

Going the distance: the benefits and challenges of engaging volunteers and community initiatives in prison sports programmes

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Contents

I. Defining Volunteering

II. Volunteering in prison context

III. The VOLPRIS project

IV. The benefits and challenges of engaging volunteers and community initiatives in prison sports programmes

V. Prison sports programmes – sharing promising practices

VI. Q&A



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I. Defining Volunteering

Volunteering can be defined as “any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group, or organization” (Wilson, 2000, p.215).

Volunteer action must be:

- ✓ performed through free will and not due to obligation or coercion
- ✓ continuous over time
- ✓ cannot be recompensed with explicit rewards such as monetary payment
- ✓ involves service to people or causes that need help
- ✓ is usually carried out through organizations or agencies (Snyder & Omoto, 2008).



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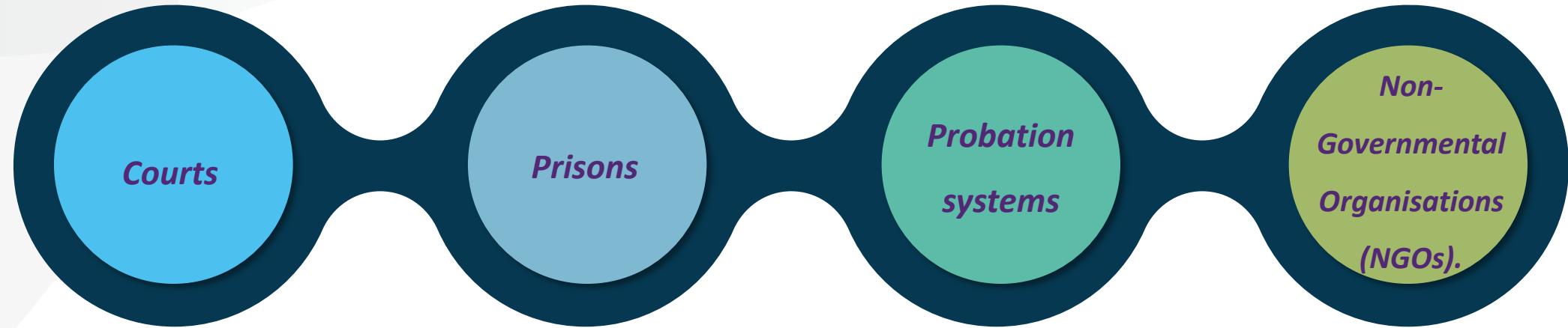


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II. Volunteering in the prison context

Volunteering in the prison context across Europe plays an integral role across a variety of contexts and settings, namely:



The activities support work with prisoners, former prisoners, families and victims of crime, although the form and scale of this contribution varies significantly (JIVE, 2014).



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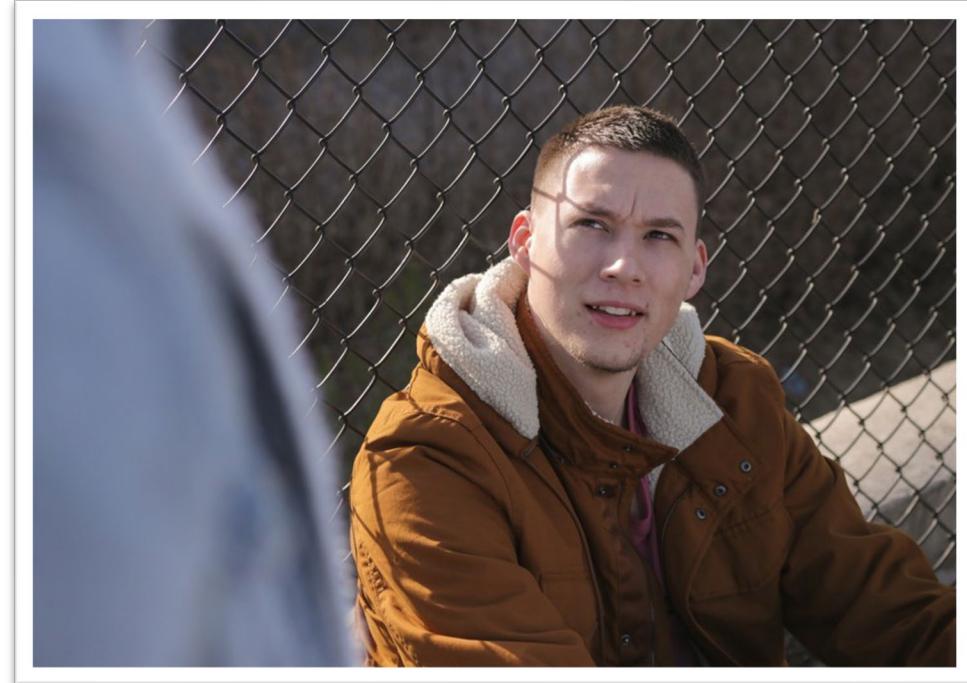
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II. Volunteering in the prison context

Involving people from the community in prison life through Voluntary Sector Organisations (VSOs) can introduce **opportunities for social participation, reinforce social ties and has the potential to enhance rehabilitative efforts conducted by prison services to prepare a convicted persons' return to society.**

Research in the field of volunteering in the CJS is scarce. Prisons and organisations who guide and support volunteers often lack the necessary information, resources and tools to support and value volunteers or to carry out a prison screening process to identify volunteering needs.



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III. VOLPRIS project

VOLPRIS project's aspiration it to contribute to an engaged and active society, where volunteering is an expression of solidarity and of European values.

It aims to **improve recruitment, training and support of prison's volunteers and promote exchange of resources and good practices in the field of volunteering in prison context.**



Target Groups: Volunteers, Volunteering Coordinators/ VSOs, Prison Services.



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III. VOLPRIS project



IO1: Screening tool to identify CJS/prisons' needs in terms of Volunteering Programmes

IO2: Volunteering Coordinator Profile

IO3: European CJS Volunteer Coordinators Training Course

IO4: Minimum Requirements for Volunteering Programmes in CJS

IO5: European platform on volunteering practices, knowledge, and experiences exchange in CJS



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**Prisons Managing
Volunteers in Europe**
an insight into prisons' perceptions,
needs and current practices



"Prisons Managing Volunteers in Europe – an insight into prisons' perceptions, needs and current practices" – Final Report



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Methodology

Exploratory research

Our exploratory research aimed to **preliminary study and become more familiar with the European scenario in terms of volunteering activities/ volunteer programmes' needs in CJS context as well as to identify possible training needs.**

Research questions:

01

What is the value of prison volunteering for prison staff?

02

What kind of volunteering activities/programmes exist inside prisons and how are these being implemented?

03

Is there a screening process for assessing prisoners' needs in terms of volunteering?

05

How do prisons engage with and manage voluntary sector organisations / volunteers?

04

How are voluntary sector organisations / volunteers recruited and selected by prisons?

06

Do voluntary sector organisations / volunteers receive any training and if so, how is it conducted?



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Results

About the respondents...

The questionnaire was completed by a total of **79** prison staff members from **5 countries**:

Country	Nr.
Germany	18
Belgium	3
Poland	10
Portugal	40
Romania	8
Total	79



The data that follows is not representative of the situation in the partner countries. It is a non-representative snapshot of needs, intended to inform improvements in service level delivery.



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Results

2nd Section: Existence of Volunteering Activities

which volunteer scopes/areas does the volunteering activity meet

Area of volunteering activity	%	Nº responses
<i>Development of social and personal capabilities</i>	15	41
<i>Community links</i>	13	34
<i>Arts and Cultural activities</i>	13	34
<i>Wellbeing (sports; art; meditation; yoga...)</i>	12	33
<i>Solidarity visit</i>	9	25
<i>Intermediating family relations/ working with prisoners' families</i>	7	20
<i>Teaching (specific subjects)</i>	7	19
<i>Health</i>	6	16
<i>Prison administrative support</i>	5	12
<i>Employment</i>	4	10
<i>Other</i>	4	10
<i>Legal support</i>	3	8
<i>Prison spaces improvement</i>	2	6
Total	100	268



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Recommendations



Promote more research to highlight the diversity of volunteering activities in the prison context and evidence their impact on reintegration needs



Keeping the prison voluntary sector on the European Agenda



Set up European Recommendations related to volunteering practices in prisons and community sanctions and measures



Awareness campaigns for what prison volunteering achieves and the added value this gives



Training those that manage volunteers matters!



Relationships matter!



Promote quality in prison volunteering activity through the development of volunteering programmes that are aligned with a prisoners' reintegration needs



Improve conditions for volunteering activities



Promote cross-border mobility of prison volunteering coordinators/managers, and prison volunteers



Continue to invest in the recognition of the prison volunteers' role



Ensuring citizens access to information about opportunities for volunteering in prison settings



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IV. What are the benefits and challenges?

What are the Benefits?

- Broadens and tailors sport for diverse, dynamic prison population
- Can both build team spirit and challenge complex individuals: one tool in an integrated physical activity and wellbeing strategy
- Used as an incentive for behaviour
- Opportunity for community partnerships and probation activities

What are the Challenges?

- Difficult to find regular volunteers and/or training for volunteers
- Cost of upskilling dedicated prison staff to support sports and volunteers
- Equipment costs
- Cross disciplinary: difficult to evaluate impact
- Space and timetabling are challenging in prison life
- License requirements (e.g. data sharing) can be challenging for VSOs



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IV. The benefits and challenges

1st Section: Perceptions on the value of volunteering activities

'In your opinion, what are the key factors that support successful prison volunteering activities?'

1st

Specific and adequate training

- "Adequate training should be provided to volunteers in order to better work with the reclusive population" (PT)
- "Training is first and foremost the most important" (RO)
- "Provide appropriate training to volunteers" (DE)
- "The main supporting factor for the effectiveness of voluntary activities is that volunteering groups should be trained" (PL)

2nd

Recognition of the value of volunteers and volunteering projects

- "Support and value volunteers as a way of bridging with the outside" (PT)
- "Supporting and valuing volunteers" (RO)
- "Support and appreciate volunteers" (DE)
- "Communication of the added values impacting the daily work of prison staff" (BE)

3rd

Relationship between prison staff and volunteers

- "The mutual support relationship between professionals and volunteers is essential" (PT)
- "One of the important factors is the relationship that is created between the volunteer and the program coordinator" (RO)
- "Supportive working relationship between skilled personnel and volunteers" (DE)
- "Welcome by management - link with staff" (BE)
- "Developing appropriate relationships between prison service officers and volunteers" (PL)

4th

Volunteer profile and characteristics

- "The goodwill of the volunteers, their field of expertise and the sharing of this wisdom with the reclusive population" (PT)
- "Their abilities to be proactive, engaged in this approach, their availability and flexibility but also their willingness to engage in a long-term partnership" (RO)
- "Transparency, trust, education" (DE)
- "Quality of volunteers" (BE)



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V. Prison sports programmes



2019 - Rugby game between prisoners from Lisboa & Vale dos Judeus Prisons

'Rugby - com Partilha'

Organisation: 'Rugby - com Partilha'

Mission: to contribute to the education and social reintegration of prisoners and former prisoners by promoting the practice of Rugby in prisons

Target group: male and female prisoners

Partnerships: The Portuguese Rugby Federation and The Portuguese Prison and Probation Services (DGRSP)

Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/Rugby-Com-Partilha-1678203075773390/>



Year	Nº of prisoners targeted	Nº of prisons involved
2019	95	4



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Health Promotion for Women in Prison/ Gesundheitsförderung für Frauen in Haft

- Bremen Women's Prison, Germany since 2007
- Voluntary commitment of female public health and psychology students
- Financed through the *Verein Bremische Straffälligenbetreuung* (VBS)

Wellness and light activities offered on a rolling basis as part of a wider programme:

- Education about contraceptive options and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD)
- Education about the risks and routes of infection in HIV / AIDS and hepatitis
- Personal health lesson
- Healthy cooking and baking together
- Creative writing, handicrafts, film afternoons
- Wellness and activity



Project Coordination
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Sarah Benlounis



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STEPS



- Led by *Der Westdeutsche Handwerkskammertag*, and funded by Erasmus+, since 2016 a group of up to 14 inmates between the ages of 14 and 25 have been training baseball - technically very demanding - on the sports field in Heinsberg Prison with volunteer coaches from the *Wassenberg Squirrels* baseball club.
- The sport of baseball not only demands physical fitness and promotes physical skills, it also places very high demands on mental aptitude, through learning special game tactics and a complex set of rules.
- Via the network of the baseball club, the prisoners have the opportunity to continue their sport in a baseball club even after they have been released; This has given former prisoners the chance to spend their own free time in a stable social environment after imprisonment, a known factor in the reduction of recidivism.





Thank you.

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JOIN US for the next VOLPRIS Discussion Forum

People in Prison engaging as Volunteers and the User Voice in Prison Voluntary Service Development

Friday 11.06.2021 10:00 - 12:00 CET (Central European Time)
Sign up here to join us: <https://bit.ly/3sBeecP>

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