its legally established obligations.*

IN TERMS OF EDUCATION:

- *To ensure full formal education that will result in the acquisition of recognized certificates, whereby it is concluded that as of 01.10.2025, an organized and continuous educational process of a formal nature has been established, which includes both primary and secondary education.*
- *To expand the scope of educational and vocational programs for all children.*
- *To ensure continuity of the educational process without interruptions*

REGARDING CONDITIONS AND TREATMENT:

- *To complete and put into operation the female ward without delay. (Established as of 8.10.2025, with the transfer of the female child from Idrizovo.)*
- *To ensure equal access to activities for all children, including those in the closed ward.*
- *To improve the quality and diversity of nutrition*

REGARDING THE PROTECTION OF RIGHTS:

- *To ensure a functional and reliable complaints mechanism.*
- *To increase children's trust in institutional care through anonymous and secure channels*

REGARDING REINTEGRATION:

- *Establish a functional release preparation system - including employment and housing.*
- *To develop and implement services such as "Halfway House".*
- *To strengthen cooperation with social work centers and increase their active involvement.*
- *To improve cooperation and coordination with the families of children during and after their stay in the institution. In doing so, the primary responsibility for direct work with families lies within the social work centers, while the institution remains focused on its target group – children referred to the Educational Correctional Institution Tetovo – Volkovija.*

the 1990s, the number of people in the world who are under 15 years of age is expected to increase from 1.1 billion to 1.5 billion.

As the world's population grows, the demand for food and other resources will increase. This will put pressure on the environment and on the world's food supply. It is important that we find ways to meet this demand without harming the environment.

One way to do this is to use sustainable agriculture. This means using farming methods that can be continued over and over again without harming the land or the environment.

Sustainable agriculture can help us to grow food in a way that is good for the planet and for the people who live on it.

There are many ways to practice sustainable agriculture. Some of the most common are:

- Using natural fertilizers instead of synthetic ones.

- Using crop rotation to keep the soil healthy.

- Using cover crops to protect the soil from erosion.

- Using integrated pest management to control pests without using pesticides.

- Using water-saving techniques like drip irrigation.

By using these and other sustainable agriculture practices, we can help to ensure that we have enough food to eat for a long time to come.

There are many other ways to practice sustainable agriculture. It is important that we all do our part to protect the planet and our food supply.

For more information on sustainable agriculture, visit www.sustainableagriculture.net.

Thank you for reading this article. We hope it has helped you to learn more about sustainable agriculture.

Yours truly,
The Sustainable Agriculture Team

P.S. - If you have any questions or comments, please email us at info@sustainableagriculture.net.