



**HOLISTIC EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT
FOR SEX OFFENDERS IN THE EU
KA220-ADU-58B1C374**

**THE CHALLENGE, THE ENGAGEMENT,
THE OUTPUT**

Sex offenders are reputedly the most difficult category of offenders that prison experts need to deal with in their work for the rehabilitation and preparation for social re-integration of the inmates. Why is that? Well, first of all, because the social and psychological factors leading to sexual deviance and sexual offences are slightly different than the ones involved in other types of crimes. Secondly, because the convictions of the offenders towards their victims are usually preventing them to acknowledge their deeds and their responsibility towards their victims. And most of all, because sexual offenders are not easily tolerated neither by the other inmates – who might stigmatize them and even abuse them –, nor by the prison staff handling them – who are often repulsed by their deeds. In these circumstances, the prison staff who is supposed to work with sexual offenders for their rehabilitation is often confronted with a different, more challenging set of problems compared to other categories of offenders and more often than not they find themselves insufficiently prepared for the task.



The Erasmus+ project Educate and Support was set on tackling this issue and on helping the prison staff gain more knowledge and develop their competencies in order to be able to better face the challenges posed by the treatment of sexual offenders, by structuring a holistic psycho-educational approach meant to reduce the likelihood of recidivism and promote efficient re-integration in the society.

The partnership consisted of five organizations from Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Romania, whose networks, end-users and collaborators are facing similar challenges and needs regarding the support of prison experts and sex offenders for achieving the goal of reducing sexual crimes all across Europe: the Cyprus Prisons Department and Eurosucces Consulting (both from Cyprus), the Centre for European Constitutional Law (Greece), The Italian Centre for the Promotion of Mediation (Italy) and the Family and Couple Therapy Association in Timișoara (Romania). All these organizations had previous experience with implementing European funded projects, as

well as with addressing the needs of vulnerable groups, including inmates and represent different geopolitical realities of Europe, thus ensuring a well-grounded and holistic approach, that would be beneficial for both targeted groups: prison staff and prison experts dealing with sex offenders, which need to improve their skills and competences, and sex offenders who need the support to improve their behaviour and be integrated into the community.

The specific expertise of each partner and their vast experience in activating in strategic partnerships has been an important premise of the project's effective course, despite the encountered challenges and difficulties: the bibliography and research regarding sex offenders is quite scarce, there aren't too many examples of good practices regarding the intervention programmes for sex offenders throughout the world, the bureaucratic and practical aspects of setting up intervention and training programs to support the inmates or the prison staff are quite sinuous and tedious, while the amount of content that had to be created was quite extensive in relation to the rather small team involved in the project's implementation.



Nevertheless, the partnerships was strong and relentless in its efforts to achieve the project's goals and managed to create all the five desired outputs envisioned in the holistic educational approach: the Model of Working with Inmates- Sex Offenders (PR1) – which was the result of a an extensive research throughout all the partner countries, the ICT Tool for Competence Assessment (PR2) – designed for profiling the current stage of competence and the training need analysis of the prison staff, the Learning Modules for Experts (PR3) – which is in fact a complete training program for prison experts dealing with sex offenders comprised from 5 modules and 11 units of content, the Programme

Toolkit with Intervention Techniques (PR4) – consisting of intervention activities and methods meant to be applied in the rehabilitation process of the sex offenders and the Exploitation Guide (PR5) – meant to support the experts and stakeholders on how to efficiently and successfully use the project’s tools and results.



Elaboration of content was followed by training activities – hosted in Milan by CIPM in June 2023 –, by piloting the outputs in all partner countries with both target groups – conducted in October 2023 – and by dissemination and multiplication events – organized in November 2023 in all partner countries. The final project conference was organized in Cyprus and was attended by over 50 stakeholders from the prison

system, the Justice Department, the research and academic fields concerned with the well-being of the community and the rehabilitation of offenders. Throughout all these events, feedback was collected in order to fine-tune and adapt the outputs to better serve the needs of the beneficiaries and, even though there was much variety within the sample of people offering feedback, there was one thing they all had in common, namely the praise for the utility and the undeniable value of the project’s results and materials for the rehabilitation and social re-insertion of sex offenders and for supporting the professional and personal development of prison staff.

The bottom line is that the project Educate and Support addressed a pretty wide uncharted area concerning the intervention upon sex offenders and its implementation left a big map instead to guide the prison experts through the challenges of educational and psychological intervention programs targeted towards the sex offenders’ rehabilitation and social re-integration.

