



Our prisons working with returned prisoners
from abroad

- The view from Romania -

THIS PRESENTATION IT IS ABOUT:

- A current overview of the Romanian Prison System;
- The project *The Ethnography of the Prisoner's Transitions* (EPTrans)
- The research on prisoner's expectations about transfer



THE NATIONAL ADMINISTRATION OF PENITENTIARIES

It has the mission to co-ordinate material and humane efforts for the improvement of life quality in detention, to ameliorate the humane condition for the inmates, to optimize the activities and to place the humane being first in any circumstance.



THE NATIONAL ADMINISTRATION OF PENITENTIARIES

27 605 inmates in:

- 17 prisons having open and semi-open regime
- 17 prisons having close and high security regime
- 23 units with special sections for preventive arrest
- 2 detention centers (juvenils and young people)
- 1 prison for women (plus 6 sections specially designed for women, in other prison units)
- 2 educative centers



DETENTION REGIMES

Executing regimes :

- The set of rules which underlay the execution of the freedom depriving penalties;
- Based on the progressive and regressive systems:

High security regime

Close regime

Semi-open regime

Open regime



PRISONER'S TRANSITIONS: ROMA AND ROMANIAN PRISONERS FINDING THEIR WAY BACK INTO SOCIETY

- **Aim** – to develop an advanced understanding of the re-entry process from the prisoner's perspective
- In two **locations**: Romania & Norway
- **Participants**: 60 (Romanians and Roma)
- **Data collection**:
 - Questionnaires
 - In-depth interviews – prior, after one week, after one month, after three months, after six months, after one year
 - Observations
 - Scale – problems, hope, citizenship
 - Photo



PRE-RELEASE PERCEPTIONS

Prison experience

- As a loss – time, family, health
- As pains of imprisonment – being away from the family, having to obey orders, accept the company of ‘evil others’, getting ill, not having capital
- As a learning & growth experience – learning about self and others, about life, strengthening resilience, becoming wiser

Imagining release

- Great happiness
- Re-birth and NEW BEGINNING
- But also reunion, rest & recovery, uncertainty



THE DAY OF RELEASE

Welcome rituals:

- The heroes – especially Roma and only those with large families
- The family man – 1-3 people waiting from the family
- The ‘lone crusader’ – one relative or friend waiting

ALL – Super-optimists and willing to start a NEW LIFE !!!



RECOVERY

First two weeks

- **Prolongation of the prison behaviours (prison syndrome)** – ‘waking up hours’, prison language, throwing the phone, looking for the escort etc.
- **Confusion and disorientation** – mental adaptation (feeling dizzy, getting tired when many people/cars around)
- **Centrality of the family** – ‘more time with the family, the kids ...’, ‘I feel very good. I am among my family’ – strongly emotional
- **Limited mobility** – ‘I don’t feel like going outside’, ‘I stayed around the house’ etc.
- **Rejoining the social networks** – visits to and from family or friends – to receive hope and help – it seems to follow the welcoming ceremonies
- **Avoiding trouble** – avoiding ‘old friends’ or ‘risky places’
- **Dealing with social isolation** – no help, no hope
- **Fear of failure** – knowing that you can go back at the first small mistake.
- **Medical checks** - some



ACTIVATION

After the second week

- The institutional behaviours fades away – less PTSD
- Main concern – getting a JOB !!!
- Other concerns: ‘face work’, problem solving, medical checks
- Lots of obstacles and problems: anxiety and disorientation, building good relationships with the kids, dealing with temptations, fighting bureaucracy, criminal record, the absence of state
- Plans: find a job, emigrate, move from the area
- Optimisms – more obstacles -----more pessimism



CONCLUSIONS

- **Family** – the best context in the reintegration process – moral and practical support, moral pressure to become productive, context for a new identity.
- There is a **window of opportunity** for a new life within 2-3 weeks from release (super-optimism, fear of prison, ambition/hope, family credit)
- **Employment interventions** should be intensified/finalized as soon as possible after week 2 – timing.
- First two weeks – family interventions – rel. with children
- **Main impediments:** mental adaptation, guilty feelings, jobs, fear of failure, temptation, social isolation, stigma, dealing with children, absence of state, bureaucratic nightmare.
- After one month – no work, no new identity, social pressure, temptation, romanticized prison life – **RE-OFFENDING**



- The Ethnography of the Prisoner's Transitions (EPTrans)
- Grant from Iceland, Lichtenstein and Norway
- www.reentry.eu



RESEARCH ON PRISONER'S EXPECTATIONS EXPERIENCING TRANSFER - EXPECTATIONS AND EARLY EXPERIENCES

- Q – How prisoners perceive the opportunities provided transfer in Romania?
- 133 prisoners held in Italy (n=11) and Spain (n=122)
- Questionnaires (n=88) and Interviews (n=41)



DEMOGRAPHICS

- Male
- Age between 22-40
- Sentenced for theft and robbery



MOTIVATION FOR SELECTING THESE COUNTRIES

- The most popular destination for the Romanian economic migration:
- 2014 – legal migration:
 - 1 mil. In Italy
 - 798,513 citizens in Spain

 - 2,886 Romanian prisoners in Italy
 - 1,849 Romanian prisoners in Spain



FINDINGS

- 41% of the Romanian in Spain would be interested
- reasons: close to family, more attention in prison (work, prison leaves)
- if released sooner even if the family is in Spain:

‘Researcher: If the family is still in Spain would you like to transfer to Romania?’

Participant: It does not matter if the family is here [in Spain]. They could move to Romania with me or they could just send me money.

R: Do you think the family will follow you in Romania?’

P: Evidently. If I come out to freedom sooner ...’



FINDINGS

Demotivating factors:

- The length of time for the procedure
- The uncertainty of the outcome
- If close to the end of the sentence – release grant in Spain (6-18 months, 426 Euro in 2015)
- Faster release in Italy



CASE STUDY

- VN was transferred from Spain where he was sentenced for organized crime for 18 years. He was in the respect module and had responsibilities in the prison for which he was paid. After serving 9 years in Spain he decided to be transferred to Romania to be close to his wife and child and get released sooner.
- Transfer procedure – confusing and very long (8 months)
- His wife abandoned him meanwhile
- In Romania he was classified in a closed prison – as if he is at the beginning of the sentence – not many activities !!!
- The closest close prison is 200 Km away from where his mum lives – social isolation
- His prison file contained only the court decision approving the transfer – his progress in Spain was not considered.
- The conditional release prospects are not clear – credits, semi-open and open regime etc.



SOME SOLUTIONS

- More transparency
- Start with those prisoners:
 - willing to transfer
 - at the beginning of the sentence and with families in the RO
 - With better social reintegration prospects in RO
- Inform all foreign prisoners about the opportunity and the procedure (brochure in the national language)
- On a long run, make the **conditional release conditions** as close as possible
- Increase the **cooperation** between prison administrations so that progress in one system is taken into account in another – assessment, programs, health issues etc.



A NEW INITIATIVE LEGISLATION !

- The Minister of Justice proposed that for every 30 executed days from the prison sentence, the inmate will have a benefit of 3 days that will be deducted from the total prison sentence, because of the bad condition in our prison system!





Questions and discussions

Thank you!

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