



## B-COMPETENT

### *Boosting Competences in Penitentiary Staff in Europe*

#### INTERNATIONAL REPORT ON TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF PRISON STAFF

#### *Abstract*

##### INTRODUCTION: PROJECT'S BACKGROUND

The 2-year project "**B-COMPETENT. Boosting Competences in Penitentiary Staff in Europe**" (2019-2021), co-funded by the EU Justice Programme and implemented by a Consortium of 7 Partners from Italy, Spain and Albania, aims to build **capacity of prison front-line civilian staff** through the acquisition of specific skills and competencies related to **human rights protection with focus on foreign inmates' special needs and rights**, in line with the EU and international law and to Recommendation CM/Rec (2012)12.

As national prison services recognize internal gaps in dealing with increasingly multi-ethnic correctional environments, B-COMPETENT aims to tackle training gaps of prison staff: the innovative B-ComPetent cross-border **train-the-trainers** programme, combined with **practical multilingual tools, best practices sharing** and **awareness raising actions**, will provide trainers with multidisciplinary competencies necessary to properly train the civilian front-line prison staff. The latter will gain increased knowledge of EU legislation and standards related to human rights and will acquire horizontal skills to manage cultural diversity-related issues and enhance dynamic security in prisons, thus preventing episodes of radicalization.

##### Project Consortium:

- University of Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli" (Coordinator)
- Observatory of the Penal System and Human Rights – University of Barcelona (OSPDH-UB)
- Avokati I Popullit (Albanian Ombudsman)
- Antigone Onlus
- Qendra Europiane - European Centre Foundation
- Prodos Consulting srl
- Bosch i Gimpera Foundation



## INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH ON TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF CIVILIAN PRISON STAFF

### OBJECTIVES

The international report on training needs assessment of prison staff – elaborated by the **Observatory on the Penal System and Human Rights (OSPDH)** of the University of Barcelona within the B-COMPETENT project - aims to identify good practices as well as weak spots and training needs of prison civilian staff in six countries (Italy, France, Spain, Albania, Montenegro and Greece). Building on the research results, B-Competent will produce an **e-learning course, multilingual tools** and **six cross-border train-the-trainers workshops**.

The international research stems from the national reports and surveys carried on by Partner organizations, running February-October 2020. Despite the numerous difficulties encountered by the researchers due to the COVID-19 outbreak and to its dramatic impact on penitentiary settings, B-COMPETENT has successfully reached the goal of thoroughly evaluating prison staff training needs and gaps in all six countries involved in the project. The full research Report will soon be available at [www.bcompetent.eu](http://www.bcompetent.eu)

### METHODOLOGY

National Reports employed a **methodological framework** - jointly developed by the Consortium members - **based on “triangulation”**, understood as a combination of different approaches: i) **desk analysis** of existing training programmes and material; ii) **online surveys** (translated in 6 languages), targeting prison authorities, prison managers, prison staff and front line prison civilian staff; iii) **focus groups** with trainers of prison civilian staff and prison administrators. An online version of the questionnaire was available via B-COMPETENT website in order to reach a larger number of recipients.

The Albanian Partners Avokati I Popullit (Ombudsman) and Qendra Europiane – European Center developed a national and international study of regulation and a summary of all existing trainings in the field, as well as other relevant materials, such as national laws, regulations, and the 2019 EU Progress Report for **Albania**. Questionnaires were submitted to gather data, and interviews were conducted with target group representatives from 24 prisons. The total number of each interviewed category was: a) Prison Authority and Prison Manager: 26. b) Prison Staff: 332. c) Front-line civilian prison staff: 67.

With regard to **Montenegro**, a total number of 48 people, including prison authorities, managers, prison staff and civilian prison staff were involved in interviews. More specifically: 2 of the interviewees were prison authorities, 3 were prison managers, 35 were prison staff and 8 were civilian prison staff.

Interviews for the purposes of this report were also conducted in **France** by *Prison Insider*. The French Institute collected the views of people with proven expertise on the issue (prison officials, officials in an association working with foreigners, staff training officers) in order to contextualise the raw data collected.

**Italy's** research study has been developed through massively disseminated surveys and focus group meetings.

In **Spain**, OSPDH - faced with an impressive number of challenges in achieving a formal collaboration with penitentiary authorities due to the COVID-19 pressures - pursued informal exchanges and interviews via e-mail and Zoom, thus obtaining fruitful insights and reflections on the subject of the research.

Many focus groups were held in different countries. In Albania, two focus groups were organised, respectively on April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020 (12 participants) and April 29<sup>th</sup> (13 participants) via Zoom Platform. In the case of Montenegro, two focus groups were held: one on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020 and the second on April 13, 2020 with the participation of prison managers as the Director and Deputy Director Directorate for Enforcement of Criminal Sanctions or the Chief of the Sector for the Staff Training and other workers of different areas and specialists. With regard to Italy, three focus group meeting were held, respectively, with the participation of supervisory court judges SMCV (4 participants), on July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020; with the Guarantor of the Campania Region for the rights of persons detained (5 participants) on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020; with the Director of Santa Maria Capua Vetere Prison on September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

## MAIN FINDINGS

One of the main issues arising from the national study carried on in **Albania** is the limited number of civilian staff and interpreters. The lack of this professional workforce forces prison staff to find alternative solutions such as, translation from the prison staff or other prisoners that know the language. Another relevant issue is linked to the continuous training, which is mainly focused on police or arm bodies in prisons. Civil staff training is not a structured practice. Multicultural trainings or trainings focused on ethnic traditions should be kept in mind. A dedicated fund for interpreters is very necessary, in order to provide a valid support for foreign prisoners.

The Study highlights that trainings are not organized at suitable intervals, particularly for civil staff, so they are rarer than needed. The interviewees state that the trainers are professionals, but the training programmes are not regularly revised and this sometimes causes training contents and curricula overlapping.



The main conclusion drawn by the Albanian national report is that the prison administration should have enough financial resources to improve living conditions, social activities and training as effectively as possible regarding the specific situation and specific needs of foreign prisoners.

General lack of proper training has been reported also in **France**, where interviewees, as well as bibliographical sources, converge to indicate that staff training on the issue of foreign national prisoners is meager. It is worth noting, however, that the prison administration in France receives assistance from external associations or structures. In 2007, the association La Cimade has signed a partnership agreement with the prison administration. With funding from the prison administration, the association is called upon to provide assistance and advice to foreign prisoners. In 2019, La Cimade has intervened in 71 facilities with 145 volunteers, supporting 3,008 prisoners. La Cimade is also involved in training, at the request of prison officials, at the level of a prison or a provincial region. In 2019, despite several discussions on the matter in several provincial directions (SPIP et directions interrégionales), no training was held for probation and rehabilitation services. La Cimade had several meetings with the ENAP in 2019, with plans for scheduled a training in 2020.

A few years ago, the training curriculum at ENAP approached the issue of religious through the prism of secularism (laïcité). This approach has been totally abandoned and has given way to a logic of identifying "religious phenomena" and the "mechanisms of influence" of some prisoners over others. An approach of holistic understanding has been replaced by a perceived risk-assessment approach. There does not seem to be any evidence of a solid targeted approach towards foreign national prisoners. The brief time previously allocated to the issue, albeit in a very generalist approach, has been abandoned.

The issues of non-compulsory nature of the training courses and the scarcity of their offer are particularly evident in **Montenegro**, where the interviewees point out that the staff do not attend trainings before entering into duty. This translates in a problem, putting on service people as safeguards, and then training them gradually. Participants to the survey explained that they depended on the central prison in Podgorica, or, due to the job organization, their officers often fail in attending the trainings, or they simply were not invited. Participants responded negatively when asked whether they had staff appointed to work with the foreign prisoners or if there was training about the rights of foreign prisoners, cultural diversities and foreign prisoners' special needs.

In the case of **Spain**, the training area of the prison administration Sub-directorate offers a course on *Social Skills, Personal Interaction and Peaceful Conflict Resolution*. The main goal of this course, whose call has been issued in September 2020, is to facilitate knowledge and strategies for the peaceful resolution of conflicts and the exercise of assertive authority. However, in no case training in specific matters regarding foreigners' rights or in relation to their needs and specificities, is required.

The training and specialization courses are developed from other voluntary agencies / organizations, for example, the project promoted by the Instituto Cervantes and the GSPI launched in June 2019



regarding the teaching of Spanish as a Foreign Language aimed at prison officials and NGO volunteers who teach Spanish to non-Spanish-speaking foreign inmates.

Since 2002, the prison services of **Catalonia** have carried out actions that affect structural, organizational and socio-educational aspects to meet the needs of the foreign population, i.e, the *Intercultural Mediation Plan* which focuses above all on the role of mediators within cultural conflicts. CEJFE offers, within its courses, one online training on migration issues targeting prison management units, but it focuses on legal procedures only. Among the courses offered for the second semester of this year 2020, nothing seems to be related to working with foreign inmates.

In **Greece** prison administrative staff, including specialists (social workers, psychologists, sociologists etc.) are university or other, post-secondary education degree holders, who are appointed without getting any training with regard to the penitentiary system and its administration, the social organization of prisons, prison staff professional role and ethics, etc.

Custodial staff, the front-line personnel responsible for the daily supervision of inmates, secondary education graduates, should undergo introductory training at the beginning of their professional career, but after their appointment. The length of this training has been continuously reduced due to lack of resources, while some officers have not attended any courses at all, as the training school is not a permanent structure.

The Greek Report underlines the need to develop staff recruitment policies and to re-organize both introductory education and on-going training for prison officers, establishing a stable, permanent educational structure and producing structured education programmes and courses, as well as training curricula and manuals.

With reference to **Italy**, the questionnaire-based survey shows that crucial skills, such as integrity, humanity and cultural sensitivity are not perceived as primary values for prison staff to work in prison settings. One of the most relevant findings of Italy's national report is what we call the "original sin" of the Italian Penitentiary administration: the disproportion between prison staff units and the total number of prisoners and consistency with the provisions of Recommendation 1999 (22) of CoE, concerning prison overcrowding and prison population inflation.

Regarding the prison staff's training needs and gaps, three main issues arise from the Italian Report:

1. the tangible disproportion between the police bodies and the educational staff, with the supremacy of the former, as we can observe from the total number of policemen in relation to the total amount of other relevant professional figures - in particular, interpreters and cultural mediators - and from the public funds supporting the penitentiary system.
2. As a consequence, educational training is mostly addressed to penitentiary police.



3. The training formally includes notions about prisoners' basic rights and best practices in everyday life in prison, but this knowledge is not often put into practice. Additionally, training contents do not properly encompass multicultural knowledge.

One very important issue arising from all national reports is **language**. None of the surveyed countries, indeed, included language courses within their prison staff trainings, although most of the interviewees underline the importance of language to guarantee a proper interaction with foreign inmates. In many countries when staff does not speak the language of the inmate, they usually find or ask some of the prisoners to translate and help them.

With regard to the importance of language in accessing information and, therefore, rights, the document called "Step by Step" from the central administration of Spain showed to be useful. However, in no case should this replace the important role of interpreters in prison settings. After reviewing all the documentation available from the Spanish penitentiary administration, we can see the difficulty to meet the needs of foreign inmates, bearing in mind that most of the training programs mainly focus on strict security and management parameters; furthermore, specialization courses are voluntary and are developed, for the most part, by external organizations. Finally, it is worth underlying that the institution's own logic, reinforced by the regulations approved for this purpose, clearly opts in favour of foreign inmates expulsion measures.

These negative conclusions cannot, however, be applied to the Catalan penitentiary administration. In this sense, the Administration recognizes that foreigners are considered a risk group together with young people and women. The Catalan Administration is aware of the importance regarding the specific treatment of foreigners, not only for a qualitative matter but because in Catalonia these people represent a very high percentage, over 40% of the total. The Catalan administration has been active in providing mechanisms for foreign prisoners to have access to interpretation and translation in order to facilitate communication with professionals. This is planned as we have seen in Circular 2/2019 where it provides for the provision of this service by the new Orientation and Reception Service (SOA).

Other good practices stemmed from the national reports, especially with regard to Albania and Catalonia.

Firstly, we would like to highlight the efforts made by the prison administration in Albania with the participation of the Council of Europe (CoE) experts that have trained the trainers at the Security Academy. This initiative is being implemented in collaboration with CoE, the Albanian Ombudsman and OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe). Several trainings have been organized within the scope of the Regional Action "*Enhancing penitentiary capacities in addressing radicalization in prisons in the Western Balkans*" implemented by the CoE. Within this action, the prison Administration and other Governmental and non-governmental institutions in Albania worked together



with the CoE towards improving the protection of prisoners' rights and supporting their rehabilitation and reintegration back into society. The Action considered raising awareness of social assistants, forensic psychologists or social workers in prisons, in order to provide more care and attention to the rehabilitation of the prisoners and to reduce the possibility of their radicalization, but also to the other detainees, due to isolation. The Catalan penitentiary administration stands out for the efforts made in respecting and safeguarding the special needs and peculiarities of the foreign population. It is necessary to highlight the creation of the Orientation and Reception Service (SOA) in each penitentiary to coordinate all the action and comply with the objectives of the Circular 2/2019 mentioned above. This service includes advising multidisciplinary teams and other bodies with specialized information on foreigners and for the management of specific cases. In order to deepen this, the Circular has among its objectives "To improve the training and specialization of prison staff in this matter." Among its competences, this Service should assess and detect needs for care, intervention or management with the foreign population, and should coordinate all actions on foreigners and provide technical support to bodies, professionals and collaborators involved in this matter.

## CONCLUSIONS

In addition to the general need for more training (before entering into duty and afterwards) - some key recommendations, specifically focused on the B-COMPETENT project's objective, can be highlighted:

- 1) Foreign inmates should have the possibility to learn a language that will enable them to communicate more effectively;
- 2) Foreign prisoners should be granted appropriate access to interpretation and translation facilities. Similarly, crucial documents / information on prison regulations, rights and duties of inmates should exist and be freely available and easily accessible in many languages, taking into account the country of origin of foreign prisoners;
- 3) Some prison workers should be specifically trained to work with foreign inmates. A central office, responsible to deal with foreign inmates' special needs and problems and to solve conflicts, should be created in each prison;
- 4) Prison workers should undertake sufficient training in: (a) international and internal standards and regulations on foreigners' rights, and the especial care and attention for especial needs in context of deprivation of liberty; (b) mechanisms to take into account the social, familiar and cultural context of the foreign inmates.

## Authors

**Alejandro Forero Cuéllar** - Associate Professor at the Department of Constitutional Law, Political Science and Administration (University of Barcelona)

Doctor in Law and Political Science and Master Degree in Penal System and Social Problems at the University of Barcelona, he specialized in prison systems, torture, state-corporate crimes, the history of



Funded by  
the Justice Programme  
of the European Union



*criminology and Spanish anarchism. Researcher at the Observatory of the Penal System and Human Rights of the UB where he has collaborated in projects related to the deprivation of freedom and human rights. He has been a University Professor in Costa Rica and Colombia. He is a member of platforms that fight against torture at national level (Coordinator for the Prevention and Reporting of Torture) and international level (Euro-Latin American Network for the Prevention of Torture and Institutional Violence). He is a magazine Contributor (Revista Crítica Penal y Poder and Justice, Power and Resistance). He is delegate of Spain and Catalonia within the European Group for the Study of Deviance and Social Control.*

**Mónica Aranda Ocaña** - *Professor of the Department of Criminal Law and Criminal Sciences – University of Barcelona*

*Doctor of Law from the University of Barcelona (UB). Professor of the Department of Criminal Law and Criminal Sciences of UB. Coordinator of the Area of Deprivation of Liberty and Human Rights and member of the Board of Directors of the University Research Center Observatory of the Penal System and Human Rights of the University of Barcelona. She is also a founding member of the European Group for Prison Research.*



*B-ComPetent is a project co-funded by the Justice Programme of the European Union, GA no. **854040**. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the Authors and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission.*

