

Perugia, Umbria Region, Italy



## Training paths in prison

Keyword(s):

**Disadvantaged groups of learners - prisoners**

**Basic Skills Education**

**Labour Market and VET**

### Introduction

The good practice presented here concerns the creation of 4 training paths for inmates of the “Capanne” prison in Perugia. Through these training courses, prisoners were able to improve and/or acquire sectoral knowledge and skills in relation to the theme of the programme, thus enriching their professional background but also useful transversal skills (e.g. communication, participation, team work).

These training courses stimulated the inmates' proactivity, made them reflect on their personal and professional future, gave them new hope and alleviated, as far as possible, the pain, sorrow and stress of imprisonment and finally, the training courses maximised the potential of each individual by encouraged experiential and collective learning.

The project started in December 2019 thanks to funding made available by the Umbria Region through the European Social Fund and the agreement already in place between the prison and "Frontiera lavoro". “Frontiera lavoro” is a social cooperative that deals with social inclusion policies and the fight against unemployment, designing, testing and managing interventions and new services that can effectively affect the full social and work integration of people, especially those with difficulties.

Through the 4 training paths, an attempt has been made to match the training demands of the inmates with the needs of the local market, with the aim of training

individuals who can respond to the job market needs while being sentenced and afterwards.

This required a strong local, regional and national cooperation between prison, vocational training centres/experts, third sector organisations, regional department for re-education/re-habilitation of inmates (Prap), ministry of Justice (DAP-Dep. for Penitentiary Affairs).

### **Main challenge**

The main challenge was to give new opportunities for personal and professional growth to detainees by promoting a flexible and personalised training offer which is at the same time tailored to the working needs of the area.

A further challenge is the widespread need to promote collaborative dynamics between different local actors and the prison to develop and renew creative training and work opportunities over time.

### **Timing**

Each training course lasted 120 hours. They were taken for supporting individual personal and professional growth of inmates in combination with skills needs on a local level in some specific sector where there is a shortage of skills.

### **Objective**

Giving opportunities to inmates who previously did not have, did not want or choose, allowing them to develop knowledge and skills useful for a full reintegration into the world of work and, in a even broader sense, of society.

### **Target group**

57 male and 15 female inmates from Perugia prison

### **Geographical range**

The project was carried out at the 'Capanne' prison in Perugia (local/city level).

## **Stakeholders and partners**

The project partnership is composed as follows:

- Prison of Perugia
- Frontiera lavoro
- CNOS FAP
- CESAR
- Consorzio SOLIDUS Milan (catering sector)
- Confcooperative Umbria
- PRAP (regional penitentiary administration department)
- DAP (penitentiary administration department)

Inmates who participated in the training courses were diverse in terms of age, origin, education, sentence to be served, etc..

The most important input was from the Head of prison. She was the one supporting and promoting the training initiative for inmates. The cooperative was crucial in order to design and implement the activities. The regional and national penitentiary departments did support the initiative as well once it was proposed and presented.

## **Strategy / materials**

The prison has strong and fruitful cooperation with local stakeholders, especially with Third Sector organisations and businesses. This makes it possible to build up useful projects, practices and initiatives supporting re-educational processes for inmates.

Four 120-hour training courses were structured and implemented as follows:

- course for kitchen staff (n.2 editions)
- course for cleaning staff
- course for installation and maintenance of electrical installations
- course for plant and tree cultivation workers

In the absence of internship opportunities, workshops were set up within the vocational courses with the aim of giving the course a strong experiential value.

At the end of the training course, participants receive a certificate, to be attached to their CV, after passing a final examination. A reconnaissance and mediation activity was carried out between several businesses in Perugia's area, which enabled 2 trainees to be employed with a regular open-ended contract.

With view to communication, the following strategies were used:

Cooperatives are very active in making citizens informed of what they are doing, for whom, which are the expected results. At the penitentiary administration level, the national and regional departments supported in sharing information on a regional and local level, also in some open events like the Conference "Liberi dentro. cambiare è possibile" which was held in the Capanne prison in order to disseminate the results of the project.

The communication material produced to disseminate the initiative included a video "Liberi dentro. Progetto Argo" and a publication "Liberi dentro. Cambiare è possibile", which was included in the publishing series "Liberi di pensare, pensieri e parole dal carcere" produced by Cesvol Centro Servizi per il Volontariato dell'Umbria, and presented at the Rome Book Fair (December 2021). Numerous articles were produced and published in the main local newspapers and numerous television reports were carried out by the editorial staff of RAI TGR Umbria and local broadcasters (TEF Channel and Rete Sole Umbria). Seminars were organised in schools of different grades in Perugia to raise awareness of the social and work reintegration of people in prison.

The trainings are highly participatory, inclusive and gender sensitive as they are experience-based and collaboration between the participants fostered the dimension of inclusiveness among the participants.

Main conclusions of the initiative are: The stronger is the cooperation with local third sector organisations as well as businesses is the more effective detention can be. Inmates more than any other disadvantaged groups need to be in effective networks that can support them in changing their lives and finding new conditions of personal and professional life. These networks should support them not only during their time in prison but also after it is over, by accompanying prisoners to find employment opportunities.

## **Resources**

The training initiative benefitted from economical resources that were needed to train inmates.

The project was funded by the European Social Fund (POR FSE) 2014-2020

## **Compliance with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)**

The strategy underlying the training course is fully aligned with the Agenda 2030 main goals, in particular goal 17 “partnership for goals”, goal 10 “Reduce inequality” and goal 8 “decent work and economic growth”

## **Innovation(s)**

Innovation is related to the use of employment for re-education purposes. So employment is not only a way to be busy in doing something but also the opportunity for inmates to rethink of their own actual and future life.

The following distinguishing elements of the methodology deserve mention in this respect:

- Demand-driven approach
- Dimension of inclusiveness
- Participatory approach and knowledge exchange
- The learning process is linked to personal commitment and direct experience during the workshop
- Community dimension of knowledge within the working groups
- Strengthening of personal and professional identity

## **Evaluation**

The "Argo" project provided for a capillary action on the territory in order to identify the employment needs of local businesses. At the end of the training course for "Kitchen staff", 2 trainees were employed with a regular open-ended contract in local restaurants as "assistant cooks". The two detainees who were placed in working contexts had, compared to the others, a legal position compatible with the admission to work outside and had been subjected to a work orientation action (not foreseen and not financed by the regional announcement) carried out by Frontiera Lavoro.

In this process, stakeholders were involved in the following way:

The Frontiera lavoro cooperative has structured and coordinated the vocational courses involving sector experts

The activities of monitoring and evaluation have a predominant connotation of self-evaluation and self-analysis of the learning process, of the projects realized, of the set of relationships established within the group.

## Success parameters

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## Impact

In addition to the normal difficulties linked to the dynamics of the labour market, it is necessary to consider the weight of social mechanisms and institutional constraints that tend to perpetuate the conditions of social exclusion of disadvantaged subjects. Almost 90% of the intramural employment offer is made up of jobs of little relevance and usability outside the prison circuit. The socio-occupational scenario is characterised by market dynamics unfavourable to the entry of new subjects into the productive fabric, and in particular of those with more difficult placement. It follows that measures for the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners and former prisoners into the social and production system must be designed on the basis of the needs and specificities of the individual. They must be personalised and flexible, with the individual as the main protagonist of his/her own reintegration process.

The skills acquired through participation in the training are usable by the recipients both outside the prison, thinking therefore of the end of the sentence or the use of alternative measures to the sentence that allow work outside the prison, and inside the prison walls, encouraging the inclusion of trainees in internal work groups.

This project is therefore one of the tools made available to prisoners to ensure that their return to freedom can also coincide with their re-entry into the labour market, becoming more agile and not constituting a further social and economic burden for the local community.

With reference to the condition of persons with a prison background, it can be stated that these persons are not simply unemployed. The particular representation of legal/illegal work, the socio-economic conditions of departure, the levels of schooling, psychopathologies, the representation that the outside world has of prisoners, cultural prejudices, are all elements that make the former prisoner an unemployed person of a certain type and that go to make up the complexity of a rehabilitation and reintegration intervention.

The "Argo" project, at the end of the different training actions, allowed the reintegration of 2 inmates into the labour market (actions not foreseen and not financed by the regional call).

## **Impediments**

The main challenges were to nurture and support the motivation of the inmates especially during the training course, to avoid abandonment of participants, and finally to support the inmates and strengthen their capacities to overcome some of the difficulties they encountered during the training, and more broadly in prison life, which they would otherwise hardly overcome on their own.

To overcome these challenges, professionals from both prison and cooperatives were supporting inmates in taking the opportunities and benefitting from it.

## **Replicability**

The model developed so far undoubtedly represents a solid starting point but it can further grow by incorporating new tools, new paths and technologies.

Essential elements for its sustainability are:

- a stable framework and financing for its implementation
- a collaboration framework between a training agency and a local institutions/organizations/ businesses dealing with job placement of vulnerable people should also be provided

## **Concluding remarks**

Penitentiary employment is one of the most challenging and effective learning opportunities for inmates that need professionals that are good at motivating, supporting and manage learning processes of inmates. The more personalized they are they more effective they can be for the function of correctional settings.

## **Website/Social Media profile(s) of the initiative**

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