

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/publications/sentencing-and-prison-practices-in-germany-and-the-netherlands-implications-for-the-united-states>

Policy Issue Resources

Publication

The U.S. prison population has increased 700 percent in the last 40 years, and state corrections expenditures reached \$53.5 billion in 2012. Despite this massive investment in incarceration, the national recidivism rate remains at a stubborn 40 percent meaning that four in 10 incarcerated people will return to prison within three years of release. To learn how other countries deal with corrections and sentencing, Vera led a delegation of state officials from Colorado, Georgia, and Pennsylvania on a trip to Germany and the Netherlands to tour those countries prisons, speak with corrections officials, and interact with inmates. This report details their experiences on the tour and the impact it has had on policy discussions and public debate on prison reform in the U.S.

Germany and the Netherlands have significantly lower incarceration rates compared to the U.S. Their systems have a number of different philosophical and practical approaches that could have implications for reform at home.

One of the biggest differences in German and Dutch prisons is the focus on normalization: making life in prison as similar as possible to life in the community.

German and Dutch prison systems are organized around central tenets of resocialization and rehabilitation. The U.S. system is organized around the central tenets of incapacitation and retribution.

Incarceration is used less frequently and for shorter periods of time in Germany and the Netherlands. Both countries rely heavily on fines or other community-based sentences, not prison sentences.

PUBLICATION

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