



bleep

Blended • Learning • Environment • European • Prisons

Policy Recommendation Paper

Authors

Mustafa Ginesar | mginesar@gmail.com

Ruth McFarlane | ruthmcfarlane@btinternet.com

Veronique Aicha | veronique.aicha@gmail.com



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Executive summary

Education in prison is a powerful phenomenon that can allow prisoners to acquire new skills and give them a renewed sense of purpose. Many research activities have proven that prisoners actively participating in education and training programmes are less likely to return to prison after release. Moreover, the trained prisoners seem more likely to find employment on release as integration into the economic life after imprisonment is crucial to reducing recidivism.

This document was developed in the context of the BLEEP project, which the EU funds within the framework of the Erasmus Plus Programme. BLEEP aims to generate methodological tools based on a blended learning approach to facilitate the digital literacy of prisoners and the digitalisation of prison education in European Prisons.

As part of the communication and knowledge transfer strategy, this document aims to inform policymakers and decision-makers from the local level up to the EU level about the key conclusions of the project. Furthermore, the policy recommendations aim to stimulate further development of and support for improving the quality and efficiency of prison education activities by stressing the brief recommendations for policymakers.

This paper consists of five main chapters in addition to the “Executive Summary” and “Annexes and References” sections.

The first chapter presents the BLEEP project in general. The second one is about the methodology of this paper and the sources of information. The third chapter summarises the legal framework of EU and partner countries regarding prison education but not in a general perspective; instead, a more focused approach to the digitalisation of prison education means benefiting from technological developments to improve prison education operations. Chapter four indicates the key findings of the BLEEP project through the sources of information explained in Chapter Three. And the final chapter lists the BLEEP recommendations for policymakers and policy implementer actors, particularly at the local level.



Section 1. The BLEEP Project

What is BLEEP?

Blended Learning Environment for European Prisoners (BLEEP) project is about digital inclusion in the broadest sense. It foresees creating and implementing an innovative, creative, Europe-focused blended learning platform for all (ex)inmates. The individual owns the learning process that can be monitored to stimulate progress in developing skills. The BLEEP project will contribute to the facilitators' professional development by supporting the reintegration of inmates into society before their release from prison. This project is being developed jointly by Netherlands, Turkey, Italy, Portugal, and Romania.

Mission and Objectives

The main priority of the BLEEP project is that reintegration should be perceived as a learning process based on the needs and qualities of an individual, which can be monitored and analysed so that the learning process can be improved.

BLEEP project's main objectives are:

1. Design a tailor/made b-learning environment that all European inmates can use.
2. Design a universal environment where the learning process can be monitored, aiming at more effectiveness.
3. Develop mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of adult learning policies and track learners' progress.
4. Support the setting up of and access to upskilling pathways in correctional settings/institutions.
5. Extend and develop the competencies of correctional staff who support offenders learning.

BLEEP Partnership

PROMOTOR

[Click F1](#), The Netherlands



PARTNERS

[Chains](#), The Netherlands



[Kocaeli Open Correctional Institution](#), Turkey



[IPS Innovative Prison Systems](#) (Qualify Just IT solutions and Consulting), Portugal



[STEPS](#), Italy



[Exodus Foundation South Holland](#) (Stichting Exodus Zuid-Holland), The Netherlands



[Bucharest-Jilava prison](#), Romania

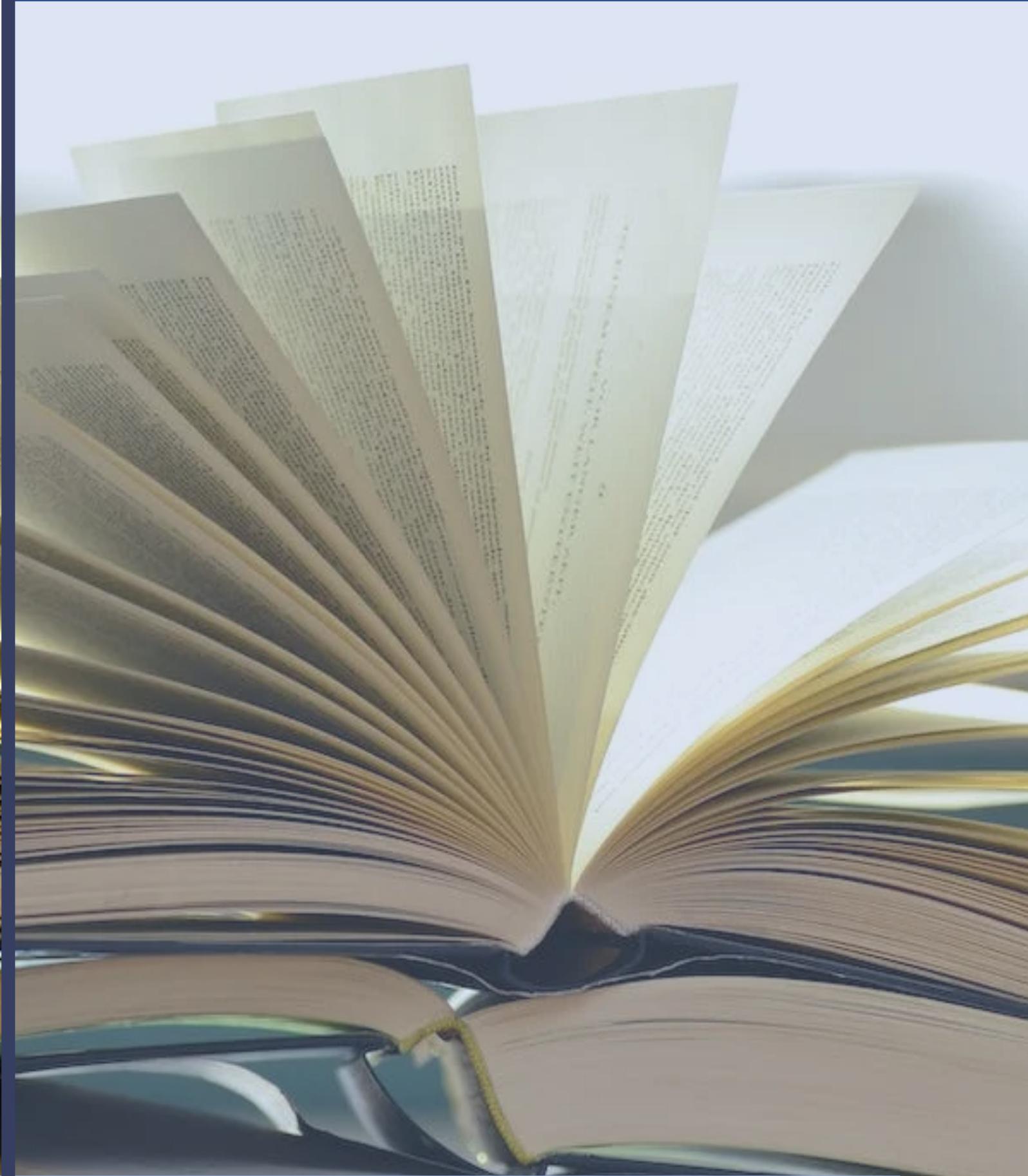


[Directorate-General for Reintegration and Prison Services](#), Portugal



[EPEA – European Prison Education Association](#), The Netherlands





Section 2. Methodology and Sources of Information

Study Context?

The context of this study aimed to examine these key questions:

- What are the main aspects of national policies of partner countries regarding the digitalisation of prison education? Common & different aspects?
- What is the level of realisation of these policies? The mismatch level between the policy and its implementation?
- What are inmates' needs and opinions regarding prison education (particularly accessing digital tools during imprisonment)? (within the perspective of 21st Century Skills)
- What are the needs and opinions of prison educators regarding prison education and their professional developments?
- What are the opinions of prison managers and other local/regional/national decision-makers regarding prison education?
- What are the opportunities that emerged from technology and blended learning methodology?
- What are the good examples in partner countries?
- Finally, what are the specific policy recommendations BLEEP can reveal?

Methodological Framework

The methodological framework of this paper is based on three main sources of information:

- a) Literature Review on prison education and studies published on the issue
- b) Findings of BLEEP research activity conducted in the starting phase of the project. The research activity also examined the existing policies and plans of the EU and partner countries (NL, RO, IT, PT, TR) for upcoming policies regarding the digitalisation of prison education;
- c) Lessons learnt and findings through BLEEP methodology testing pilots in partner countries;
 - Evaluation by participants (inmates and ex-inmates)
 - Evaluation by facilitators and observers, who are full-time prison staff

- Interviews with local decision makers (judiciary actors, prison managers etc.)

In the first 8 months of the project, the partners conducted a survey activity and generated a research report. The main goal of the survey is to answer the following question: how can we create an innovative, Europe-focused E-Learning environment in which the learning process of an individual can be monitored from the inside to outside prison?

1. Research into existing methods concerning acquiring skills needed to “survive” in 21st-century skills; “How is the learning organised in European prisons regarding education and reintegration?”
2. Research into the needs of inmates, teachers and staff focused on reintegration and education; “How would they like to see these two be integrated? What role do they see for themselves, their responsibilities and others?”
3. Research into setting up blended learning environments in closed, digitally poor settings.
4. Research into ex-inmates needs regarding education and reintegration; “How can the learning process in prison be transferred with the individual to the outside?”

After the first versions of BLEEP tools were generated, the consortium members organised pilot testing activities in different types of prisons in the Netherlands, Romania, Portugal and Turkey. These activities were used not only to test the BLEEP methodology but also to identify the specific needs of the inmates and the prison staff regarding prison education in general and their needs for digital skills.

After the first round of pilot, activities were accomplished, the consortium updated and improved the BLEEP methodology and its tools. In the last year of the project, the second round of pilot testing activities was organised in the same countries and prison contexts, but mostly with different participants. The evaluation forms of this second pilot included specific questions to precisely identify the views, needs and expectations of our target groups on policy-making issues.

Meanwhile, the consortium members dealt with literature review and collected key data from the existing research published on relevant subjects. Furthermore, many partners conducted face-to-face interviews with local/regional decision-makers on prison education to gather more relevant information.

In the final phase, the BLEEP consortium combined all the key findings through these three main sources and prepared a list of feasible, realistic, needed and practical policy recommendations for decision-makers.



Section 3. Legal Framework for Prison Education as regards “Digitalization of Prison Education”

Council of Europe Recommendations

In 1989, the Council of Europe adopted a set of recommendations outlining the needs and responsibilities concerning the education of imprisoned persons in Europe. These recommendations stipulate that all imprisoned persons should be offered the opportunity to engage in educational activities and that these activities should serve to develop the whole person, be conducive to effective reintegration, and encourage a reduction in recidivism.

These recommendations form the basis of the objectives of the European Prison Education Association, and have been ratified in the educational policies of a number of European countries. More recently, the Council of Europe adopted a resolution (CONF/PLE(2020)RES1) relating to Access to digital technology in Europe and the responsibility of member states. This contains a number of points which are relevant to prison education, and supports the updated guidance from Europris¹ that “Education in prison should include access to and training in the use of modern digital Information Technology” (recommendation 7, 2018).

This includes the following specific recommendations :

- Prison authorities and prison education providers should invest in modern digital technology to ensure access and training in digital skills to enhance the learning experience and provide prisoners with the skills and preparation to better manage their lives.
- Where appropriate, access to modern technology should include secure or supervised access to the Internet to better equip prisoners to prepare for liberation and manage their lives on release from custody.
- Where access to the Internet is not allowed or not feasible, a range of alternative options such as Moodle ‘Intranet’ systems should be employed to help mirror the digital experience.
- Where access to the Internet is permitted, prison authorities and education services should collaborate to review and enrich curriculum choices, access to rehabilitation services and to promote responsible on-line use and practices.
- Where access to digital technology is permitted prison authorities and education provides should promote compacts with prisoners detailing agreed protocols for Internet use and educational development.

¹ EUROPRIS: <https://www.euopris.org/file/table-of-recommendations-and-practices-in-european-prison-education/>

Detailed research on the effective use of digital technology for the sake for prison education is limited, partly due to the lack of any substantial practice in this area and due to the challenges of carrying out ethically approved research in prisons. The BLEEP consortium has gathered information from its partner agencies to create a summary of good practice in this areas.

Worldwide Examples

Kerr and Willis² compare approaches in Australia and the rest of the world. In particular, they highlight the use of the PrisonCloud in Belgium, a secure platform which enables prisoners to “access services relating to all aspects of life such as employment, education, leisure, healthcare, finances and legal matters. It aims to improve offender reintegration into society by normalising the use of technology and responsibility for such matters through a ‘seamless’ linking of classroom-style and in-cell learning”. However, due to the age of many prisons, this system is currently only in use in one of Belgium’s 45 prisons. A similar system is adopted in prisons in England and Wales, known as the Virtual Campus, which is available on specific computers in the prison education centres. As a result of the Covid pandemic, more progress has been made on the provision of offline devices to be used in cells rather than in the prison education centres. Secure Chromebooks with a purpose built learning platform have been approved for in cell learning and are currently being trialled in 55 of the 121 prisons in England and Wales.

This approach of “normalising” use of technology is also being adopted in Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands. Norway has created an infrastructure called DFS (Desktop for Students) which encourages prisoners to become e-citizens. Student-inmates in Norwegian prisons can access learning platforms and learning resources outside the prison, communicate with teachers, upload assignments, research online and take online exams³. The aim for the system is to normalize the learning situation for inmates with the situation for students outside prisons. In autumn 2022 a new project will introduce an updated version of the system (DFS 2.0), this time based on a modified version of Microsoft Teams for Education.

² Kerr, A., & Willis, M. (2018). Prisoner use of information and communications technology. Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice. Retrieved from <https://aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi560>.

³ Pike, A., & Adams, A. (2012). Digital exclusion or learning exclusion? An ethnographic study of adult male distance learners in English prisons. Research in Learning Technology, 20(4), 363–376. <https://doi.org/10.3402/rlt.v20i0.18620>

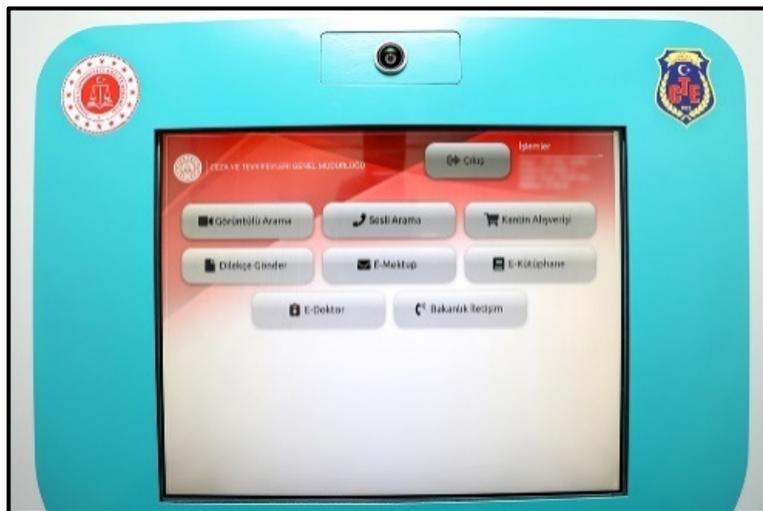
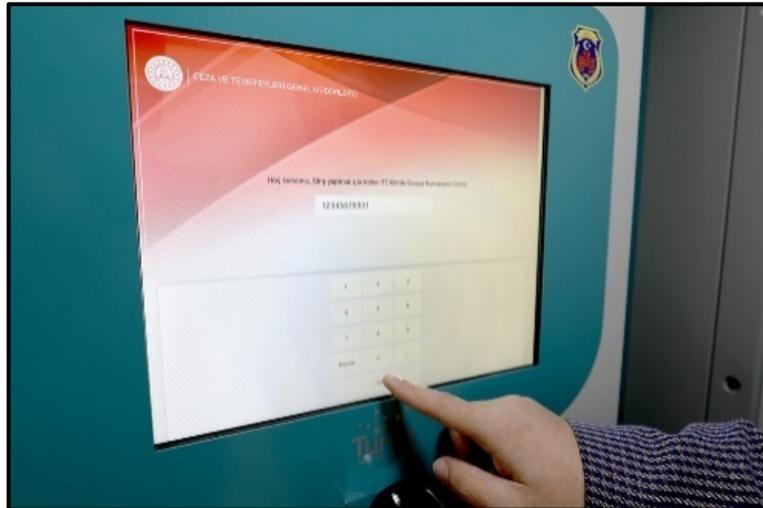
ACEP Project (Turkey)

The Turkish Directorate General of Prisons and Detention Houses (DGPDH) is developing various projects for penitentiary institutions to benefit from the technological opportunities. One of the studies initiated DGPDH is “The Integration of Information Technologies into Penitentiary Institutions (ACEP)”⁴. The ACEP project is also among the digital targets set in the Human Rights Action Plan and Judicial Reform Strategy Document announced by the Turkish Government.

The most important pillar of the ACEP project is multimedia devices (MMC) to be placed inside the prisons. The inmates can access MMC devices to be installed in the living areas of inmates with biometric data such as fingerprint and face recognition. MMC devices have digital applications such as video calls and voice calls, canteen shopping, sending petitions, e-letter, e-library, e-doctor and communication with the Ministry or its relevant institutions. In addition, the enquiry process, which is one of the routine applications in penitentiary institutions, can be done with these devices. DGPDH aims to install 20.000 MMC devices in penitentiary institutions by the end of 2022.

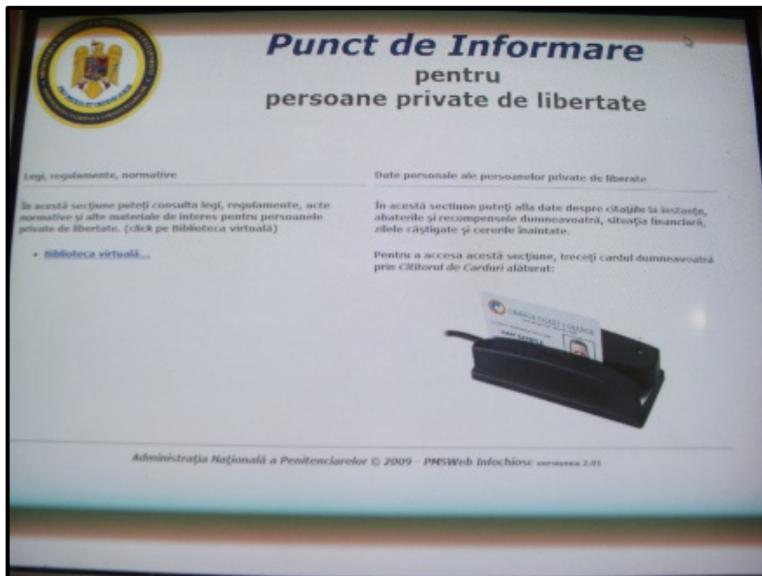
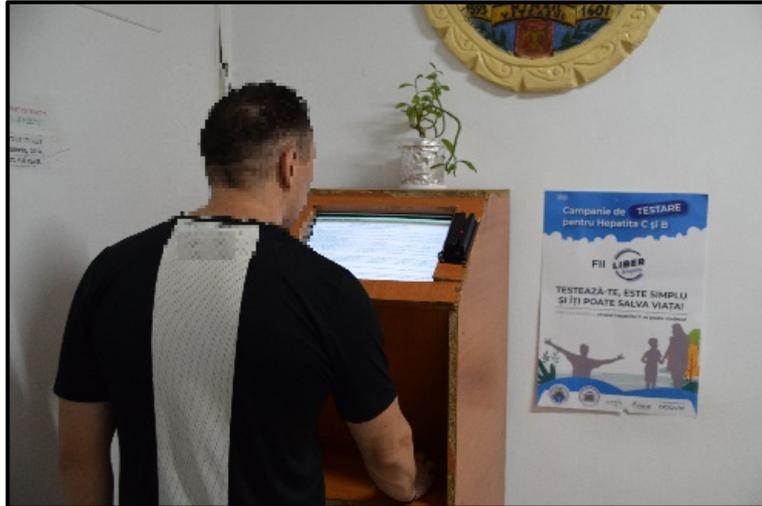


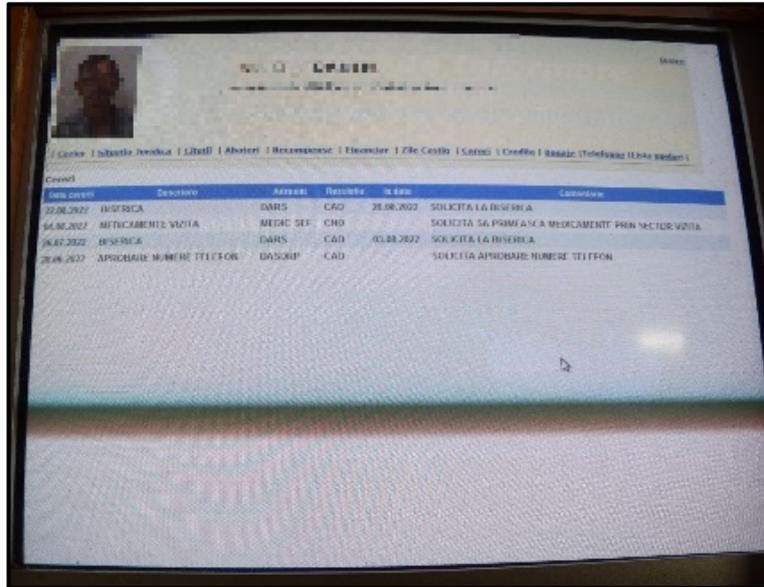
⁴ Turkish Ministry of Justice, Directorate General for Prisons and Detention Houses
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KIOSK Application (Romania)

In Romania, inmates have access to a KIOSK where, using an individual card with a personal code, the inmate can see the answers or the status of his requests, his rewards, his sanctions, legal information about his conviction (the number of his file, how many days he executed, when is he eligible to be in the conditional release commission etc.), information about his account (how much money he has, his transactions) and also, they have access to an online library containing laws and legal documents of interest for them, in Romanian and also in other languages like English, French and others.





Data	Descriere	Adresa	Rezultate	N. Ed.	Categorie
27.08.2022	BUCUREȘTI	DARIS	CAJ	28.08.2022	SOLICITA 14 BUCUREȘTI
04.08.2022	BUCUREȘTI	MEDIC DEI	CHD		SOLICITA SA PRIMA SA MĂSCĂRĂCĂMÎNTE PĂRIN SECTOR VOLTĂ
04.08.2022	BUCUREȘTI	DARIS	CAJ	03.08.2022	SOLICITA 14 BUCUREȘTI
28.08.2022	BUCUREȘTI	DARIS	CAJ		SOLICITA APĂCĂMÎNTE BUCUREȘTI



Section 4. BLEEP Policy Recommendations



	Findings / Justification	BLEEP Recommendation
1	Innovation – The General Principle: The world is changing; new jobs require new skills.	<p>The prison education policies should focus on innovative aspects of learning, including digitalisation and 21st-century skills.</p> <p>The entire prison should essentially be a ‘learning environment’ encapsulating all learning activities from traditional education to therapeutic programmes, modern technology and new programmes such as life skills, yoga and mindfulness.</p>

	Findings / Justification	BLEEP Recommendation
2	Investing in prisoner and prison staff education will be more profitable in the long term as education and learning will lead people to employment, socialisation, and self-realisation, which are strong elements to keep individuals from illegal actions ending in imprisonment.	Adequate funding must be allocated to equip each prison with a fully resourced school. In addition, further resources are needed to cover education provision for prisoners with specific educational needs, such as literacy/numeracy difficulties. Prison authorities and prison education providers should also consider investing in modern digital technology to ensure access and training in digital skills to enhance the learning experience and provide prisoners with the skills and preparation to manage their lives better.

	Findings / Justification	BLEEP Recommendation
3	Higher levels of digital skills will be an advantage in acquiring a job, as the chances of employment at a living wage are low for those who do not possess digital skills, especially when this low level of skills is coupled with a criminal record.	Prison education systems – particularly vocational education courses – should be updated to cover digital upskilling curricula for inmates.

	Findings / Justification	BLEEP Recommendation
4	Digital skills are not only vital in the workplace; they are important for practically every aspect of social interaction, from using a smartphone to keeping in touch with family and friends, booking a holiday, ordering a takeaway and shopping online. Furthermore, digital literacy is now essential to engaging in education outside the prison context.	Supporting the digital literacy of inmates is one of the key issues in engaging them in the “digitalised” society on their release. Digital connectivity must be assured and digital literacy promoted among learners, both as a prerequisite for modern pedagogical practice and so that learners can access educational resources beyond the prison confines.

	Findings / Justification	BLEEP Recommendation
5	Related security concerns can be addressed through technology that prevents people from accessing toxic sites or, where necessary, provides offline access only to digital resources.	Prison education systems can adopt a secured internet connection with a “white list” of appropriate and useful websites like employment agencies, social funds etc. BLEEP provides a good example by using secured devices with “white lists”.

	Findings / Justification	BLEEP Recommendation
6	Law Education on digital crimes can prevent unintended illegal actions by ex-prisoners after their release.	The prisoners should be given the fundamentals of the law system of the relevant country so that they are more aware of the consequences of their illegal actions when released. Furthermore, the context of prisoner law education should be expanded to cover the “new” types of crimes derived from technological improvements such as cybercrimes, bad use of social media, blockchain system etc.

	Findings / Justification	BLEEP Recommendation
7	“Digital Libraries” can provide non-formal learning environments.	Policymakers should consider investing in “equipped digital libraries” where inmates can have access to written sources through technological devices like kindles or secured tablets. This way, it would be motivating for inmates to use the library while at the same time gaining some digital skills in a non-formal way.

	Findings / Justification	BLEEP Recommendation
8	Motivation and equipping of the educators in prisons play a key role in the effectiveness of prison education.	All prison staff need to be trained in the importance of prison education. Education should be prioritised alongside security and safeguarding, so it is more influential as part of prison inspections. To overcome the complexities of teaching in coercive environments, the educational actors in prison education should be supported to adopt innovative strategies and approaches and benefit from technological tools in their work.

	Findings / Justification	BLEEP Recommendation
9	Learning to learn and Lifelong learning are key concepts of modern life. Integration of prison education into the formal education channels outside the prison can support the lifelong learning of prisoners.	The decision-makers should seek alternative methods that are considered as a means of attracting people in prison to school. Therefore, by encouraging them to engage in education in prison, they are making education in jail more attractive and more effective for inmates. They can do so by, for example, establishing stand-alone schools within the prison grounds that are located away from cells and accommodation blocks, giving access to well-stocked libraries (with secured digital tools) and computer facilities or distant learning opportunities in high-security prisons through closed TV broadcasts.

	Findings / Justification	BLEEP Recommendation
10	The world is changing; new jobs require new skills.	The prison education policies should focus on innovative aspects of learning, including digitalisation and 21st-century skills.

	Findings / Justification	BLEEP Recommendation
11	Ex-prisoners need links and channels to job providers as soon as they are released from prison.	Establishing common platforms where the prisoners (potential jobseekers on release) and employers can meet and interact. This mechanism will also include educational actors (particularly vocational education). This common platform could be established using digital tools/methods like online conferences with employers as speakers or online job interviews between employers and inmates.

	Findings / Justification	BLEEP Recommendation
12	“Communication” may be the most powerful soft skill that can lead a prisoner to access the needed channels and information. On the other hand, significant numbers of people in prison do not speak the language of the country in which they are located.	This situation necessitates the provision of specific curricula on communication skills and language classes. Moreover, learning another language can also empower students in prison to engage more openly with others and the wider world. Prison management can benefit from digital tools and open sources if they can solve the security issues (Language learning videos on YouTube etc.).

	Findings / Justification	BLEEP Recommendation
13	Correlatively to the previous article, benefiting from (secured) online communication tools like video calls may contribute to decreasing social isolation and stronger family connections.	Prison management should seek ways to overcome crucial issues such as security, privacy, availability, implementation and financially affordability. The Turkish Ministry of Justice has launched a good innovative example in this regard; ACEP - Integration of Smart Technologies to Penitentiary Institutions Project (https://medya.turktelekom.com.tr/ceza-infaz-kurumlarinda-akilli-teknoloji).

	Findings / Justification	BLEEP Recommendation
14	Jewkes and Reisdorf ⁵ (2016, p. 540) note that requiring prisoners to take responsibility for aspects of their lives previously administrated by officers potentially frees up significant periods of staff time formerly spent on form-filling. Although, in theory, this newly acquired time can be spent on more meaningful interactions with prisoners. For many prisoners, innovations such as digital kiosks reduce some of the stresses and tensions of life inside by offering a greater degree of agency.	Prisons can establish intranet-connected kiosks/computers through which the prisoners can manage their pathways (like the money on their accounts, the time left for their next family visit, submitting a petition to the management and receiving the response for their petitions etc.). A good example of such a digital kiosk project is from the Romanian Ministry of Justice (https://anp.gov.ro/).

	Findings / Justification	BLEEP Recommendation
14	ICT deprivation must be considered equivalent to other social deprivations, such as low income, unemployment, low education, poor health, and social isolation.	Prison management should consider giving prisoners supervised and secured internet access to prisoners so that they can develop some basic digital skills. This can alleviate digital exclusion upon release and help them draw up real-life pathways for employment, accommodation, family and social links covered by the BLEEP approach.

⁵ Jewks Y., & Reisdorf B.C. (2016). A brave new world: The problems and opportunities presented by new media technologies in prisons *Criminology & Criminal Justice* Volume 16, Issue 5 Pages: 534 – 551.

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Jewks Y., & Reisdorf B.C. (2016). A brave new world: The problems and opportunities presented by new media technologies in prisons *Criminology & Criminal Justice* Volume 16, Issue 5 Pages: 534 – 551

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Turkish Ministry of Justice, Directorate General for Prisons and Detention Houses <https://cte.adalet.gov.tr/Home/SayfaDetay/ceza-infaz-kurumlarinda-dijital-donusum-icin-altyapi-calismalari-devam-ediyor25102021031431>



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