

A reflection on formal and non-formal educational activities in the in
penitentiary of Malta, Italy, Cyprus and Hungary

Una riflessione sulle attività educative formali e non formali negli istituti
penitenziari di Malta, Italia, Cipro e Ungheria

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Abstract

This paper provides a comparison of educational activities in prison settings in Malta, Italy, Cyprus and Hungary. It highlights the role of education and training in promoting meaningful re-educational processes. Moreover it analyses various educational initiatives, ranging from primary literacy to advanced higher education, and raises the issue of their effectiveness in improving personal development, employability and reducing recidivism rates among incarcerated people. The proposed analysis highlights vocational training as a critical component in many European prison systems and explores the challenges posed by inadequate resources and systemic inconsistencies. The adopted approach aims at highlighting best practices and suggesting some ideas for improving educational policies and support structures in prisons. The proposed reflection shows how education has a transformative thrust, equipping detainees with practical skills and promoting pathways towards social reintegration, to the benefit of both individuals and communities.

Keywords: prison; adult education; professional training.

Sintesi

Il contributo offre un confronto sulle attività formative nelle realtà penitenziarie di Malta, Italia, Cipro e Ungheria, evidenziando il ruolo dell'istruzione e della formazione nel promuovere processi rieducativi significativi. Analizza varie iniziative educative, che vanno dall'alfabetizzazione primaria all'istruzione superiore avanzata. Pone inoltre l'attenzione sulla loro efficacia nel migliorare lo sviluppo personale, l'occupabilità e la riduzione dei tassi di recidiva tra le persone detenute. L'analisi proposta sottolinea la formazione professionale come componente critica in molti sistemi carcerari europei ed esplora le sfide poste da risorse inadeguate e incongruenze sistemiche. L'approccio adottato intende mettere in evidenza le migliori pratiche e suggerire alcuni spunti per migliorare le politiche educative e le strutture di supporto nelle carceri. La riflessione proposta mostra come l'istruzione abbia una spinta trasformativa, dotando le persone detenute di competenze pratiche e promuovendo percorsi verso il reintegro sociale, a vantaggio sia degli individui che delle comunità.

Parole chiave: carcere; educazione degli adulti; formazione professionale.

1. The European standards of prisons

The European Prison Rules (EPR), developed by the Council of Europe (2006), aim to ensure humane treatment, rehabilitation, and respect for inmates' rights. These guidelines, applicable in all 47 Council of Europe nations, provide guidance to prison personnel on upholding and defending inmate rights. Contributing from government representatives, specialists, and practitioners, they offer comprehensive best practices in prison administration from admissions to release. Revisions were made in 2020 to keep up with changes in European prison law and practice (Ivankov & Tseluiko, 2022; Spolverato, 2021).

1.1. History of the EPR (European Prison Rules): key components of EPR

The EPR are a set of regulations aimed at ensuring the efficient operation of correctional facilities and the humane treatment of inmates. They cover aspects such as staff training, healthcare, and detention conditions. The EPR emphasizes the importance of treating prisoners with dignity, providing regular checkups, emergency care, mental health care, and education. It also emphasizes the role of prison employees in maintaining a fair criminal justice system, protecting prisoners from cruel or inhumane treatment, and implementing strong systems for complaints and inspections (Chantraine & Sallee, 2015; Juzl & Vlach, 2022).

1.2. Benefits of implementation

The EPR aim to improve prison systems by defending human rights and promoting dignity. They align with global human rights frameworks, ensuring respect for inmates and preventing torture. The EPR strengthens public confidence in the criminal justice system by demonstrating societal commitment to rule of law and compassionate treatment. It may reduce recidivism rates by prioritizing rehabilitation over punishment and promoting the fundamental human right to legal representation. Adopting European standards for prison treatment could enhance international cooperation, leading to a more equitable and compassionate international criminal justice system. International agencies and human rights groups monitor compliance, document violations, and advocate for reforms. Regular inspections, reports, and public awareness campaigns can drive transparency and accountability (Carpanelli, 2023; Fazel et al., 2017).

1.3. Challenges in implementation

The EPR are a complex system influenced by the diverse and complex nature of Europe's penal systems. The challenges include infrastructure and resource disparities, lack of consistency in prison conditions, and deeply ingrained institutional and cultural views on punishment and rehabilitation. To implement the EPR, public, legislators, and prison staff must undergo extensive retraining and instruction. Public opinion and media portrayals of crime and punishment often influence the perception of rehabilitation. To effectively implement the EPR, prison staff must receive sufficient training in mental health services, conflict resolution, and cultural competence. However, this requires significant resources and logistical work, especially in large prison systems with frequent employee turnover (Guidini et al., 2020; Rucker & Richeson, 2021).

1.4. Recommendations for strengthening EPR

The EPR should be applied consistently across member states, requiring prison employees to receive improved training on human rights, moral prisoner treatment, and contemporary correctional techniques. Regular inspections and a user-friendly grievance system are also crucial. Infrastructural improvements in prisons are necessary to meet EPR requirements, with funding for repair and enlargement given priority. Technological solutions and educational programs should be provided to help prisoners reintegrate into society, with partnerships with community organizations and businesses.

2. The significance of education in prisons

Access to education in European prisons is considered a right for all inmates, regardless of background or sentence length. Limited education hinders rehabilitation, especially for foreign inmates facing language and cultural barriers.

Correctional facilities in Hungary, Malta, Italy, and Cyprus are aiming to enhance the education of inmates, as it plays a crucial role in their personal growth and successful reintegration into society. In spite of obstacles like negative past encounters, innovative methods enhance the learning process. Hungary involves ex-convicts in training programs for practical guidance and issues diplomas without referencing their time in jail. The system strongly advocates for primary education, seen as essential for pursuing additional learning or acquiring a skill. Classes like ECDL that need limited internet access have more choices now. The Ministry of Justice has overseen prison education in Cyprus with assistance from certified Ministry of Education teachers since 1959. The central jail initiated a Social Literacy Programme (SLP) that addressed various aspects of life including social, cultural, and political elements. European projects like the Pebble project use ICT for educational purposes.

2.1. Higher education in prisons

Higher education in prisons is a transformative initiative in penal rehabilitation, enhancing skills and knowledge, reducing recidivism, and counteracting entrenched beliefs. Participation in educational programs improves employability, self-esteem, and confidence, contributing to positive social reintegration. Higher education benefits not only incarcerated individuals but also society as a whole, contributing to crime reduction and societal growth.

2.2. Organisation and responsibility

Italy's Ministry of Justice regulates education in prisons, offering literacy courses, middle and high schools, and university programs. Technical and vocational schools are emphasized, covering disciplines like craftsmanship, catering, IT, and construction, to provide practical skills for reintegration into the job market. These programs are preferred over academic ones due to their practicality, effectiveness in combating unemployment, and the sense of achievement and dignity they provide. Cyprus manages education in prisons through the Ministry of Justice and Public Order, while Malta's Correctional Services Division and the Ministry of Education manage educational programs in prisons. Hungarian prisons also offer vocational training courses and higher education programs.

2.3. University-level education

Adult and university education in prisons is vital for imprisoned individual's rehabilitation and reintegration. The state of affairs varies greatly between countries, reflecting differing legislation, supplies, and societal attitudes towards educational institutions. In this chapter, the discussion delves into the situation of the educational facilities of Malta, Italy, Hungary and Cyprus at senior and university levels. The focus will be on available programmes, obstacles, and their impact on recidivism rates and reintegration.

3. The situation of adult education in European prisons as seen in Malta, Italy, Cyprus and Hungary

Corradino Correctional Facility in Malta offers educational programs for inmates to improve employability and reintegration into society. However, limited resources, such as cash, qualified instructors, and administrative support, make it difficult to provide university-level education. Collaboration between prison officials and educational institutions is crucial to address these challenges. Italy's jail system has a robust education system, with the University of Siena partnering with it to provide university-level education. Cyprus's prison system offers adult and university-level education, but insufficient funding, bureaucratic barriers, and conflicting policies hinder the implementation. The Hungarian Prison Service manages the prison education system, using distance learning and university collaborations, but challenges like limited resources hinder the effectiveness of these programs and inmate participation (Costelloe, Warner, 2014; Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 2019; Hungarian Prison Service, 2021; Maltese Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security, 2019; Cyprus Ministry of Justice and Public Order, 2019; University of Siena, 2022; University of Cyprus, 2021).

Education, especially at the university level, has a considerable impact on lowering recidivism among offenders. According to studies, offenders who participate in educational programmes are less likely to re-offend after their release. This tendency is consistent in Hungary, where educated convicts are better able to reintegrate into society and obtain work (Vacca, 2004). University education promotes critical thinking, self-discipline, and a sense of accomplishment. These characteristics are vital for personal growth and healing. Inmates who pursue higher education frequently express stronger self-esteem and determination to construct a better future. Educational programmes assist inmates in developing positive social behaviours and the skills required for reintegration into society. University-level courses frequently include collaborative projects and interactions with professors and peers, which can help students develop a supportive network that goes beyond the jail setting (University of Debrecen, 2020). It also enables inmates to form positive social networks and develop pro-social behaviours. This is critical for their rehabilitation into society and stopping the cycle of incarceration (Maltese Ministry of Home Affairs and National Security, 2019).

3.1. Analysis of non-formal education programmes and workshops in the system

The role of educational and workshop programmes in prisons is of paramount importance in promoting the reintegration of prisoners into society. These programs provide opportunities for personal, professional, and educational development, helping to reduce recidivism and promote social integration (Duguid, 2000). Non-formal education, which involves structured learning outside the formal education system, plays a critical role in this context, offering flexible, learner-centred approaches that meet the diverse needs of

the prison population (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974).

Non-formal education is defined as any organized educational activity outside the established formal system, whether operating separately or as an important feature of some larger activity, intended to serve identifiable learning clientele and learning objectives (ibidem). It includes a variety of educational and training programmes aimed at personal and professional development, skill acquisition, and social integration, tailored to specific needs and conditions of the trainees (UIL, 2018).

3.2. Overview of programmes available to prisoners for their personal, professional and educational development

Cyprus, Malta, Italy, and Hungary are offering non-formal educational programs and workshops to improve the skills of prisoners, facilitating their successful reintegration into society. These programs include vocational training in carpentry, tailoring, culinary arts, literacy and numeracy, and trades like plumbing and electrical work.

Non-formal education in prisons significantly contributes to the personal and professional development of prisoners, acquiring practical skills, self-esteem, and purpose. It reduces recidivism, improves social behavior, and promotes critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills. Emphasizing student-centered approaches ensures meaningful educational experiences (Behan, 2014; Schuller, 2009).

3.3. Comparison of topics addressed in the workshops

Prison workshops are vital for rehabilitation and reintegration, offering vocational training and skill development in various countries. In Cyprus, workshops cover carpentry, sewing, and culinary arts, while Malta offers literacy, numeracy, and trade training (Ioannidou et al., 2018). Italy's Second Chance initiative provides education and vocational training in agriculture and crafts, fostering self-esteem and social responsibility, while Hungary uses art-based programs for emotional healing (Alcini, 2023). These workshops also emphasize life skills, such as communication, problem-solving, and conflict resolution, to support successful reintegration.

A diverse curriculum is crucial for meeting the diverse needs and interests of the prison population, ensuring access to meaningful learning opportunities regardless of their background or personal circumstances. In Italy, the prison education system covers a wide range of subjects, from basic literacy to advanced vocational training, catering to different educational levels and professional aspirations (Alcini, 2023). This approach is supported by educational theorists who argue that a diverse curriculum enhances student engagement and motivation, leading to better educational outcomes (Schuller, 2009).

In Hungary, art therapy and creative workshops are being implemented to address the emotional and psychological needs of prisoners, alongside educational and vocational training. These programs provide an outlet for self-expression and emotional processing, crucial for mental health and rehabilitation. This holistic approach aligns with the wider literature (Behan, 2014).

3.4. Evaluating the impact of educational on recidivism and reintegration

Informal education programs and workshops in prisons in Cyprus, Malta, Italy, and Hungary have significantly reduced recidivism rates. Studies show a positive correlation between educational engagement and reduced recidivism. For example, a meta-analysis by

Davis and colleagues (2013) found that inmates who participated in educational programs had 43% lower odds of reoffending, highlighting the critical role of educational interventions in promoting crime prevention.

In Cyprus, prisoners who participate in vocational training and education workshops have a 28% lower recidivism rate compared to 42% among non-participants. In Malta, recidivism rates decrease by around 15% among those completing literacy and vocational training programs. Similar trends are reported in Italy and Hungary, highlighting the effectiveness of educational initiatives in promoting long-term behavior change (Ioannidou et al., 2018).

4. Importance of ongoing support and access to educational resources after release

The sustainability of positive outcomes in prison education programs depends on continued support and access to educational resources post-release. Transitioning from incarceration to community life presents challenges, necessitating a holistic approach. Ongoing educational opportunities, stable housing, employment, and mental health services support reintegration. Access to educational and vocational training after release reduces the likelihood of recidivating, emphasizing the need for comprehensive reentry programs (Schuller, 2009; Travis & Visser, 2003).

4.1. Evaluation of the role of education and workshops in facilitating successful reintegration into the community

Education and workshop programs help prisoners reintegrate into society by equipping them with marketable skills, enhancing employment and reducing recidivism. Examples from Italy's Second Chance initiative show successful transitions into agriculture and crafts, promoting economic self-sufficiency. In Hungary, art therapy and creative workshops address psychological and emotional needs, enhancing self-esteem and coping mechanisms for navigating life after incarceration (Alcini, 2023; Pager, 2003).

4.2. The importance of providing comprehensive support to address social, economic and psychological challenges

Successful reintegration into the community requires addressing the social, economic, and psychological challenges faced by ex-prisoners. Integrated support systems that offer housing assistance, job placement services, and mental health care are integral to mitigating these challenges (Travis, 2005). Economic stability through employment reduces the incentive to return to criminal activity, while social support networks provide the emotional and psychological resilience needed for sustainable reintegration (Maruna, 2001).

4.3. Highlighting the importance of informal learning and workshops

Informal learning and workshops are crucial in prison education, playing a critical role in holistic rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners. Unlike formal education, informal learning takes place in flexible, spontaneous environments, driven by the learner's immediate needs and interests. It promotes personal growth, skills development, and social reintegration. Forms of informal learning include peer education, mentoring programs, and self-directed learning initiatives. Peer education involves teaching prisoners to each other,

drawing on their experiences and skills. Mentoring programs pair experienced prisoners with those seeking guidance and support. In Italy, mentoring programs focus on vocational training and personal development, while in Hungary, art-based mentoring helps prisoners explore their creative potential while developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Alcini, 2023; Ioannidou et al., 2018).

4.4. Importance of informal learning in complementing formal education and workshops

Informal learning complements formal education and workshops, offering a more comprehensive educational experience for prisoners. It focuses on personal and social development, preparing them for reintegration into society with technical and basic life skills. Informal learning activities promote autonomy, self-efficacy, and resilience, which are essential for successful reintegration. These environments mimic real-world scenarios, helping prisoners develop practical skills and social behaviors that can be directly transferred to life outside prison (Behan, 2014; Kiprianos & Mpourgos, 2020; Schuller, 2009).

4.5. Highlighting adult education methodologies for non-formal learning

Adult education methodologies for non-formal learning are effective in prisons. Andragogy emphasizes self-directed learning, experiential learning, and relevance to real-life situations. These principles are particularly applicable in correctional institutions, where educational programs must be flexible and responsive to the diverse needs of the inmate population. Experiential learning, hands-on activities, and collaborative learning methods like group projects and peer teaching foster a sense of community and mutual support among prisoners, improving their overall learning experience (Alcini, 2023; Knowles, 1980).

5. Concluding reflections

In conclusion, the European Prison Rules emphasize the importance of upholding human rights and fostering environments that reflect free society to aid in the rehabilitation of inmates. However, there remains a significant gap between these ideals and the realities of many European prisons, where inadequate conditions and a lack of resources undermine these principles. Education within prisons, particularly in Hungary, Malta, Italy, and Cyprus, has proven to be a critical tool in addressing these deficiencies. Programs and research initiatives in these countries have highlighted the transformative power of education in improving inmates' basic skills, boosting self-esteem, and preparing them for reintegration into society.

By prioritizing both formal and non-formal education, prisons can offer inmates opportunities for personal development, emotional resilience, and social interaction, which are essential for breaking cycles of idleness and fostering pro-social behaviors. Furthermore, post-release support ensures that these positive outcomes are sustained, reducing recidivism and benefiting society as a whole.

Ultimately, achieving meaningful progress requires collaboration, innovative approaches, and adequate budget allocation. Society has a collective responsibility to treat incarcerated individuals with dignity and provide them with the tools to build better futures. By

embracing education and rehabilitation as central to the prison system, we can create a more just and hopeful society, where former inmates can successfully reintegrate and contribute positively to their communities.

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