BETTER PRISONS: A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO MORE HUMANE PRISON PLANNING AND DESIGN
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In 2018 the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) published *Towards Humane Prisons: A Principled and Participatory Approach to Prison Planning and Design*. Written in response to the global trend of larger prison populations and prison estates – and the shortcomings that the organization too often observes when new prisons are built (resources are wasted and opportunities for improvement are lost) – it was intended to help ensure that prison design empowered and enabled prison staff to provide humane and dignified treatment and living conditions for detainees.

This booklet provides a brief overview of the same themes and topics and is both an introduction to the larger publication and a catalyst for discussion on these important ideas.
INTRODUCTION

At the ICRC, we have a long history of working to ensure that all detainees experience humane treatment and reasonable living conditions. We work closely with security services, the military, prison and probation services, and other state authorities, as well as non-state armed groups and individuals, to make sure detainees are held in safe, orderly settings – regardless of the circumstances of their arrest, the nature of their offence, how they conduct themselves while detained, and the reasons for their detention or internment. In general, we advocate for non-custodial measures, where appropriate, as an alternative to prison estate expansion.

In this booklet, we explore how the planning and designing of places of detention, including an assessment of whether a prison is really necessary, can be done more collaboratively with a better understanding of the intended outcomes, and how design might help to realize better outcomes, as well as the costs, both financial and human. Building on our wealth of experience in visiting places of detention around the world, with a particular focus on conflict and post-conflict countries, we look at how the common use of incarceration could be avoided, and what managers, staff and visitors can do to limit the risk to people’s dignity and safety where it is determined they should be deprived of their liberty.

Evidence shows that building new prisons is very expensive and not a long-term solution to overcrowding. We want everyone who is considering building a prison to consider first whether it is really necessary and whether there are better alternatives. But we also recognize that there are times when prison building is necessary, such as to alleviate the conditions experienced by those deprived of their liberty and to prevent the harm to detainees and staff that derives from unsuitable prison design.

The ICRC wants to support prison authorities in leading the design and planning process and to offer guidance concerning the deliberations that should precede the decision to build. Planning, designing and building a prison is a complex undertaking that requires a variety of people to work together and consider multiple perspectives. The basic principles of humane prison design concern everyone involved in the process. It is essential for all participants to develop a common understanding of what a prison is, what it should achieve, what it is to live and work in a prison and how all of this can be supported by effective design.

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1 A probation (or parole) service is responsible for the supervision of people sentenced in the community, either instead of or after a custodial sentence has been handed down and provides reports to the criminal courts to assist them in their sentencing duties.
FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

WHY DESIGN MATTERS

Prison buildings last for generations. When new ones deliver the best possible experience for the detainees, staff and visitors who live in, work in and visit them, there are significant, positive long-term outcomes for society too. Equally, every bad process that results in poor conditions affects society negatively for generations to come.

We know prison authorities are critical in leading effective processes that focus on the real needs associated with the people who spend time in the prisons being built. We also know many of these authorities are engaged in this complicated and difficult process without the support they need.
There are a number of common practices relating to the building of prisons that cause us serious concern:

- Some prisons are constructed without the benefit of a proper strategic planning and design programming process.
- Often the designs were made for and reflect other cultures, climates and socio-economic backgrounds, and clash with local needs and customs.
- The designs do not take into account the varied roles that the prison should fulfil or the varying characteristics of those who will inhabit them.
- Those who will be responsible for managing, visiting and living in the prison are often excluded from the planning process.
- Some authorities do not have expertise or access to expertise in planning and design.

**IMPACT OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT**

Our fundamental premise is that design matters. Prison environments have a profound impact on the people who live and work there, as well as on those who visit. The design of a prison can either create conditions that add to the suffering inherent in the loss of liberty or that help people cope with that loss.

Everything about a prison’s design – from the nature of the materials used to the organization of the spaces within it – reflects decisions that embody the criminal justice philosophy of that place of detention and will affect detainees, staff and society for decades. Acknowledging the impact of design and making effective choices through a clearly set-out design process can result in a prison that is more humane, safe and secure. Effective prison planning and design facilitate analytical thinking about the built environment and the potential short- and long-term consequences of design decisions on detainees, staff and communities. It involves making conscious decisions about what the building is intended to be and how it should operate. Design choices affect the amount and quality of social interaction, levels of stress and physiological functions of those living and working in that space. The impact of environmental stressors is magnified when individuals have little control over the setting, such as in a prison. Recognizing that design matters – a positive belief in the power of thoughtful, intentional design – is a crucial part of accepting the importance of the prison planning and design process. Design reflects culture, values and goals; it affects behaviour, attitudes and emotions – and cost effectiveness over the life cycle of the facility.
We ask participants involved in the prison planning and design process to use the following questions as a basis for discussion when considering how design can successfully support operations and more humane treatment of detainees:

- Are all participants similarly informed about the impact of design and committed to making informed and effective design decisions?
- In what ways will the design of the planned building serve the goals of the criminal justice system, i.e. in both the implementation of individual sentences and the wider intentions of the criminal justice system?
- What other goals and values will be reflected in the design?
- Who will the building serve and what services will be available to them? In what sort of facilities?
- How will the needs of users – detainees, staff and visitors – be determined and responded to?
- How will the prison be organized, managed and funded, and how can design support the intended operations?
- How are detainees, staff and visitors intended to experience the prison?
- How will the design of the prison support detainee health and help detainees prepare for release?
- What irritants and stressors can the design of the building mitigate or avoid?
- How much control will the design give users over when and with whom they interact?
- How much control will the design give users over aspects of the environment that they would normally control outside prison?
FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES: PRINCIPLES TO BUILD BY

Liberty is a fundamental human right; deprivation of liberty must remain the exception. Many international conventions recognize that all aspects of detention should be strictly regulated, but few international laws and standards offer guidance on the physical design of prisons. Basing any prison building project first and foremost on humanitarian principles and using these principles consistently in the planning and design process of prisons, will lead to better design decisions and better facilities that are more likely to fulfil their key mandates successfully. The four foundational principles for building by outlined below are rooted in the Nelson Mandela Rules and other international standards regarding the rights of detainees and the responsibilities of detaining authorities. Applying the principles – in strategic planning and design decisions – is the foundation for making prisons more humane.

Different ways of doing things are not prescribed in this text, or even described, but a series of concepts are laid out and lead to questions to be used in discussions with participants in prison planning and design.
PRINCIPLE 1: DO NO HARM

The prison environment should not add to the inevitable suffering that arises from deprivation of liberty. Living conditions should respect human dignity and preserve the physical and psychological integrity of detainees and staff.

Prison plans and designs should always be reviewed with their capacity to do harm in mind, and for safeguards to be in place as much as possible to mitigate the inherent harm associated with imprisonment.

PRINCIPLE 2: MAINTAIN A MAXIMUM OF NORMALITY

Life within prison should be as normal as possible (within the necessary bounds set by safety and security restrictions). Detained people are deprived of their liberty, but this does not mean that they should be deprived of all forms of responsibility and autonomy while they are in custody.

Design solutions that enable detainees to continue making choices and decisions for themselves, and assuming daily tasks and responsibilities, help to maintain their sense of themselves as individuals and as part of the community they come from. Both are important for when they return to society.

PRINCIPLE 3: PROMOTE HEALTH AND PERSONAL GROWTH

Prisons should promote health and personal growth in a living environment that is as positive and healthy as possible. Prisons are places where people live and work. Whether it is for a short or a long time, a detainee is spending part of their life in a place of detention. Beyond avoiding harm, therefore, prison leaders should promote design that facilitates growth and health.
PRINCIPLE 3: (CONTINUED)
PROMOTE HEALTH AND PERSONAL GROWTH

The appearance of, access to and design of the facilities affect the attitudes, expectations and behaviour of those who live and work there. Prison design that supports expectations of positive and pro-social behaviour, also facilitates safety, security and good order, which, in turn, improves detainees’ prospects for integrating back into their communities later.

PRINCIPLE 4:
MAINTAIN CONNECTION WITH SOCIETY

Persons deprived of liberty remain members of society. Prisons should create and maintain meaningful connections and promote regular contact between detainees and the outside world. Detainees should not be cut off from the outside world any more than is necessary; their treatment should not equate to exclusion.

The following questions provide a foundation for discussion to help participants involved in prison planning and design to apply these humane principles to the wide range of decisions that must be made during the planning and design processes to support the humane treatment of detainees. They should be asked in relation to each decision:

• Will it harm detainees and staff? What is the likely long-term effect on detainees? the local community? broader society?
• Will it create conditions that resemble normal life outside the prison?
• Will it create a healthier environment and stimulate personal growth?
• Will it improve detainees’ ability to maintain meaningful connection and contact with society? How will it affect the prison’s relationship with the local community?
FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES: DECENCY IN DETENTION

People are sent to prison as punishment, not for punishment. Providing decent conditions ensures that the way people live in places of detention does not add to their punishment. Treating detainees with the respect due to their inherent dignity and value as human beings includes not simply meeting minimum standards but meeting them in a way that fits standards of appropriateness and decency. Authorities are legally and ethically obliged to meet the basic needs of detainees and to keep those deprived of liberty in decent and humane conditions. Treating detainees as people first and foremost and using design principles to underline the key message that they are not somehow “less than” or “less deserving” than other people supports this aim. Providing decent conditions helps staff to feel valued and meet the challenges of their work more effectively.
The following questions provide a foundation for discussion to help participants involved in prison planning and design determine how to best meet the human needs of detainees and staff and support the humane treatment of detainees:

- What constitutes “decency” in the culture and context in which the prison is or will be built? What are the expectations for what is fair, ethical and acceptable in terms of meeting each need? What do people expect in their daily lives?
- What implications do the answers to these questions have for infrastructure in terms of adequate space, access to that space and effective use of that space?
- What specific facilities and design features are required to meet each need decently?
- How will specific facilities and design features promote a safe and respectful environment?
- What specific facilities and design features will promote meaningful interactions and purposeful activities?
- What specific facilities and design features will provide good working conditions for staff?
- How will ideas of what is considered decent be charted and reviewed? How can design features support future revisions as ideas about what is decent evolves?

By decency we mean treatment and conditions in prison that are fair, reasonable, acceptable and ethical. It is about striving to maintain dignity, humanity and equality of access. Decency applies both to the human interaction and services in prison as well as to the quality and character of the facilities themselves. Meeting basic human needs decently includes providing meaningful social interaction, physical activity, access to outdoors, a hygienic environment and nutritious food, ample access to clean and safe water, and sufficient access to health infrastructure and sanitary facilities. Notions of what is decent are not fixed but differ from place to place and evolve over time.
The use of deprivation of liberty as a sanction is a relatively recent concept that replaced some inhumane practices, such as corporal punishment, as well as some more positive practices, such as reconciliation, that might be more appropriate. Imperialism and colonization in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries brought in foreign notions of justice and punishment, and prison designs were often ill-adapted to local customs and practices. Prison buildings often outlive the ideas behind their initial development, and many older designs are still being used today for new building projects, even though they are poorly suited to the local context, and ideas about how they were intended to operate were not
transferred with them or have been lost over time. Imprisonment on a large scale only began to be used in the early twentieth century. In the late twentieth century, there have been both moves towards more individual and humane treatment and an increase in the use of extreme high-security models.

Learning the local and global history of detention, evaluating the successes and challenges in existing places of detention and using relevant data and research can help avoid preventable mistakes, shortcomings and failures in the prisons of the future. Understanding and considering the lessons of the past allows new designs to fit the rules and mores of the contemporary society they serve, in line with recognized international laws and standards. Obtaining available information, judging its relevance and appropriateness to local conditions and projects, and applying a suitable solution results in better design decisions – but there are no pre-existing or “one-size-fits-all” answers. Reviewing the available information as part of the planning and design process helps to identify gaps in knowledge that can then be addressed by future research. Evaluating the outcome of projects is vital for ensuring that new buildings capitalize on designs and features shown to be positive and for avoiding repeating the mistakes of the past.

The following questions provide a foundation for discussion to help participants involved in prison planning and design give due consideration to historical influences, as well as to relevant and available research, to make design decisions that support operations and ensure the humane treatment of detainees:

- What is the history of punishment and types of prisons in the place the facility is to be built?
- What, in terms of what has been inherited in criminal justice philosophy and prison operations and design, is still appropriate today?
- What is out of place and no longer relevant?
- What else could be imagined? What else might be accepted and acceptable?
- What information is available and relevant (from studies, research in prisons and other settings, and post-occupancy evaluations)?
- What additional information might it be useful to gather?
- How will the prison be evaluated after it is occupied?
- What can be done to use existing resources and create new opportunities to develop evaluation research that can inform prison design and policy?
FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES: ACCOUNTABILITY

All those who are in one way or another involved in the planning, design and building of a prison, including the private sector and donors, bear the huge ethical responsibility of building a place in which human beings will be deprived of their liberty and the impact of this on detainees, staff and society. The level of accountability varies according to each contributor’s role and responsibilities.
The planning of a prison is a participatory activity where every effort must be made to hold one another accountable, learn from the past and avoid preventable mistakes, excessive costs and design features that will harm detainees or hinder intended operation. Those involved should accept being held morally and – where relevant – legally accountable for the final result, not only in terms of cost and security, but also with regard to compatibility with these overarching humane principles, and the various ways the latter are embodied in various legislation. All participants are accountable for meeting their own responsibilities as well as supporting the work of fellow participants; collaborating and holding each other accountable is vital to planning and designing humane prisons.

The following questions provide a foundation for discussion to help participants involved in prison planning and design consider how to hold themselves and one another accountable to successfully support effective prison operations and the humane treatment of detainees:

- What responsibilities do each of the participants in a prison planning and design project have?
- How will those participants be made aware of their responsibility and accountability?
- What mechanisms are in place to ensure participants fulfil their responsibilities?
- How will participants understand the roles and responsibilities of others, cooperate and interact, provide and incorporate feedback, and facilitate one another’s work?
- How can participants make the best use of lessons learned from past projects?
Strategic planning creates an opportunity to envision and articulate a desired future. It plays a critical role in determining whether a prison is actually needed, the type and number of detainees to be housed, the specific needs of the projected population, and how design will help to meet those needs to ensure safe and humane conditions that meet local and international standards and fulfil the intended function of the prison.

Prisons are affected by the way the rest of the criminal justice system works and cannot be planned for in isolation. The strategic planning process offers a vehicle for reviewing the whole criminal justice system to look at what other measures can avoid the expansion of prison capacity. It is the means to identify and rectify gaps both in the prison estate and in the wider criminal justice system. Improving outcomes for detainees might require prison
estate reform even where additional detention facilities are not required. Strategic plans need to be revised regularly in the light of changing information and an evaluation of their outcomes. Understanding demographic and social trends is critical for predicting likely demands on the criminal justice system and the need for prison spaces. The four humane principles will only be realized in the final build if they are incorporated within the strategic planning process (and the design process outlined below). Effective strategic planning is a participatory process.

Even if prison planning and design has begun without the benefit of a strategic plan, it is not too late to consider broader issues about how the criminal justice system works, affects decisions to build new prisons, and affects the design of prison building projects.

The following questions provide a foundation for discussion to help participants involved in prison planning and design use strategic planning to support effective prison operations and the humane treatment of detainees:

• Who should be involved in the strategic planning process, what methodology will be followed, how will it be paid for, and over what period of time will it be carried out?
• How can current judicial policy, practices and other aspects of the criminal justice system be improved to reduce the use of detention and promote alternatives?
• What indicators will be used to measure progress towards achieving the desired objectives?
• How will plans and progress be communicated and to whom?
• What means are available (e.g. specialists, information systems) to gather and analyse the data needed to support strategic planning?
• What is the current state of the existing detention facilities? Consider:
  – available capacity versus current and projected population
  – ability to meet detainees’ needs and local and international standards for safe and humane treatment
  – level and type of resources necessary to maintain and run facilities.
• How big is the gap between the current reality of the criminal justice system and detention facilities and the proposed vision, and how can it be closed?
• Is there a need to build new prisons and/or renovate existing prisons? If so, where should they be, and what kinds of spaces and programmes should they provide?
The steps of the design process should be highly participatory, drawing on many sources of experience and expertise, including facility users. The design process itself is critical to the success of the overall project and should be properly prepared for and budgeted. The process should allow multiple opportunities for review and feedback for the brief and design, including its ability to deliver on the four humane principles. Each step is necessary and contributes to a successful outcome. Site selection should consider the availability of resources, safety from a natural and conflict-related perspective, accessibility for all users and possible community connections. Moving into the new place of detention provides an opportunity to learn from problems and successes to guide future facility...
development and continually improve conditions for detainees, visitors and staff. Both the design and strategic planning processes are cyclical in nature and there is an ongoing need for accountability, as described above.

A good process includes:

- the prison authorities at the planning and design table at critical moments in that process, as well as the staff who work with and are directly affected by the design
- an understanding of the information needed for the process to be successful
- the knowledge to set up the systems and practices necessary to provide that information
- the confidence to insist on the design elements that will allow for humane prison management
- the ability to defend designs against perverse adaptations
- the development of safeguarding standards, regulations, practices and procedures (including inspection procedures).

The following questions provide a foundation for discussion to help participants involved in prison planning and design successfully support delivery of a prison project that ensures the humane treatment of detainees:

- How will the strategic plan and operational and management strategy inform the prison brief?
- How well does the brief meet humane principles and relevant legal frameworks and national standards, and how well do the initial designs respond to the brief?
- How will quality assurance be managed to ensure that materials and construction meet relevant building codes and respond to the plans?
- What range of people and expertise should be included in the participatory brief preparation process, and how will both technical and user expertise be represented?
- What procurement is needed? If work is outsourced, what are the tender procedures and the selection criteria for contractors?
- What transition planning and staff training arrangements are needed?
- Does the proposed site allow connection to community while meeting the requirements in the brief?
- What arrangements are in place to collect data to allow learning from both successes and problems in the new place of detention, including post-occupancy evaluation?
Finally, in applying the above principles to design, first and foremost prison planning and design must understand and incorporate the local context for which the prison is planned – the social and cultural values and practices of a community being a critical foundation of humane prison design. Local practices do not always meet internationally recognized standards for humane and decent treatment. Investigating the gap and the reasons for it is then needed to find an acceptable way forward. Ensuring that a place of detention reflects local values and
The following questions provide a foundation for discussion to help participants involved in prison planning and design reflect the local context in the prison design to support operations and the humane treatment of detainees:

• Who can help identify the local cultural values and social practices, both in the community and in existing places of detention?
• What are the appropriate ways of engaging the identified persons meaningfully?
• What are the common societal themes and values, both in the general community and those developed in places of detention, including those deriving from the local criminal justice system and those detainees have themselves adopted and adapted?
• Where are the projected detainees and staff from? Who can speak with knowledge and authority about cultural values and practices in these varied places?
• What social practices do people agree are the most important to apply to the proposed place of detention? How do they help to deliver the overarching humane principles?
• Can social practices from the local community replace some established institutional practices?
• How is the social and cultural vision for the new prison to be determined and agreed upon?
• What specific activities, interactions and behaviour can be accommodated in the prison design to support cultural life inside the prison?
Ensuring that prison planning and design understands and responds to the physical context within which the prison will sit – the local landscape, environment and available resources – is vital to the sustainability of the resulting prison. Studying local architecture and incorporating local building techniques is likely to be more sustainable and cost effective than importing solutions. Building with materials and equipment that are familiar to the people responsible for maintaining them as well as making sure that spare parts are available within the local market all help to address sustainability and ensure it is cost effective. What may appear cheap during construction may be very costly in human and financial terms during operational use. What may appear expensive during construction may be a wise investment that reduces maintenance costs over the short and/or long term. A broad range of issues affect sustainability, including location, choice of technology and quality, and local availability of materials, equipment and human resources. Sustainability is not only about minimizing the prison’s negative impact
on the physical environment. It is also about maximizing the prison’s operational effectiveness and ability to meet human needs over the long term. It therefore requires appropriate adaptation to the local context, climate and cultural practices, as well as current and future financial and human resources. Lack of sustainability directly affects the living conditions of detainees and staff and the ability of staff to properly manage a place of detention. Building sustainably contributes to the physical and mental health of detainees and staff, to their sense of connection with the natural environment and to the sense of normality within the prison environment. Appropriate design utilizes research and user feedback. Long-term durability relies on anticipating maintenance and repair requirements.

The following questions provide a foundation for discussion to help participants involved in prison planning and design make sustainable design decisions that successfully support operations and the humane treatment of detainees:

• What information exists or can be collected about:
  – the climate?
  – the site and its geographical orientation?
  – the availability of sources of energy?
  – the state of pollution of the soil and the air?
  – the availability of resources?

• How can this information support sustainable decisions in the building design in relation to:
  – minimizing the environmental impact?
  – minimizing running costs?
  – choosing appropriate features and suitable building materials?

• How will the building contribute to the sense of connection to the natural world and local context?

• What planning and building legislation exists and needs to be taken into consideration?

• Who will be consulted to study the appropriateness of systems and built spaces (bathrooms, kitchens, accommodation, heating and water systems, etc.), fixtures and fittings (taps, devices to flush the toilets, door and window handles, etc.), and how will this information be factored in?

• What is the likely capacity and budget for maintenance, and how can designs, materials and systems be chosen to stay within that budget?
Society and detaining authorities have a moral and legal obligation to maintain strong and meaningful connections with society throughout the period of a person’s detention. Maintaining integration with society throughout their time in prison helps detainees during detention and upon release and is a major factor in reducing the likelihood of reoffending and re-incarceration.

The choice of prison location is critical for the prison’s connection to society and ease of access for visitors, workers and
volunteers, as well as to services and courts. Prisons are part of the society within which they are located, as they share utilities, infrastructure, and human and natural resources. They can support integration by designing infrastructure or features that can be shared with the community. Designing the prison to fit in locally, and actively sharing specific facilities and services with the local population, can further promote integration. Integration is facilitated by sufficient and normalized spaces and efficient access to those spaces. Effective prison design makes visitors feel welcome and focuses on personal and face-to-face contact between detainees and their families, friends and service providers.

We believe in a shift from the current focus on reintegration – because the detainees are separated from society during detention – to integration where detainees remain connected throughout their prison experience.

The following questions provide a foundation for discussion to help participants involved in prison planning and design support successful integration into society and ensure the humane treatment of detainees:

- Who will need to enter and exit the perimeter of the prison regularly and where within the prison will they need to get to?
- How will location and design support access to the prison?
- What spaces and resources will support activities and services aimed at integration?
- How will design facilitate detainees’ access to those activities and services?
- How can normal life outside the prison be reflected in the design of these spaces?
- What specific facilities and services will be shared with the surrounding population?
- How will prison design facilitate communication and interaction between detainees and society, particularly in person, and avoid stigmatization?
- How can prison design allow detainees to stay connected to the outside world and the outside world to connect to the prison?
Detainees are a diverse group of people with different needs, from some based on the most obvious distinctions, such as physical or cultural differences, to the less obvious, such as those brought about specifically by virtue of the individual being in prison. Design should provide features, options and flexibility to accommodate these unique needs. Separation by gender, age (juveniles and adults) and sentence (pre-trial and sentenced, civil and criminal) is a minimum requirement. Such separation is only a starting point and does not mean the diversity of need is met. Other groups may also require special attention to meet their particular needs. Restricting access to activities and services to address diversity of need is ultimately harmful. Where physical separation is implemented, it should not result in less access to important resources, spaces or services. Recognizing the diversity of detainee needs early in the planning process is important in creating the spaces and options ultimately required to address both predictable and less predictable specific needs.
The following questions provide a foundation for discussion to help participants involved in prison planning and design consider how design can successfully support the individual and diverse needs of detainees to help ensure their fair and humane treatment:

• What will the diversity of the projected population be, and what proportions of categories are anticipated within this diversity (numeric data)?
• How will the specific needs of each category be identified and met?
• How will data be used to understand trends and anticipate future needs? (See the “Strategic planning” section.)

• Who will represent detainees with different needs during the participatory processes of the planning and design?
• What relevant laws on equality exist and how will they be taken into consideration during planning and design?
• How will the planning and design meet the required separation between men and women, adults and juveniles, civil and criminal offences, and pre-trial and sentenced detainees, as well as any other required separations?
• How will the planning and design meet the diversity of needs among the elderly, ill, disabled, young, etc.?
• How is equality of access for all detainees assured with regard to:
  – programmes?
  – services?
  – access to worship?
  – health-care facilities?
  – work?
  – leisure?
  – contact with the outside world?
• How will the building reflect the diversity of cultures and social practices of its anticipated detainees? (See the “Social practices in the local context” section.)
• How will services and facilities be adapted for the variety of detainees to be held, and what will the options be for accommodation, access and suitability for their specific needs?
• How will design cater to the need for separate spaces – not isolation – where individuals require temporary or long-term distance from each other?
APPLYING PRINCIPLES TO DESIGN: HUMAN NEEDS

Meeting the human needs of detainees and staff is the very minimum required of the authorities when depriving people of their liberty.

Prisons should aim not only to meet these needs, but to do so decently (see the “Decency in detention” section). Meeting basic human needs effectively has a major impact on preserving the physical and mental health of detainees, staff and those who visit the prison. It also plays a huge role in supporting staff in fulfilling their duties. Done well, meeting human needs gives suitable levels of autonomy to detainees and helps normalize the prison environment. Poor conditions in a community are not a justification for poor conditions inside a prison. Basic levels of decency must still be met. Meeting identified needs includes careful consideration of what is contextually appropriate for the anticipated population and how detainees and staff will be able to access the facilities provided.
The following questions provide a foundation for discussion to help participants involved in prison planning and design successfully meet basic human needs and ensure the humane treatment of detainees:

- What are the minimum standards for each basic need? How can those standards be met decently to ensure dignified, fair and humane treatment?
- Considering a typical detainee’s day, how will the design allow for adequate space for all planned services and activities?
- How will the physical design replicate normality in providing these basic needs?
- How will the design be adapted to the climate and culture?
- How will access to natural light, fresh air, individual beds and sleep, physical exercise, privacy, social interactions and meaningful activities be delivered?
- How will appropriate communal and individual space be provided, taking cultural expectations into account?
- How will access to personal hygiene be ensured?
APPLYING PRINCIPLES TO DESIGN: SAFETY

States that deprive people of liberty have an obligation to provide for the safety of those they house. Prison design, along with effective policies and procedures carried out by motivated, well-trained and supervised staff, can make the difference between a safe and an unsafe detention experience. Prison design can promote effective supervision by providing settings that support contact between staff and detainees and facilitate the ability to defuse incidents when they occur. Reducing environmental stress can reduce levels of aggressive behaviour. Design can help prevent detainees from harming themselves or committing suicide by, for example, keeping detainees in contact with other detainees and staff. Prison design can mitigate scarcity, and the competition this provokes, by providing sufficient infrastructure to meet the identified needs of detainees.
A respectful and normalized setting is more likely to evoke respectful and normal behaviour and result in less environmental damage and vandalism.

Safe prisons are vital for everyone living in, working in and visiting prisons. Detainees who feel unprotected, such as when staff are at a distance or in enclosed stations, are likely to take steps to protect themselves, resulting in increased tension and perceived risk for all. Staff who feel unprotected may resort to abuse of power, increasing fear in detainees and reducing engagement in positive activities and programmes. Visitors who feel unsafe may simply stop visiting or providing the services secured through them. For everyone, part of living with dignity is to live free of fear of physical, emotional and sexual assault or abuse.

Design must be flexible enough to adjust to the reality of the prison population and its changes over time without isolating or depriving groups of detainees with specific safety needs. Alternative housing with closer supervision for people removed from the general population should meet the same minimum standards of size, light, ventilation and access to visits, food, water and sanitary hygiene facilities as in regular housing.

Places of detention must have the same safe building standards as any other public building. Safe prisons plan and prepare for safe evacuation of all detainees and staff in the event of an emergency.

The following questions provide a foundation for discussion to help participants involved in prison planning to use design to keep detainees, staff and visitors safe and ensure the humane treatment of those deprived of their liberty:

• What will contribute to people’s feeling of safety in the place of detention?
• How can living areas increase connection and contact between staff and detainees?
• What measures will minimize environmental stressors and provide means to cope with stress?
• What options will there be for reducing the risk of physical harm and facilitating conflict resolution without resorting to isolation of detainees?
• How will design support those at risk of harming themselves?
• How will equal and fair access to resources be facilitated?
• How will the design reflect a normal environment and communicate expectations of positive behaviour?
• How will the design optimize emergency preparedness and response, including emergency evacuation?
Good planning and design ensure containment measures that support the four humane principles and fair treatment of detainees; it requires a balanced approach in which containment is sustained without limiting the other important functions of a decent prison. It supports the three mutually supportive elements of effective containment: dynamic, procedural and physical security, and the ongoing operation of a safe and humane prison.

Containment measures should be proportionate to the assessed level of detainee risk. The cheaper and more humane system is one that uses the least restrictive setting.
appropriate for detainee risk. Containment affects all users of the prison, including detainees, staff, family, professional visitors and service providers. Effective containment is best achieved with effective supervision by trained and alert staff who are in constant contact and communication with detainees and supported by thoughtful facility design and appropriate technology.

The following questions provide a foundation for discussion to help participants involved in prison planning and design successfully support proportionate containment and ensure the humane treatment of detainees:

- What information is available about the needs and risk profile of the anticipated prison population, and how does this affect the need for containment measures?
- What role does classification and categorization of detainees play in the prison system and within each place of detention?
- What facilities and spaces for classification and categorization will be provided?
- What varying levels of physical containment will support humane containment of the expected population?
- How will the technology choices match the staffing, operational approaches and available resources?
- How will the choices of physical security measures support the operating climate and available resources?
- How will the proposed containment measures enable access to services, programmes and activities?
- How will the proposed containment measures enable contact between detainees and staff and visitors?
- How will the physical containment measures support procedural and dynamic security?
CONCLUSION

This publication offers a framework for a participatory planning and design process rooted in humanitarian principles that place the needs of the end users – detainees, staff and visitors – at the centre. The questions are intended as a catalyst for collaborative discussions and multidisciplinary explorations of possible answers and actions by anyone who plays a part in the complex undertaking of planning, designing and building a new prison, be they experienced or new to the work, involved in the financing or functioning, detainee or minister.

We see this as relevant whenever the possibility of constructing or adapting prison buildings arises, that is:
• during discussions of criminal justice policy
• during deliberations by funders and donors
• during consideration of plans and budgets, including the possibility of public/private partnerships
• during the assessment of bids for undertaking the work and
• during any relevant process of consultation.
Prison buildings are made better or worse by the people who staff them and the policies they are required to follow. While the prison building is only the shell in which staff carry out their work and detainees live their lives, its features and atmosphere have an undeniable impact on detainee and staff health and behaviour, delivery of services and efficiency of prison operations. Every planning and design decision has the potential to support or hinder a humane prison experience.

We see society, the local community, visitors to the prison, staff and detainees as critical influencers of the eventual prison design. But that design has an equal influence outward towards detainees, staff, visitors, the local community and society and that is why collectively our engagement with creating as humane prisons as possible is so important.

Placing the end users – detainees, staff and visitors – at the centre of the planning and design process.
We help people around the world affected by armed conflict and other violence, doing everything we can to protect their lives and dignity and to relieve their suffering, often with our Red Cross and Red Crescent partners. We also seek to prevent hardship by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and championing universal humanitarian principles.