

## PREP - PRISONER REINTEGRATION THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND PSYCHOLOGY

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The Erasmus+ project partners from Germany, Ireland and Romania want to achieve the ambitious goal mentioned above. EPEA was able to attend a presentation of this project and was very impressed.

«More recently, people have tried an alternative approach to reintegration into work i.e. reintegration through entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship programs, which were often developed in and imported from the USA, have tried to foster entrepreneurial thinking and action in prisoners so that post release they can become more autonomous and self-determined through self-employment rather than depending solely on employment. Although the idea seems plausible at first sight, such entrepreneurship trainings come with their limitations.



*Members of the Erasmus+ funded Consortium on day one of the project*

For example, in a prison environment, using traditional teaching and training methods, it is almost impossible to have a competency- and project-based training approach, as prisoners are not able to test out their ideas whilst still being incarcerated. Similarly, the few available educational programs regarding entrepreneurship for prisoners have mainly focused on the business mindset approach aimed at delivering basic knowledge on running

a business. However, recent research (Frese et al., 2016) has shown that in addition to this business approach, a psychological mindset approach to entrepreneurship education is fruitful in helping to generate the entrepreneurial intentions of people. These studies have been primarily conducted with students; however, it seems logical that such an approach would be especially beneficial to prisoners as it is crucial to work on prisoners' attitudes, motivation and self-efficacy for them to develop a long-term oriented way of thinking and acting.

Lastly, traditional prison entrepreneurship programs are failing to translate the knowledge gained during imprisonment into action once prisoners are released. Hence, it is important that an entrepreneurial training program for prisoners takes a multidisciplinary approach and includes the post-release phase. Of course, educational programs need to start during imprisonment in order to lay the groundwork for future self-employment and ideally such programs can also utilise digital teaching methods for their sustainability. But once free (then) ex-prisoners will likely realise the challenges of enacting their entrepreneurial thoughts and ideas and will need personal guidance and coaching for following through with them. Although in many European countries there are support organisations that help ex-prisoners to deal with the basic challenges of life including finding work, such organisations lack the knowledge and training in respect to entrepreneurial coaching for ex-prisoners. In European countries, such as Ireland, Germany and Romania, the increasing focus on entrepreneurship for prisoners has led to a growing need for evidence-based approaches to entrepreneurship training as a means for ex-prisoners to join the labour market.

The overarching objective of the project is to design and evaluate a new integrated approach to an entrepreneurship education program for prisoners. These programs are evidence-based approaches to reduce the recidivism rate among prisoners, but given that most entrepreneurial ideas fail, a program that solely focuses on business aspects is not enough for achieving positive long-term effects. Thus, our new integrated and multidisciplinary approach aims at improving previous programs in three different ways:

- A multidisciplinary approach for the training, including fundamental training modules for reintegration.
- Integrate the psychological-mindset approach into entrepreneurial training programs, which might prove to be even more relevant to prisoners.
- Incorporate the post-release phase into the training by building capacity in community-based organisations for entrepreneurial coaching of ex-prisoners.

**More specifically by implementing the project we want to achieve the following goals:**

- Creating an evidence-basis for prison entrepreneurship programmes
- Teaching prisoner's fundamental knowledge and skills that will facilitate their integration.
- Foster entrepreneurial intentions among prisoners and train.
- Build capacity in community-based organisations for
- Raising awareness in the society at large for a more inclusive approach towards ex-prisoners
- Inclusiveness.

These goals can only be achieved by a multidisciplinary perspective and a holistic approach towards entrepreneurship for prisoners. This consortium, therefore, combines expertise from sociology, social work, psychology and business in planning to create a learning experience that reaches a large number of prisoners across Europe and motivates many of them to take steps for becoming self-employed after they are released.”

Text from the project’s website <https://prisonentrepreneurship.eu>

On X/Twitter [https://x.com/prep\\_eu](https://x.com/prep_eu)

The Coaching toolkit “Information on Entrepreneurial Coaching” and “Entrepreneurial Coaching Guideline” can be accessed via this link <https://prep.learnkey.lt>

See the scientific article in the Journal of Education and Work

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13639080.2024.2335466#d1e1069>

