

Prison as a Learning Environment

*Whoever opens a school, closes a prison.
(Victor Hugo)*

THE EESPIP PROJECT

In the framework of the EESPIP project, we met with managers, officers and prisoners in different European penitentiary centres. The EESPIP project, which runs from 2018 to 2021, tries to **provide a solution to the problem of prisoners' access to training in penitentiary institutions** in 5 countries: France, Spain, Portugal, Poland, and Romania.

The first part of the project consisted of a survey realized in detention and prison centres, focusing on three main areas:



Perception of education in prison for managers and their involvement in the system.



Perception of prison education for officers and their involvement in the system



Perception of prison education for prisoners and their involvement in the system

Our target audience was mainly women and ethnic minorities in prison.

Following this survey (complete results and presentation of the project on www.eespip.eu), we worked on the possibility of involving prison guards in the access to training of the detainees, by offering them for additional training.

But let us first agree on the purpose of education:

The critical role of adult education in the development of society has long been recognized. Since the First International Conference on Adult Education in 1949, UNESCO's Member States have redoubled their efforts to ensure that adults have the right to exercise their fundamental right to education. Subsequent conferences in Montreal (1960), Tokyo (1972), Paris (1985) and Hamburg (1997) have reaffirmed this right and suggested ways to realize it. In 1976, the General Conference of UNESCO approved the Nairobi Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education (UNESCO, 1976), which enshrines the commitment of governments to promote adult education as an integral part of the education system within a lifelong learning perspective.

"Adult learning and education are central components of lifelong learning. It encompasses all forms of teaching and learning that aim to ensure that all adults participate in society and the employments possibilities. Adult education has many definitions: it is the substitute for primary education for a very large proportion of the world's adults; it is the complement to elementary or vocational education for many people who have received only a very incomplete education; it extends the education of those it helps to cope with the new demands of their environment; it improves the education of those who have a high level of education; and it is a means of individual development for all. (Faure et al., 1972, pp. 231-232).

How is prison education different?

Education in prison is different from education offered in an open environment.

There are several reasons for this:

At the level of the prison itself

- Lack of personnel,
- Lack of means,
- Lack of staff involvement.

At the level of prisoners

- The personal and financial difficulties of prisoners,
- Their basic level of education and lack of involvement,
- Their volatility: some prisoners do not stay long enough to complete a course of study, while others, on the contrary, sentenced to a long term, do not see the need for it.

However, a great deal of research has led to the development of various measures to facilitate the participation of prisoners:

Empirical research on the socio-demographic characteristics of prisoners has highlighted the low level of education and lack of qualifications inside prisons (Morgan, Liebling, 2007; Combessie, 2001: 37). From a utilitarian point of view, while crime is a negative externality with a tremendous social cost, education can reduce criminal activity and crime rates (Lochner, Moretti, 2001). The human rights approach also emphasizes the need to implement educational activities in prison to provide opportunities to *"help prisoners to reorganize their imprisonment in a positive way [...] by encouraging the prisoner to develop as a person"* (Coyle, 2009: 94).

The commission of the European Union recommends to the governments of the member states to implement a policy taking into account the following:

1. All prisoners shall have access to education, which should include basic education, vocational training, creative and cultural activities, physical education and sports, social education and library facilities;
2. Education in prison should be similar to that provided in the outside world for corresponding age groups, and educational opportunities should be as wide as possible;
3. Education in prison should aim to develop the whole person, taking into account his or her social, economic and cultural context;
4. All those involved in the administration of the penitentiary system and the management of detention facilities should facilitate and encourage education as much as possible;
5. Education should not be considered less important than work in the prison system and prisoners should not suffer financially or other harm as a result of receiving this education;



6. Every effort should be made to encourage the prisoner to actively participate in all aspects of education;
7. Developmental programs should be put in place to ensure that prison educators adopt appropriate methods of adult education;
8. Special attention should be paid to prisoners with special difficulties, in particular those with reading and writing difficulties;
9. Vocational training should aim at the broader development of the individual while taking into account the evolution of the labour market;
10. Detainees should have free access to a well-stocked library at least once a week;
11. Education, physics and sport should be developed and encouraged;
12. Creative and cultural activities should be given an important role, as they provide prisoners with special opportunities for personal development and expression;
13. Social education should include practical elements to enable the prisoner to manage his or her daily life in the prison, in order to facilitate his or her return to society;
14. Prisoners should be allowed to participate as much as possible in education provided outside the prison;
15. The outside community should be involved as much as possible in education of prisoners even when it is to be provided inside the prison;
16. Measures should be taken to enable prisoners to continue their education after their release;
17. Prisons should be provided with the necessary funds, equipment and teaching staff to enable prisoners to receive appropriate education.

(Recommendation No. r (89) 12 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on l'éducation in prison (adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 13 October 1989 at the 4298 meeting of Ministers' Deputies))



In general, in Europe, we can see and understand prison education from the perspective of how a particular country of Prison Administration is perceiving the prisoners: citizens or offenders.

From a citizen perspective, prison education is seen as a basic human right, and the approach is to assure same access and same quality to all learners regardless of where the learning happens. In this context the approach is going towards the principles of adult education.

From an offender perspective, education is seen as a tool to reduce re-offending. The accent is on employability and how vocational training context is supporting this.

THE POLICY

The leading voice in European context, setting the standards and rules of the prison education, is the Council of Europe. Seeing the person in prison as a citizen, a member of society, is central to the Council of Europe's penal policy in general and its prison education policy in particular. The Council's policy on prison education is set out most fully in Education in Prison (Council of Europe, 1990), and this is endorsed strongly in the European Prison Rules (Council of Europe, 2006). For the past three decades, the Council of Europe (COE) Recommendations on Prison Education (1989) have provided the principal point of reference and generally accepted standards for custodial education services. The COE's Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950) stated that *"no person shall be denied the right to education"*, while the Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners proclaimed that *"All prisoners shall have the right to take part in cultural activities and education aimed at the full development of the human personality"* (United Nations, 1990, Resolution 45/111: No 6). These rights were reiterated by The European Prison Rules in promoting *"access to educational programmes*



which are as comprehensive as possible and which meet their individual needs while taking into account their aspirations" (COE, 2006, 28.1). Furthermore, the European Commission's Charter of Fundamental Rights recognised that *"everyone has the right to education"* (COE, 2007).

Seeing the person in prison as a citizen, a member of society, is central to the Council of Europe's penal policy in general and its prison education policy in particular. Imprisoned men and women are regarded as entitled to a form of adult education that those in the community outside should have available to them. The Council of Europe sees adult education as 'a fundamental factor of equality of educational opportunity and cultural democracy', and sees it as promoting 'the development of the active role and critical attitudes of women and men, as parents, producers, consumers, users of the mass media, citizens and members of their community'.

In the Council of Europe's policy, adult education is 'seen to be about participating and experiencing rather than about the passive absorption of knowledge and skills; it is a means by which people explore and discover personal and group identity' (Council of Europe, 1990: 18). Thus, a key recommendation in Education in Prison is that all prisoners should have access to a wide curriculum, the aim being 'to develop the whole person bearing in mind his or her social, economic and cultural context' (Council of Europe, 1990: 8). The approach here is very clearly to see the person in prison as a full citizen and as a 'whole person'.

THE PRACTICE

Throughout 2017 up to 2019, a review and research on the status of prison education in Europe was organized under the coordination of Europris Expert Working Group. The conclusion was that even if the policy supports adult education, in practice we see emphasis on basic skills and vocational: "invariably structured around the remediation of low level literacy/numeracy abilities and the development of low-level employment skills. While identifying and addressing low level literacies and promoting employment skills are necessary and important functions of education, they are often excessively emphasised in relation to the provision of more general social sciences, arts and humanities opportunities. This imbalance can both discriminate and limit the aspirations for equity of access and for providing a range of opportunities that meet the needs of the wider prison population."

Women in prison: the double penalty

The detention of women is a little-known reality that has an important fatality. It is surprising to note the limited amount of work and research by academics or prison experts on this subject. (Parcours de femmes (Nov.2019))

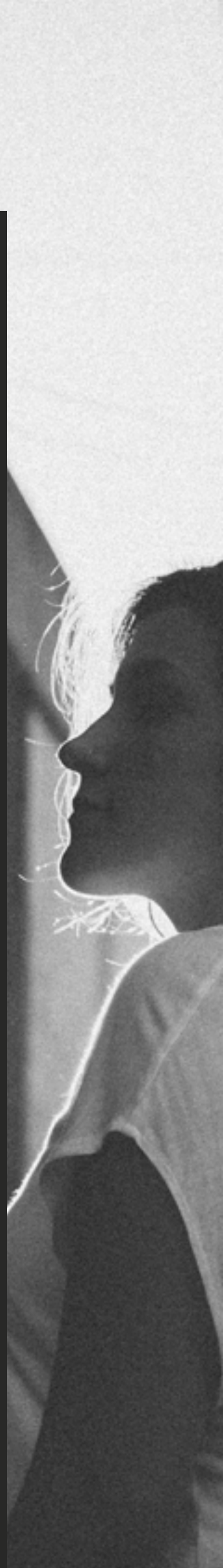
Women in prison should have access to a full programme of motivating activities (work, training, study and sport) on an equal footing with men. The CPT's visiting delegations too often meet women prisoners who are offered activities considered "appropriate" (for example, sewing or handicrafts) and who are excluded from much more vocational training courses reserved for men. The small number of women sometimes means that it is not considered viable to set up a workshop exclusively for them. However, such a discriminatory approach can only reinforce outdated stereotypes about the social role of women.

(European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) January 2018).

An isolation that reduces access to activities

The strict separation of women's and men's accommodation is in theory accompanied by the possibility of participating in mixed activities. In practice, "women's quarters" within institutions that accommodate men and women are usually landlocked, isolated from the rest of the detention, which makes access to different services - such as medical services, training or workshops - more difficult for women. This makes it more difficult for women to access different services - such as medical services, training or workshops - especially as they need to be accompanied on all their moving. In these institutions, women therefore do not, in practice, have access to the majority of activities, which are primarily intended for the biggest number: men.

(Prison Observatory, January 2016)





How do justice professionals view education in prison?

Here are some extracts from the managers' vision

Education is seen as a means of helping prisoners reintegrate into society. A majority agreed that their correctional system provides a sustainable number of programs for inmates. Managers report that all staff are aware of the education and reintegration process. However, in face-to-face interviews in the Romanian prison, it was evident that security staff were completely unaware of the specialized adult education or literacy programs available.

Formal and informal education (training and learning activities) outside the classroom is very common. When asked about the importance of involving prison staff in encouraging and supporting education in prison, most respondents felt that it was very important for prison staff to be involved in both areas.

They believe that it is relevant for prison staff to be involved in any way that supports education in prison, for example by having different discussions with prisoners, through different programmes and the involvement of NGOs (Non-governmental organization), by rewarding prisoners who have completed vocational training courses or who have assessed their education. However, all these things are difficult to do if the prison is overcrowded.

When respondents were asked whether security or administrative staff were formally or informally involved in supporting educational activities in their prison, most responded positively and staff were responsible for guarding, escorting or transporting to various activities outside the penitentiary, supervising, supporting the development of educational programs, particularly in raising awareness of the mandatory nature of inmate participation in these programs and providing support and encouragement to inmates.

"Nothing is worse than a dry exit" said Muriel Tabeau, director of "Le Havre" penitentiary centre, during our interview. A dry exit is an exit where the person released has no project, no job, no diploma. A simple sentence, but one that alone sums up the importance of education in a prison environment.

The opinion of the detainees (extract)

The majority of inmates interviewed stated that education for them is knowledge, learning and development at all levels, allowing them to broaden their horizons. It is a way to find a job, a profession, it is something good and useful that helps them acquire the skills needed in society.

All the persons interviewed, consider it very important to have education in their daily routine. This is how they expressed it:

"Education is important in the life of any person who wants to achieve a goal in life, such as a well-paid job."

"Education has taught me humility, self-respect above all else. It has also taught me to believe in my abilities, and after leaving prison I would like to continue my studies - to go to university."

"Education is a way to find a job, to acquire certain knowledge, to enhance skills already acquired."

"Education is fundamental to become a better person."

"Education, training, it gives you meaning, it reduces anxiety and depression. But it's so hard to get when you're a woman in prison."

At the following question "How do you think your prison officer can help you in your training course?" the detainees answered:

"A better presentation of the forms of teaching available by the agents, help in the choice of courses, consideration of their needs and help in the follow-up and the possibility of helping in the courses when the teacher is not available."

"It should be noted that many detainees feel that they do not feel that prison officers are sufficiently supportive and that they should listen to them more, that they could help them by pointing out courses they can take, or perhaps improve their access to books and school."





It can be concluded that:

Most prison staff do not receive training or support in encouraging and supporting the education of prisoners. However, **most respondents consider it important to encourage and support the education of prisoners. In addition, most staff members stated that their initial training did not include anything about education and training in prison.**

To conclude, a few testimonials among many others:

Guy, 54 years old. Angers, France

"I've done a lot of time in prison, unfortunately. But fortunately, during my last incarceration, I took classes to learn to read and write. Now I have a permanent contract, I work in an employers' group and I can finally have a normal life."

Annie, 35 years old.

"I never went to school and soon I tipped over. I ended up in prison after domestic violence, but with the training I received, I now have a job and I have my children back. "

Mohamed, 45 years old.

"I didn't speak French when I came to this town. In prison, I learned and now I can manage on my own. But when you get out, it's hard to find your way around. It's not as easy as in prison where they do everything for you. Because going to school on a voluntary basis is not very highly regarded among criminals..."

KEY DOCUMENTATION FOR ALL TO READ:

Faure et al., 1972, pp. 231-232

Morgan, Liebling, 2007; Combessie, 2001: 3

Coyle, 2009: 94

United Nations (1948), Universal Declaration on Human Rights (Article 26); <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html>

European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) January 2018)

United Nations (2005) High Commissioner for Human Rights & Prisons; <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/training11Add3en.pdf>

United Nations (2016) Resolution pertaining to the acceptance of the Mandela Rules <http://undocs.org/A/RES/70/175>:

Council of Europe European Prison Rules (revised in 2006): <https://rm.coe.int/european-prison-rules-978-92-871-5982-3/16806abgae>

Recommendation No. r (89) 12 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on l'éducation in prison (adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 13 October 1989 at the 4298 meeting of Ministers' Deputies

Parcours de femmes, Nov.2019

Prison Observatory, January 2016

European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) January 2018



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