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- *How can informal job shadowing in other European countries help to improve education in prison – and the support services for ex-prisoners post-release?*
- *How can the new digital technologies be harnessed to enhance learning opportunities for prisoners without jeopardising security, also for people serving a sentence in a country other than their own?*
- *How can comparing and sharing cooking techniques in different countries contribute to motivating prisoners for successful reintegration in society?*
- *How can autobiographical writing or participating in theatre productions help prisoners to take stock of their lives and give them a new sense of creativity and self-esteem?*

As these examples show, projects in the Adult Education strand of *Erasmus+* address a wide range of issues relating to adult learning in the prison context. Yet all, in their specific way, are helping to find an answer to the key question: *What can adult learning in the context of the justice system do to help to ensure that prisoners reaching the end of their sentence have all the life skills – cognitive, social and personal – and the support they will need to make a fresh start in the increasingly challenging world outside?*

Sitting at the intersection between education, social policy and justice, Prison Education can sometimes find it difficult to make its voice sufficiently heard in all of these policy sectors. However, building on the pioneering work carried out under previous EU initiatives such as “*Grundtvig*” in the framework of *Socrates* (1995-2006) and the *Lifelong Learning Programme* (2007-2013), as well as the “*EQUAL*” Community Initiative under the European Social Fund, *Erasmus+ (Adult Education)* has now established itself as a focal point for the development of innovative approaches to Prison Education, based on cooperation and mobility across the participating countries.

How many projects have been supported?

In overall terms, 154 projects relating to education in the context of prisons were supported in the first phase of *Erasmus+* within the Adult Education sector of the programme (just over 2% of all Adult Education projects). Of these, 84 were “KA104” Mobility Projects and 70 “KA204” Strategic Partnerships. A further 7 projects with a strong adult learning dimension in the justice context were supported under “KA3” (policy-related / forward-looking cooperation projects).¹ Other actions of *Erasmus+* (notably Youth, Vocational Training and Sport) may also be marginally relevant for Prison Education but are not covered by the present analysis.

¹ They include notably the “FORINER” project designed to experiment with models for improving the educational offer for prisoners serving a sentence in a foreign country by tapping into the education system in their home country.

Which countries have been most actively involved?

In the first phase of *Erasmus+*, 26 of the 34 programme countries coordinated a Prison Education project and 31 were involved in projects either as project coordinator or partner. Less than half the countries coordinated projects under both KA104 and KA204, with certain countries (Spain, Ireland, Malta, Norway, Turkey) tending to opt more for Mobility Projects and others (notably Italy and Rumania) more for the Strategic Partnerships. In overall terms, the most active coordinating countries were Italy (25 projects), Spain (18), France (15), Turkey (12), Rumania (9), Norway (8), UK (7) and Belgium and Germany (each with 6). Italy also “topped the polls” in terms of its overall involvement in projects (KA104 and KA204), i.e. either as coordinator or non-coordinating participant: organisations from Italy were involved in 47 or just over 30% of all projects, followed by Spain with 43 (28%), Portugal with 33 (21.4%) and Rumania 32 (20.8%).

To obtain a clearer impression of the relative importance attached to Prison Education within the entire spectrum of Adult Education, it is instructive to look at the number of Prison Education projects coordinated in each country compared with the total number of Adult Education projects selected for support in that country. Against this criterion, Malta emerges as the country attaching highest importance to Prison Education (9.4% of the Adult Education total), followed by Norway (8.5%), Serbia (7.0%), Ireland (6.1%) and Italy (5.7%). In all other countries the Prison Education share was below 5% of the Adult Education total, and in 19 of the 34 programme countries under 2%.

The figures also reveal a surprisingly low involvement of certain countries with strong Prison Education systems, notably in the Scandinavian countries Denmark, Finland and Sweden – in sharp contrast to the leading role played by Norway. Sweden, indeed, is the only one of the 34 programme countries not involved in Prison Education under *Erasmus+* KA104 or KA204 projects at all, either as coordinator or partner, except for the very small countries Liechtenstein (which does not have a full prison system) and Iceland. This is a missed opportunity both for the countries concerned and for the Union as a whole, as the experience and expertise from these countries in delivering high quality Prison Education is not so far being harnessed within the programme. Every effort should be made, in active partnership with the relevant education and justice authorities, to encourage stronger participation of these countries in the second phase of *Erasmus+*.

How much did the projects cost?

The following table (in €) shows the overall funding provided for Prison Education projects in the framework of the Adult Education section of *Erasmus+* 2014-2020:

	Total grants awarded	Average grant per project	Average grant per project-year	Smallest grant	Largest grant
KA104	2,049,022	24,393	14,430	1,160	131,292
KA204	13,967,003	199,529	82,645	33,970	449,845
TOTAL	16,016,025				

As the table shows, almost 7 times more of the available budget was spent on projects under KA204 than under KA104, even though the number of projects was significantly lower (70 compared with 84). KA204 projects cost on average over 8 times more than KA104, and each year of project funding cost almost 6 times more under KA204 than KA104.

Taking a closer look, one-third of all KA104 projects received a total grant of under €10,000 and over two-thirds under €30,000, with only 8% receiving grants of over €50,000. By contrast, over half the KA204 projects received grants in excess of €300,000.

Both in KA104 and in KA204, the size of projects supported varied widely, within the KA204 category by a factor of >13, in KA104 by an astonishing factor of >113 between the lowest and highest grant awarded.

What types of organisation have taken the lead?

In overall terms, over two-thirds of the Prison Education projects in the first phase of *Erasmus+* have been coordinated by either NGO's (36%) or Adult Education Centres (32%). NGO's predominate strongly as regards the coordination of Strategic Partnerships (53% of all KA204), Adult Education Centres in the Mobility Projects (49% of all KA104). Adult Education Centres coordinate 5 times more Mobility Projects (41) than Strategic Partnerships (8).

Prisons coordinate Mobility Projects (8) for Education staff more frequently than Strategic Partnerships (only 2). Higher education institutions figure significantly as coordinators in the Strategic Partnerships (10), whereas National/Regional prison services or their support agencies are a significant coordinator of Mobility Projects (9) but not of Strategic Partnerships. The data here appears to reflect both the higher (perceived?) volume of work involved in coordinating KA204 projects, and the nature of the organisations for which Mobility Projects relating to Prison Education are most relevant.

What specific topics have been addressed?

As indicated in introduction, In overall terms the prison-related projects supported in the first phase of *Erasmus+* (*Adult Education*) address a wide range of themes, but all may be said to focus – directly or indirectly, and each project in its own specific way – on facilitating the successful reintegration of prisoners in society, whether by improving the learning opportunities in prison itself or by enhancing related services prior to or following release.

In the case of the **Mobility Projects (KA104)**, projects relating to the professional development of Prison Education teachers, most notably in areas such as basic skills/literacy, host country language teaching, IT and the use of various art forms in prison, are most frequent. Other projects concern staff development in contexts other than pedagogy, such as staff training to help prisoners tackle health problems (sometimes bordering on therapy), improvement of post-release and social service strategies, inter-agency collaboration, victim support or the sensitisation of society at large to issues concerning prisons and prisoner rehabilitation.

As regards **Strategic Partnerships (KA204)**, a number of general thematic characteristics can be discerned. Firstly, while some projects do relate to "classical" classroom situations, probably more are concerned with various formats for non-formal/informal learning and in many, there is a strong emphasis on 'personal' attributes / behaviour, boosting motivation and self-esteem, developing 'soft' skills and social competence rather than cognitive aspects of learning. At least in the project descriptions at the time of selection, many projects address prison education in general rather than specific disciplines, and in several of them, Prison Education is not the exclusive focus but rather one of several, the projects concerned seeking to address various aspects of social marginalisation. Furthermore, Prison Education is often seen not in isolation in the projects, but rather in conjunction with other aspects of the prison régime conducive to making the prison a more positive learning environment. And several projects indeed focus on issues relating not directly to improving learning

opportunities within prison, but rather to strengthening links with the outside community (probation, employers, inter-agency cooperation, awareness-raising in society about ex-prisoners, promoting the work of volunteer organisations), to human rights and anti-discrimination issues, or to developing restorative justice methods and so on.

Nonetheless, a majority of KA204 projects do have a focus on **improving aspects of the learning opportunities in prison**, whether for prisoners in general or for specific groups such as female prisoners, juvenile prisoners, foreign prisoners, remand prisoners, older prisoners, prisoners nearing the time of release, or prisoners with special needs. Specific topics include:

- Basic skills / literacy
- Personal and social skills
- Arts and creativity (theatre, music, dance, video-production)
- IT (digital competence, e-platforms, developing computer games etc.)
- Active citizenship
- Language (host country language - L2) and inter-cultural competence
- Family and parental issues
- Anti-radicalisation
- Health-related issues (addiction, mental health, stress, aggression...)
- Environmental awareness, sustainable lifestyle after release
- Sport
- Cooking
- Autobiography
- Ageing problems
- Validation / accreditation of non-formal/informal learning
- The special role of the prison library

Finally, it must be noted that a substantial number of projects under both KA104 and KA204 have addressed issues which stretch the limit of “Adult Education” in the *Erasmus+* sense of the term, focussing for example on the improvement of methods relating to vocationally oriented training for prisoners, employment-related aspects of reintegration in society or the continuing training of prison officers – issues which might in some cases more legitimately have been supported in the Vocational Training part of the programme.

Some other key features of Erasmus+ Projects in Prison Education

Mobility Projects (KA104)

Project duration:

2-year projects predominate (55%)

Volume of mobility:

Evenly spread, with 39% of projects envisaging mobility for under 10 participants, 37% mobility for 10-19 participants, 24% mobility for over 20 participants

Type of mobility:

Some projects foresee mobile groups, others mobility of individuals;

Less formal training formats (especially Job-shadowing / study visits) predominate over structured (sometimes customised) courses;

Few training placements and scarcely any teaching assignments envisaged

Length of mobility:

Short-duration stays of up to one week are strongly prevalent

Participants:

Many projects target Prison Education staff in general, others focus on staff working with specific groups of prisoners (foreign nationals, juveniles, women etc.);

Some projects foresee the involvement of ex-prisoners in mobility;

In some cases the focus is on staff not directly involved in education

Strategic Partnerships (KA204)

Project duration:

Broad overall balance between 2-year projects (51%) and 3-year projects (46%)

Size of partnership:

The projects involve 3-8 participating countries (average 4.6 per project);

Over three-quarters have 3-5 countries, only 5% more than 6 countries

Target groups:

Primary target group: prison educators / teachers / learning facilitators;

But many projects address other prison staff: prison officers, psychologists, social workers, probation officers/workers, volunteers, health workers, staff in national prison services / training centres etc.

What results and outputs are planned?

The basis for the present study is the profile of projects at the time of initial selection for support by *Erasmus+* and their *intentions* with regard to the outputs to be developed and results to be achieved. In the case of **Mobility Projects under KA104**, these centre on the improved professional competence of the staff targeted by the projects concerned, this being defined as the aim and purpose of this funding line. While projects of this kind generally focus on the further professional development of in-service staff, there are also examples of particularly creative approaches such as using the project support to promote the training of inmates to become mentors / peer trainers during their sentence or subsequently. A number of projects state their intention of going beyond a purely local or domestic impact by generating ancillary products such as good practice reports resulting from study visits and disseminating these via various means at regional or national level. In a few instances, some really ambitious results are envisaged. This is the case, for example, of the Mobility Projects designed to assist in developing a new plan for Prison Education in the Netherlands and a new curriculum and certification system for Prison Education in Norway.

As noted above, projects funded pursuant to the **KA204 line for Strategic Partnerships** vary considerably with regard to their level of ambition, some smaller scale projects being more process-related and oriented towards promoting cooperation between local institutions while others envisage more complex and tangible outputs, sometimes even with potentially system-wide relevance. Probably consistent with projects in other thematic areas of “Adult Education” within the programme, the Prison Education projects supported in the first phase of *Erasmus+* envisage a broad range of end ‘products’, including:

- Research reports, state-of-the-art reports, best practice reports
- Catalogues of teaching materials
- Needs analyses
- Surveys
- Digital outputs such as online tools, games, exercises, blended learning formats, open learning resources, e-books, videos, a “Dynamic Virtual Reality System” and digital radio
- E-platforms and online services, websites
- Training activities, courses, programmes, modules, including joint curricula
- Procedures for validating and accrediting learning outcomes
- Methodological toolkits, manuals, train-the-trainer materials
- Quality assurance procedures
- Competence portfolios (including new professional profiles, e.g. social theatre operator)
- Peer-learning and mentoring guidelines
- Guidelines on many topics (e.g. inter-agency cooperation post-release)
- Policy recommendations
- Indicators (e.g. susceptibility to radicalisation)
- Drama productions, multi-media performances and other artistic outputs
- Definition of European standards (e.g. for 3D-printing in prisons)
- Self-efficacy tests
- Motivation strategies
- Techniques for sensitisation of society regarding the reintegration of ex-prisoners
- Reports on project, study visits etc.
- Project newsletters
- Analysis of European project results
- Initiation of new European cooperation networks

What does the analysis tell us for the future?

So what are the overall messages which emerge from this analysis? First, with over 150 new projects in the first 7-year phase of *Erasmus+*, it is clear that the passing of “Grundtvig” with its strong commitment to Prison Education under the *Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP)* has not meant the end of support for projects in this field or the end of interest across the Prison Education community in engaging with the programme to seek new avenues for mobility and cooperation in Europe. That is encouraging, but equally there is still room for improvement, also in sheer quantitative terms. Thus the 70 cooperation projects represent a decrease in number compared with the 83 projects supported in the previous 7-year period under *Grundtvig*, despite the much higher budget available in *Erasmus+*, and the percentage share of Prison Education projects relative to those in Adult Education as a whole has fallen by more than half. Furthermore, many KA104 and KA204 projects relate to other aspects of education and training in the justice context, rather than to improving learning opportunities for inmates in the strict sense of the term “Prison Education”.

Second, as the old saying goes, “the proof of the pudding is in the eating”. As indicated above, the present analysis is based on the statistics – kindly supplied by the National Agencies and the Commission – relating to projects selected for support during the first phase of *Erasmus+*. Only when the results of the projects are available for scrutiny will it be possible to assess the material impact which they have had (or are capable of having, given the necessary dissemination and exploitation measures) on the quality of Prison Education in Europe and level of European cooperation in the field.

Third, our analysis reveals a broad variety of projects in terms of their size and funding, their geographical distribution, their complexity of design and level of ambition, the target groups addressed, the types of output envisaged and the aspects of Prison Education on which they focus. In other words, the message to the Prison Education community is clear: there is room in the *Erasmus+* programme for projects of all kinds, and smaller organisations with limited infrastructure for managing grants and more local outreach should be no more reticent about getting involved than more powerful bodies seeking to implement more complex and large-scale reform models in the field. Both are vital, and in *Erasmus+*, there is truly something for everyone!

Thus, as the second phase of *Erasmus+* gets under way, with its exciting new possibilities for support and in some countries especially high chances of selection in the Adult Education part of the programme, opportunities beckon to the Prison Education community to take even fuller advantage of the programme in the future. This comes exactly at the time when Prison Education – a sector of education particularly hard hit by the effects of Corona due to the special context of its delivery – is struggling in many countries to regain momentum. Indeed, sharing experience on this process could itself be a valuable focus for future European collaboration.

Finally, as we take stock of the first seven years of *Erasmus+* and look towards what the future may hold, it is well worth reflecting on the kind of “Prison Education” which progressive players are trying to achieve and to which European cooperation and mobility can make such a valuable contribution. The contours of this have emerged clearly from our review of EU support for the Prison Education in the preceding programmes (see box below), and every indication is that the Mobility Projects and Strategic Partnerships supported so far under *Erasmus+* are confirming this vision and agenda for Prison Education in Europe.

Key messages resulting from EU support for Prison Education

- Prison systems emphasising reprisal rather than rehabilitation, are out-of-phase with democratic ideals: “People should be sent to prison as punishment, not for punishment!”
- Prisoners – including those with special learning needs – have a right to education just like any other citizen. This principle should be implemented in all countries.
- “No-one is only a prisoner”. Education and training can help to develop the prisoner’s full personality and greatly enhance his or her self-esteem.
- Prison Education should consequently espouse a holistic approach embracing basic and general education, social and personal skills, artistic and cultural creativity as well as practical and vocational training.
- Vocational training should be relevant to modern employment needs and strike a balance between generic skills and adaptation to local / regional labour market requirements.
- Prison Education should be seen as an integral part of education and training in the country at large, and as similar as possible to education and training ‘outside’.
- Prisoners are a heterogeneous group. A learner-centred approach to Prison Education should be adopted, with flexible course provision, a focus on learning outcomes, acknowledgment and validation of prior non-formal and informal learning, and accompanied by effective guidance and counselling.
- Links between the prison and the outside world, during a prisoner’s sentence as well as post-release, should be acknowledged as a key factor in determining the success of rehabilitation strategy, also as regards education and training.
- Effective reintegration depends crucially on multi-faceted cross-agency cooperation, which should therefore be strongly supported: “Education and training cannot do it on their own”.
- New technologies offer exciting new ways of broadening and individualising learning opportunities in prison. Their use should be expanded and optimised, supported by the necessary further training of educational and other prison staff.
- Every effort should be made to improve the learning environment in prison, notably by sensitising governors and officers to the importance of education and training and taking education and training needs into account in the transfer of prisoners.
- Teaching staff engaged in Prison Education should be provided with the necessary initial and further training required to assist them in assuming the role of learning facilitator and to equip them for the specific challenges – social, psychological and pedagogical – of working in this field.
- Further efforts should be undertaken to demonstrate the economic – as well as social – benefits of investing more in Prison Education, as part of an integrated package of measures to reduce the rate of re-offending.
- Research on Prison Education (within educational research as well as research on detention and reintegration issues) should be greatly expanded, to address more aspects and cover more countries. Cost-benefit analysis should be one of the priorities.
- In many countries the funding of (better: “investment in”) Prison Education should be significantly enhanced as a proportion of budgets in both education and justice.
- Transnational sharing of innovation and experience should be intensified in both practice and policy, through sustainable partnerships and networks and improved dissemination and mainstreaming of project results.
- EU funding is vital in underpinning this process and should be greatly increased in order to achieve an ongoing strengthening of European cooperation in Prison Education.

The data presented in the present article is drawn from the author's year-on-year analysis of the support provided for Prison Education projects during the first phase of *Erasmus+* (2014-2020). The term "Prison Education" is defined as referring to all projects funded within the Adult Education part of the programme which deal to a significant extent with aspects of learning in the context of the justice system. The figures relate to the profile of projects at the time of being selected.

The full analyses are to be found in the rubric "The EU and Prison Education" on the website of the European Prison Education (EPEA) at: <https://www.epea.org/archive/>:

- <https://www.epea.org/wp-content/uploads/Prison-Education-in-Erasmus-Adult-Education-2014-2020-Analysis.pdf>
- <https://www.epea.org/wp-content/uploads/Prison-Education-in-Erasmus-Adult-Education-2014-2020-Statistical-Review.pdf>

together with an essay reviewing the entire period of the EU's involvement with this field:

- <https://www.epea.org/wp-content/uploads/Smith-Alan-The-EU-and-Prison-Education-A-historical-review.pdf>

and a comprehensive collection of other documents produced in this context.

About the author

One of the "pioneers" of the original *Erasmus* programme in the 1980s, Alan Smith (*1947) was later responsible for developing and – for almost a decade – coordinating the EU's first programme for Adult Learning "*Grundtvig*" which began in 2000. In this role, he took a keen interest in Prison Education and in 2015 was awarded Honorary Life Membership of the European Prison Education Association (EPEA) for his contribution to the field. Readers interested in further information can contact Alan at alansmith@unitybox.de