



# How can ICT make the offender better prepared for release?



EuroPris ICT Expert Group

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EuroPris brings together prison practitioners with the specific intention of promoting ethical and rights-based imprisonment, exchanging information and providing expert assistance to support this agenda. The organisation exists to improve co-operation among European Prison and Correctional Services, with the aim of improving the lives of prisoners and their families, enhancing public safety and security; reducing reoffending; and advancing professionalism in the corrections' field.

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## Introduction

The development of digital tools and devices does not seem to stop. On the contrary, the use of digital devices and services is in fact increasing. If one buys a new car today, it will contain all kinds of services: one can start the car with a smartphone at distance, or check the gas level, brakes etc. It seems like there is no limit. The best of all is that the costs for this is close to nothing. If the infrastructure and the wireless connection are there, and a receiver like a smartphone one can with very limited costs put in more and more gadgets that are measuring new things.

No offender should be released without five fundamental skills:

- how to read;
- how to write;
- how to do math;
- how to express in speech, and
- how to use digital tools.

This last one is very important and may also be the key to combine the others.

When an offender is released he/she should also be prepared for the life outside prison. A job, a place to live, a network of good friends, good relations with family and friends are all factors, which are important for a continuous good life in freedom.

ICT cannot make this happen all alone, but ICT can be an important tool which makes our job easier and enhances the lives of the offenders both inside prison and on release from prison.

## Use of ICT Today

When looking at other countries/Prison Administrations, often islands of ICT can be seen. One country is very good at kiosk systems for offenders. Another country has the possibility for the offender to send e-mails to their family.

No country, as far as we can see, has really made a complete plan for the use of ICT by offenders in prison. In many cases there are also no connections to other authorities, like unemployment agencies, social services etc.

Prison and probation services tend not to be first movers in taking advantage of ICT. Therefore, the digital development is mostly driven by the surrounding society (maybe other authorities) setting a digital agenda, to which the offender and the prison and probation system needs to comply.

In the Swedish Prison and Probation Service (SPPS) we think that the future lies in building platforms that are compatible with the outside. At the same time one should not be naive and think that there is no security risk involved with this. There definitely is. It will be important to have control over the platforms, so one can steer how and for what they can be used for and at what time.

## Platforms

The world today is digital and built upon platforms. One of these platforms is the smartphone. The smartphone can be connected to everything regardless which brand or operating system (OS) one got: iPhone, Android or Microsoft - it works in the same way and will connect you to everything.

The time when buying digital devices was meant for one task only is over. The new norm is: “If I cannot get it in my smartphone I am not interested”.

In Sweden the SPPS thinks that they should go the same way. Gathering all functions, needs and requirements into the same platform, and that is the smartphone. At the same time it is necessary to being able to lock down some functions for security reasons. In building a platform, one should go for an Android solution and create an own OS. An OS were different functions can be switched on and off. For example, inside prison the offender should not be able to use the camera, but when he is on a short time leave, it could be switched on.

The platform should have open, but controlled interfaces, so different functions can be combined in the platform.

It is important that five different areas can be controlled: device, access, person, place, and period.

D: Device, which device is doing what?

A: Access - full or limited access?

P: Person, which person is logged in?

P: Place, a position could be with GPS as well as a network

P: Period, a possibility to schedule access

## **Education**

The access to teachers is, and will, always be limited. The needs are more than the teachers can provide. Prisons are often stuck in the old school method with a teacher teaching live in front of the students. Outside prison, e-learning and having a teacher at distance is becoming more and more common.

With good digital devices prisons could easily adopt this new way of learning. A teacher could easily teach students at different prisons without being there. The offender can have a pedagogic support at the prison but the subject responsible teacher can be elsewhere.

In Ireland for example the Prison Service is joining up with the Higher Education Authority (HEANet) network. The HEANet is connected to other education authorities in other parts of Europe and in this way they have the possibility to have, for example, a teacher in Spain teaching Spanish to offenders in the Irish Prisons via a video link.

In Denmark a site for e-learning was set up in the maximum security prisons in 2010. The ambition was to offer the same educational solutions as outside prison – to the best possible extend. The solution is based on a whitelist with the addition of a restricted possibility to send messages. Two contact lists are available, so the offender can send messages to teachers only, and teachers can send to both offenders and others teachers. The system is no longer contemporary and needs replacement.

## **Communication**

When talking about communication in prisons one often means telephone calls and the old paper mail. The new way of communication is digital and includes, e-mail, SKYPE etc.

For most security levels in prison it is important to have some control of the offender's communication in order to prevent new crimes, threats on witnesses etc. In Sweden the SPSS considers that all communication should be put into the same platform and to keep control over it.

At the same time, communication with friends, family and also with other authorities before release is very important for the offender and it should be promoted.

In Ireland the Prison Service is about to pilot a video conferencing solution for offenders to have video visits with their families. This will be of special benefit to foreign national offenders. Ireland also has a pilot to allow offenders to call their families from their cells. This has proved very beneficial in other countries such as the UK and Germany in that it allows the offender, to make calls away from the landing and thereby reducing potential flash points, as well as being more convenient for the offender and their family.

The internal communication within a prison is too often made in written papers. The offender applies for something or s/he has a grievance about some case. The offender writes a paper and gets an answer or decision back in paper. A communication platform should be able to handle this communication with some connection to the offender management system. There is a lot of convenience both in time and costs to save here.

## **Electronic Monitoring**

Electronic monitoring (EM) has been in use since the 90's and most countries have good experience with it. The traditional EM is that the offender has a strap around the ankle with an electronic device. This device communicates via radio frequency with a transmitter which communicates via internet connection with a central database. There is no really intelligence in the device around the ankle, it just has to have a good battery.

In the next generation of EM the technic for monitoring is based on new technology. GPS, WIFI, the use of tele stations etc. This new technology gives prisons the possibility to track the offender at all times. It gives prisons also a possibility to automatically monitor an offender by exclusion and inclusion zones and times connected to that.

Lately Danish lawmakers have called for experiments and new possibilities on the use of GPS-monitoring instead of home-monitoring only. So far the Danish prison and probation system has not been able to accommodate this, but this is expected to change with the introduction of a new EM-system in February 2018.

## **The digital citizen**

The increasing number of interactions with private and public authorities require most of the time the use of digital services. While in prison the offender might need to use some of these services. This is often a conflict, because the offender might not have access to ICT at all, and then the prison will need to find a

labor intensive way around this. Especially when preparing the offender for release, the offenders will need to use these digital services to find a job and housing, handle payments etc.

In Denmark the ordinary citizen is used to digital interaction with their surroundings. 85% of all expenditure for consumption is done using some kind of digital payment and it is almost impossible to get by without home banking. Public authorities have developed digital services for decades and in some aspects of life the old paper based public processes have been phased out.

See below for example a list of digital services that all Danish citizens must know how to use:

### **Borger.dk**

Denmark has a web-entrance to all the services the Danish state provides called borger.dk – “borger” is the Danish word for citizen. Borger.dk helps citizens with registrations of all aspects in life like:

- Family matters
- School and education
- Health matters
- Senior citizens
- Disability
- Work/unemployment benefits
- Taxes
- Pensions
- Garbage
- Passport renewals/drivers license
- Moving abroad
- Applying for Danish citizenship

Just to name the most important ones.

To use Borger.dk one must have a “Nem ID” literally translated meaning “Easy ID”.

### **Nem-ID**

Easy Identification online – the service can be used on all kinds of homepages like one’s bank account, mortgages, student loans and pensions, Borger.dk, tax reporting, education, health matters and many more that need a safe and secure ID-verification. To supplement a personal access code, the citizen gets a card with codes to a digital key. So when one logs in with Nem-ID, the citizen verifies with a unique code.

### **NemKonto**

Easy account – for all public money transfers like student loans, salaries, unemployment benefits to citizens from officials.



### **NemSMS**

Easy texting to citizens – mostly used as reminders to citizens from libraries, public authorities and all kinds of appointments.

### **Netbank**

Digital banking – makes it possible for citizen to access safe banking.

### **Digital Post**

A digital letter box – online and secured by Nem-ID. All letters and messages from public authorities are sent by Digital Post and most letters and messages from private authorities likewise. Digital Post can also be used to send letters to authorities in a secure way.

Offenders do not always have access to the above digital services. For instance during custody, the offender cannot access the internet at all. Depending on their sentence and imprisonment offenders have different access to the internet and the above services. As a rule of thumb; in a maximum secured prison it is impossible for inmates to use the public digital services, but in minimum secured prison it is not a big problem. The inmate can have a personal PC and internet access.

In the minimum secured prisons the inmates can have all of the above digital services including **NemID**. Using NemID makes resocialization easier, making it possible for inmates to apply for services and taking responsibility for their own affairs while in prison (e.g. apply for education) and before they move out of prison (e.g. finding housing). An inmate who is getting released from a maximum security prison does not have this possibility.

Inmates who don't have access to the Internet cannot check their Digital Post. If a citizen does not have internet access, it is possible to be exempted from Digital Post. Instead, the inmate will receive letters from the public authorities by paper mail. The inmate may also choose to give a relative a written authority, so he/she can access the inmates Digital Post online.

The Danish Prison and Probation Service does not yet have a strategy regarding how to make the above digital possibilities accessible, while also dealing with the security issues. Problems raised by new digital services for citizens are handled one at the time, even though it is certain that new services will develop also in the years to come.

## The Future

It is important that offenders, as well as the rest of us, are able to handle digital tools. An offender must be prepared to life outside prison when released and that includes buying a bus ticket, parking a car, applying for a job or apartment or just for fun. Therefore, prisons must introduce digital devices in a more offensive way into the prison system.

In Sweden SPPS believes that every offender should be given a smartphone when entering a prison. With this device it can be controlled what he can and cannot do. When starting out at a maximum security prison the device should only be for communication with the prison and to make already cleared phone calls. Communication with the prison includes things such as treatment programs, education etc.

When coming to more open prisons, ICT can open up the possibility for other communication ways such as e-mail, SKYPE etc. The device can also be used to prepare for release. The offender can use the device to communicate when applying for a job or with the social welfare authorities.

On short time leaves, ICT can enable the GPS function and can control where the offender can be or might not be. Prison staff can then also communicate with the offender via the communication channels in the device, telephone or even SKYPE. ICT can add new devices, such as alcohol measuring. While being on SKYPE with the prison staff the offender has to blow in a device and it can be checked if s/he is sober.

The step from being locked up to going on a short time leave on your own is quite large. By using digital devices, prisons can help with the problems of this transition and the ICT can be a supportive function for the offender.

The traditional and stigmatizing foot strap can be replaced by voice and/or face recognition. ICT can randomly send text messages and the offender has to do a voice and/or face recognition test.

This platform can be used in the aftercare, by for example probation offices. If prisons have the platform they have a possibility to communicate with the offender. Also, there is the possibility to add apps to the platform. The offender has the possibility to finish the studies that he started in prison.

As a part of the Danish rehabilitation policies the Danish Prison and Probation Service has to inspire and motivate inmates. One of the cornerstones is rehabilitation through education. With improved e-learning and possible gamification in the cell and spending time in a motivational fashion, offenders can easier be part of normal society after prison.

Of course, many security issues need to be solved to make this possible.

This might lead to giving the offender access to new types of digital communities while in prison, and thereby giving the chance to maintain and develop positive social relations with close family and good friends outside prison. Especially for inmates that are parents, it gives them the possibility to nurture a better relationship with their children.

To achieve a broad public acceptance of the fact that it is positive to give offenders access to ICT in prisons, is still very much a challenge. At the moment this is as an ongoing political issue in Denmark.

In Ireland the Prison Service is rolling out an education platform for the offenders called Secure Prisoner Academic Network (SPAN), which will allow them to access centralized learning materials, and it will allow locked down access to the internet and to email. It will be provided over wired and WIFI connections.

For the future Ireland is looking at voice analytics to help prevent suicide, self-harm and attacks on other offenders. Ireland is also looking at video analytics to assist in prison security. Another interesting area is the use of sensors and software to detect changes in the offender while locked in their cell with the facility to alert officers if certain thresholds are exceeded.

At the Technology in Corrections (TIC) conference 2017 in Prague, Sweden presented their probation app. The app supports communication with the probation officer, information provision from the probation office such as scheduled meetings etc. and even has tools to help the offender in critical situations. Also, at the TIC virtual rehab and gaming as behavioral and treatment methods were presented. Merging these instruments together was clearly considered as a benefit.

Today prisons release offenders which were born before the digital revolution and it is our task to make them prepared for a new kind of society and living. And today prisons also lock up digital natives, who will be released after ten, fifteen maybe twenty years. By that time they should not be released as digital illiterates.

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