

## FROM PRISON TO WORKING LIFE NETWORKING FOR A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION



The level of the education and training of most prisoners in Germany is below average and this parallels the situation in other EU Member States. Many of these prisoners have an accumulation of serious disadvantages including drug addiction or psychological problems. Research and experience consistently confirm the strong correlation that exists between the overcoming of these disadvantages and the successful rehabilitation of the ex-offender. Yet, during their custody, many prisoners do not have access to opportunities to develop the capacities and competencies that they will need after their release if they are to be successfully re-integrated into social life and a labour market that has an accelerating pace of change and a rising demand for new types of skills.

The European Employment Guidelines place a strong emphasis on reinforcing social inclusion and preventing exclusion from the world of work. In its Recommendation ([2004/741/EC](#)) on the implementation of Member States' employment policies, the Council stresses, in one of its specific recommendations to Germany, the need to "...improve education levels of the workforce and ... to increase participation in lifelong learning, especially for the low-skilled..." Ex-offenders clearly represent a vulnerable group that would benefit from policies addressing this need.

During the last 30 years, North Rhine-Westphalia, which is the largest of the federal states of Germany with more than 18 million inhabitants, has been successful in creating a wide range of education and training opportunities for detainees. However, two issues have given rise to further concern:

- Firstly, much of the training provision in prisons is either geared to traditional vocational sectors that offer only limited, labour market prospects, or else it is not flexible enough to respond to the rapid changes in the world of work;
- Secondly, assistance during the period of detention is often not sufficiently well articulated with after-care support in finding employment. Ex-offenders face difficulties in making contact with services and labour market actors and/or they run the risk of dropping out of training if they have to complete their course after release.

Therefore, new policy priorities are now focused on adapting education and training to changing labour market needs and on linking vocational preparation with new forms of after-care that enable ex-offenders to continue their training on release and also facilitate their placement in a job.

The EQUAL [ZUBILIS](#)<sup>1</sup> Development Partnership (DP) plays an important role in putting these priorities into practice. Coordinated by the Ministry of Justice, the DP involves almost all the groups of key actors and stakeholders in North Rhine-Westphalia whose cooperation is needed to achieve a sustainable improvement in the transition from prison to working life, including:

- The Ministry of Education, vocational training centres, and a range of organisations specialising in course development and certification with a particular focus on modular learning, e-learning and the use of ICT;
- Key actors in the labour market, such as the Federal Agency for Employment, or employers who participate in the DP through the regional Association of Chambers of Craft and the Association of German Agencies for Temporary Employment representing more than 900 temporary employment agencies;

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<sup>1</sup> The acronym *ZUBILIS* stands for **Zukunft der Bildung im Strafvollzug** (Future of Training and Education in the Prison System of North Rhine-Westphalia)

- A number of pilot prisons that were selected to reflect the specific situation and role of different types of penal institutions, and the state agency responsible for the administration and supervision of the prison system.

Together these partners offer a comprehensive package of complementary expertise and competence which also provides a strong basis for mainstreaming the outcomes of the DP.



Wolfgang Wirth, coordinator of ZUBILIS


ZUBILIS started in July 2005 and will operate until the end of 2007. This period will also be marked by policy debate on the reform of the federal structure in Germany, which includes a proposal to shift the responsibility for the regulatory framework of the penal system from the national level to the level of the individual federal states. As a corollary, prison practices may change and come under tougher scrutiny in terms of their costs, including those related to the provision of training and resettlement support. For Wolfgang Wirth, who coordinates the work of the DP and heads the *Task Group on Criminological Research* at the Ministry of Justice, the challenge is quite clear. “*The regulations of the prison system*

*require that the enforcement of sentences must enable prison inmates to live their future lives without re-offending. Qualification and access to employment are crucial factors in the reintegration of ex-offenders. All our analyses and experiences show that the provision of training and placement support not only benefits the detainees but also our society. It significantly reduces the risk of recidivism and this can save considerable costs”* he explains, emphasising that “*we are not social romantics. We are aware that we will have to demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of the new approaches that are being developed and piloted through ZUBILIS”.*

## INTEGRATING PRISON EDUCATION, PREPARATION FOR RELEASE AND AFTER-CARE

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ZUBILIS is the latest element in a comprehensive strategy of articulating the broad spectrum of education and training opportunities that exist in the prisons of North Rhine-Westphalia with new approaches to the effective employment integration of ex-offenders. This strategy is based on three pillars:

- Work on the first pillar started in 1998 with the launch of **MABIS<sup>2</sup>**, a programme for market-oriented employment preparation, which provides individualised vocational or employment guidance, and initial contact with potential employers, during the final months of the inmates’ periods of detention. The European Union supported the development of this programme through the EMPLOYMENT-Integra Community Initiative;
- The second pillar, **MABIS.NeT** () , was established during the period 2002 to 2005 to complement the MABIS programme through the creation of a state-wide network of after-care agencies that liaise closely with the MABIS counsellors in the prisons and ensure continuity of training, placement and other resettlement services for ex-offenders after their release. *MABIS.NeT* was implemented as a Development Partnership during the first round of EQUAL;
- **ZUBILIS**, the third pillar, will underpin the continuing operation of *MABIS* and *MABIS.NeT* and, in particular, focus on new approaches to adapting the training provision in the penal system to changing labour market needs and the new skills required. It will also explore new job opportunities that could be created through close cooperation with temporary employment agencies.

The combination of these three pillars constitutes the lynchpin for the further development of an integrated rehabilitation policy in North Rhine-Westphalia but the success of this policy depends on effective cooperation between different partners. In addressing participants at the annual *MABIS.NeT* conference in 2004, Wolfgang Gerhard, who was then Minister of Justice, underlined

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<sup>2</sup> **MABIS** - Marktorientierte Ausbildungs- und Beschäftigungsintegration für Straftatlassene

that “the penal institutions cannot shoulder this task alone, as their responsibility formally ends at the moment of the prisoner’s release. We need the support of ‘external’ agencies including, in particular, the key actors in the labour market”.

## THE SYSTEM IS NOW IN PLACE

The *MABIS* programme is currently operating in 11 of the 37 prisons in North Rhine-Westphalia. In each of the 11 prisons a (team of) **MABIS counsellor(s)** is in place to work out, together with each willing prisoner, an individualised support plan involving guidance on suitable training opportunities and possible placement in employment after release. The counsellors also have a crucial interface function in ensuring effective links with the **after-care agencies** that were established by **MABIS.Net** in seven regions of the state. Different types of private providers played a central role in piloting these new agencies, including NGOs and trade union and employers’ organisations. They have knowledge and expertise in both the world of prisons and the field of employment, unlike most other labour market intermediaries with whom they cooperate closely. They are thus particularly well placed to offer advice and services to ex-offenders, training providers and employers, to help to normalise the situation of ex-convicts during the first six months after their period of custody and to prevent drop out from training or work. The effective networking contacts that exist between the regional agencies make it possible to ensure that this resettlement support is also available to the large number of individuals who, after having served their sentence, decide to move away from the location of their previous imprisonment. The Ministry of Justice has now decided to mainstream this network in co-operation with key labour market actors including the State Agency for Employment.

However, successful reintegration into employment does not only depend on effective support systems for the transition from prison to work. It also requires access to skills and qualifications that have a real market value. The primary aim of *ZUBILIS* is therefore to **increase the relevance of education and training provision for ex-offenders**, by modernising its content and methods of delivery, in close cooperation with employers and other labour market actors. Activities until the end of 2007 will focus on three main areas:

- Increasing the media competence of teaching and training staff in the penal system and developing media-supported programmes for prison inmates that offer a combination of vocational and basic educational qualifications;
- Adapting existing vocational qualification programmes for use in prisons, through modular design and certification of learning units and the introduction of e-learning;
- Mobilising, and capitalising on, relevant expertise available outside the penal system, e.g. from temporary employment agencies and research organisations.

In all three areas of work, special attention is being devoted to the particular situation and needs of female offenders. This issue is also a common thematic priority for the Transnational Partnership, *TIP – Transitions in Prisons*, in which *ZUBILIS* cooperates with DPs from the Netherlands, Hungary and the United Kingdom.



*Learning in Hövelhof, one of the prisons involved in ZUBILIS*

## OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNT

Successful placement in employment is the strongest lever for preventing recidivism. This is demonstrated impressively by the outcomes of a sample survey conducted amongst ex-offenders who had enrolled in a vocational preparation programme during their period of custody. Within the four years after their release, 80% of those who remained unemployed after completion of their course lapsed back into offending and were re-arrested. In contrast, the corresponding figure for those who found employment in the field in which they had been training was only 33%. Amongst those who had failed the examination or had discontinued their course, the rate of recidivism was 90% for the unemployed, against 65% for those who had found a job. In presenting the results of this survey, Wolfgang Wirth concludes that “these figures confirm the

*importance of placement support during the preparation for release through MABIS, and of the after-care services that are offered through MABIS.Net. The provision of training opportunities alone is not enough – the determining factor in re-integration is sustainable placement in employment<sup>3</sup>.*

MABIS achieved a placement rate of up to 50% amongst more than 4.000 prisoners who have participated in the programme to date. For adult participants more than 80% of these placements led to employment in the primary labour market and most of the rest to some form of education, training or work experience programme. For young people almost two thirds of the placements relate to training or work experience, but more than one third have resulted in a job in the primary labour market.

The large majority of those who call on the services of the MABIS.Net after-care agencies are ex-offenders who did not find access to employment or training through the MABIS programme or those who had dropped out of an initial placement. During the period 2003-2004, 85% of 1100 individuals who were “registered” with the after-care agencies after their release from prison<sup>3</sup> were facing these problematic situations. For half of this large group of clients, the agencies were able to offer job or training opportunities. While help in providing placements appears to be the most frequently requested form of support, it is not the only one. More than one third of the clients also required other types of assistance to enable them to stabilise their life situations during the first difficult six months after custody. These included job coaching, help with social or health issues, solving housing problems or advice in dealing with debt and other financial matters. Only 16% of all participants abandoned the after-care programme and this is a testimony to the relevance of the assistance that it offers.



*A MABIS.Net counsellor and her client*

MABIS.Net also developed and tested a number of tools based on electronic data processing to facilitate the placement process for ex-offenders, including data bases on those suitable training opportunities within the penal system or in public training institutions, a diagnostic tool to help in establishing meaningful profiles of applicants and the “JobExplore<sup>MABIS.Net</sup>”, an instrument to match individual profiles with the entry requirements for available jobs or training. These tools, which are already in use in several prisons, are at a stage when they can be implemented more widely.

## **MAINSTREAMING THROUGH NETWORKING AND WIN-WIN EFFECTS**

From the outset, provision for the transfer and mainstreaming of good practice was an inherent element of MABIS, MABIS.Net and ZUBILIS. All three programmes were designed to underpin a policy for the employment integration of ex-offenders that drew on a state-wide endeavour to promote closer cooperation between different relevant actors in the fields of criminal justice and the labour market. This concern for coordination is strongly reflected in the composition of the partnerships that were set up to implement these programmes. A further point of concern was the fact that innovative measures to tackle an entrenched problem like the social and vocational rehabilitation of ex-offenders take time to make an impact and even more time to ensure that their impact is sustained. Delivering MABIS, MABIS.Net and ZUBILIS in progressive stages has appeared to be an effective approach, as it has enabled all of the different agencies and actors that are involved to advance at the same pace and to consolidate their outcomes at the end of each stage before moving on to the next.

One of the most significant mainstreaming activities was the establishment of “regional reintegration fora” to intensify collaboration between prisons and relevant labour market actors. These were launched in the catchment areas of all seven MABIS.Net after-care agencies and

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<sup>3</sup> In addition, MABIS.Net provided support to more than 500 prisoners **during** their period of detention.

during the period 2003 – 2005, almost 400 key actors and stakeholders became members of these fora.

The regional reintegration fora had positive repercussions on networking between the field operators involved in *MABIS.NeT* and these network links created “win-win” situations for the different actors which, in turn, encouraged and enhanced the wider transfer of successful practices. Two examples illustrate these positive effects:

- The first relates to the successful placements of *MABIS.NeT* clients. Only 5% of these placements were attributed exclusively to action by the public services and 47% exclusively to action by the after-care agencies. However, the remaining 48% of placements resulted from cooperative action between the *MABIS.NeT* aftercare agencies and the local public employment services. Thus, the activities of these agencies contributed significantly to easing the work of the public placement services;
- The second example concerns support in solving other reintegration problems such as difficulties with vocational orientation and qualification, financial and housing matters or drug issues. Depending on the nature of the problem, a solution could be found in 25 to 60% of all cases, but where the after-care agencies cooperated with other specialised services the success rate was two to three times higher than in situations in which the agencies operated on their own.

Based on conclusions from these networks and similar arrangements, *MABIS.NeT* prepared a proposal on Guidelines for Effective Networking between Actors in the Fields of Criminal Justice and the Labour Market. This proposal has now been reflected in a new decree of the Ministry of Justice to secure the funding of measures for the vocational reintegration of (ex) prisoners that build on, and develop, the structures piloted by *MABIS.NeT*.

Drawing on the accumulated experience of *MABIS* and *MABIS.NeT*, the *ZUBILIS* DP will seek to develop the quality of networking between these actors and strengthen their cooperation with providers and experts in the field of vocational training.

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Links to EQUAL database descriptions: [MABIS.NeT](#)  
[ZUBILIS](#)