



PO21 Policy Recommendations for re-thinking Prison Officers' training

Executive Summary

Ana Nascimento
Carolina Pereira
Pedro das Neves
IPS_Innovative Prison Systems

Vítor Costa
UBI/BSAFE LAB

www.prison-officers21.org

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Summary

To meet the objectives proposed in the PO21 Project - namely the construction of a transnational initial training curriculum, the development of learning resources and a training course for prison officers; the promotion of sectoral qualifications and the facilitation of professional mobility through the adaptation and development of new offers of vocational education and training, according to the current and future needs of prison officers - data collection was carried out at various levels, including:

- National Level - **National Reports** - national report of each country present in the partnership (Portugal, Romania, Germany, and Belgium) considering: i) the jurisdiction of the training; (ii) admission requirements for the profession; iii) characterisation of the course or initial training courses and iv) characterisation of the course or course of continuous training.
- European Level - **European Report** - analysis of 21 EU countries considering: i) the jurisdiction of training; (ii) admission requirements for the profession; iii) characterisation of the course or initial training courses, and iv) characterisation of the course or course of continuous training.
- Auscultation of key actors:
DACUM workshops - to survey current and future needs and challenges, considering the duties inherent to the prison officer's professional profile and contributing to designing a curriculum.

- **Advisory Board Meetings** – the PO21 Advisory Board involves experts and critical stakeholders in the sector. Advisory Board discussions have produced a set of records integrated in minutes. The inputs relating to topics such as (i) the challenges prison officers face and their impacts on their daily work, (ii) requirements to be considered for the admission of prison officers, (iii) elements to be included in the initial and continuing training plan, (iv) the importance of collaboration between agencies and (v) future challenges.

- Auscultation of prison officers - **PO21 Survey** - through a questionnaire applied and distributed by the partnership countries, which intended to collect data on i) the professional posture of prison officers; (ii) the perception of the inclusion of training elements in their initial formation; (iii) interest in each of the training topics submitted; (iv) the teaching-learning methods of initial and continuing education; (v) the skills considered to be essential to develop; (vi) and also on the perceived importance of emerging areas of knowledge. The results obtained in each activity were subjected to a comparative analysis.

- The inputs from the participants in the **Transnational Roundtables** and **National Roundtables**

The **main results** from each source were the following:

- National and European Level - National and EU Reports -

- The **definition and regulation for training, profile and access to the PO career** depends entirely on the national governments or administrations – most countries have implemented a centralised training entity.

- **Recruitment process** – most countries recruit their POs through a national contest or tender; most candidates must be 18 or more, born in the country where they will work and have a clean criminal record. All candidates undergo a battery of exams (from language knowledge to physical and medical tests) during the selection process. Each country designs the set of exams. Most countries set EQF level 4 as the minimum entry qualification requirement.

- **Initial training** – varies from 3 weeks to 3 years, in a wide range of training hours, organisational models and pedagogical strategies, theoretical and practical training. All courses have a final exam evaluation, and some include a final project. The exit qualification level is mostly EQF level 5. The training contents mainly focus on Law, Psychology, use of Weapons, Administration, Self Defence and Professional Ethics.

- **Continuous training** – all countries assure continuous training provision, and for most, this is defined according to identified needs. In some countries, it is not mandatory.

- **PO profile is defined** in all countries. Some countries have implemented a career development and improvement path associated. The continuous training is related to career promotion possibilities and is designed for specific functions, both in the PO career path and other positions.

– Key actors:

- **DACUM workshops**

- The data collected contributed to defining the primary duties of a PO and dividing them into more specific categories. Although there are differences according to the national contexts, it was concluded that PO carry out similar duties which require equivalent knowledge, skills, and competencies.

- **Four primary current duties:** A – Prison – Facilities and Premises (Static and Procedural Security); B – Inmates’ management (Dynamic Security); C – Administrative procedures; D – PO well-being and Professional Development.
- **Future needs – common duties:** A – Surveillance and security through digital means and promotion of digital competencies (Static and Procedural Security) and B – Inmates’ management and supervision (dynamic security)
- **Future needs – specific duties:** Specific challenges – COVID 19 and Induction of new employees (minimising generational conflict).
- **Challenges identified are aligned with the needs**, focusing on the same subjects (ICT and security technologies, ageing inmates, inmates’ mental health, radicalisation, organised crime, emotional and relational skills, continuous training, legal frameworks, and career changes, interculturality, challenges regarding extreme situations such as the COVID 19 pandemic and concerns regarding the environment).

- **Advisory Board Meetings**

- **Current challenges faced by the prison systems:**

- Prison overcrowding; Recruiting (insufficient candidates to fulfil the vacancies, lack of attractiveness of the PO job, current employment market situation); Different types of inmates (ageing inmates, groups of prisoners more demanding and challenging to rehabilitate; the increasing number of serious offences, radicalisation); Poor connection to society; Poor relationship with other services (social services, training, housing, child protection); Outdated prison facilities and technology (for the use of officers and inmates); Budget reductions and insufficient budgets to face all demands; Inmates isolation; Constraining legislation regarding placement of inmates considering security levels; Different laws encompassing different views of the penal system; Training too theoretical.

- Impacts on everyday work:

- Shortage of staff due to difficulties in recruiting but also due to sick leaves – overstress and burnout leading to reduced support to inmates that may contribute to drug smuggling and addiction, inmates Isolation and fewer rehabilitation activities, higher levels of violence, resulting in higher recidivism rates;
- High levels of retirement of staff and massive employment of professionals with no experience; Lack of professional expertise can cause staff-inmate violence; The staff has to improvise and prioritise since it is impossible to face all requests; Work overload and harder work leads to frustration; Ratio PO/inmates highly unbalanced; Lack of career opportunities and training; Unfulfilled salary expectations;
- Lack of awareness from society in general.
- Difficulties in keeping up with the mission under the current circumstances
- Legislation - misunderstanding regarding the mission of correctional services;
- Lawmakers are unaware of the complexity of the job.

- Entry educational levels:

- Most agree with level 4 or a complete secondary education; although others defend level 3 candidates are easier to train to better meet the requirements after training:
- Entry requirements must be flexible. Establishing an entry-level 4 may risk not finding suitable candidates or that level 4 candidates will choose better-paid jobs or pursue other academic interests.

- Qualifications requirements

- Minimum age – 20 to 25 years; Driver’s license class B; No criminal record; Good health; Pass a physical function test that includes strength exercises and an endurance test at a possible admission day; Citizenship is not a requirement, but a work and residence permit must be verified; character and attitude.
- Some considered that the current entry requirements are too low and too general.
- Special qualities when choosing a candidate: Mastery of the language of the country; Proficiency in English; Autonomy – ability to make independent decisions; Teamwork – Good collaboration skills; Open, inclusive, enterprising, and flexible; reflection and critical thinking; Being familiar with the correctional Service’s social mission; Attitudes and values must be in line with the values of the penal care system.

- Exit EQF level

- Level 5, similar to the military post-secondary education institution, full-time education or correctional studies with bachelor’s and master’s degrees.

- Training – possible answers to tackle challenges and impacts

- More practical – more hands-on experience; Include more soft skills training – negotiation, assertive communication, problem-solving or conflict resolution; More focused on attitudes and values to foster rehabilitation and fairness regarding inmates’ treatment.
- Renovate old buildings and build new facilities, using the latest technology and provide trainees with simulation training.
- Increase training budgets and create training opportunities.
- Prioritise Continuous Training and provide more refresher training opportunities.

- Promote job attractiveness.
- Establish partnerships with universities.

- Initial training

- Length: between one and two years. A balance between theory and practice: there is a growing trend toward practical and experiential knowledge. Practical training makes the initial training more efficient, refines the theoretical part, consistently supports practice, and better staff integration. Regarding the organisation between the two components, some defend an extended period of theory followed by a more extended period of practice but most stand for an alternate model between theory and practice.

- Continuous Training

- It should be an ongoing process and is imperative to:
 - Constant update - Central prison issues; Legislation; New crimes; Health issues; New technologies (for staff and inmate's use); the change of many systems to more direct supervision and "normalcy" concept; Staff adaptation; Interculturality.
- Deal with the increasing complexity of the job; Be Appropriate to the role.
- Develop a commitment from the organisation - invest in staff training.
- Establish Partnerships with other educational institutions.
- Associate with professional development and appraisals procedures. A professional approach for a profession to increase standards and knowledge; Support changes with appropriate training; An opportunity for individual staff members, in a non-threatening environment, to identify areas where they see training as supporting their performance; Participation in training is an indicator of the employee's commitment to the service.

- Training opportunities involving different staff, considering different grades and roles.
 - Inter-agency and cross border cooperation should be promoted.
 - Future challenges – Deradicalization, dealing with different ethnicities, religions, and sexual orientation; everything that represents the procedure, action, and development of adequate professional behaviour must be presented in a practical way.
- **PO21 survey**
- **Education level** – most respondents completed secondary education.
 - **Correctional orientation** – There is a vast difference of opinion regarding most items regarding correctional orientation. On the one hand, POs believe in and support inmates’ rehabilitation. On the other hand, they seem to be primarily concerned with their daily security routines and not so much with inmates’ rehabilitation.
 - **Initial Training Topics** – there are many shared training topics, but the level of inclusion shows some disparity. Topics such as Mission of the Prison Service, Policies, Procedures, Rules and Regulations (Legal frameworks which impact the daily prison routines), Practice in a legal context (Constitutional Law, Criminal Law, Penal Law), Professional Ethics, Dynamic security and officer-inmate relationship (everyday communication and interaction with prisoners based on professional ethics) and Static and Procedural Security (procedural security: importance of security procedures; static security: barriers, locks, equipment used to restrain prisoners) are the most common whereas Use of social media by prison officers (sensible personal use of social media networks), Staff Support and Development (information on the supports available to staff, to carry out their role effectively, e. g., stress management), Use of Information Technologies (e.g., internet access for prisoners, e-health and e-learning for prisoners, biometrics, video-

conferencing) and Gender Responsiveness (awareness regarding women and gender-based violence) are the least included.

- **Importance of the training topics** – PO consider the most important topics the prison service's mission, Legal frameworks that impact the daily prison routines, dynamic security and the relationship with inmates, professional ethics, and staff support and development. When comparing the level of inclusion of the initial training topics with the importance given, some discrepancies appear, namely regarding Staff Support and Development (information on the supports available to staff to carry out their role effectively, e. g., stress management), considered very important but not at all or a little included in initial training, but also concerning Report writing, Suicide and Self-harm, Risk Assessment and inmate's Mental Health. To a lesser extent, Substance Misuse, Safety, and use of force and Static and Procedural Security. These discrepancies suggest that these topics should have a higher level of inclusion in the initial training.

- **Continuous training Topics** – most PO chose self-related topics such as Safety and Use of force, and Staff support and development, and, to a lesser extent, The mission of the Prison service. Subjects such as Human Rights, Anti-discrimination practices, Gender Responsiveness and even the use of social media by PO were not considered priorities by most respondents.

- **Initial and continuous training methods and techniques** – there is some similarity between countries with little usage of digital technologies in both training types and high usage of classroom-based sessions and group discussions. However, in continuous training, Film and Video, Role Playing and Demonstration on location are used more frequently.

- **PO skills and competencies** – most of the competencies reveal some level of the agreement since they have been considered important or very important and highly focused on the relationship with the inmates and their development and personal ability to respond to a challenging situation as opposed to the use of force.
- **Emerging knowledge** – most respondents considered it very important or extremely important to increase their knowledge in all topics, except for Mental Health, which is mainly considered moderately important.

These results gave rise to a report culminating in the proposal of recommendations on the elements to be considered for preparing a proposal for vocational training that may be nationally appropriate and internationally recognised (0.3.4 Recommendation Paper for re-thinking prison officers' training).

It should be noted that, throughout Europe, despite the specificities of each country, prison officers share common duties and tasks and, consequently, common needs and challenges.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Considering the results of the country analysis, the DACUM workshops, the Survey and the Advisory Board Members contributions and the **CoE guidelines**, the project partners recommend the following:

Mission

When reviewing the results of the correctional orientation, it is possible to see that its articulation with the prison mission is not balanced. The correctional orientation toward the prison mission is essential to promoting the desired professional posture.

#1 Prison Officers' training should be strengthened with modules that would cover essential topics such as the "mission of the prison administration", "minimum standards on inmates' treatment" (the European penitentiary rules, the European Charter of Human Rights, the Nelson Mandela Rules, the Bangkok Rules, etc.), "evidence-based rehabilitation approaches" (what works in prison rehabilitation), "motivational strategies", and "dynamic security".

Entry educational levels of staff and requirements regarding recruitment and selection

Most requirements are already taken into consideration when recruiting and selecting future PO. However, nationality and citizenship are still obstacles to potential professional mobility.

#2 Confirming common practice among the EU Member States, EQF level 4 (or a nationally recognised apprenticeship or vocational equivalent) is recommended as a minimum requirement for the recruitment of European Prison Officers.

#3 It would be advisable that PO's recruitment requirements include basic knowledge of a foreign language, enabling professional mobility and cooperation among the EU Member States.

#4 Nationality requirements should be revised or removed to foster professional mobility among the EU Member States (e.g., Germany et al.).

Education and Training (Features)

Length

The length and time distribution of initial training varies significantly among countries. However, international recognition of the Professional competence that promotes professional mobility requires a significant level of homogeneity in the training programs.

#5 Initial training length for each mandatory subject should be presented in terms of the number of hours required to achieve the requirements of the PO professional profile (not in weeks or months of training).

#6 The curriculum time distribution should be flexible and allow different organisation patterns to respond to country-specific needs and contexts (e.g., shorter initial training combined with on-the-job and compulsory continuous training modules instead of long-term academy training and vice-versa).

Organisation

Training organisations must allow different learning paths to promote the desired flexibility.

#7 A modular organisation for each training course is recommended (according to the Council of Europe guidelines). Each training module should include its learning outcomes to clarify the expected results, allow the recognition of competencies acquired, and foster mobility between member-states.

#8 Given the diversity of countries and respective laws and practices, core modules should consider both a harmonised European structure and national specific modules (legislation/ regulations), allowing the recognition of training by the other Member States, fostering European mobility, while allowing the respect for national diversity.

#9 An alternate training model (theory-practice-theory-practice) should be introduced or reinforced.

#10 Training delivery should take advantage of the existing learning methods and technologies (online and face-to-face, interactive learning, e-learning and blended learning, virtual reality, and augmented reality).

#11 The training should follow the guidelines of the Council recommendation 2020/c 417/01 on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness, and resilience¹.

¹ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/08b9af27-3465-11eb-b27b-01aa-75ed71a1/language-en>

Training topics

Although it was possible to find a core of topics already considered in most countries, broader consensual core topics are needed to respond to POs and professional mobility needs.

#12 The inclusion of training “modules for specific prison populations” (women, juveniles, men, elders, mentally disabled, other nationalities) and “interculturalism” is advisable.

#13 Considering country differences regarding the level of inclusion of relevant training topics, training modules on topics such as “radicalisation prevention in prisons”, “ageing in prisons”, “mental health”, “use and impact of security technologies and Information and communication technologies (ICT) in prisons” (inmate and officer’s ICT tools), among other relevant and emerging topics should be available.

#14 Modules on “ICT” and “sustainability” with a general overview of these subjects and prison-specific are advisable.

#15 Training modules on “foreign languages” (e.g., English) as a second working language to help communicate with foreign inmates, increase POs mobility and communication with colleagues in other countries are recommended.

#16 Initial training must include a strong component of “human rights”, “gender responsiveness”, and “anti-discriminatory practices”.

#17 Given the nature of the profession, a mandatory specific module concerning POs “well-being” and “personal and development” is advisable.

#18 Topics such as the “practice in a legal context”, “safety and use of force”, “psychological, social work and criminological approaches and policies”, “procedures”, and “rules and regulations” are sufficiently covered in the PO’s initial training throughout Europe. However, topics such as “the mission of the prison service”, “dynamic security”, “professional ethics”, “static and procedural security”, “sentence planning and implementation”, “substance misuse”, “risk and needs assessment”, “conflict and crisis management”, “dealing with violent inmates” and “organised crime in prisons”, should be emphasised with a strong practical component.

#19 Topics such as “communication”, emotional”, and “relational competencies” should be promoted transversally.

Training methods

There are various training methods in the initial and continuous training, although highly dependent on classroom-based sessions.

#20 Promote methods that foster transversal competence development in significant ways, such as digital competencies, teamwork, communication, interpersonal relationships, and Emotional management competencies.

#21 Promote the use and explore the potential of distance and blended learning and the use of virtual reality scenarios and augmented reality on initial and continuous training, when appropriate.

Trainees Assessment

Trainees’ assessment is transversally considered, and traditional evaluation methods are dominant.

#22 Regarding initial training assessment, it is advisable to be more practical and less theoretical, based on practical skills embedded in the theoretical knowledge acquired.

#23 Training results should be expressed in learning outcomes to clarify the expected results and to foster mobility between Member-States.

EQF Level

Exit training levels are not always considered.

#24 It is advisable to assign an EQF level at the end of the initial training. Considering the average entering level 4, a standard EQF level 5 should be observed.

Trainers/Tutors

As important as the training organisation and curriculum is the key staff involved.

#25 Given its importance in reinforcing the organisational values and culture, reinforcing positive behaviours, and minimising potential conflicts on the integration of recruits, on-the-job mentorship/tutoring/coaching of new prison officers should be considered.

#26 on-the-job mentors, tutors, coaches, or field training officers should be specifically trained to perform this task and be periodically evaluated.

#27 On-the-job mentors, tutors, coaches, or field training officers should be recognised as such, being this task formally recognised as part of their professional profile.

Training Assessment

Monitoring and evaluation of the training is a crucial element.

#28 PO's initial training courses evaluation should consider a holistic approach (including curricula, training methods and trainers' evaluation) and be audited by an independent body. It should also be evaluated on a long-term basis to determine the training impact on the effectiveness and performance of the POs.

Continuous Training

The PO's professional training considers a path between initial and continuous training. Although the last is less regulated, it seems to present a vital role in PO's career and performance and can be a decisive motivational factor.

#29 Continuous training should consider specialisation according to the type of prison/characteristics of the prison population.

#30 Continuous training should be mandatory concerning recycling courses ("legal framework", "minimum standards on the treatment of inmates", "ICT", "dynamic security", "staff well-being and development", "inmates' affairs") and trainers training.

#31 Continuous training should be related to and considered an essential element of career development and promotions.

#32 PO's continuous training modules and competencies should be recognised as part of the respective National Catalogue for Qualifications or National Qualifications System.

#33 Initial and continuous training should relate to a training and learning path that should allow POs to pursue education and training to EQF levels 6 and 7.

#34 Specific topics such as “safety and use of force”, “staff support and development”, and “mission of the prison service” should always be considered as continuous training topics.

#35 The prison services should periodically assess PO’s needs and attend to them through continuous training.

Other relevant recommendations

Apart from training, some challenges deserve attention, namely career support, mental health promotion among PO, promote activeness in the career. In this sense, some recommendations **emerge from the work presented in this report.**

#36 Career counselling should be available.

#37 Attending to the growing responsibilities and the workload of PO, the creation of specific profiles/specialisations should be analysed.

#38 National and international evidence-based practices and research should be constantly observed and feed training programmes.

#39 Inter-agency and cross border cooperation in training and sharing experiences should be fostered.

#40 Initial and continuous training should embed an ethical code that regulates all prison service areas and aligns with the respect for human rights.

#41 Given the difficulty of attracting and retaining POs, prison administrations should develop professional marketing campaigns to attract candidates (e.g., UK, France, Switzerland, Norway, and Denmark).

#42 Complementarily to financial incentives, other incentives should be sought to motivate PO to remain in the job whenever possible.

#43 Psychological support should be available for all PO to prevent burnout situations.



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