

“Formal Education for Female Inmates” is based on the collection of data from female inmates who will be given a voice to express their educational needs to promote reintegration into society.

Prison is a place where the right to education for all and throughout life should be put into practice systematically. The level of education of the incarcerated population is generally low, because the school was often a personal failure. Besides informal education, chances are often neglected. Delinquency and crime are usually due to lack of education, social cohesion and insecurity. The prison is a place of custody which also has to fulfill its mission of rehabilitation as against deterrence, incapacitation and retribution.

The first argument in favour of education in prisons should be the hope of a reorientation of life through an acquisition of qualifications, skills, or simply to get out of the spiral of exclusion and reduce or prevent recidivism. In the long term, it is more important, other than concentrating solely on vocational training and general education, to improve of the level of reflection and self-esteem which can lead to a change in values, in order to facilitate reintegration into the community. Finally, the underlying project in any curriculum gives meaning to this period of incarceration, allows management of anger and pain and chance to escape from regression and despair generated by the confinement.

It must be remembered that re-integration rarely happens by chance, and it is in society’s interest to work towards the rehabilitation of these individuals to become active citizens again. That requires, among other support, teaching and counseling.

FEFI partners are from public institutions or associated and worked from time to time in different European projects whose theme was education in prison and was mainly addressed to inmates regardless of gender or age.

During such activities focusing on the entire prison population (aftercare, validation of prior experiential learning in prison, working with illiterate migrants,...), the partners identified specific situations that could not be addressed appropriately. Thus they found that women were underrepresented, either by the heterogeneity of backgrounds and levels that do not allow the institutions to assign the corresponding means, or because their place of confinement does not facilitate lessons and / or teaching practices in groups (e.g. very small number of women incarcerated in an area within a prison receiving mostly men can attend the public library’s service inside the prison). They also identified case by case situation of women with very specific issues (e.g. women who gave birth in prison and for whom support is not appropriate for learning). Women spend less time in prison, they are not so violent so they need less security and have better relationships with the prison staff. But they have more psychological problems such as sexual violence and home problems. Due to their low self-esteem, they tend to abandon their activities in learning and working when they are not successful the first time.

Most often, men at the end of their sentences found shelter and family support, whilst for most female ex-prisoners there is dearth of support and services. Thus, the transition from internal isolation to external isolation is unfortunately enhanced due to the lack of cohesive support from the community or the family especially from the children of the former inmate. Additionally in cases of homelessness, the ex-inmate though free becomes even more isolated in the community. The FEFI project will therefore seek to empower those females leaving prison aimed

at reducing recidivism. On a different level it will seek to simultaneously integrate the fact that there are few women in detention facilities, which have very heterogeneous levels of education.

To answer these types of targeted learning, the project FEFI will research the state of the art and best practice, compare and undertake new approaches (eg, post-release follow-up and re-integration). This includes transfer of knowledge and review of new forms of supports throughout the life-time of the project by combining the works from partners within the “square of crime” such as experiences of "guest stars" including judges, magistrates, prosecutors, defense lawyers, police, counselors in insertion and probation, professionals from social services, job services,...

Together with their complementary missions (university, department of criminology, ministries, women's prisons, study center, teaching unit), the partners, aim to investigate very accurately the field of education for women in prison (adult/minor, convicted/sentenced) and to provide transferable solutions that reflect specific situations with their particularity due to the small number of female offenders (3 to 7%) of the total prison population in partners' country. This work will involve the voices of the protagonists on which the partners have to count to make appropriate solution's proposal.

The implication of the binomial Policymaker / Teaching Unit is essential to the sustainability of results while it shows too the willingness of partners to approach the form and content together with the security constraints that are added to the already highly specialized and individualized educational support necessary for the female inmate. With the project FEFI we will get the chance to extend activities towards the specific problems of female inmates. Together with the different partner organisations we will better discover the background for female inmates and will create new procedures for new practices under the different conditions in the partner countries. After a period of implementation of these procedures of practices we hope to give adequate recommendations for further prisons.

To prepare this application, a summary sheet with the problems of prison education specific to female prisoners had been sent electronically to a range of stakeholders and policy makers met over the last few years (contact seminar in Lisbon in 2008, EPEA conferences in 2009 and 2011, Budapest conference in 2010 organised by the European Commission, projects' conclusive seminars in which partners have been involved ...). This first contact allowed for the identification of organisations that have expertise in the theme.

Initial research showed that some difficulties were common to all (eg. few number of female inmates) whilst others (eg. Open prison's system) are particular to some partner.

It was agreed to organise a preparatory visit for together give life to FEFI project (unfortunately not everyone received funding from their national agency but their input was taken into account when transferring their needs taking into account their voice).

The preparatory visit enabled the partners to draw up an inventory (not exhaustively) of various specific situations, organise work areas based on selected issues, reflect on best practice studies to conduct and to draft methodologies to be used as a follow-up in these two years of investigation process.

The mere fact that female inmates are so few in number inherently entails that we must not forget them. It also implies that their rights have to be protected and that we must care and give attention to their voices.

Following up the EU Action Plan on Adult Learning “It’s always a good time to learn” (2007) and the Council Conclusions (5/2008) on the role of LLL to enhance the competences of the adult population, the Council Resolution (12/2011) on a renewed European agenda for adult learning which has highlighted the need to enable adults to improve adapting to changes in labour market and society. Adult learning is not just targeted at employment but at social inclusion of those disadvantaged, e.g. because of low literacy, low vocational skills or lacking skills for full integration into society.

From previous projects such as HIPPO, RISE, KEYS, ESM, PHOENIX... we know that there is need for a prison cultural change. Like every male inmate, female inmates have the right for education. Partners notice that due to the low number of female inmates, they are often housed in wings in male prisons, often neglected from certain forms of participation they could join if more numerous. In addition due to the heterogeneity in their levels of education, it’s difficult to organise groups to teach. Moreover minor female inmates have profiles which are not so compatible with each other (e.g. sometimes it is not ideal for minors to attend the same courses as adult females). Minors need different learning environments as well as different pedagogical methods).

From all national data published by national ministries of justice, it is observed that female inmates are always very few and sometimes the figures are not completed because there are so few. This results in marginalization of the female inmates.

This project is innovative in the fact that it will address the problem of gender competences, as an issue that needs to be addressed in the context of penal system competences at management/systems level. Therefore there is no top down strategy for gender equality. To our knowledge the Prison staff do not receive any differential training where gender of inmates is concerned and therefore are not prepared to face specific difficulties female inmates encounter. To implement educational approaches in prisons that are oriented both at the inmates’ competences and needs and at the requirements for successful social and labour market (re)integration, the cooperation of all actors responsible for sentence, integration and release planning is necessary. In fact, few penitentiary systems show a well-structured system in this regard. A crucial point is the absence of a holistic coordinated and multi-disciplinary approach towards providing services in prison.

As innovation, partners noticed that female inmates’ voices are not listened so FEFI project gives opportunity to female inmates to express their needs in the matter of education. Therefore adopting this bottom up approach, together with the top down approach, the project intends to propose changes at the system, prison personnel and pedagogical levels.