

Books beyond bars

The transformative potential of prison libraries



Lisa Krolak



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



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Forewords

David Atchoarena, Director of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning

Education is a human right to which all people are entitled, regardless of age or sociocultural background. Recognition of this fundamental right is at the heart of UNESCO's mission and is reflected in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UN, 1948) and other key international instruments. It is one of the underpinning principles of the Education 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which enjoins Member States to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'.

Securing full enjoyment of the right to education is central to achieving sustainable development. It is integral to efforts to support and empower socially and economically marginalized children and adults to overcome material disadvantage and participate fully in society. This is particularly true for at-risk groups such as prisoners. Prison libraries play a critical role in supporting prisoners' access to education, and in helping them build new and different lives on release.

In reality, however, the right of prisoners to education is frequently overlooked or disregarded. Prisoners are rarely part of educational discourse as they are locked away, often at a distance from the public. At the same time, many prison systems around the world are in crisis, with severe overcrowding, high rates of recidivism, violence and poor prison conditions.

Underlying this reality, often, is a belief that the purpose of imprisonment is merely to punish or deter. Such an approach not only runs counter to the commitments countries have made to protect the basic rights of prisoners, it also negates the potential

social benefits and cost savings associated with the rehabilitation of ex-offenders. As most prisoners will eventually return to be part of general society, we need to explore how to improve prison conditions and to secure the social reintegration of prisoners upon their release.

Prisoners are subject to discrimination generally and to discrimination in the provision of education specifically. They are more likely to come from challenging social backgrounds, to have had limited or no educational experience, and to suffer from difficulties with reading and/or writing – disproportionate to the rest of society. The time spent in prison should ideally help them to continue or return to learning, and give them the chance to experience the joy of having access to reading materials for education, self-reflection or simply recreation.

'Literacy as freedom' was the theme of the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003–2012) and it remains integral to the UN's thinking about literacy. It is especially meaningful for prisoners. Reading and using a prison library can open up a world beyond prison bars, allow prisoners to forget for a time the harsh reality of prison life and empower them to choose their own reading materials in an otherwise extremely restrictive and regulated environment.

With these considerations in mind, this publication explores the extent to which prison authorities around the globe enable inmates to pursue their right to education through access to books and information by using prison libraries. It takes a closer look at selected examples highlighting the

current state of prison library systems around the world, outlining best practice and possible challenges. Its contents are grounded in the authoritative frameworks of the *United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners* (the Nelson Mandela Rules; UNODC, 2015), as well as the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions' (IFLA) *Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners* (Lehmann and Locke, 2005) (for both, see *Chapter 4*).

The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) supports policy and builds capacity in lifelong learning, shaping the global discourse and

supporting national and regional partners in making a case for education and learning throughout life. We have a tradition of supporting adult learning in the prison environment. Our engagement in this area goes back to preparing the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V) in 1997, where prison education was debated at a global level. At the same time, UIL has been advocating for the important role of libraries in lifelong learning, particularly for developing literacy skills, fostering a love of reading, and providing a space for communities to meet and engage. This publication combines these two areas of work.



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‘It is said that no one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones.’

Nelson Mandela

Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan (right) meets with Nelson Mandela in Johannesburg, South Africa, March 2006

Barbara Lison, President-Elect, International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)

This publication argues that prison libraries can make an important contribution to improving the lives of prison inmates, and supports its case with some convincing and impressive case study examples. Of course, prison libraries are subject to a long list of special restrictions with which they must comply. Security rules dominate life in prison and, naturally, also the conditions in the prison library. A prison library – in contrast to any other library – is not an open venue into which patrons can enter freely and decide how long they will stay.

But, in most other aspects, prison libraries do not differ from other libraries: in standards, in function or in the fact that they should be welcoming places where people can pursue their personal or topical interests and expand their knowledge; in short, a place for lifelong learning. It is important that the prison library is a special space, separate from the rest of the prison, where inmates can experience an inspiring, creative atmosphere different to their everyday cell life.

Viewed from an international perspective, prison libraries are an important part of the worldwide community of libraries. They share the same values as expressed and outlined in the first three key findings of IFLA's *Global Vision* (IFLA, 2018), as, even given the restrictions within which they must work, they:

- are dedicated to equal and free access to information and knowledge;
- remain deeply committed to supporting literacy, learning and reading;

- are focused on serving [their] communities (IFLA, 2018).

IFLA fosters the work and activities of prison libraries within its Section for Library Services to People with Special Needs (LSN). Through this section, an informal but effective international network of prison librarians has been created, which represents a good opportunity for cooperation and mutual support in this special field. Furthermore, I am glad that colleagues working in prison libraries are continuously participating in the annual IFLA World Library and Information Congress, thus bringing to the stage of the worldwide library community their specific concerns.

This publication presents global experiences on the state of prison libraries. It is naturally interesting for library colleagues but – and this is perhaps even more important – it should also be of interest to policy- and decision-makers in the field of prison management and experts on rehabilitation.

I want to conclude this short foreword with a personal remark on the impact of our prison library in Bremen, Germany, which is a branch of our public library network. One inmate who had served his sentence and was leaving the prison for good told the director of the prison: 'I'm not going to miss anything but the library.' These words thrill me every time I remember them and I hope that this man has been able to discover and enjoy his local public library as a free man.



Acknowledgements

The information in this publication is based on extensive desk research and an international call for contributions on national prison library experiences that was answered by prison librarians and other stakeholders from all world regions. The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) would like to thank everyone who responded to the call for contributions, thereby helping to form an understanding of prison libraries in their respective countries.

To ensure accuracy and reliable dissemination of information, this publication was reviewed and validated in the course of an editorial meeting held at UIL from 12 to 13 February 2019, coordinated by Lisa Krolak (UIL, Chief Librarian). We would therefore like to acknowledge, with appreciation, the advice received from the experts who participated in the meeting and supported the whole process of developing this publication, Gerhard Peschers (Germany) and Erlend Ra (Norway), representing the Section for Library Services to People with Special Needs of IFLA, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. The draft publication was shared with all members of the respective IFLA section for comments. In addition, we would equally like to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of Anna Bernhardt (Germany), Latifa Al Wazzan (Kuwait) and Yohan S.R. Lee (Jamaica), with compiling information, writing and editing this publication. Also, special thanks to Clifford Harper for creating the beautiful cover illustration.

This publication is dedicated to prison librarians all over the world, often working in isolation and under extremely difficult constraints, but making such a difference in many prisoners' lives.

1

Introduction

Today, some 11 million individuals are thought to be held in penal institutions worldwide. In 2018, there was an average imprisonment rate of 145 prisoners per 100,000 people (Walmsley, 2018), with 6.9 per cent being female (Walmsley, 2017). Following a constant and rapid growth of global inmate populations and subsequent overcrowding of prisons, there is a deepening crisis in prison systems. Facilities are finding it increasingly difficult to provide humane conditions and accommodate holistic resocialization based on international standards (UNODC, 2018). Research even suggests that when prisons are overstretched, there is a risk of transforming places intended for

The way in which prisoners are treated must follow the core objectives of reformation and social rehabilitation.

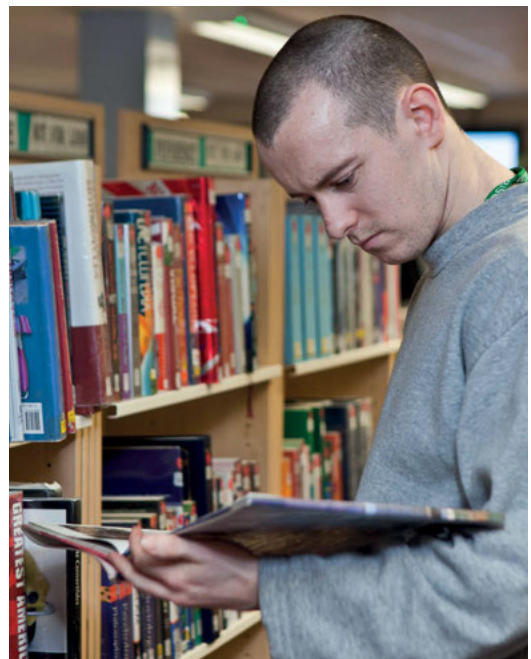
the rehabilitation of criminals into fertile breeding grounds and incubators for radicalization, or even 'crime schools' (ibid.).

Nearly 7 in 10 formerly incarcerated people will commit a new crime, and about half will return to prison within three years (Prison Studies Project, 2018). These numbers vary significantly from country to country, and even within a country when you take into account different penal institutions and systems. There are countries and prison systems with recidivism rates of around 80 per cent and countries and systems with recidivism rates of less than 20 per cent. Since recidivism contributes to ongoing crime and violence in society, and is associated with higher cost levels as imprisonment is expensive, it is important to keep the recidivism rate low, and to learn from examples of best practice.

Imprisonment, in itself, is not capable of addressing the global prison crisis or the social integration issues of prisoners; rather, the way in which

prisoners are treated must follow the core objectives of reformation and social rehabilitation. These objectives have been recognized by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which advocates for supporting an inmate to the point where he or she is able to successfully reintegrate into society and turn away entirely from a life of criminality.

Such an achievement requires a multipronged approach that addresses several dimensions, and the implementation of a number of programmes covering an array of activities. Activities may include (but are in no way limited to) those that accommodate educational, medical, psychological and behavioural treatment, in addition to counselling and cognitive-behavioural programmes. Reform of the prison system should, therefore, employ an integrated, multidisciplinary strategy to achieve sustainable impact (UNODC, 2017).



Types of prison-based rehabilitation programmes



Source: UNODC, 2017, p. 4

In view of this complexity, it might appear that prison libraries and reading play only a minor role in the whole prison-based rehabilitation process. This publication will challenge this notion by exploring how library services support the educational, information, legal and recreational needs of prisoners.

For common understanding, it should be noted that the term ‘prison’ is used as an all-encompassing concept to refer to any institution or facility in which people are held in custody, detention or remand, or are incarcerated. These include penitentiaries, penal institutions, jails or correctional facilities. Additionally, the terms ‘prisoner’ or ‘inmate’ refer to anyone held by the justice system. This includes

those below the legal age of adulthood who may be held in juvenile centres, as well as people with disabilities in special-care facilities.

The information in this publication is based on extensive desk research, the experience of visiting several prison libraries in different parts of the world and a global call for contributions via the IFLA e-mail Listserv that was answered by prison librarians and other stakeholders from all world regions. Books, articles, website information and personal communication from 38 countries were compiled and analysed. This publication does not claim to give a comprehensive overview of the global prison library situation, but it shares impressions from different parts of the world.

2

Lifelong learning in the prison environment

Libraries are important community spaces for lifelong learning; this is particularly true in prisons, where there are limited learning opportunities. Providing these opportunities is crucial as, on a global level, the majority of prisoners have had limited educational experiences. Vibeke Lehmann points out that prisoners constitute 'a user group with special needs because of their generally low educational level, their mostly disadvantaged social and economic background, and their high rate of substance abuse and mental illness' (Lehmann, 2011a, p. 503).

The proportion of men, women and youth in prison who struggle with reading and writing is disproportionately high (Czerwinski et al., 2014). For example, the U.S. Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) Survey of Incarcerated Adults showed that the incarcerated population in the United States of America had lower average literacy and numeracy scores than their household counterparts (Rampey et al., 2016).

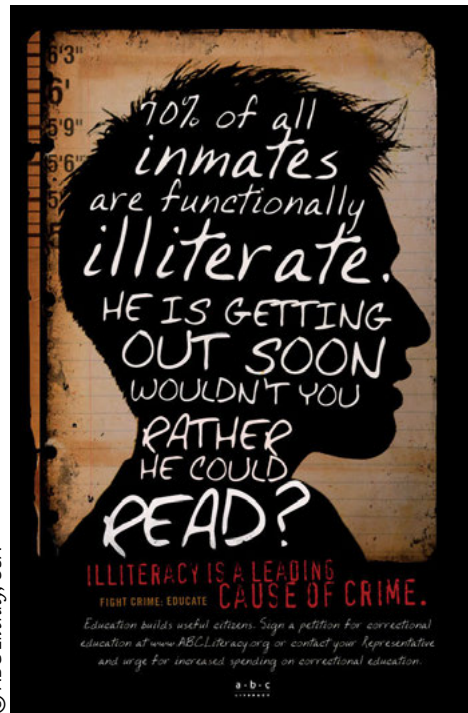
Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 54 per cent of people entering prison have literacy skills equal to those of an 11 year old child, compared to 15 per cent of the general adult population (Prison Reform Trust, 2018).

The prison population includes a disproportionate number of persons coming from poor, discriminated and marginalized groups and communities (Muñoz, 2009). As research suggests explicit connections

between crime, poverty, violence and educational disadvantage, it is important to address this bias. Like every other citizen, prisoners deserve a good education. The continued failure to educate prisoners comes with tremendous economic and social costs.

Based on this understanding, equal and fair access to education is a question of how custodial power is being leveraged and to what end. For this reason, recognizing the power of education as one entry point for resocializing inmates and giving them the tools they need for a crime-free life after incarceration is

crucial. Providing prisoners with lifelong learning opportunities in general, and literacy opportunities in particular, can have a significant impact. If we do not address prisoners' lack of foundational skills, there is the danger of perpetuating existing socio-economic inequalities.



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In Guinea, 90 per cent of prisoners are reported to be 'functionally illiterate' (Prison Insider, 2015). In New Zealand, it is estimated that about 57 per cent of prisoners have low levels of reading and writing skills and have few or no formal qualifications (Department of Corrections, 2017). In the United

Most countries provide formal education free of charge to prisoners, at least with regard to primary and secondary schooling and vocational training. Some countries provide access to higher education, whether through distance-learning or in prison, at the prisoners' own expense or financed by private grants. Very few countries offer higher education free of charge (Muñoz, 2009, p. 19).

However, lifelong learning is more than access to formal education; it also refers to non-formal and informal education, such as literacy programmes, life skills, vocational training, creative, religious and cultural activities, physical education, and access to libraries. Learning in prison through educational programmes is generally considered to have a positive impact on recidivism, reintegration and, more specifically, employment outcomes upon release. Education is however much more than a tool for change; it is an imperative in its own right.

Available evidence shows that education is key to the successful rehabilitation of prisoners into society. A meta-analysis of correctional educational studies in the US found that inmates who continued learning were 43 per cent less likely to return to prison than those who lapsed. Likewise, employment after imprisonment was 13 per cent higher among those who were exposed to a culture of learning. Among 28 per cent of those with vocational training, there is an increased likelihood of being gainfully employed after release. Prison education programmes are also cost-effective: direct costs of accommodating prisoners' learning were estimated to be between USD\$1,400 and \$1,750 per inmate compared to reincarceration costs, which were \$8,700 to \$9,700 (Davis et al., 2013).

In his report to the United Nations General Assembly, the Special Rapporteur on the right to education of persons in detention underscored the inherent human rights of prisoners, including the right to education. He listed institutional and situational barriers to learning, which inmates

themselves identified, including inadequate prison libraries, or the absence of prison libraries and the absence and confiscation of written and educational material in general. Prisoners also mentioned limited, and often a complete absence of, access to and training in information and communication technology and related skills necessary in everyday life. Among his recommendations, the Special Rapporteur said that 'detention institutions should maintain well-funded and accessible libraries, stocked with an adequate and appropriate range of resources and technology available for all categories of detainees' (Muñoz, 2009, p. 25).

But he also warned that 'education is not a panacea for the social, psychological and physical damage

Education is much more than a tool for change; it is an imperative in its own right.

caused by detention. It has the potential, however, to offer previously unmet realistic opportunities and assistance, which contribute to meeting the rights and needs of the incarcerated and those of our entire

community' (ibid., p. 8). He concluded his report by saying that the 'deprivation of liberty should be a measure of last resort, given the considerable negative long-term economic, social and psychological consequences' for prisoners, their families and the community (Muñoz, 2009, p. 26).

The following chapter will highlight the contribution and potential of prison libraries. Supporting education by providing access to educational materials might be the most obvious contribution, but, as we will show, there are other important benefits of having access to relevant reading materials. After a general introduction to prison libraries, we will take a closer look at the policy environment and specific guidelines, before comparing and analysing what is actually happening on the ground in different countries.

3

The contribution of prison libraries

Prison libraries play an integral role in their function as educational, informational and recreational centres for the entire prison community. They are places in which people can gather to read, borrow books and carry out research, take part in organized activities, or simply enjoy the company of other people in a relaxed and safe environment. It is a space abounding with possibilities, all of which lend themselves to constructive ways of spending what all inmates have: time. Prison libraries, at their core, help create a literate environment. Although they provide services to all prisoners and prison staff, they often give special attention to prisoners with low literacy levels and from non-native language backgrounds.

The prison library space abounds with possibilities, all of which lend themselves to constructive ways of spending what all inmates have: time.

The value of a prison library lies in its ability to help inmates become or continue to be lifelong learners. In other words, it is a social space that can inculcate a culture of reading and learning. Assisted exposure to a library has the capability of encouraging prisoners to develop a long-term interest in and habit of reading. It is a systematic nudge in the right direction.

Libraries in prisons: A condensed history

Over the centuries, prison libraries have been inextricably linked to the specifics of the prison environment and the ideological framework of punishment and/or rehabilitation. In her paper on prison libraries in Australia, Jane Garner (2017) reports that the earliest mention of books being supplied to European and US-American prisoners goes back to the seventeenth century: clergymen dispensed religious books as an act of generosity and in the hope of reforming inmates. The first provision of prison library services in the form of an organized collection of books dates back to the mid-nineteenth century in the United States of America. These collections were also composed of religious teachings. Similarly, libraries in prisons in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland at this time supported the overall goal of

reforming criminal behaviour by exposure to spiritual and moral reading and training. This focus on religious reform started to change in the early 1900s and the function of prison libraries began to more closely resemble public libraries.

In Germany, Gerhard Peschers (2013) notes that Bruchsal prison, which was built in 1848, already had a library integrated into its design. It was the belief of the then prison manager that a library is an effective tool in the transformation of inmates. Again, priests were in charge of the library and the choice of available literature was designed to promote the 'moral improvement' of inmates. Books with entertaining content, such as novels and criminal stories, were strictly excluded from prison libraries until the

beginning of the twentieth century, when the administration of prison libraries began to be entrusted to teachers working in the prison.

Here, for the first time, the idea of reading in prison for educational purposes and for emotional, personal and intellectual development gained traction. Libraries initiated regular reading hours and aligned their stock and lending practices more and more with

public libraries. During the First and Second World Wars, there was a pause in this positive development: prisons were overcrowded and, due to limited resources, their libraries suffered. Since the mid-twentieth century, however, a gradual opening up of the normative foundations of reading promotion in prisons has taken place, away from religious and/or educational principles towards a value-free securing of access to information (ibid).

While it is difficult to measure the impacts of reading and using a prison library, it is possible to gain some understanding of their importance by listening to the first-hand experiences of prisoners, ex-prisoners and prison staff. These testimonies can shed some light on the impact libraries have on real lives, from the perspective of individuals.

Generally, the prison library, through its function and space, and in keeping with the principle of normalcy, has been found to give inmates a level of freedom that essentially catalyses responsible, self-directed and critical decision-making skills. That is to say, in having the freedom to choose to use the library services and select the books they read,

inmates experience an appreciation of their own self. The prison library reminds them that there are still aspects of their lives over which they have control.

Data related to prison library use – for example, book loans or attendance levels – differ from prison to prison, but, as an overall global estimate, at least half of all inmates tend to use the prison library, if available, regularly. A prison in Ghana, for example, reported that 76 per cent of inmates used the library (Mfum, 2012). In Algeria, a study done in four medium-security prisons showed that 24 per cent of prisoners started reading after incarceration and 52 per cent said they felt that the prison library



The library at Kamiti Maximum Security Prison in Nairobi, Kenya, which was set up by the UK-based African Prisons Project

helped them cope with life in prison and prepare for reintegration into society (Mehdi, 2017). In Germany, the prison library in Bremen experienced a record number of books being borrowed by some 1,200 inmates, who requested approximately 25,000 library materials each year (Bleyl, 2016), highly outnumbering the use of any other public library branch in the same city.

There are well-known cases of people whose time in prison highlighted the immense importance of reading and access to information. For Nelson Mandela, the late president of South Africa, there was an absence of reading material during the majority of his 27 years in prison. His fellow freedom fighter, Denis Goldberg, reported that, for 16 of the 22 years that he spent at Pretoria Central Prison, serving time for his fight against apartheid

alongside Mandela, newspapers and newsmagazines were banned. The prison library itself was in a bad condition and he was not allowed to choose books but, rather, was provided with books that were deemed acceptable.

Through distance education, both Goldberg and Mandela were able to receive educational materials from the library of the University of South Africa (Goldberg) and the University of London (Mandela). These books were vital for enabling the men to stay connected to and interested in what was happening outside of prison (Förderverein Gefangenenbüchereien e.V., 2017). Mandela's experiences behind bars influenced much of his post-incarceration advocacy for education and the moral treatment of prisoners, some of which was adopted by the United Nations (UNODC, 2015).

Malcolm X

The life story of Malcolm X, one of the most influential black leaders of the twentieth century, is testament to the power of books behind bars. Malcolm Little was born in 1925 in Nebraska, in the United States of America. At the age of 15, he dropped out of school with limited literacy skills; in 1946, he was arrested on burglary charges and sentenced to 10 years in prison. While there, he became interested in the teachings of the Black Muslim faith.

In order to learn more about the movement, Malcolm became determined to improve his literacy skills. He started by borrowing a dictionary. As he would later recount, 'In my slow, painstaking, ragged handwriting, I copied into my tablet everything printed on that first page, down to the punctuation marks. I believe it took me a day. Then aloud, I read back, to myself, everything I'd written on the tablet. ... I woke up the next morning, thinking about those words – immensely proud to realize that not only had I written so much at one time, but

I'd written words that I never knew were in the world' (Malcolm X Imprisoned, n.d.). He copied the whole dictionary and, when he was finished, he 'could for the first time pick up a book and read and now begin to understand what the book was saying' (ibid.).

To aid in his journey towards enlightenment through reading, Malcolm's sister secured him a transferral to another prison, in Norfolk, Massachusetts, which was equipped with a large prison library. Malcolm's next five years of incarceration (he was paroled after seven years) were spent reading widely in order to test his new faith, Islam, against the writings of historians, philosophers and scientists. He found that 'no university would ask any student to devour literature as I did when this new world opened to me, of being able to read and understand'. Years later, he recalled, 'I have often reflected upon the new vistas that reading opened to me. I knew right there in my prison that reading had changed forever the course of my life' (ibid.).

A recent article on prison libraries in Argentina again highlights their potential to transform the lives of the prisoners who use them. 'Libraries are not a mere pile of books bought by the state for the formal and informal reading, curiosity, entertainment and escapist desire of the imprisoned but for a space opened for *becoming*,' it states. 'The question here is not: What am I? The question is: *What can I become?*' (Giacchino De Ribet and Sai, 2011, p. 240; italics in original).

These examples express the dynamism of the prison library as well as the far-reaching impact of reading.

Furthermore, they demonstrate many of the reputed benefits of reading and lifelong learning initiatives in prisons. This aligns with the conclusions of a Bulgarian study on prison libraries, which found that reading reduces recidivism because it builds prisoners' confidence, which has a positive impact on their lives outside of prison (Tsvetkova and Adrekova, 2016).

Before we take a closer look at selected experiences from prison libraries from all parts of the world, we will explore the international, regional and national policy situation for prison libraries.

4

Policy environment and guidelines for prison libraries

Modern library work in prisons is strategically based on Article 19 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UN, 1948), concerning the right to access information ‘regardless of frontiers’. Several international, regional and national policies call for prison libraries to be in place, adequately stocked and accessible to all inmates. Among these, the *United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners* (also called the Nelson Mandela Rules) is one of the most relevant documents (UNODC, 2015).

This updated version of the 1955 Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners was revised in

eight areas and adopted unanimously in December 2015 by the UN General Assembly. Setting out the minimum standards for good prison management, the rules are based on the idea that the purpose of a prison is to protect society and reduce reoffending. To ensure that the rights of prisoners are respected, the *Minimum Rules* should be applied from the date of an inmates’ admission to their release.

While all 122 rules aim for treatment of prisoners with respect for their inherent dignity, according to their needs and without discrimination, seven rules are linked to the right to education, information and reading materials, with Rule 64 specifically asking for prison libraries.

The Nelson Mandela Rules

Rule 4

1. *The purposes of a sentence of imprisonment or similar measures deprivative of a person’s liberty are primarily to protect society against crime and to reduce recidivism. Those purposes can be achieved only if the period of imprisonment is used to ensure, so far as possible, the reintegration of such persons into society upon release so that they can lead a law-abiding and self-supporting life.*

2. *To this end, prison administrations and other competent authorities should offer **education**, vocational training and work, as well as other forms of assistance that are appropriate and available, including those of a remedial, moral, spiritual, social and health- and sports-based*

nature. All such programmes, activities and services should be delivered in line with the individual treatment needs of prisoners.

Rule 14

In all places where prisoners are required to live or work:

(a) *The windows shall be large enough to enable the prisoners **to read** or work by natural light and shall be so constructed that they can allow the entrance of fresh air whether or not there is artificial ventilation;*

(b) *Artificial light shall be provided sufficient for the prisoners **to read** or work without injury to eyesight.*

Rule 63

Prisoners shall be kept informed regularly of the more important items of news by the **reading** of newspapers, periodicals or special institutional publications, by hearing wireless transmissions, by lectures or by any similar means as authorized or controlled by the prison administration.

Rule 64

Every prison shall have a library for the use of all categories of prisoners, adequately stocked with both recreational and instructional books, and prisoners shall be encouraged to make full use of it.

Rule 104

1. Provision shall be made for the **further education** of all prisoners capable of profiting thereby, including religious instruction in the countries where this is possible. The education of illiterate prisoners and of young prisoners shall be

compulsory and special attention shall be paid to it by the prison administration.

2. So far as practicable, the **education** of prisoners shall be integrated with the educational system of the country so that after their release they may continue their education without difficulty.

Rule 105

Recreational and cultural activities shall be provided in all prisons for the benefit of the mental and physical health of prisoners.

Rule 117

An untried prisoner shall be allowed to procure at his or her own expense or at the expense of a third party such **books, newspapers, writing material** and other means of occupation as are compatible with the interests of the administration of justice and the security and good order of the institution.

Source: UNODC, 2015; emphases added



Valtura Prison Library, Croatia

In addition to the UN's global guidelines for ensuring the rights of prisoners, different regions of the world have adopted their own conventions. Taking Europe as an example, the *European Prison Rules* were drawn up by the Council of Europe as a legally non-binding means of regularizing principles and practices in the treatment of prisoners and management of prison facilities. The current rules include a recommendation that prisoners are kept abreast of current events through electronic and printed media unless restrictions are specifically authorized. In addition, all prisons are required to have a library that is adequately stocked with a diverse collection of books and media to which all inmates have access, and, wherever possible, the prison library should be organized in cooperation with community library services (Council of Europe, 2006). Before these rules were formalized, the Council of Europe endorsed the *Education in Prison* report (Council of Europe, 1990), which called for prison libraries to adopt professional standards similar to those employed by libraries in the outside community.

In fact, many countries' policy documents refer to the advantage of cooperating with public libraries. For example, the Prison Sentence Enforcement Act of Croatia mandates that each correctional facility either has an adequately stocked library or that prisoners have the possibility to borrow

books from the public library. The Law on Execution of Punishments and Remand Detention of Bulgaria stipulates that prison libraries should be maintained according to established rules and practice of the public libraries. The Finland Imprisonment Act states that, if a prison is unable to provide an in-house library, prisoners must have the possibility to use the public library. Norway, meanwhile, is a special case: its prison libraries adhere to the Public Library Law, which states that each person has the right to access a library, including inmates.

To ensure that legal requirements are fulfilled, guidelines and standards are helpful, particularly as national policy documents often only mention the need for prison libraries in one or two sentences, without indicating how they shall be run and managed. Some countries, such as Australia, the UK and the United States, have specific standards for their prison libraries (Sutter, 2015), but their existence is not necessarily a guarantee that they are implemented. In the case of Australia, for example, prison library standards are reported to be 'in no way a reflection of the current practices found in Australian prison libraries, but rather an aspirational document that describes the minimum standards that should be met by prison libraries in areas such as staffing, financial resources, collections and library services that should be provided to prisoners' (Garner, 2017, p. 335).

Remission for reading

Brazil implemented a law in 2012 that enables prisoners to reduce their sentences by reading books. It is based on the Criminal Enforcement Act (LEP), approved in 1984, which affirms that it is the duty of the state to prepare a prisoner for his or her return to society. Initially, remission was weighed against the numbers of days worked (one day of remission for three days' work). However, the law was modified in 2012 to include remission for study, guaranteeing one day of remission for every 12-hour block of study.

That same year, the National Penitentiary Department of the Ministry of Justice (DEPEN) published a decree which established the right to remission for reading in specific circumstances. A commission, comprising a judge, representatives of both the prison administration secretariat and state secretariat of education, and a teacher, chooses a book to be studied; the reader has 30 days to complete the book, after which it is discussed within a group. To demonstrate understanding and application

of the subject matter, participants are required to write a review of the book, to be analysed by the appointed commission. Once a submitted review is accepted, the participant is granted four days of remission. In theory, it is possible for a participant to submit up to 12 reviews each year, earning a total of 48 days of remission.

The strategy is part of a wider pedagogical process aimed at resocializing prisoners and helping them to develop into critical and informed readers while engendering greater autonomy and independence to be utilized in the outside world (Torres da Silva, 2017).



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Brazilian inmates study in a prison run by the Association for the Protection and Assistance to the Convicted (APAC)

IFLA stands as the global voice of the library and information profession. It produces a wide range of standards in all fields of library and information services. Through the joint *Public Library Manifesto* (IFLA and UNESCO, 1994) for example, IFLA, alongside UNESCO, advocates for the provision of public library services, including for linguistic minorities, people with disabilities, as well as the hospitalized and imprisoned.

On this basis, IFLA developed *Guidelines* (see box, opposite, for the document's major points) that target library services to prisoners specifically, and function as a practical tool for the manifestation of well-functioning prison libraries (Lehmann

and Locke, 2005). The document, first published in 1992 and last revised in 2005, provides 94 recommendations for establishing and maintaining prison library services. It is a useful document for governments developing guidelines appropriate for their local contexts, whether they are opening or upgrading prison library facilities. Separately, guidelines of this nature serve as a formal advocacy tool on the path to securing the fundamental right of prisoners to read, learn, and access information (ibid.).

The extent to which policy documents, standards and regulations are translated into realities on the ground will be discussed in the next chapter.

Major points of the IFLA *Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners*

- Written policies for the provision of library services in prisons should be in place, clearly stating mission, goal and funding source.
- Local library procedures and long-term plans should be developed.
- Libraries and associated services should be accessible to all prisoners.
- At least 100 popular and current books, or two books per prisoner, should be available in each housing unit and changed at least once per month.
- Every prisoner should be able to select at least two titles per week.
- The library should be situated at a central location within the prison, preferably near the education department.
- The design should include functional lighting, computer use, climate control.
- The library floor space should be large enough to accommodate user activities, staff functions, and materials storage and display.
- The prison library should make use of current information technology to the extent possible without compromising prison security.
- All prison libraries, regardless of size, should be supervised/managed by a professional librarian.
- Library staff should be given opportunities to participate in professional organizations and to attend professional development and continuing education programmes.

Lehmann and Locke, 2005

5

Experiences from prison libraries around the world

This chapter highlights experiences from prison libraries in different parts of the world and explores the extent to which they comply with the policy situation as discussed in the previous chapter. To be able to compare experiences from different countries, a closer look must be taken at various aspects of prison libraries, such as their institutional set-up, staffing, library collection and services. Examples from different countries illustrate the variety of experiences, but they are only 'snapshots' and cannot claim to provide a comprehensive, global overview.

5.1 Institutional set-up and cooperation with public libraries

The institutional framework and set-up should be understood as the organizational structure and institutional positioning in which the prison library operates. This affects the overall position of the prison library and, in particular, funding and staffing. Some prison libraries are located in or close to the educational department of the prison, some belong to the psychosocial treatment department, others are stand-alone libraries.

Another important difference is the varying degree of cooperation with external organizations, notably public libraries. This ranges from the full provision of library services to prisons, some degree of cooperation or supplementing the prison library services via an interlibrary lending scheme, to cooperation in the training of the staff and organized exchange of information. The following sub-chapters show various models of cooperation with public libraries.

5.1.1 The prison library as a branch of the local public library

This model can be seen in Norway, where the prison libraries are part of the national library network and are operated as branches of local public libraries. Everyone who lives in Norway is, by law, entitled to access to library services. This includes inmates. The services are funded by the government through agreements between the National Library of Norway and the municipalities

responsible for the services. The responsibilities of the library and the correctional institution are covered in a standard agreement between these two parties. This is an example of what is known as the 'import model', where services in prison are provided by public agencies responsible for these services in the outside community. Services include, but are not limited to, healthcare, education and libraries. Therefore, the prison library is a branch of the local public library. All prison libraries are run by professional librarians, and their salaries and the prison library resources are paid for by the Norwegian National Library.

Everyone who lives in Norway is, by law, entitled to access to library services. This includes inmates.

Bastøy prison island, Norway

As of September 2018, Norway had 64 prisons with around 3,400 inmates (World Prison Brief, 2019a). Norway's criminal justice system focuses on rehabilitating inmates and, at 20 per cent, it has one of the lowest recidivism rates in the world. Norway's prisons are also renowned for being some of the world's best and most humane. For example, when prisoners have completed all but about three years of their sentence, they are eligible to go to Bastøy island, about 75 km south of Oslo, where a minimum-security prison is located. It comprises a multi-building complex with a working farm and timber operation. A little over 100 prisoners live on Bastøy, performing various jobs on the island, such as preparing meals for the inmates and staff or tending to the animals and crops. They can walk freely on the island, and some inmates are allowed to go to the mainland each day for jobs or school, returning to Bastøy at night.

Library services at Bastøy prison are managed by the nearby Horten public library on the mainland, with the prison librarian being employed not by the prison but by the public library system. This gives the prison librarian a degree of independence, within the perimeters of prison security, in making decisions about the collection and activities. As a branch of the public library, Bastøy prison library – which is



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housed in a small wooden building on the island (see above) and is decorated with artwork made by the inmates – allows prisoners to borrow books from any library in Norway. In addition, inmates at Bastøy have limited access to online educational resources as part of the prison's educational programmes. Plans are under way to allow prisoners digital access starting in 2020.

Bastøy prison is designed to prepare inmates for everyday life outside of prison, and the prison library works towards this principle. Before being incarcerated, many prisoners will have never used a public library before. It is therefore the desire of the prison librarian to teach inmates how to use a library so that they can continue to use the resource once they return to the community (Bolt and Ra, 2018).

Whereas in Norway this model is standard, there are isolated examples of it in other countries. Bremen contains the only example in Germany of a prison library treated as a branch of the local public library. This branch is integrated into the education building of Oslebshausen prison. The prison library is organized and managed by a professional in-house librarian and hosts several events that are carried out in collaboration with the public library. When leaving the prison, inmates receive a free membership card

for the local public library, and a significant number of ex-inmates use this opportunity to continue reading (Bleyl, 2016).

5.1.2 The prison library working closely with the local public library

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is a notable example of this type of institutional framework. Historically, the backdrop of

the Second World War made the organization of the UK's prison system difficult: financial constraints and relatively high acquisition costs for new books necessitated active cooperation with public libraries. As a result, prison authorities had to pay a fee to public libraries and, in return, the libraries were obliged to provide the prisons with sufficient books. After decades of the practice, it emerged as the default model for the operation and maintenance of prison libraries. The Public Libraries and Museums Act of 1964 later formalized the principle of public library provision for prisons, and while the law does not directly mandate the availability of a library service within prison walls, close cooperation and provision between libraries and prisons is standard (Sutter, 2015).

In Germany, Hamburg public libraries have a prison library coordination point in the central public library. Since 1968, this central library service has been responsible for organizing the collection and general administration of the six prison libraries in the city. This includes the training of staff and the supply of a constantly changing, relevant and attractive book and media collection. Additionally, prisoners in Hamburg can use the interlibrary loan system to access more than 1.8 million media items held in the public library.

5.1.3 The prison library having limited cooperation with the local public library

This seems to be a frequent approach. For example, a respondent to our call for contributions on national prison library experiences pointed out that, in South Africa, although there is evidence of cooperation between prison libraries and public libraries, it is not a consistent and sustainable model and only happens in some places and under certain circumstances. Other countries reported isolated initiatives of cooperation with the public library. In Colombia, the District Network of Public Libraries in Bogotá (BiblioRed) provides prisons with a selection of their holdings through an interlibrary loan initiative called the 'Travelling Suitcase' programme, where a changing set of books is delivered in a suitcase.

Meanwhile, a study of prison libraries in Bulgaria revealed that only two out of 13 prison libraries

surveyed had some interaction with the local public library. These interactions were based on individual initiatives and were not part of a national strategy (Tsvetkova and Adrekova, 2016).

In Croatia, a 2013 survey revealed that, out of 23 prisons, 11 had occasional contact with the local public library, principally when the latter sent materials no longer in circulation to the prison library; another was visited regularly by the public library bookmobile; and five reported no collaboration between the prison library and the public library. The remaining prison libraries were part of an interlibrary lending scheme with their local public libraries (Šimunić et al., 2016).

5.1.4 The prison library having no cooperation with the public library

Prison libraries are always dependent on the goodwill of the prison administration, but this is particularly true for this model, as prison libraries working in isolation often have to rely on support from external organizations, such as non-governmental organizations, religious organizations and book donation agencies.

India notes that the quality of their prison libraries depends largely on how the prison management conceptualizes libraries and reading and perceives their role in the prisons. In Nigeria, there is no formal cooperation with public libraries. However, at the Enugu Prison, the public library was one of the major donors of reading material. The Enugu State Library Board, alongside a number of non-governmental organizations and religious groups, also contributed to the renovation of the prison library space. Ghana reported a similar lack of cooperation with the public library (Mfum, 2012).

Prison libraries in Kuwait did not report any cooperation with a public library. There is no interlibrary loan system, and purchasing books is also not an option. Instead, the prison library depends on donations from various groups and institutions, which results in a library collection that is often limited and outdated. Books are most commonly sourced from religiously affiliated donors. This lack of resources may be attributed, in part, to the lack of laws or policies that enforce the establishment of prison libraries. It is

often the choice of the individual prison to designate a space where books can be stored.

5.1.5 Mobile library services

In places where there is no in-house library, a mobile library can be a practical and cost-effective

solution. In Nicaragua, for example, the Bibliobús Bertolt Brecht travels to a variety of rural villages, schools, factories and institutions, including several prisons, at regular intervals. Its services are funded by a German non-governmental organization (Hanemann and Krolak, 2017).

Books in motion in Slovenia

Mobile Library Ljubljana is an independent unit of the Ljubljana City Library in Slovenia. According to the head librarian of the bookmobile, this travelling collection of books has been making the rounds since 1974. A route with 47 different stops has been identified. It is staffed by three employees and offers library services free of cost. Significant focus is placed on those special groups of people who cannot visit the main library because of disabilities or remote residence. A key group it serves are inmates who are confined within prison walls. As such, a partnership has been struck with Correctional Facility Ig (CFI) since 1998.

CFI is the sole correctional facility in Slovenia for women who are sentenced to imprisonment.

Here, their confinement is classified as either open, semi-open or closed, which indicates the level of security required. Visits to the Mobile Library Ljubljana are coordinated so as to coincide with the end of the dinner session, a time at which the prisoners are allowed to leave the communal areas. However, only prisoners who fall in the open category are permitted to leave and visit the mobile library, under the supervision of prison guards.

With no need to pay membership fees, the inmates are also exempt from late charges or fines. Each borrower can reserve material inclusive of books, DVDs and CDs. There is also the option to have an extended loan period of 75 days.



Mobile Library Ljubljana in front of the CFI correctional facility for women in Slovenia

As this section shows, there are significant variations when it comes to the set-up of prison libraries. Every prison library is unique and the concept of what is considered to be a prison library can be anything from a professional library branch to a cupboard with some old books. There are attractive and inviting spaces modelled after outside public libraries, providing a carefully selected range of materials and a space to meet and socialize, but there are also neglected rooms housing outdated, old or irrelevant books and materials.

There are also library spaces where inmates are not allowed to go inside, but need to order materials to their cells, for example via a printed catalogue. In other places, the 'library' is a book cart on wheels going from cell to cell with a selection of materials to choose from.

Some prison libraries offer unrestricted access and prisoners are encouraged to use them in their free time. In other cases, there are strict rules regarding who can visit the prison library, when and for how long (for example, once or twice a week for 30 minutes). It often depends on the interest and support of the prison management as well as the vision of the person in charge of the prison library.

The next section demonstrates how the dedication of the prison librarian is crucial in providing professional library services and making the best of the unique conditions present at any given institution.

5.2 The role of the prison librarian

Generally speaking, the role of the prison librarian goes beyond simply organizing and overseeing a collection of books. That is to say, a librarian who works within the confines of a prison is key to the success of the prison library. Often, the librarian is the only professional employed, and all support staff are inmate workers. Therefore, the librarian needs to manage all aspects of library operations and must often concentrate on services that have the most impact and serve the largest number of users (Lehmann, 2000). Several things distinguish the work of prison librarians from those at a public library. Prison librarians often have to work with

scarce resources and greater restrictions, due to the nature of the space and the need for increased security precautions.

Additionally, it is important for prison librarians to strike a balance between the demands of institutional leadership and the prisoners they serve. Key to the effectiveness is the forging of an open but professional relationship with visitors to the library that is built on trust. In this way, the library becomes a space conducive to inmates feeling comfortable with expressing their needs. For this reason, it is preferred that library personnel have some kind of training in library services and are stationed in the prison library. And while it is constructive to have inmate assistants, they are not ideal candidates to operate and manage such a crucial service. However, as with other standards in prison libraries, there are variations and different applications of what is considered to be best practice.

In a study of prison libraries that was conducted in the USA, Marjorie LeDonne came to realize 'that while space, time, money, training, and adequate support staff are all important, the key to quality correctional library service is the turn of mind, the energy, and sense of dedication which the librarian brings to the job' (LeDonne, 1977, pp. 65–66). In other words, it takes a very special person with not only a sound educational background, but also certain humanistic qualities. However, it is easier to define and quantify the academic requirements than the more intangible skills; existing standards and guidelines mainly deal with the former.

Next to the necessary professional qualifications, the prison librarian needs to work effectively in a prison environment and ideally has supplementary knowledge or experience in areas such as psychology, criminology, teaching, social work and/or counselling. This is further enhanced by prison librarians ideally having some years of experience in a library space that exists outside the prison system. This is recommended because of the isolated nature of prison libraries. Not only are prison librarians often disconnected from other prison library colleagues, they are also often unable to participate in professional associations where support and development can be sourced.

An award-winning prison library in Germany

In recognition of its services to inmates and attractive design following an extensive renovation involving a renowned architect in 2005, the prison library at the Münster Correctional Facility in Germany (pictured below) was named ‘German

Over 70% of Münster’s prison population used their free time for reading, making it the facility’s most popular leisure activity.

Library of the Year 2007’, surpassing public and university libraries across the country. Instrumental to all these changes was the hiring of a dedicated professional librarian five years previously.

At the time, the library at Münster consisted of almost 10,000 materials in 30 languages, including more than 2,000 foreign-language titles, enabling inmates from more than 50 countries to read in their mother tongue. It provided easy reading materials,

illustrated books and comics, newspapers and magazines, as well as 2,000 audio books, CDs and DVDs. Graded reading materials were also available and catered to inmates with low reading skills. Meanwhile, publications on legal topics gave prisoners background information on how the German justice system works, enabling them to conduct their own research. In addition to providing reading materials, the library hosted events such as author readings. It also entered into partnerships with many local organizations, including bookstores, publishers, the local university and, mainly, the Münster City Library.

In 2006, the Münster prison population’s reading habits were assessed: 80 per cent used the library regularly, 79 per cent of respondents claimed they used their free time for reading, making it the most popular leisure activity in the facility. Additionally, 60 per cent of respondents said they read for an average of two hours per day, which far exceeded the amount of time that most had spent reading prior to their incarceration (Peschers, 2013).



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Library professionals must also develop some semblance of flexibility, emotional intelligence, assertiveness, strong tolerance for stress, and acute patience. As service providers, prison librarians have to interface with prisoners whose life is the product of different cultural and personal situations, both past and present, with different personalities and skills. Therefore, the prison library space can only be useful if those it is intended to serve feel comfortable, confident and valued. Essentially, all inmates, regardless of how they ended up in prison, must be seen as someone seeking literary and reference services and nothing more. A prison librarian should not operate with bias, but treat all users with the same professional respect. A librarian's level of responsiveness to needs is core to the library occupying a positive role in inmates' daily lives behind bars (Lehmann, 2000).

A successful prison library space provides gratification for both prisoners and professionals. In prioritizing the inmates' information needs, the prison librarian can derive a great deal of job satisfaction. For example, one prison librarian from the USA describes prison librarianship as the 'hardest, most rewarding, saddest, happiest, challenging, eye-opening, frustrating, and interesting librarian position around' (Andrew, 2017). Helping others is rewarding in a special way.

Prison librarians can be the most remembered personnel from a person's time spent in prison. This is captured in the positive feedback shared by another respondent to our call for contributions, this time a prison librarian from Sweden, who recalled inmates telling him, 'You are the most important person in this prison' and 'You are one of the few positive things from when I served time at Skänningeanstalten' (a medium-security prison about 200 km from Stockholm). Libraries create moments when the inmate can immerse him- or herself in literary works and escape the reality of confinement, and librarians can instil in inmates a love and habit of reading.

5.2.1 Training and networking

The IFLA *Guidelines* advocate standardization of the practice of staffing prison libraries with professionally trained librarians. Based on provided

reports, evidence of adherence is found only in very few countries, such as Norway and the Netherlands, on a national level. In many other countries, it is reported that the use of professional librarians is inconsistent. Many prison libraries are run by prison staff, who are likely to have other duties in addition to supervising the library. It is also common practice that inmates assist in the day-to-day management of prison libraries.

Australia reports a lack of qualified professional staff in the majority of their prison libraries. Most prison libraries in the country are managed on a day-to-day basis by prisoners, but 'despite great dedication and a recognition of the value of their libraries, these prisoners are not able to offer the services and skills that could be offered by a professional staff member. These libraries also have no one to advocate for them within their prison, or within the corrections system, leaving them vulnerable to a lack of recognition and support from prison administrators' (Garner, 2017, pp. 334–335). In Ghana, oversight responsibility of the library in the country's largest prison, Nsawam Medium Security Prison, is the responsibility of the prison's education coordinator, but the daily management of the library is performed by an inmate with no basic training in librarianship (Mfum, 2012). In Turkey, prison libraries are managed by teachers. Inmates with a higher level of education can be assigned to assist the teacher-librarian.

The Croatian study (see section 5.1.3) found that none of the prisons surveyed employed a trained and experienced librarian. Seven of the prison libraries were run by an inmate, five by an inmate together with a prison officer, six by a prison officer for whom the library was not the primary responsibility, and two were run by a prison officer or other staff member whose main responsibility was managing the prison library. All of the library staff had no formal or informal library training (Šimunić et al., 2016).

After analysing several country examples for a special *IFLA Journal* issue on prison libraries, Vibeke Lehmann concluded, 'The fact that, in many countries, professional and university-degreed librarians are still not employed in prison libraries, or even in a supervisory or coordinating capacity, is cause for great concern. Many of the

authors describe this as a major obstacle to future development and to the ultimate goal of building truly professional prison libraries that meet the rehabilitation, education and recreation needs of their patrons' (Lehmann 2011b, p. 385).

One practical solution to this concern has been implemented in France. When a report revealed in the 1980s that prison libraries were not professionally organized, did not provide direct access to their collections and that their holdings were unattractive and inadequate, professional librarians from public libraries were assigned to work in French prison libraries on a regular basis. They were asked to reform the prison libraries according to the public library model. This meant that public librarians became instrumental in the practical operation of the prison libraries, as well as collection development and implementing programmes to promote a culture of reading among prisoners (Cramard, 2011).

The fact that professional librarians are not employed in prison libraries is a major obstacle to the rehabilitation, education and recreation needs of their patrons.

Another practical solution is to have a professional librarian coordinating various prison libraries, as is the case in Münster and Cologne, Germany, where a single professional librarian coordinates 20 to 30 prison libraries. The coordinator's work includes the training of library staff, introducing them to library software, giving advice for collection development, outreach and literacy activities and offering support in all other library management issues.

In the United States, it is common practice to have prison library coordinators. Lehmann (2011a) reported that in June 2010 there were about 950 prison libraries in the country, roughly two-thirds of which had designated library staff, albeit not all of them professional librarians. About 25 states employed a central prison library coordinator or consultant, either within the Department of Corrections or on the state library staff.

On a positive note, working in the prison library can be an opportunity for inmates and prison staff to become trained as library assistants. A number of countries have reported that they offer specialized training initiatives in order to provide professional knowledge. Since being a prison librarian can be a lonely endeavour, there is a strong need for networking. At the international level, prison librarians can connect in the IFLA Section on Library Services to People with Special Needs. At the national level, some countries reported that networking amongst prison librarians is institutionalized.

In the Netherlands, prison librarians and prison library assistants graduate from formal training programmes and are, by definition, civil servants who report to the Ministry of Justice. Regulations stipulate that they complete compulsory training courses which prepare them to deal with the specific user group of detainees. In addition, the Prison Libraries Coordinator has functioned as an intermediary between libraries and the Justice Department for Prisons in The Hague since 2009. Supplementary to this role is an advisory body which represents the interests of prison library staff. This prison library group organizes annual meetings, facilitating networking, exchange of information and the promotion of useful expertise.

In the UK, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) holds the Prison Libraries Group, which gives those who are interested a chance to network with others who work in prison libraries. The group states that they try 'to share and develop ideas through training and publications, be of benefit to all members concerned with library services to prisoners, prison and education staff, liaise with the prison service, and encourage contracts between the local library authorities and prison service establishments' (Prison Libraries Group, 2014). To follow through on these endeavours, the group offers comprehensive training and development workshops and bursaries aimed at funding training expenses. This is in addition to *The Prison Libraries Training Pack*, which is regularly revised and updated and is provided free to members (ibid.). In the United States, the American Library Association's Division of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies (ASCLA) runs an active and popular e-mail discussion list called 'Prison-L, Library Services to Prisoners' (Lehmann, 2011a).

A systematic revamp of prison libraries in Chile

In 2015, the public library service of Chile analysed the prison library situation in the country and noticed a high variation in the quality of services. Generally speaking, those libraries with professional staff had stability, while others 'had no more than the first impulse and then remained inactive, reporting great loss of books and low interest of officials. The result was libraries of little interest for the inmates and very difficult to access. Those libraries that were linked to schools had better luck, appreciated the service and added it to their educational offer [although this benefited] only those who attended these educational establishments. ... In any case, the fate of the library depended solely on the motivation of the people, or even a single person' (Rivera Donoso, 2018, p. 2).

As a result of these findings, Chile's system of public libraries implemented a prison library plan with the aim to promote better reading habits among the prison population and make the prison library the cultural centre of all correctional facilities in the country. After talking with many actors involved in reading promotion in prisons, a list of suitable book titles for inmates was compiled. These titles were then integrated into the existing collection of predominantly donated books, 'most of which did not have any relevance to the needs of the prison population. In general, the collections we found rather repelled reading and increased the vision of the library as a boring place. Even a place of punishment' (ibid., p. 4). The particular characteristics of individual prisons were also taken into account; these included factors such as minority-language populations. To complement the physical library collection, an offline digital resource centre was developed, providing digital literacy training, access to educational and recreational materials, vocational training, the bibliographic catalogue of the prison library, and entertainment tools, such as videos and music.

Today, together with the strengthening of the library collection, efforts are being made to make the country's prison libraries attractive and comfortable, as previous experiences showed that providing books alone is not sufficient to support the development of a reading habit. Regular group sessions, where inmates can discuss topics of common interest such as football or fashion, are also held. This provides a backdrop for the introduction of related literature and an opportunity to share experiences through talking and writing. Other workshops include digital literacy, creative writing and book clubs.

As a result of these and similar workshops, more than 78 per cent of inmate participants are said to have 'written a literary text for the first time, to have shared the experiences and readings of the workshops with their families and friends during the visits, to have improved their reading comprehension and vocabulary and to have more desire to read' (ibid., p. 8). Security personnel report that inmates attending workshops have lower levels of anxiety, and that the general level of violence has decreased in the prison environment.

Another initiative has been the initial and ongoing training of the library personnel, including face-to-face training, visiting public and prison libraries for peer learning, library management and IT training. Additionally, a virtual training course on library management was developed, and every prison library became part of the regional network of public libraries.

As of May 2018, about two-thirds of inmates are registered library users. The number of users and book loans is constantly increasing and, regarding the social impact, job placement of former prisoners is increasing and criminal recidivism is decreasing (ibid.).

Networking is also important to prison library systems in Germany. There are only four professional prison librarians employed in the country. In 1995, these librarians connected in a special working group of the German Library Association. By 2006, a national support agency for prison libraries (Förderverein Gefangenenbüchereien e.V.) was founded. It convenes each year, bringing together some 130 friends of prison libraries (Peschers, 2013).

Portugal created a networking opportunity via the project *Leituras Em Cadeia*, which ran for two years and included an in-service training for inmates, prison staff and teachers working in prison libraries. There were also two short courses on prison libraries and reading promotion in prisons aimed at teachers, teacher librarians, public librarians, reading mediators, prison educators and other staff. To ensure ease of communication and the sharing of information and experiences among prison librarians throughout Argentina, the Sunflower Network was implemented between 2009 and 2015. The network consisted of an interconnected mailing system and a blog (www.bibliotecasabiertas.wordpress.com). The blog functions as an archive of experiences of and about prison libraries in the country. It is also possible to access prisoners' works of art, including poetry, stories, drawings and texts (Giacchino De Ribet and Sai, 2011).

5.3 Library collection and security issues

According to the IFLA *Guidelines*, library materials should be selected according to a library collection management policy or plan that is based on the demographic composition of the prison population. No censorship shall be applied in the selection of materials, except in such circumstances where an individual title or item is known to cause a threat to prison security (Lehmann and Locke, 2005).

In many places, however, there is a wide gap between the applicable guidelines and what is actually offered (Sutter, 2015). The book and media collections available in prison libraries differ greatly from prison to prison, and country to country. As such, only some prison libraries have what is considered a carefully selected, needs-based and constantly evolving collection. In reality, many

prison libraries are instead filled with old and often irrelevant books and materials. Library materials are not always provided by prison authorities, and many prison libraries have to rely on book donations (Muñoz, 2009).

For example, a study from Nigeria highlights the role of non-governmental organizations, religious groups and individuals in providing materials for prison libraries (Eze, 2015). Another study conducted in four prisons in Nigeria showed that around 85 per cent of prisoners found the condition of their prison library inadequate (Sambo et al., 2017). Bulgaria reported survey findings that their prison library collections are full of old, obsolete, outdated and irrelevant titles, many of them in bad condition because of intensive use and most of the collection dating back to before 1989. In one prison library in Bulgaria, only 3 per cent of the book collection had been published after this date. Many books were donated by 'publishers whose generosity is associated with excess and obsolete specialized publications that cannot be interesting for the convicted' (Tsvetkova and Andrekova, 2016).

In Jamaica, upon entering the prison, inmates receive religious material and books of moral instructions that are tied to their denomination. Ghana reported that most books donated to the prison library were religious material (Mfum, 2012). Prison libraries in Kuwait depend on book donations or on religious books supplied by the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs.

Ideally, books and other materials need to reflect the multicultural and multidimensional needs of a prison population with various language skills and different reading capabilities. Therefore, comics and easy reading materials as well as reference materials in foreign languages are in high demand. In addition to books, prison libraries should provide newspapers and magazines, games, audiobooks, language courses, movies, music and other audiovisual material (Sutter, 2015).

To enable prisoners to access information in their own language and to realize equality in reading and learning, practical solutions such as the Multilingual Library in Finland deserve to be highlighted. This is

a large-scale library collection which functions as a resource for other libraries. It comprises collections in more than 64 languages, and is intended to help libraries with less diversity in languages supplement their own collections of material in foreign languages. Finnish prisoners have the opportunity to borrow books written in their own language from the Multilingual Library (Helmet, 2019).

Another practical solution is found in the Netherlands, where freedom of expression and the right to information are the basic principles that guide collection development in Dutch prison facilities. The variety of languages spoken by inmates is reflected by a collection of media in some 25 foreign languages.

Furthermore, a network of mutual exchange is set up between up to 20 libraries which focus on one foreign language each. Through this cooperation, the available selection of media can meet the needs of all prisoners, regardless of religion, language or educational level. Prisoners have

access to legal articles, dictionaries, self-study and life-skills material. Novels, comics, newspapers, magazines, audio books and CDs are also available in the library collections, alongside musical instruments, puzzles and drawing equipment. Additionally, inmates with low literacy levels are provided with an individualized literacy plan, provided by the Ministry of Education, the Municipal Department of Education, or other agencies and institutions specializing in the area (Peschers, 2013).

In Norway, inmates are very diverse and collectively speak as many as 20 to 30 languages. The National Library runs a service that supplies books in 70 different languages to public libraries in Norway, including prison libraries (Bolt and Ra, 2018).

Likewise, inmates with disabilities or special needs must have access to material that is designed to meet their reading and learning requirements.

Books need to reflect the multidimensional needs of a prison population with different reading capabilities.

However, the translation of this recommendation into practice seems challenging in many countries. Many operate with inadequate resources, limited or unstructured state support and an incapacity to cater to the special needs of prisoners.

In Canada, the range of books, newspapers and periodicals varies in each prison library. Decisions are based on the judgement of the resident librarian. For example, a librarian may seek out newspapers based on the cities and countries where most offenders are from, or their destinations after release. Books and materials are available that meet the basic needs of minority language inmates and that support inmates' literacy and academic grading. Inmates can request books that are not available at the institutional library, and requests are considered for approval on a case-by-case basis.

In the United States, access to legal resources is provided by law to inmates. In 1977, a United States Supreme Court decision stated that prison authorities must provide legal resources for inmates via adequate law libraries or adequate assistance from persons trained in the law. However, each state, and in fact it varies by institution, handles this federal requirement differently (Lehmann, 2011a).

As all processes and organizational regulations in prisons are significantly impacted by security considerations, censorship is an issue for collection development. Censorship is typically intended to prevent violence, escapes, mutinies, smuggling and other crimes within the institution. The prison library forms part of the enforcement and is, therefore, subject to security requirements in two ways. Firstly, provisions must be made so that the physical premises and the borrowed materials cannot be utilized for illegal purposes. Censorship may be enacted by simply scanning books for hidden messages or contraband weapons, drugs or other forbidden substances. Secondly, the content of books or other materials may be withheld and censored if found to be in conflict with legal regulations or counterproductive to general order, such as pornographic or violent content.

Censorship is a prominent topic in prison libraries of the USA, where prison librarians must balance

the conflicting principles of freedom of access to information and compliance with institutional restrictions on content (Garner, 2017, p. 337).

Media and communication use during detention must be adapted to the changing habits on the outside.

rights have been stripped, including the right to some forms of reading materials' (Andrew, 2017). Ideally, censorship would be enacted only when essential and would not impede the literary and/or educational development of inmates.

Access to the Internet and other digital media is another area where the balance between provision and security is a challenge, as discussed in section 5.4, below.

5.4 Digital opportunities and challenges

The use of information and communication technologies in prisons, and particularly in prison libraries, can be worthwhile for a variety of purposes. Library staff can benefit from the use of library software to manage their holdings or use internet access for research or interlibrary lending. Simultaneously, by having direct access to computers, prisoners can not only do their own research on internal and external collections, but can also practise using computers and other digital media. But the use of digital media and technical equipment in the prison environment is subject to extensive security and cost considerations. This is due, on the one hand, to the risk of improper use and manipulation of the devices for the purpose of external communication and, on the other, to the high costs of hard- and software and the need of specialized staff to maintain technical equipment.

While the issues of limited resources and threat to security remain at the forefront of this discussion, media and communication use during detention

One US prison librarian stated that 'censorship is a harsh reality for prison librarians and counterintuitive to the librarian profession.

However, security is paramount, and in prison, some

must be adapted to the changing media and communication habits on the outside. Accordingly, the IFLA *Guidelines* propose that the prison library should make use of modern information technology. This integration should, however, be implemented without compromising prison security. Library users should be able to use multimedia software, and library staff should have access to the Internet, including e-mail, in order to answer information requests, search web-based library catalogues, communicate with professional colleagues and vendors, participate in professional development activities, and facilitate interlibrary loans (Lehmann and Locke, 2005).

In India, 600 female prisoners at the Tihar Jail benefit from an e-library that authorities set up in October 2014. Five to six computers and two tablets are available to empower the women and sharpen their technical skills. They are encouraged to read electronically and make use of e-learning opportunities (PTI, 2014).

Some of the prison libraries in India serve as study centres to facilitate the distance learning of prisoners who are enrolled in different courses and to provide textbooks and reference books. For example, the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) initiated a programme for setting up 94 Special Study Centres in prisons across India by 2017, benefiting around 25,000 prisoners (UNODC, 2017).



IFLA Guidelines call for prison libraries to make use of current information technology without compromising prison security

Experiences from India

With over 1.35 billion inhabitants, India is the second-most populous country in the world. According to World Prison Brief data, in December 2016, the country had around 1,400 prisons, housing around 430,000 men and women (World Prison Brief, 2019b). Tihar Central Jail in New Delhi, thought to be southern Asia's largest, houses some 15,000 prisoners alone in its complex of eight jails, each of which is equipped with a library. Here, prisoners can read for up to four hours daily or check out books. The intention, according to a former law officer, is to 'encourage prisoners to read so that they get inspired to take the right path in life' (Lama, 2017).

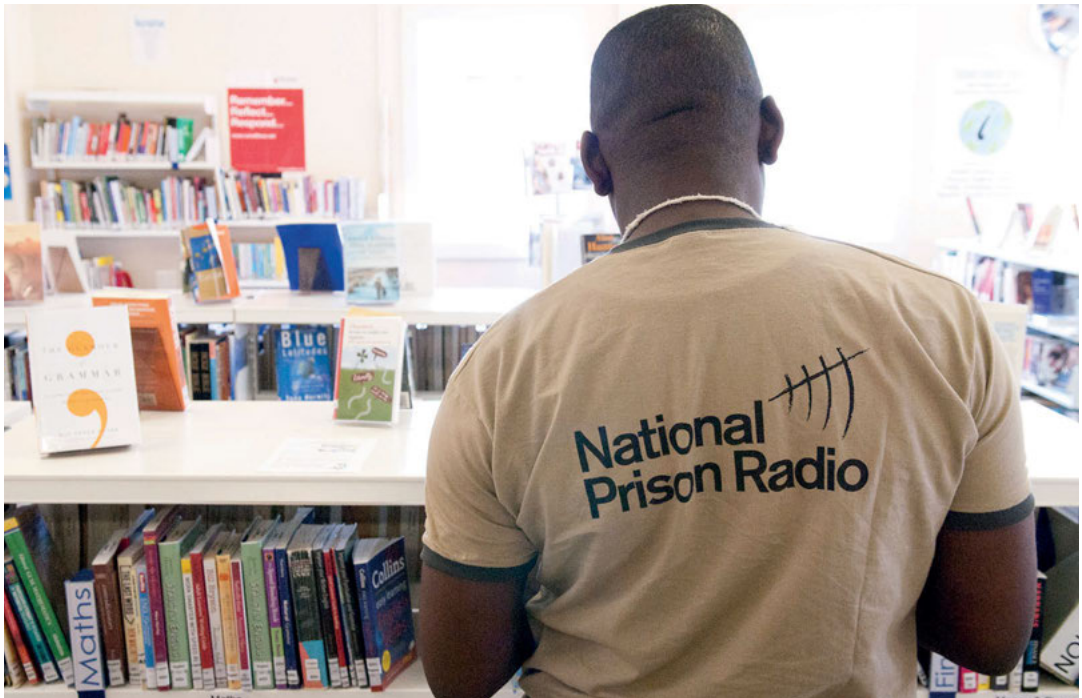
The Tihar libraries' collection of around 100,000 books comprises donations from citizens and NGOs or discount purchases of the prison authorities. Genres include reference books, Indian and Western fiction, and books on law, religion and spirituality. Mahatma Gandhi is the prison's most-read author: according to a prison librarian, Gandhi's autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, is borrowed by no less than 10 inmates per week. It is also useful that the book has been translated into some 35 languages. 'You will seldom see a copy of *My Experiments* in good condition,' explained a former prisoner who worked in the Tihar library. 'There will always be pages missing

or numerous markings on the book' (Lama, 2017). This provides some insight into the popularity of specific books in prison – for example, when the content reflects prisoners' own experiences, as is the case with *My Experiments* (Gandhi was arrested in 1922, tried for sedition and sentenced to six years' imprisonment).

Another prison facility of note, Central Jail Viyyur in the Thrissur district of Kerala, Southern India, is the only known jail in the state with a stand-alone library building. Over 10,000 books, plus newspapers and periodicals, are available, with most literature being in Malayalam, the local language. The library is open every day and almost all of the 800 prisoners use the service. A welfare officer who works in the library noted that, 'none of the prisoners come as book-lovers, but the confinement in prison attracts many to our library. Most of them spend their free time here, reading books and discussing social issues with others' (Shyam, 2011). Prisoners in Viyyur are in charge of managing the library on a day-to-day basis, and those using the library say they find it a productive and satisfying way of spending their free time. 'Reading novels and other books lifts me to a totally different plane,' explains one inmate. 'Had reading been known to me earlier, I would have been a total different person' (ibid.).

For many prison libraries, a reasonable goal would be a digital connection to the prison library catalogue and, in a second step, to library catalogues of outside libraries. This would expand the range of media to which inmates have access to. Another desirable goal would be a stand-alone or closed online version of a web-based database or e-learning training module to create a simulated online browsing experience.

To this end, several prisons have already taken preliminary steps towards the integration of digital means in the resocialization of inmates. For example, in Germany, a learning management platform called elis (e-learning in prisons), which dates back to 2004, functions as a repository of a wide range of online and offline (learning) media in a variety of formats and for multiple learning purposes ready for use in prisons. Elis also provides



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the technical infrastructure to provide secure access to online digital media. The technical, pedagogical and organizational support lies with the Institute of Education in the Information Society (Institut für Bildung in der Informationsgesellschaft gGmbH), which is affiliated to the Technical University of Berlin. The first stand-alone intranet version of 'www.ich-will-lernen.de' (I want to learn) for prisons was installed in 2011 and has since been used successfully in more than 120 correctional facilities, including prisons in Austria. In 2014, 'ich-will-deutsch-lernen.de' (I want to learn German) was also prepared as an intranet version and used with great success as a learning programme via the elis platform in the prison system.

Inmates in Canada have access to a digital reference library. It is also known as the 'inmate CD-ROM' or shared drive, through which inmates access computers and CD-ROMs at all federal institutions. This digital reference library is a series of documents, forms and other resources that inmates can use and refer to on a number of topics. Updated on a quarterly basis, resources include, but are not limited to, the Correctional Service of Canada policy, broadscale legislation, and many legal reference materials.

The *Minimum Standard Guidelines for Library Services* of the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA, 2015) state that having an information and communication technology (ICT) lab is of importance in Australian prisons and mandates that every prison ought to be so equipped. It further states that an ICT committee should comprise both a librarian and educational staff. According to the policy, 'the presence of a professional librarian would ensure current and ongoing library requirements are met, and new technologies evaluated from an information perspective, as they arise' (ibid., p. 16). Where possible, prisoners, depending on their individual case and security requirements, should be granted supervised internet access. To achieve all this, it is proposed to involve a librarian in the selection of approved sites based on desired levels of security. In the event that there is no internet connection, the prison is obliged to ensure that computers with multimedia software for informational, educational, and recreational pursuits become available (ibid.).

In Belgium, the PrisonCloud project provides limited internet access to inmates. In their cells, prisoners can use this digital service to have access to television, film, desktop programmes, e-learning

gateways and other educational provisions. The PrisonCloud offers web access through categories like healthcare, job search and e-learning (Knight, 2017). In Singapore, where the importance of keeping up with family and with current trends is recognized, a pilot programme was introduced that allows inmates to share tablets that are connected to a secure internal network. In late 2018, Trinidad and Tobago made allowances for inmates to Skype with their children. In Argentina, the Internet is used to aid in distance learning projects that are generally offered by prison libraries (Giacchino De Ribet and Sai, 2011).

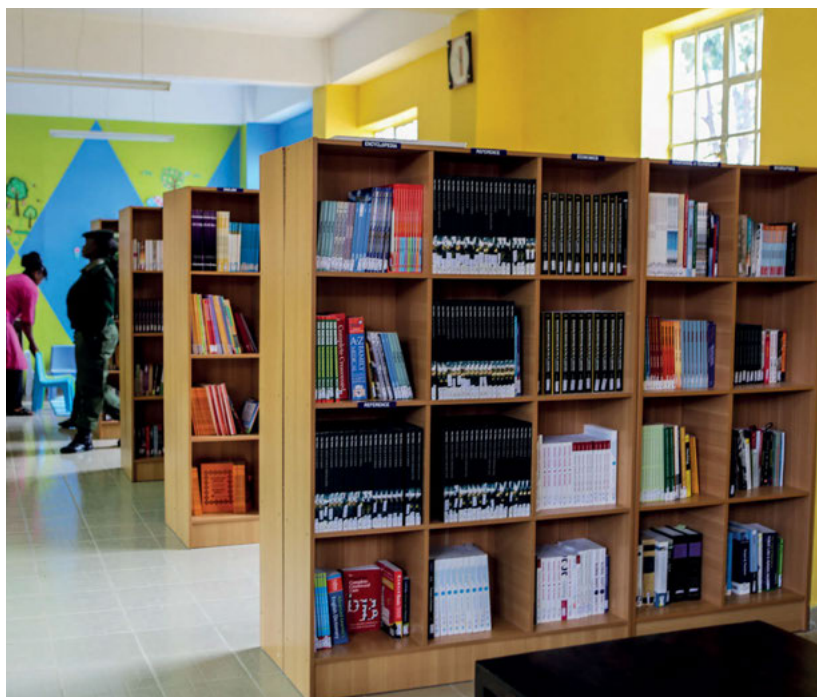
For an inmate to reintegrate into today's world, the role of information and communication technologies must be negotiated, as access to information has gone digital and content is increasingly accessible only through digital means. Practice is especially necessary for those who are far removed from the age of computers and digital media or were not adequately exposed before incarceration. At the same time prison authorities, and by extension prison libraries, need to cater to those prisoners who already lived a digital life before they started their prison term.

Due to security considerations, it is understandable that it is challenging to provide open access to the Internet in prisons. But providing closed online services is a good way of opening a window to the wealth of information available outside prison walls. In addition, access to computers, tablets or other digital devices offers prisoners a chance to practise the digital skills they will need once they are released from prison.

5.5 Outreach services and literacy activities

A prison library should ideally provide a range of outreach services appropriate to the educational, informational and recreational needs of its users. Simply providing access to printed and digital reading materials does not capitalize on the many pertinent skills and opportunities that a prison library could impart and provide, including outreach activities such as reading circles and book clubs, creative writing (including poetry and short stories), debating groups, author visits, poetry slams and theatre workshops.

Just looking at some examples from all over the world shows that there are many innovative and creative ways to use the materials and space offered by a prison library. Ideas often simply depend on



The Jones Day Women and Children Library at Lang'ata Women's Prison, Nairobi, Kenya

the drive and imagination of the prison library staff. Even prisoners themselves show initiative and organize literacy activities, or facilitators from outside prison assist. For example, the prison library of Lang'ata Women's Prison in Nairobi, Kenya, above, enables more than 600 women and their children, as well as prison staff and their

families, to access a wealth of relevant educational materials for children and adults and supports family learning opportunities (African Prisons Project, 2018). The outside facilitator of a creative writing workshop in Lang'ata Women's Prison shared her experiences:

I have given up all attempt to teach, aware I learn more than they do each week. ... Yesterday, one of the women said to the group, 'I don't want to talk about what happened then – it was just a moment that I don't recognize myself in. I want to talk about

today, tomorrow and beyond this place. I want to be a writer not a prisoner bound to her crime forever.' She recognized and expressed perfectly what I had hoped to peddle in prison. The class nodded as they heard her, and we silently agreed that writing could be a way beyond the prison bars; whatever the prison one is in. And entirely beyond the many bloody and meaty moments that got them into prison, I see the gentleness of these women. Their compassion and patience as we listen to each other in the hardest of places is, indeed, truly radical (Bowden, 2018).

The power of a prison book club in Uganda

The UK-based charity African Prisons Project (APP) was launched in 2007 with the aim to empower prisoners and prison staff, in particular to improve access to life skills, justice and leadership and to enable them to understand the law and their rights as individuals (African Prisons Project, 2018).

One of the ways APP works to achieve this goal is by developing and strengthening prison library facilities. Book Aid International, a UK book donation and library development charity, supports APP's work by donating brand-new books to be used in the 14 prison libraries that APP operates in Uganda and Kenya. These libraries are more than just a place to house a collection of books: they also hold various reading activities and classes.

To support the joy and value of reading, the library at Luzira Upper Prison, Uganda, for example, plays host to a book club run by one of the prisoners, along with APP staff. On Monday mornings, inmates gather to discuss the most recent reading material. The session is also an opportunity for prisoners with lower

levels of literacy to practise their reading skills with more advanced readers (Book Aid International, 2016).

'When I arrived in prison, I was unable to read or write,' explained the club's organizer. 'I asked my cellmate to compose a letter on my behalf, but he told me that it would be the first and last time he would do me that favour' (ibid.). This experience persuaded him to improve his own literacy skills, first through prison education classes and then by organizing the book club sessions.

Another beneficiary of the book club shared how he also recommenced his schooling in prison and then became infatuated with reading. 'Every book has a purpose,' he told his fellow inmates. 'Even in romance novels, there is something that we can take from them.' For prisoners around the world, books are more than just a way of escape: they are a gateway to furthering education. In Luzira, for example, many book club participants have said that their new love of reading has, in turn, propelled them to complete the schooling that they missed out on as children (ibid.).



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A prison library facilitator in the UK

Prisons in Croatia run literary and creative writing workshops that help prisoners with publishing prison newsletters and magazines (Šimunić et al., 2016). Something similar occurs in Bulgaria, where the prison libraries house the editorial offices of the six Bulgarian prison newspapers. According to one prison, their editorial team comprises five prisoners and 10 regular contributors, reporters and/or correspondents, who meet regularly in the prison library for the monthly publication of their prison paper (Tsvetkova and Adrekova, 2016). Apart from publishing prison newsletters, there is also the opportunity to publish the literary works of prisoners, such as poetry or short stories. Acknowledgements and awards can be given to outstanding examples.

Prison library activities in Algeria vary from one prison to another. Due to the availability of other services and programmes in correctional facilities,

prison libraries have had to find ways to attract users. The solution was to offer incentives through competitions and events based on information found in books that are available in the prison library; summarizing book content, which helps promote creative writing as well as comprehension; discussions and conversations; celebrations on local and international occasions such as the Day of Knowledge on 16 April; workshops on poetry, creative arts, literature, drawing and religion; talks by lecturers, authors, professors and scholars; informational posters all around the prison to invite inmates to visit the library and participate in its events and activities; and the prison radio was also used to promote the library (Shebahi, 2017).

Bulgarian prison libraries conduct the Big Reading project, during which 14 prisoners gather regularly in the library. Each one presents a Bulgarian literary

work, then they discuss, analyse, debate, retell and recite it with the other participants. The project is organized as a competition among different prisons in Bulgaria, with the winner receiving books as an award. Apart from nurturing a joy of literature and reading, the project included elements of group work, team building and communication (Tsvetkova and Andrekova, 2016).

Bulgarian prison libraries offer a wealth of other outreach activities to promote a culture of reading

Bulgaria's Big Reading project nurtures a joy of reading by combining elements of group work, team building and communication.

and writing and stimulate the use of the library collection. This is particularly remarkable as their prison libraries seem to have many outdated materials. Examples include literature or poetry

circles, book discussion clubs, creative writing workshops, active reading clubs; public reading of self-written essays, poetry, prose texts or short stories; entertainment competitions, such as quiz shows, that are prepared in the library and where the library materials need to be consulted for the answers; workshops or conferences devoted to renowned Bulgarian and foreign writers, poets, scientists, etc.; lectures, talks and special courses; competitions for the most expressive reading of national poetry, with the best reciters invited to present their skills on stage; celebration of various national and international holidays and anniversaries, such as World Book Day, and national heroes and classic poets; book exhibitions; amateur theatre and reading marathons.

In Kenya, where most prison libraries are also described as more than collections of books, the spaces accommodate life skills programmes, including adult literacy courses and vocational training (African Prisons Project, 2018).

Reading and writing as transformative tools

Committing a crime, being arrested and serving time in prison are life-changing events; for healing to take place, it is important to find ways to deal with these and other traumatic experiences. Treatment can be offered in the form of *bibliotherapy*, defined by the *Dictionary for Library and Information Science* as the use of books to facilitate recovery from 'mental illness or emotional disturbance' (Reitz, 2019).

Creative writing has therapeutic potential and can be used to rehabilitate prisoners as well. For example, the Free Minds Book Club and Writing Workshop, founded in 2002 in Washington, DC, offers bi-monthly book club discussions, creative writing exercises and poetry workshops for juveniles charged as adults. When entering the programme, only 5 per cent of the young people say that they have read or enjoyed reading and only 10 per cent have written a poem before.

After participating, 75 per cent identified as active readers and 90 per cent as writers. In 2015, the recidivism rate of participants was 10 per cent, compared to the national rate for juveniles charged as adults, which was between 70 per cent and 90 per cent (Hanemann and Krolak, 2017).

Increased self-knowledge and self-understanding can help inmates to question and even change values, beliefs and behaviours. Reading and writing initiatives can benefit individuals of any age by increasing their self-esteem, their self-awareness and their ability to discuss thoughts and feelings, to tolerate different points of views and to see alternative solutions. This, in turn, improves coping and problem-solving abilities and thus represents a powerful transformative tool for personal development in the prison environment.

Non-governmental organizations in the UK, meanwhile, do not just provide prison libraries with book donations, but facilitate literacy outreach activities. For example, the Reading Agency works with 7,000 prisoners in more than 100 prisons. In 2013, it started a project called 'One Quick Read One Prison' in seven prisons. It gave 2,550 copies of the six 'Quick Reads 2013' titles to the seven participating prisons, so prisoners and staff could read, review and talk about the same book (Reading Agency, 2019).

Another UK agency, Prison Reading Groups, promotes the spread of reading groups in prisons and provides support and funding for those who run them. The project began in 1999 and now works with over 40 groups in more than 35 prisons nationwide. The groups are informal and encourage reading for

pleasure. Members choose what they read and the books are theirs to keep or pass on to others. The agency also organizes author and playwright visits and supports family days by providing appropriate books and activities for children visiting their parent in prison (Prison Reading Groups, 2019).

Providing inmates with different literacy activities as described above is particularly impressive when this is done against all odds, with little or no financial resources and based on mainly old and outdated reading materials. Dedicated prison library staff manage to develop and adapt services and programmes to the interests and needs of this special user group. In any case, it is important to share interesting and innovative experiences and creative solutions by documenting and publishing them and/or presenting them in national or international workshops and meetings.

Storybook Dads: Using stories to strengthen family ties

The UK charity Storybook Dads celebrated its 15-year anniversary in 2018 and now operates in 107 prisons across the country, generating between 5,000 and 6,000 stories a year, and reaching an estimated 17,000 beneficiaries – a huge milestone for a project begun by a volunteer working at a men's prison in South West England. Sharon Berry, then a tutor at HMP Channings Wood, saw the detrimental effect imprisonment had on families. To help fathers in the prison keep in touch with their children, she developed Storybook Dads, which enabled participants to record themselves reading a book, which their children could then listen to or watch at home. 'When I began tutoring and volunteering at HMP Channings Wood, I realised just how difficult it was for imprisoned parents to keep in touch with their children ... and the negative effects that this had. I just wanted to do something to help,' Berry explains. 'So, along with the writer in

residence, I developed the concept of Storybook Dads. After all, what better way to engage a non-reading, hard-nut prisoner who lacks parenting skills and has lost contact with his kids than getting him to read *Cinderella*?' (Storybook Dads, 2018).

Today, Storybook Dads also operates in women's prisons and youth offender facilities. In addition to recording stories for their children, participants in the programme at Channings Wood have the opportunity to receive training in audio/visual editing – skills that can be used to find employment upon their release. The project also runs workshops where inmates can create calendars, pop-up books and other educational gifts for their children.

The results of the charity's efforts are impressive: 98 per cent of participants said that taking part in the project improved their confidence; 97 per



© Storybook Dads

cent said the project improved their relationship with their children; 82 per cent said they felt less likely to reoffend as a result of taking part in the project; and, since 2002, 830 prisoners have been trained in audio/visual editing (ibid.). Moreover, according to the Scottish charity Families Outside, which supports the families of people in prison, prisoners who maintain family ties are up to six times less likely to reoffend (Families Outside, 2018).

A former inmate and beneficiary of Storybook Dads comments, 'It's hard to explain the feelings you get in prison. You don't ever get to cuddle with anyone – you don't even get to shake hands. You miss the love from your kids in their eyes. You start to feel quite cold every day.' He says that reading stories for his children brought some of that warmth back into his life. 'It's massively important for someone who wants to be rehabilitated' (Shaw, 2019).

6

Conclusion and policy directions

I was sentenced to life in prison with no hope of parole. I sat on my bunk that day, in my solitary confinement cell, and cried, because my life was over. ... So I started reading. ... I read at least one book every week. No matter the circumstances, I made the time. ... We had full access to the prison library. I lived in that library. I lived *for* that library. It took me everywhere: deep into outer space, deep into history, and even deeper into myself. I've probably spent more than 10,000 hours in the Patuxent library [in Jessup, Maryland]. ... I didn't just live *for* that library. I lived *because* of that library. The Patuxent prison library saved me from crushing despair.

Former prisoner Chris Wilson (2018; italics in original)

The experiences from prison libraries around the globe, as discussed in this publication, reveal their role and potential in providing access to education, information, recreation, spiritual development and the improvement of literacy levels among prisoners. They also show that using a prison library can be a very transformative and powerful experience with far-reaching and lasting effects.

Though varied in concept and design, prison libraries promote a culture of lifelong learning among prison populations. Creating an infrastructure that acknowledges and secures inmates' right to access reading materials and participate in educational opportunities amounts to an adherence to the principle of normalcy. Alternatively, not providing this opportunity means discrimination and further disadvantages for those who are, by default, marginalized. Therefore, for prisons to fulfil their duties to society to rehabilitate and reintegrate inmates, they must not hinder their right to information and education.

Learning and enjoying to read regularly can be an opportunity to enable the change that is expected of those we hope to reintegrate. It is understood that society as a whole benefits when more people are able to read and fulfil their civic duties, which include making better decisions and respecting the law. Additionally, reducing recidivism rates and increasing the number of rehabilitated, literate and

educated inmates saves public money over the long term as there are higher costs associated with crime, incarceration and reincarceration.

This publication demonstrates that prison libraries have many different advantages. The most obvious ones are connected to educational benefits, such as providing access to educational reading materials and information, including legal information,

For prisons to fulfil their duties to society to rehabilitate and reintegrate inmates, they must not hinder their right to information and education.

supporting formal education and achieving educational qualifications, and improving literacy levels and normalizing a culture of reading.

Then there is the benefit of pleasure reading as a calming

and constructive way of passing free time, reducing boredom and offering solace, generating a feeling of normalcy in a closed environment, and as a means of distraction and escaping daily worries.

Prison libraries also support social cohesion, acting as meeting places with a calm, relaxed and safe atmosphere, as well as being spaces for debates and events and offering cultural entertainment.

Then there is the transformative potential of reading and participating in literacy activities, which might enable prisoners to self-reflect on their life, eliminate anxiety, stress and depression, empower engagement and self-responsibility, increase empathy, communication skills and self-esteem, and expand and broaden their perspectives.

Using the services of the prison library is one of the very few opportunities where inmates have the autonomy and responsibility to make their own choices by selecting what to read and get informed about. The prison library supports prisoners in reflecting on their current situation and in planning for their life once released. It is also one of the few places where prisoners can feel relaxed and be confident that their requests will be attended to.

Prison libraries provide a window to the world. By working closely with organizations outside the prison environment, they provide a bridge to culture, events and services beyond the prison walls. Taking security issues into account, inmates deserve the same library services available to citizens living in freedom.

The responsibility for the rehabilitation of individuals behind bars and their reintegration into society lies on both sides of the wall. Governments and other stakeholders outside prison have the power to ensure the creation and application of policies that cater to the holistic transformation of former legal offenders. Meanwhile, prison administrations must accept the mandate of ensuring that their prisons are spaces that are conducive to lowering recidivism rates, rather than the incubation of further criminality. They must also recognize the potential

of the prison library while ensuring that it is accessible, attractive, properly funded and run by trained library staff.

The need for adequate prison libraries should be reflected in relevant policy regulations, but at the same time updated guidelines are also needed to give practical direction about how to implement adequate services. Adapting national, regional and international policies and guidelines into local contexts is crucial.

Unfortunately, many prison libraries still face significant challenges. 'As a rule, prison libraries are insufficiently funded, and the relevant national policies and decisions are, in most cases, made by prison administrators who lack a fundamental understanding of library work in the prison environment. In addition, prison libraries are often managed by prison staff who have no professional training in librarianship and are allocated in unsuitable and inaccessible locations' (Šimunić et al., 2016, p. 77). Furthermore, they often have to rely on donated and often outdated materials that do not reflect the interests and needs of the prison population.

This publication shows how varied prison libraries and their services can be all over the world. Their commonality is their support of the right to education and their provision of access to lifelong learning opportunities to incarcerated people. Prison libraries need to be further developed based on updated policy documents and guidelines, relevant impact research, and effective practices and inspiring experiences which need to be documented and shared to facilitate peer learning.

Country experiences and anecdotal evidence presented throughout this publication have shown the transformative potential of adequate prison libraries by providing access to relevant reading materials. The review conducted in this publication, covering a wide range of experiences across the world, suggests a few policy directions that emerge from good practices:

Prison libraries should model the library system that is used outside the prison walls.

Prison libraries should not operate in isolation, but work closely with the local (public) library system. Apart from ensuring professional and modern library management, this enables inmates to experience a public service that they will hopefully continue using once they are released. Librarians from both sides of the prison wall should work together and take initiative to find the best ways of providing access to quality prison library services.

Prison libraries should be an integral part of relevant policy regulations and networks.

The operation and conditions of prison libraries need to be based on relevant and continuously updated policy documents and practical guidelines. Regular exchanges and cooperation between representatives of prison libraries, public libraries, continuing education stakeholders and the judiciary system to further review and develop these documents need to be institutionalized. The establishment of national and regional prison library networks and associations should be encouraged.

Prison libraries need to be managed by trained prison library staff with access to sufficient resources.

Initial and ongoing training for all prison library staff must be ensured to enable the provision of professional services. Training should include a needs-based approach to modern prison libraries, including an understanding of literacy challenges and the use of information and communication technologies in the prison environment. Sufficient budget is needed to cover staff, materials, inventory, information technology and events.

Prison libraries should contribute to a literate environment that encourages inmates to develop, enhance and sustain literacy skills.

Prison libraries need to provide access to relevant reading materials and information in a safe and friendly environment. This includes access to electronic media and the Internet within the framework of security regulations. Prison libraries also need to be inclusive by providing materials for inmates with different literacy levels and abilities, and in languages that are represented in the prison environment. The library collection should be attractive, up-to-date, and reflect the needs of a diverse prison population. Ideally, inmates should be allowed to enter the library space to select their own reading materials.

Prison libraries should use their materials and provide a space to offer interactive literacy activities.

To enhance the transformative potential of reading and writing and to give an incentive to use their services, prison libraries should organize various outreach and literacy activities, such as reading circles, creative writing workshops and cultural performances. This can be done in cooperation with other prison departments or with outside facilitators or organizations.

7

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