
Employment, reintegration and reducing re-offending – a short look into offender resettlement within Europe

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ABSTRACT

“Offence after offence and sentence after sentence appear to be the inevitable lot of him whose foot has once slipped. Can nothing be done to arrest the downward career?” – Frederic Rainer (1876)

Criminological research and statements made by Governments across the EU on measures taken to assist offenders often make assertions on the levels of re-offending and importantly, how the crisis of re-offending can be resisted. Education, Training and Employment (ETE) provisions for (ex)-offenders have become increasingly prominent across EU criminal justice sectors as evidence links the provision of them to the process of desistance. The diverse range of European funding programmes provides an opportunity for the sharing and dissemination of good and promising practice in this field.

Despite the increasing empirical knowledge of what needs to be addressed in this field, there is still not enough of an evidence base with regards to the most effective interventions. The Ex-offender Community

of Practice (ExOCO_P) learning network helped to identify some of the key evaluations of ETE interventions across Europe, considering what outcomes these evaluations intend to measure and subsequently increase knowledge and understanding of successful interventions.

INTRODUCTION

The following article begins by outlining some of the research and practice in employment and re-offending across Europe and specifically focuses on evaluations currently identified, the types of evaluations or monitoring systems in place and the type of data collected. Following this is a short review of a primary research study in this field conducted as part of a multi-lateral Europe wide learning network aimed at enhancing employment prospects and subsequently, reducing recidivism in offenders and ex-offenders.

BACKGROUND

The “Ex-Offender Community of Practice” (ExOCO_P) learning network aimed to identify and improve EU wide services with regards to

Education, Training and Employment (ETE). ExOCOP proposed close collaboration with decision makers in the fields of justice, labour and education, as well as with third sector representatives. It supported the construction of a European network to ensure that the best available evidence and resources are available EU wide with regards to ETE reintegration measures¹. The learning network was funded by the Director Generals Employment, Inclusion and Justice of the European Commission.

An evaluation sub-project which formed part of ExOCOP focused on the link between employment and desistance. The initial aim was for the sub-project to contribute towards an enhanced EU understanding of 'what works' in improving offender resettlement across Europe. Primarily, it intended to demonstrate the importance of employment and skills related strategies in reducing re-offending and exemplify the importance of evidence based practice in confirming 'what works'.

CONTEXT

"The number of unemployed offenders in Europe is likely to run into millions" according to the European Offender Employment Forum (EOEF) report published in 2003 (EOEF 2003); but what relevance does this have to crime and re-offending? Studies by Gendreau et al 1996, Lipsey 1995 and Finn 2008, document the high risk of unemployment for offenders and the links between unemployment and recidivism. It is evidence of a relationship between unemployment and re-offending and the factors that affect it that is required for interventions to be developed and to be effective with the right people.

The quality and breadth of research in criminal justice is variable. There are few European studies on the effects of ETE on re-offending and these have differing effect sizes, research designs and levels of methodological rigour. Experimental designs using statistical data and meta-analyses are often identified as more reliable in their data outputs (Lum et al 2001). Their rigorous designs produce results which are subsequently used to inform policy and practice. However, such designs are limited in this field of criminal justice, largely due to the difficulties of

accounting for all variables that can affect an intended outcome. Lum and colleagues found that evaluation design has a systematic effect on intended outcomes in criminal justice studies; the weaker the design, the more likely a study is to report in favour of an intervention or treatment. Despite this, Brazier et al (2006) comment that the rather distinct and generalised outcome of 'reduction in re-offending' does not always tell us enough about the details of the programme, how the programme works (if it does), and the clients it targets.

Despite studies demonstrating the links between unemployment and re-offending, we are still faced with a restricted evidence base that provides limited hard data or statistics to confirm the link between employment and desistance. Davis et al (2008) comment that there are several interesting and informative evaluations of community based employment and skills training programmes, however *"none of these incorporate a sufficiently strong research design to clearly measure the effects of its programme on employment or recidivism"* (Davis et al 2008). This also suggests that we do not yet know enough with regards to what extent these programmes and interventions meet both the needs of the (ex)-offenders as well as current labour market requirements. Tarling (1982) noted that the relationship between unemployment and crime is interactive; both problems being related to, or being the effects of, social and economic disadvantage (Hearnden et al 2000); having a criminal record is both at the source of unemployment as well as a barrier to getting a job.

Unemployment is identified as a persistent problem for ex-offenders, whether this is related to the stigma of the term 'ex-offender' or the low educational and skills base that a large proportion of the offending population hold (Davis et al 2008). Hearnden et al (2000) suggest that the link between unemployment and crime is well established and subsequently criminal justice agencies introduce a range of employment opportunities and training with the key aim of preventing further offending. This is supported by the UK government through a green paper released in 2010 which contained a large emphasis on employment for ex-offenders, and the notion of the 'working prison'. Prisoners can work

up to and above 20 hours a week (HMP Maidstone, UK, encourages a 33 hour working week). The 'working prison' encourages prisoners to become acquainted with a normal working week, preparing them for reintegration and employment on release.

The National Offender Management Service (NOMS), UK, is committed to reducing re-offending and making communities safer through successful reintegration and rehabilitation of offenders. NOMS developed a Good Practice Guide for Skills and Employment related interventions as a practical guide to assist those working directly with offenders (Ministry of Justice 2008). The guide supports the notion of working across Government bodies to develop a coherent strategic framework within which providers and practitioners work. It accepts that more needs to be done to increase provisions, ensure they are flexible and relevant to individual requirements, and work across a number of issues and 'barriers' to desistance. In addition, skills and employment interventions cannot exist in isolation and therefore, the guidance reinforces the notion of working across different networks and for all involved to have an understanding of the wider context that affects the offender.

CURRENT RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE

Considerable efforts are being made to further introduce employment related interventions to prisoners and ex-offenders across the EU and a number of studies have sought to evaluate these. Prison work and vocational training 'do work' according to the criteria developed by Sherman et al (1997). Further studies concerning the efficacy of job training and educational programmes within the prison setting by Bushway and Reuter (1997) and Lipsey (1995) also look to prove effectiveness. Many of these evaluations focus on success of the programmes in terms of numbers into employment, length in employment and skills development. Whilst this may appear that we are lacking rigorous data it shows a causal link between successful employment interventions and reducing re-offending, these evaluations that test for programme success against some pre-determined criteria provide valuable data with regards to 'what works' and on whom within employment interventions.

The INCIPIT programme in Italy and the Chance programme in Germany are two examples of programmes that rely on data on numbers into employment, types of jobs gained and length in employment when determining their effectiveness (ExOCOP 2012). These programmes deliver vocational training courses to support ex-offenders into employment. The courses not only concentrate on labour market guidance, job searching and CV skills but also the emotional and social support during the transition into society and reintegration. These programmes have the opportunity to develop and enhance their services as the evaluation results they generate continue to show positive outcomes.

When considering employment to be one of the most critical factors in aiding desistance, the first challenge to address is overcoming barriers to employment. Although offenders perceive employment as a key pathway to their reintegration, they are often presented with many obstacles to getting a job such as poor educational and skills background, literacy or numeracy issues, lack of work experience, lack of accommodation and health and social care issues. Brazier et al (2006) identified the four main barriers to employment to be:

1. Offenders have lower levels of education and qualifications compared to the general population;
2. Offenders are more likely to have psychological and/or drug related issues;
3. Offenders are more likely to have unstable and insecure living conditions;
4. Employers may stigmatise an 'ex-offender'.

The question to consider is whether all of these barriers need to be addressed to enhance employment prospects or whether interventions should be tailor made? Bouffard et al 2000 suggest that the more interventions applied then the harder it is to determine what caused the outcome, subsequently applying an element of uncertainty to an evidence base promoting positive outcomes (Brazier et al 2006).

It is important to acknowledge that the factors affecting unemployment and offending and the subsequent treatment required will depend on the nature and circumstances of the individual. For

example, a drug abuser may be unable to sustain a job due to their habit, commit drug related crimes and require drug related treatment. However, a person just released from prison with poor literacy and numeracy skills will require entirely different treatment to support their route into employment. According to Tony Ward's 'Good Lives Model', a strengths based case management approach helps offenders identify and achieve their specific valued goals and seek constructive ways to realise pro-social and meaningful lives. This recommends a flexible approach to working with offenders that accounts for individual circumstances, abilities and ambitions (Brown and Ward 2004). Nevertheless, despite the plethora of individual reasons for unemployment; a lack of legitimate means of earning money, lack of structure to one's day and the demoralising effects of being turned away from jobs are just a few factors that could be linked to offending behaviour. Consequently, employment is identified as one of the key pathways to reducing re-offending and desistance.

In Finland, 70% of all offenders and 90% of young offenders return to prison after serving their first sentence (EQUAL 2006). The PoMo development programme funded through the European Social Fund (ESF) tackles this through intervention and support programmes for young offenders to deal with a range of issues from drug/alcohol abuse, dealing with criminal tendencies, providing positive role models and quite significantly, providing guidance on education, careers and social benefits and engaging the young people with employers where possible. Feedback from ex-prisoners showed how the support encouraged them to lead normal lives and provided them the guidance and positive role models they needed to better their lives.

Research on employment schemes run by the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO) showed that many offenders felt there were few jobs available to them, and due to their lack of skills and qualifications, the jobs that were available tended to be predominantly part time, temporary, menial and low paid (Hearnden et al 2000). In support of this, Fletcher et al's (1998) research found that a criminal record, attitudes of employers and a lack of skills and qualifications hindered ex-offenders from getting a

job (Hearnden et al 2000). They also found that low self esteem, confidence and motivation, which resulted from poor educational attainment, also hindered employment prospects. Finally, they found that ex-offenders were more likely to function within segregated social networks which meant that not only were they less aware of the diversity of employment opportunities, but that they lacked the informal contacts which were proven to be invaluable in supporting individuals into employment.

Lipsey (1995) conducted a meta-analysis of 400 control or comparison group studies from 1950–1990 and reported on various types of interventions for offenders. The results from a sample of over 40,000 juveniles showed that for these individuals, the single most effective factor in reducing re-offending was employment stability. In support of this, Gillis et al (1996) found in their work that offenders themselves considered getting a job post release to be critical in stopping them turning back to crime (Brazier et al 2006); this was based on the understanding that a job not only keeps you busy and provides structure to your life, but primarily, it brings in income which previously, may have been generated by illegitimate means.

Finn (1999) studied four prison based programmes in the US that prepared offenders in custody for employment on release. They found that all programmes succeeded in supporting large numbers of ex-offenders into employment, and the main reasons for this were the excellent collaboration with outside agencies and the continued support services available for offenders upon release. Furthermore, Roberts et al (1997) reinforced the notion of strong local partnerships on ensuring the level of support required for the (ex)-offender's reintegration is met and that each local agency provides their expertise where necessary (Hearnden et al 2000).

The FALPREV programme in France supports this notion through employing local stakeholders to work with prison and probation services to support offenders in preparing for their release and reintegrating into the local communities (ExOCOP 2012). The Nordic Prison Education Report (Baldursson 2009) reinforces the notion that good co-operation between authorities such as the prison and probation services and other associated

organisations, is a key factor in satisfying prisoners' education and training needs. If the attitudes of local employers and stakeholders can be re-appraised through lobbying, partnerships and even developing a new policy for employing ex-offenders then there would be increased confidence in such groups welcoming offenders back into society.

The UK Department for Education Rapid Evidence Assessment found that although the interventions under study tended to provide a range of skills applicable to the work place, in some prison based programmes out of date equipment was being used to train offenders (Brazier et al 2006). Prisoners were also being taught skills for work that was not going to be available in the community. The Nordic Prison Education Report (Baldursson 2009) acknowledges that modernised provisions and services are necessary for prisoners to be able to develop the skills and knowledge that can be applied in current society. The introduction of new ICT systems to meet prison security needs would be a simple and effective way of accessing a broader range of services through one portal, potentially allowing for cost savings in the future. The report recommends to the education authorities in the Nordic countries that legislation should aim to provide prisoners with the same rights and access to education as those in mainstream society; including keeping up to date with current labour market demands.

EXISTING EVALUATION METHODS

The following information emerged from the ExOCop evaluation E-survey which aimed to identify some of the evaluations linked to employment programmes for ex-offenders across Europe. The ExOCop programme survey supported by some of the literature and research evidenced earlier in this article, have shown that there are a plethora of programmes, interventions and services across Europe that target the education, training and employment needs of (ex)-offenders. However, the evaluations of such programmes and evidence base surrounding the effects of employment related strategies on reducing re-offending is somewhat restricted and limited in the information it provides. In the longer term the ExOCop survey results would intend to assist in improving evaluative

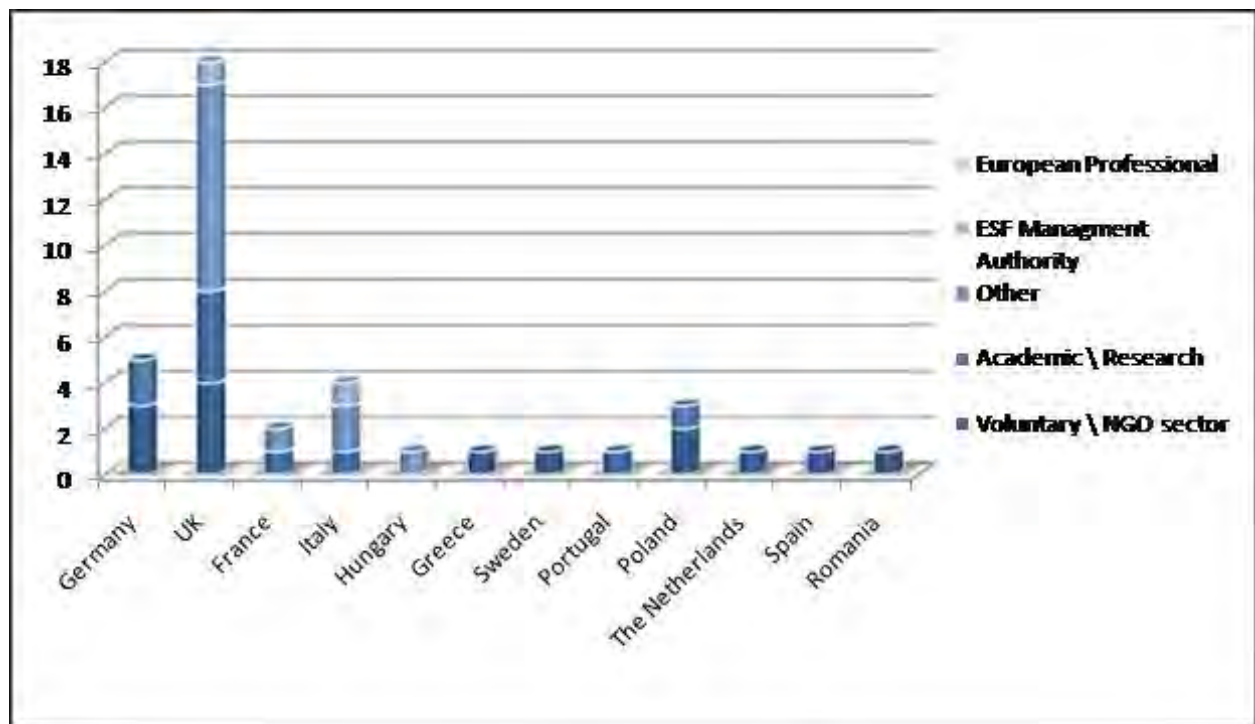
practice in this field by making it more robust and to identify the current obstacles to achieving this. By the time the survey was closed in April 2012 there were only 39 useable responses across 12 different EU member states. Unfortunately not all data sets were complete as many of the responses were missing answers to ad hoc questions.

The full evaluation sub-project report, available at www.exocop.eu provides a detailed table of all the programmes that responded, their aims and objectives, their client groups and evidence of evaluation and effectiveness. For the purposes of this short article we have drawn out some of the specific information surrounding evaluations of programmes across Europe, specifically focusing on the types of evaluations evident, outcome measurements and challenges and obstacles to measuring effectiveness.

Regarding the responses to the ExOCopE-survey, *Figure 1* details the countries where responses were received from and the types of organisations they related to. Evidently, the largest number of responses came from the UK, where the survey was administered from, accounting for 46% of the overall responses. To get full coverage in the future, sufficient resources are needed to either undertake the survey in each member state or use a core team to organise other more inclusive methods such as focus groups. The majority of responses were received from Justice Organisations (36%) or 'other' (33%). Of the 'other' responses, three of these came from private sector companies, four from charities and the remainder from training and careers advice providers.

Responses indicated that ideally, all programmes would strive to deliver well-structured evaluation methodologies that measure the programmes key criteria as well as determining whether stakeholders' requirements had been met. Evaluations perform a regulatory function and provide reassurance to funding bodies that programmes are compliant, cost effective and the intended outcomes are being met. Publicising the results of evaluations promotes the dissemination of good practice to demonstrate that programmes are effective, represent value for money and help inform policy development.

FIGURE 1



The survey indicated a broad spectrum of engagement in and use of evaluations between organisations. The 'model' of evaluation an organisation or programme adopts varies according to the requirements of funders, type of organisation (public, private or NGO), the size of the organisation, the resources available to it and the scale and complexity of the programmes. However, in the current climate it is evident that cost effectiveness and value money are the key criteria driving evaluations. It was generally agreed that the aim of evaluation is to provide information on what works and what does not and to make improvements accordingly. At a time where demand for services rises above supply and resources available to deliver services are limited, organisations are increasingly under pressure to show what they are doing 'works' and that they are in parallel with the pace of change in society.

Client follow up was aspired to by all programmes included in the survey, however only 50% of them were able to provide this service. It is evident that limited funding and resources and an inability to maintain contact and track clients are just a number of reasons why programmes do not always gather long term post programme data; this subsequently prevents reconviction data being drawn upon. As

Brazier et al (2006) note, these evaluations with differing and often more in depth data can often tell us more about the programme itself, the areas of success and the clients it appears to work best with. Nevertheless, from the survey responses it was evident that programme developers did acknowledge that follow up would provide added value to their evaluations and aid the future development of their programmes, allowing them to monitor and record the sustainability of programme effects.

Standard types of evaluations were most common based on the evidence gathered. It is important to recognise the disparity in understanding of what a 'type' of evaluation may entail. For example, within the survey we provided a basic definition of what we categorised standard, advanced and comprehensive evaluations as, however, these definitions are open to interpretation and what may be deemed as a standard evaluation in one jurisdiction could be regarded as advanced in another. One future recommendation would be the development of a common European framework of evaluation that assists jurisdictions to categorise their evaluations within a standardised framework which would allow for consistency across Europe.

Responses to the survey indicated that it is relatively common to be required to produce regular financial information either for a governing organisation or for external funders. Funders will often require programmes to use standardised data collection systems; national programmes and ESF projects in particular use common data management information systems. Co-ordinating organisations often offer resources to help ensure data collected on their behalf is of sufficient quality and can provide the required information. Smaller organisations however, can often struggle to cope with what can be a bureaucratic burden and are often reliant on commissioners or lead contractors to help with their capacity requirements.

Evidently, a primary driving force for evaluation is to provide information on progress and outcomes to funding bodies. Funders need to ensure money is being spent correctly and that programme deliverables are adhered to. In addition, contractual agreements often state that programmes must produce data with regards to effectiveness or simply as evidence that outputs are visible. The type of evaluation will largely depend on what information is required, for example for re-offending, comprehensive evaluations with data collection from offenders post programme completion is required, and ideally a comparison group should be used. There are, of course, ethical considerations to be taken into account when a control group is used, in that some individuals will be deprived of an employment service. However, for personal perceptions of whether a programme is effective, less structured evaluations that document individual feedback and opinions is all that is required.

It was also acknowledged that programmes must be given the opportunity to run for long enough for any improvements to be realised and for substantial outcomes to be recorded (Hearnden et al 2000). Some funders ask for effectiveness results after one year, which proves very difficult as it can take at least two years for a programme to become settled into its environment. Short term results often show a programme not to be as effective as would be intended for the longer term and, subsequently, some programmes may be prematurely discontinued. As organisations strive for consistent innovation, procurement services often ensure programmes are

discontinued before being given the chance, in order to make room for the next innovative service. Therefore, programmes require plenty of time to become embedded into processes and organisations. They need to be tested, allowed to adapt to the environment and be refined based on the needs of the clients they are piloted on.

It was not possible to make any generalisations regarding types of evaluations across different countries from the survey results due to the limited responses received and only 12 of the 27 member states being represented. Despite this, the survey gathered some interesting data regarding innovative projects across Europe, the types of evaluations they undertake, their goals of evaluations and much more. This data enabled us to present some useful programme specific information and provides an insight into what evaluations are evident across Europe, their limitations and how programme developers would like to see evaluative practice improve in the future (ExOCop 2012).

DISCUSSION

It is important to note the limited range of available evidence regarding evaluations of employment related programmes across Europe. The information gathered from available research is predominantly UK based, with a few examples from the US and the Nordic States. Despite there being a plethora of such programmes across Europe, it appears that there are few studies to rigorously test their effectiveness. Countries should be encouraged to undertake evaluations, even if starting off with basic local investigations. Evidence needs to be shared and disseminated across Europe more effectively to ensure EU justice organisations are making the most of the effective and innovative practice available to them.

It is also worth noting that much of the evidence that is available only shows effectiveness based on pre-determined criteria. Evidence currently does not highlight the impact of some of the key factors that affect the types and style of interventions that are needed. These key factors include: age (young offenders needs differ significantly to adult offenders'), gender (male and female offenders have different needs), setting (prison or community) and

ethnic group (ethnic minorities are over-represented within the criminal justice system; they face additional discrimination in the labour market and have specific needs as a result). Therefore there is an additional dimension on top of employment related needs and social barriers which should also be addressed as factors within this dimension have a significant effect on the nature of the intervention required and how effective it may be.

There needs to be some identified differentiation between the need for employment related services (CV skills, training, educational qualifications) and social barriers (substance misuse, mental health, homelessness) when determining which offenders utilise what services. This comes down to effective risk and need assessment; one offender may need qualifications to enter the labour market but their added substance abuse problem would additionally need to be supported to ensure they could maintain an educational programme. It is often difficult to determine whether it is the employment skills that need to be addressed or in fact the general social skills. Full assessment of initial needs and barriers to employment is essential for case managers to identify the circumstances of the offender and apply interventions appropriately.

Evidently programmes are limited by the evaluations they can introduce and the type of data they produce. Planning ahead to secure a budget and resources for evaluation, ensuring clients are followed up and evaluation data can be gathered 12 to 24 months post programme completion would lay foundations for more rigorous evaluations. Where possible, a budget should be allocated to an individual and follow them 'through the gate' to pay for further support and allow for the prison to retrospectively share any success.

It is extremely difficult to identify any direct re-offending data to determine the effectiveness of employment related interventions. This could be attributed to the diversity of factors and behaviours that can contribute to, and have an effect on, the likelihood of re-offending. Therefore the majority of studies reviewed set more realistic criteria for programme effectiveness and measure success in relation to these. The common measurements include numbers into employment, sustainability of

employment and identification of the factors that the individuals themselves feel are important in preventing recidivism.

It is important to acknowledge that the reduction in re-offending is the long term goal of interventions. There is a whole wealth of processes that need to be addressed prior to this result being achievable. Obtaining a job is commonly recognized as criteria for success for many interventions, but once again, there are a number of areas to address prior to the job being obtained. These areas include basic literacy and numeracy skills, CV work, building self-confidence, developing skills in education and training, building knowledge of the workforce, adaptability to a lifestyle that works around a career, stable housing and supportive families. These are just a fraction of the factors that affect employment and the journey towards desistance from crime. With such a breadth of factors it will continue to be difficult to research and quantify their impact when so much of it is done in isolation by different criminal justice agencies.

A number of recommendations can be provided with regards to how interventions could be run more successfully. Firstly, skills and training must be aligned to the needs of contemporary job markets. If provisions are out of date this could further hinder chances of (ex)-offenders meeting requirements of current employment opportunities. Secondly, strong local partnerships and co-operation between agencies is a key recommendation to ensure that all provisions link up and that the offender is supported in every way possible (Hearnden et al 2000). The new Integrated Offender Management (IOM) in England and Wales encourages a joined up approach of managing offenders, with a number of agencies (police, probation, local authorities, voluntary partners) working together to tackle the offenders that cause the most harm in their communities. Although this has not yet been evaluated, it is evidently a positive step in working towards stronger partnerships and utilising the skills and experience of different agencies to tackle re-offending. A joined up approach does however raise implications for evaluators who must consider who and what organisations are involved in and have an effect on the reintegration processes.

The final ExOCOP policy forum held in Berlin on 18th and 19th June 2012 further disseminated the expert European knowledge that the network gathered on the concepts, strategies and practices with regards to the resettlement of ex-offenders. Director Generals and Senior Officials from a number of European Countries attended the forum. The policy forum raised discussions surrounding:

- European Social Fund (ESF) policies in the prison and resettlement context
- Future policy perspectives on active inclusion
- Future funding and objectives of European Commission DG Employment
- Evaluation of ETE strategies across Europe
- Commonly agreed European frameworks and strategies for the resettlement of ex-offenders

For further information please refer to www.exocop.eu

NOTES

- ¹ The task of the partnership was the development and extension of a European Learning Network focused on the exchange, transfer and standardisation of expertise amongst participating member states, with the overall aim of developing a joint strategy for improving the conditions necessary for the successful reintegration of ex-offenders at regional, national and European level. The ExOCOP network ran from 2009-2012 with more than 40 partners from public administrations, ESF and non-profit umbrella organisations across 14 member states.

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