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Similarities and Differences in Transition Management Strategies in four EU Member States



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The prison population across Europe is largely made up of people who have been excluded rather than included, have poor formal educational qualifications, have few employment skills and have experienced long-term housing, family and addiction problems. Women and men leaving prison bring with them the effects of a custodial sentence and encounter suspicion, rejection and hostility as they make the transition from prison to society.

For higher risk prisoners leaving custody these factors increases the risk of their return to crime and custody. The risk of re-offending is high. Up to half of those released returned to prison within two years. Research shows that effective resettlement can assist the prevention of further offending, the reduction of victimisation and is in the best interests of the community in general. This is critical in the management of higher risk offenders who pose the greater risk of further offending.

Across Europe there are examples of effective resettlement initiatives and good practice but no single jurisdiction has all of the key elements in place. There is a need to share, learn and develop best practice for better outcomes not only for the prisoners leaving custody but also for communities and the criminal justice systems.

Estonia, Finland, Ireland and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (Germany), have agreed to develop this project, European treatment and transition management of high risk offenders project 2012 -2014.

The Irish partners, the Probation Service and Irish Prison Service hosted work stream 2 workshop in Haymarket, Dublin between 12th -15th June 2013.

The objective of work stream 2 was to compare existing systems of transition management. The intention was to identify those national programmes and elements of transition management systems which are common among partners, those which are different and where gaps exist.

The workshop examined integrated case management, information and knowledge sharing for best practice, reduction of duplication and enhanced efficiency. An integrated resettlement process could contribute to reducing recidivism and thereby to the safety of the society in general and the protection of potential victims in particular.

Other partners involved in the reintegration process of offenders, e.g. health, addiction and health services, housing authorities, employment services, police, courts, prosecutors, lawyers, non-profit organizations and local authorities will be invited.

The shared learning, practice exchange and networking of practitioners in the different justice systems will in turn contribute to the creation of an enhanced European identity and shared understanding.

It was agreed in the course of a partner meeting prior the workshop that the definition of high risk for the purpose of the project should be revised to include reference to a violent and sexual offender to avoid any possible misunderstanding by readers and other interests. The revised definition now reads:



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“A high risk offender (a violent or sexual offender) is someone who presents a high probability to commit crimes which may cause very serious personal, physical or psychological harm.”

Identifying who is high risk and how they are evaluated was a key topic of discussion throughout the workshop presentations and discussions. What is done with the information to address the issues in prison, in transition and on release was explored. The risk that an individual could be labelled as “high risk” attracting security and related attention while neglecting interventions to reduce that risk was acknowledged and highlighted as a priority for action in the project.

How this was done and how, when and what for the information was used varied from country to country. It was, however, clear that assessment was a critical factor that should be consistently used to inform decision-making and interventions in preparation for release, transition management and post-custody supervision.

The role of NGO/community based services working in prisons was identified as valuable in supporting the transition phase and continuing a supportive engagement in the community after release. There were different levels of such engagement with NGO/community and voluntary services engaged in this work in the partner jurisdictions. It was highlighted as an area that could be promoted and developed in the course of this project.

The importance of co-operation, engagement and co-ordination between the criminal justice agencies and mainstream social service providers in prison and in the community was highlighted as an area where there were differences in approach and practice in partner jurisdictions. The workshop concluded that such co-operation and so-operation between services and agencies is important in developing good and effective practice. It helped, in particular, in preparing the services and prisoners on release to continue engagement in a positive and less distrusting or hostile manner. It assisted “joined-up” service provision and easier access by ex-prisoners.

The development of a relationship, open communication and a level of mutual trust between the services, supervisors, in particular, and the offender was highlighted as valuable in sustaining the transition, coping with unexpected and other difficulties that can arise and reducing the risk of relapse. Again it was clear that there are differing levels of engagement and communication that could be improved. This was viewed as an area where skills training practice could be shared between partners.

It was agreed that the project has made significant progress to date in establishing a common awareness of shared issues and differences in practice in the transition management of high risk offenders, identified existing practices, opportunities for learning and room for improvement.

It was acknowledged that there was considerable evidence of good practice, knowledge and expertise among the partners, potential to strengthen weaknesses, willingness to work together to share learning and experienced and to proceed to the next workshop to identify best practice.



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