

## Barriers to prisoner participation in educational courses

Brosens, Dorien; Croux, Flore; De Donder, Liesbeth

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# Exploring Educational Opportunities for Foreign National Prisoners in Europe

VERSION ACCEPTED FOR PUBLICATION

Brosens Dorien, De Donder Liesbeth, Smetcoren An-Sofie, Dury Sarah

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## Abstract

To gain insight into the educational opportunities for European foreign national prisoners, an online survey was distributed among educational providers and prison managers (N=108). The results demonstrate that courses for learning domestic languages are most frequently offered. Other educational courses mostly relate to primary education and psychosocial courses. Based on the online survey, four organizations are investigated in depth to gain more information about how they work. We conducted 12 semi-structured individual and one group interview with professionals and prisoners. The results of the hybrid thematic analysis showed that different models exist to organize education for FNPs. The findings make contribution to the development of European pilot projects that provide distance education to FNPs offered by their home country.

*Keywords:* Foreign national prisoners; Educational participation; Europe, FORINER project

## **Introduction**

European prisons are confronted with an increasing number and proportion of foreign national prisoners (FNPs). A considerable amount of research about FNPs has addressed the problems they experience during their detention besides the traditional pains of imprisonment. The founder of these traditional pains is Sykes (1985), but more recent research also explicitly focuses on the pains foreign national prisoners experience during their imprisonment (e.g., Ugelvik & Damsa, 2017; Warr, 2016). Research on their educational opportunities is more limited. In this article, we approached this research topic by using an exploratory sequential mixed-method design. Prison managers, educational providers, ICT staff members, and FNPs are involved as research participants. First, an online survey was used to ask prison managers and educational providers about their educational offerings and the barriers they experience in organizing education for FNPs. In a later phase, four organizations across Europe were selected to explore the experiences of professionals and FNPs involved. This research is part of the European FORINER project.

## **Foreign National Prisoners in Europe**

In criminological literature, FNPs are defined as “prisoners who do not carry the passport of the country in which they are imprisoned” (Atabay, 2009; Hollin, 2013). According to Atabay (2009, p. 81) “foreign prisoners” are a broad group that encompasses three categories: (1) foreigners traveling from one country to another with the aim of committing an offense (e.g., drugs smuggling, trafficking in human beings), (2) prisoners who have resided for prolonged periods of time in the country in which they are detained, but who have not been granted citizenship for various reasons, and (3) prisoners who are legal residents in the country for a short period of time (e.g., migrant workers). In addition, Atabay (2009) adds that in countries where illegal immigration is an offense, there is a fourth type of foreign national prisoner. In

these countries, illegal immigrants can be convicted and locked up in the same institutions as prisoners convicted for internationally recognized criminal offenses.

In 2013, around 150,000 people detained in European countries had a foreign nationality (Mulgrew, 2016). More recent numbers from the Council of Europe demonstrated that on September 1, 2015, on average 22.1% of the prison population in European prisons consisted of foreigners—including prisoners from all over the world, from Africa, to Asia and America. Of the foreign national prison population 32% were citizens of other European member states (Aebi, Tiago, & Burkhardt, 2016).

Prison studies pay little attention to the experiences of FNPs (Bosworth, Hasselberg, & Turnbull, 2016) and they are frequently excluded from research (Yildiz & Bartlett, 2011). However, some notable exceptions have shown that FNPs are confronted with three major problems: (1) language problems, (2) problems in maintaining contact with family members, and (3) immigration issues (Barnoux & Wood, 2013; Bhui, 2009; Lloyd et al., 2006). First, concerning the language problems, Ugelvik (2014) states that “a lack of understanding the native language will colour every part of the everyday prison experience” (p. 115). As FNPs do not understand staff instructions, they frequently lack information about basic provisions and prison staff members misunderstanding them (Bhui, 2004; Ugelvik, 2014). Second, maintaining family contact is a problem for FNPs. Compared to national prisoners, they experience more difficulties in keeping in touch with their family members, mostly because of the great distances involved in visiting a relative in prison, but also because of high telephone charges (Ugelvik & Damsa, 2017). This is particularly the case for prisoners who were not a resident of the country where they are imprisoned (Atabay, 2009). Third, FNPs are also confronted with immigration problems. If they do not hold the passport of the country, they are at risk of deportation or removal (Barnoux & Wood, 2013). Long-term residents who have not been granted citizenship

for various reasons may have no ties in their country of origin, and may not even speak the language of that country (Atabay, 2009).

### ***Foreign National Prisoners' Participation in Education***

Before discussing the research on education for FNPs, we first want to present the concept of “opportunity to learn”. There are different understandings of this concept (Haertel, Moss, Pullin, & Gee, 2008). According to Cooper and Liou (2007, p. 44) “Opportunity to learn (OTL) refers to the conditions or circumstances within schools and classrooms that promote learning for all students. It includes the multiplicity of factors that create the conditions for teaching and learning, such as curricula, learning materials, facilities, teachers, and instructional experiences.” Traditionally, it is considered that people have the same opportunity to learn if they have been exposed to the same content. In other words, they have each had the opportunity to learn it. The problem with this traditional view is that it does not take into account learners’ prior knowledge. People integrate new knowledge with their prior knowledge, and the extent to which the new knowledge is learned depends on the extent to which it can be linked with prior knowledge (Gee, 2008).

Related to the population under study in this article (FNPs), the question can be asked whether they have the same “opportunity to learn” as prisoners who are imprisoned in their own country—in particular in terms of having “the same content to learn”, implying that they can follow the same types of courses and get the same educational materials. In this article, we thus focus on the educational offer as part of the opportunity to learn. Policy makers do not consider providing education to FNPs as a priority (Lemmers, 2015). Most of the educational courses provided inside prison are related to the national welfare system outside prison. As it is expected that many (or most of the) FNPs will leave the country after their period of

imprisonment, the educational courses are not considered relevant (Atabay, 2009; Ugelvik, 2014).

Imprisonment is inevitably linked with deprivation of the right to liberty. However, prisoners preserve all their other rights as human beings (Coyle, 2009) and remain citizens who are capable of reflection and reform (Easton, 2011). Despite the deprivation of liberty, other aspects of life should be as similar as possible to life outside prison (Smit & Snacken, 2009). These rights of prisoners are established in international conventions and recommendations, such as the standard minimum rules for the treatment of prisoners. The United Nations (1955) states that “all” prisoners shall have the right to participate in education. However, in 2009 the Human Rights Council of the United Nations demonstrated that not all its member states meet the requirement for equal rights to education and recommends that special attention should be given to educational programs for FNPs. Within this report, the special rapporteur of the United Nations uses a broad definition of education as educational programs should be aimed at the full development of a person (Muñoz, 2009).

Also within Europe some non-legally binding regulations focus explicitly on the right of prisoners to have access to education. For instance, article 28.1 of the European Prison Rules states that “every prison shall seek to provide all prisoners with access to educational programs which are comprehensive as possible and which meet their individual needs taking into account their aspirations” (Council of Europe, 2006). In a relatively recent document explicitly focusing on FNPs, the Council of Europe (2012) recommends their European member states to ensure that educational and vocational training is as effective as possible for FNPs. Prison authorities need to take into account the individual needs and aspirations of this subpopulation, which may include working toward qualifications that are recognized and can be continued in the country in which they are likely to reside after their release from prison (Council of Europe, 2012). The

policies of the Council of Europe are based on the traditions of adult education, implying that participating in education can become a comprehensive and transformative experience for the learners. However, although all countries provide education to their prisoners, the regulations vary greatly on how they are put into practice (Costelloe & Warner, 2014).

Nevertheless, various studies have shown that prisoners' participation in education has several benefits for those who effectively follow educational courses during their incarceration period. Prison education can transform and change lives (Behan, 2014; Stern, 2013). The research of Kim and Clark (2013), using data acquired from New York state, reveals that taking part in education during imprisonment decreases recidivism rates. Of the students who completed a college program 9.4% ended up back in prison within three years after release, while this was 17.1% among the comparison group who did not complete a college program. Through education, prisoners not only have the opportunity to gain valuable skills and qualifications, but also to develop competences which can help them to better manage their lives upon release and to find employment (Costelloe & Langelid, 2011). Other academics call this "up-skilling" during detention as prisoners gain certain achievements (Giles, Paris, & Whale, 2016). Some achievements of prisoners can be generic in nature (e.g., the ability to understand and give written or oral instructions), while others are skill-specific (e.g., learning computer skills or welding) (Gaes, 2008). Besides, involvement in education reduces the experience of the prison context as dehumanizing (Stern, 2013). In other words, participating prisoners are able to retain a sense of agency within the controlled and coercive prison environment (Behan, 2014). Furthermore, prison education also plays a positive role in creating a regime of dynamic security (Costelloe & Langelid, 2011).

Although FNPs and national prisoners have an equal right to education (Council of Europe, 2012), Westrheim and Manger, (2014) demonstrate that FNPs participate less because various

factors impede their participation, in particular lack of information about educational opportunities. A study in the Antwerp prison (Belgium) has demonstrated that it is not necessarily nationality that explains non-participation: insufficient understanding of the national language is the primary determinant (Brosens, De Donder, Dury, & Verté, 2015). For instance, these prisoners do not always have a sufficient understanding of the language in which the course is offered (i.e., most of the time in the native language of the country in which they are detained) (Lemmers, 2015; van Kalmthout, Hofstee-van der Meulen, & Dünkel, 2007). Furthermore, educational courses are not always considered relevant for FNPs. The courses are mostly linked with the welfare system outside the correctional institutions and it is expected that FNPs will leave the country upon their release, and thus no longer be part of that society (Atabay, 2009; Ugelvik, 2014). Offering education to FNPs is a low priority for policy makers and, as a consequence, the budget to offer courses to FNPs is very limited (Lemmers, 2015).

However, some countries provide FNPs with educational opportunities. For instance, in order to deal with language problems, (national) language courses are organized (Lemmers, 2015; Ugelvik, 2014). Having an understanding of the language of the country in which they are detained can help FNPs to communicate with prison staff and their fellow prisoners (Ugelvik, 2014), and these courses help FNPs understand the information provided (Westrheim & Manger, 2013). Besides the language courses for prisoners, some countries also provide language training for prison staff aimed at facilitating communication between prison staff and the foreign national prison population (Hawley, Murphy, & Souto-Otero, 2013). For instance, through the project ELBEP (i.e., Eliminating Language Barriers Online at European Prisons) prison staff can learn a new language (i.e., Greek, Polish, Russian, Spanish or Turkish) through online learning (Barkan et al., 2011).

Based on the preceding literature, the hypotheses for the present study are that (1) FNPs have less educational opportunities compared to national prisoners—and thus also a diminished

“opportunity to learn,” (2) educational courses to learn the native language of the country in which prisoners are detained are most frequently offered to FNPs, and (3) there are different ways to offer education to FNPs.

### *The Current Study*

The literature review has demonstrated that studies concerning the educational participation of FNPs are somewhat scarce. The aim of this study is to gain insight into the educational initiatives that exist for European citizens detained in another European country (recall that on average 32% of the foreign national prison population in Europe consists of prisoners who are citizens of another European member state (Aebi et al., 2016)). The FORINER project, begun in January 2016, was initiated to give European citizens detained in another European country access to qualitative, low threshold, certified learning opportunities provided by home institutions but received by a prisoner detained in a foreign country. To gain insight into the current state of play, mixed-method research consisting of two consecutive phases was undertaken. First, an online survey was distributed to explore the educational opportunities for European citizens detained in foreign European countries. Second, based on the results of the online survey, four organizations across Europe that organized (distance) education for FNPs were selected to investigate in detail how they work. The aim of this article is to provide an answer to the following research questions:

- (1) What kinds of opportunities to learn—in terms of educational programs—are available for national and foreign European national prisoners in European prisons? In other words, do foreign European national prisoners have the same “opportunity to learn” — in terms of having the same “content to learn” — as national prisoners?
- (2) Which barriers do professionals experience in organizing education for foreign European national prisoners?

- (3) How do the organizations organize (distance) education for foreign European national prisoners (both from the perspective of prisoners and of staff)?
- (4) Which recommendations do the respondents of the organizations formulate concerning the organization of distance education for European citizens detained in another European country that is provided by the home country, based on the strengths and weaknesses of their own approach?

## **Materials and Methods**

### ***Phase 1: Online Survey***

#### *Data Collection and Participants*

An exploratory sequential mixed-method design was used to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2013). First, an online survey was distributed among prisons in Europe to gain more information about the educational programs they offer to national and foreign European national prisoners, and the barriers professionals experience to organize education for FNPs. An online survey was used for several reasons: (1) the respondents were geographically distributed across Europe; (2) anonymity could be guaranteed as the open source survey application Limesurvey was used; and (3) respondents could feel safe about providing honest answers in an online environment (Sue & Ritter, 2012). The online survey consisted of a structured questionnaire that had been distributed through the networks of the associated partners of the FORINER project (i.e., the European Prison Education Association (EPEA); EuroPris; the Confederation of European Probation (CEP); and Weston College). The contact person of these organizations received an e-mail with a link to the survey and was asked to forward it to relevant people (i.e., snowball sampling). Although it was a conscious choice to use the snowball sampling method to reach more prison managers and educational providers,

we are aware that this sampling method has several disadvantages (e.g., selection bias and gatekeeper bias (Bonevski et al., 2014), and non-random selection procedures (Mujere, 2016)).

The questionnaire was available in four languages: Dutch, English, French, and German. One hundred and eight prisons from 22 different European countries took part in the survey. We divided the prisons into four European regions (based on Berglee, 2012) and it became clear that 38 respondents came from a northern European country, 38 from western Europe, 21 from eastern Europe, and nine from southern Europe. Two respondents did not indicate the country in which their prison was located. Of the respondents 48.1% were educational providers, 36.1% prison managers, and 15.8% had other jobs (e.g., employees of prison administration, prison guards, social workers). Of the participating prisons 5.6% had no foreign nationalities among their population, 39.8% had a population in which 1–10% were of foreign nationality; 25% had a prison population of 10–30% who were foreigners; 18.5% had a population of 31–50% who were foreign, and 11.1% had a population in which more than 50% had a foreign nationality. In particular, prisons in northern and western Europe had a high population of FNPs, while prisons in eastern and southern Europe had a lower percentage of FNPs (tested using a chi2-test;  $\chi^2 = 28.787$ , 4 df,  $p = 0.000$ ). Of prisons in eastern and southern Europe, 80% had a prison population with 0–10% foreign nationals. The majority of the prisons in northern Europe (44.7%) had between 11 and 30% foreign national prisoners, and 29.6% were confronted with a prison population among which more than 30% had a foreign European nationality. Of the prisons out of western Europe, 18.4% had 11–30% foreign national prisoners and almost half of the prisons had more than 30%.

### *Analytical Strategy*

The first two research questions were addressed with the quantitative data using descriptive statistics. To obtain insight into the educational opportunities for foreign European national

prisoners, the respondents were asked two questions: (1) “What levels of education are provided for prisoners in general? Also indicate which levels are taken by foreign European national prisoners”; and (2) “What other educational courses are provided for prisoners in general? Also indicate which levels are taken by foreign European national prisoners.” In the results section, we provide the frequencies of how many prisons offer certain educational courses to national and foreign European national prisoners. In addition, the respondents answered the following question: “The following statements are about the barriers to offer education to foreign European national prisoners. To which extent do you agree with the following statements?” The barriers were measured using a 5-point scale where 1 = totally disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = totally agree. The data were analyzed using SPSS 22.0. As not all respondents provided answers for each question, N ranges from 79 to 108. In total, 108 participants completed the questionnaire.

## ***Phase 2: Qualitative Interviews***

### *Data Collection and Participants*

Based on the results of the online survey, four organizations were investigated in depth. In order to select the organizations, the following criteria were used:

- (1) Sole focus on foreign national prisoners/no exclusive focus on FNPs;
- (2) Making use of technology to support education/not making use of technology.

The first two organizations selected were practices solely focusing on foreigners: (1) Educatie Achter Buitenlandse Tralies (EABT – In English: Education behind bars abroad) (the Netherlands) and (2) Kongsvinger Prison (Norway). Some of their courses had technological aspects and others not. The other two organizations were chosen because they used a secured IT platform to offer education to prisoners, but they did not explicitly focus on FNPs: (3)

Weston College made use of the Virtual Campus (England), and (4) the Beveren Prison used PrisonCloud (Belgium). In total, 12 qualitative semi-structured individual interviews and one group interview with professionals and prisoners were conducted. Table 1 provides an overview of the organizations involved as well as the people that were interviewed. Initially the plan was to conduct an interview with an educational coordinator, teacher, and prisoner for each organization. This was done in Kongsvinger prison. For EABT, all of these actors were involved. Instead of one prisoner, we interviewed two prisoners as the director requested that two of the students could be interviewed. For Weston College, we did not get permission to interview a prisoner thus only an educational coordinator and teacher were involved. Lastly, in collaboration with the educational coordinator of the prison at Beveren, it was decided to conduct interviews with an ICT staff member and a developer rather than a teacher in order to also include their perspective. The initial plan was only to conduct individual interviews as this would enable the lived experiences of respondents and the meaning they made of this experience to be understood (Seidman, 2013). In the Beveren prison, staff approached three prisoners to request an interview and all three wanted to participate. For organizational reasons, it was more practical to bring these different prisoners together and do a group interview rather than individual interviews. The advantage of this “small” focus group (like individual interviews) was that we could generate understanding of participants’ experiences and beliefs (Krueger & Casey, 2015). In addition, group interviews enable discussion between the different participants whereby other issues can emerge (Liamputtong, 2011).

The interviews were conducted between March and June 2016. The medium used for the interviews was flexible. The majority took place face-to-face. When the respondents were situated far from the researcher’s location (Belgium), the interviews were conducted by telephone or Skype. There was considerable variation, with the shortest interview taking 24 minutes and the longest 78 minutes. Both of these interviews took place face-to-face. Except

for the shortest interview, interviews conducted by telephone and Skype were shorter in duration than the face-to-face interviews.

<Insert Table 1 about here>

At the outset, all respondents were asked to briefly describe the organization in which they were involved. The following questions addressed the who (target group), what (types of courses), and how (method) of the selected organizations. At the end of the interview, interviewees were asked: “What do you think are the most important recommendations to offer concerning distance education provided to European citizens detained in another European country by their home country?”

Before the interviews began all respondents read and signed an informed consent in which they declared that they (1) were informed about the purpose of the research, (2) participated voluntarily in the study, (3) agreed with tape-recording during the interview, and (4) gave permission to use their personal details anonymously.

### *Analytic Strategy*

The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. The first author subsequently read and analyzed the transcripts using a hybrid approach of deductive (i.e., theory-driven) and inductive thematic analyses (i.e., data-driven) (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The majority of the analyses were, however, data-driven as only a limited theory-based knowledge was already available (e.g., what – educational offer: language courses (Lemmers, 2015; Ugelvik, 2014); how – method: working toward qualifications (Council of Europe, 2006)). The structure of the coding labels and results were regularly discussed with the second author. The interviews were coded and analyzed using MaxQDA software package, a qualitative analysis program.

The aim was to provide an answer to the third and fourth research questions about the different models of organizing education for FNPs, and the recommendations concerning the organization of distance education provided by the home country for European citizens detained in another European country. Table 2 provides an overview of the thematic categories, key terms codes, and examples from the analysis.

<Insert Table 2 about here>

## **Results**

### ***Quantitative Findings***

#### *Educational Opportunities in European Prisons*

To gain a picture of the education on offer in European prisons, we asked the respondents to indicate which educational offerings they provided to prisoners in general, and to specify education in which foreign European national prisoners can participate. Table 3 presents the results from the different educational levels, and Table 4 the other types of educational courses offered.

<Insert Tables 3 and 4 about here>

In general, national prisoners have more participation opportunities than European FNPs. In addition, the higher the educational level, the less often it is offered. Primary education is most frequently offered, both to national prisoners and FNPs (78.9% and 47.8%, respectively). Concerning the highest educational level: 7.8% of the prisons offer the opportunity of enrolling in a master's program to national prisoners and 3.3% to FNPs.

Respondents were also asked to provide more information about the opportunities of taking part in other educational courses. As with educational levels, educational courses are more often provided to national prisoners than to FNPs. The courses most frequently offered to national prisoners are psychosocial courses about drugs, life skills, parenting, and bullying (71.1%), and academic courses like maths, sciences, physical education, or history (58.9%). The offerings for FNPs are different. Most frequently, they have access to language courses to learn the language of the country in which they are detained (53.3%), and to psychosocial courses (47.8%). The offer of employability courses (interview techniques, how to write job applications and CVs) is low, both for nationals (47.8%) and foreign European national prisoners (27.8%).

#### *Barriers to Providing Education for Foreign European National Prisoners*

<Insert Table 5 around here>

Table 5 presents an overview of the barriers professionals experience in providing education to FNPs. The barriers are divided among three categories. The first category is “lack of prison resources.” Almost 60% of the respondents (completely) agreed that there are little or no educational materials available for FNPs, and that the financial resources to organize education for this subpopulation are too limited. Half of the respondents lack knowledge on how to educate FNPs and 46.8% (completely) agreed that there are not enough prison officers to provide education to FNPs. A second category concerns “language barriers.” Almost half of the respondents had experienced the fact that FNPs insufficient grasp of the local language was a barrier to providing education. The last category concerns “safety.” A minority (8.9%) considered educational courses for FNPs as a safety threat.

## ***Qualitative Findings***

### *Description of the organizations*

As an introductory question, respondents were asked “Can you briefly describe your organization/prison?” The foundation *Education behind bars abroad* organizes distance education for Dutch citizens who are detained in foreign countries all over the world. Their educational courses are available for citizens with Dutch nationality and those with a residence permit in the Netherlands.

The *Kongsvinger prison* of Norway is a prison that has only held foreign nationals since December 2012. At the time of the interviews, 120 prisoners could be detained in this institution, but in the near future that would increase to 140 prisoners. Originally, FNPs came to Kongsvinger prison when they had one or two years of imprisonment remaining. Recently the situation has changed. Norway has rented a prison in the Netherlands (Norgerhaven) since September 2015 and most prisoners transferred to this prison are FNPs. When FNPs are coming close to their date of release, they come to Kongsvinger prison one or two months before release to serve the rest of their sentence. This suggests that Kongsvinger prison has a high turnover rate in its population.

*Weston College* is a college located in the South West of England that offers educational courses in free society. They also have a contract to organize education in nine prisons and one Immigration Removal Centre in this region. Inside these institutions, Weston College uses the *Virtual Campus*, a highly secured web-based environment. Besides a resettlement tool, the Virtual Campus is an educational tool used as a learning aid for educational courses offered in prison.

Lastly, the *Beveren prison* is one of the most recently built prisons of Belgium (opened in March 2014) and offers room for 312 male prisoners. All prisoners have access to *PrisonCloud*, a secured IT platform delivering several services to prisoners (e.g., television, games, writing

facilities, the means to order supermarket products). PrisonCloud also offers prisoners the opportunity to take part in e-learning courses in their cells.

### *Different Models to Organize Education for Foreign National Prisoners*

The organizations were selected to examine more in-depth information about how they worked. Questions were asked pertaining to who (target group), what (types of courses), and how (method). Figure 1 provides an overview of the target group, the types of educational courses offered, the method used, types of formal support provided to prisoners who are studying, and the certification of courses offered.

<Insert Figure 1 about here>

First, the selected organizations differ with regard to their **target group**. In the majority of the prisons in Europe, FNPs are detained in “normal” prisons. This is also the case in the Beveren prison (Belgium) and the prisons where Weston College (England) provides education. Their educational offerings do not differ for national and foreign national prisoners. As the Kongsvinger prison (Norway) solely accommodates prisoners of foreign nationality, the focus is on their educational offers. Before Kongsvinger prison the educational coordinator worked in another prison where national and foreign nationals were detained together, and he experienced it as an easier place to organize education solely for FNPs:

In that prison, 30% of the prisoners came from other countries and we had few education options for them. We had to make a priority for the Norwegian inmates because they needed different things. It’s much easier when you have only one category. So I think the foreign prisoners in Kongsvinger prison have a better offering than in other prisons. (...)  
We also shortened our courses. We want them to finish the courses before they are

released. If you are Norwegian, you can start education in the prison and continue it when you are released. That is not possible for foreign inmates. (Educational coordinator, Kongsvinger prison, Norway)

Besides, organizations can also focus on citizens of their own country who are detained abroad. This is what EABT (the Netherlands) does. People with Dutch nationality or those who have a residence permit for the Netherlands can follow educational courses with the support of EABT. One of the questions in the online survey asks whether prisons work together with other European countries/organizations to provide education to FNPs detained in their own institution. Results indicate that one out of ten does and they all work together with EABT. Based on this, we can conclude that only people of the Netherlands who are detained abroad have access to education provided by their home country, while people originating from other European countries do not.

Second, the selected organizations can be compared when looking to the **types of courses** they offer. The courses can be developed by the organization or not, and may be only intended for prisoners or also used by students in the outside society. EABT (the Netherlands) develops their own courses for people detained abroad. In addition, they also make use of courses from other educational providers that specialize in distance education (e.g., National Business Academy, the Open University). This enables them to provide comprehensive educational offering. One of the prisoners of EABT was happy that he had the chance to follow the course of an officially recognized institution:

When I received the course, it was a big blue map. And do you know what turned out? It was a course of the NHA, the Nationale Handelsacademie [National Business Academy]. (...) They work together with local educational providers. I was a little bit surprised

because I could also choose a course of the academy on my own. But the big advantage is that EABT offers the courses free of charge. (Male prisoner, EABT, the Netherlands)

Kongsvinger prison (Norway) and the prisons in the South-West of England (Weston College) work together with ordinary schools (which provide education in the outside society), therefore their courses do not solely address prisoners. Lastly, the PrisonCloud system of the Beveren prison (Belgium) offers about 130 e-learning courses from the public employment service of Flanders. These courses are also provided externally. All of these prisons find it important to offer educational courses inside prison that are similar to those outside in order to maintain the parallels between the two as much as possible.

Furthermore, the **method** that is used to provide education and **formal support** to student prisoners varies between the selected organizations. Two organizations are based on self-study: EABT (the Netherlands) and the Beveren prison (Belgium). EABT works together with prisons all over the world to provide distance education. Distance education is largely organized by post, except for those prisoners who have approval to return their homework assignments through the secured Internet, but they are relatively few. The courses are based on self-study in one's cell, but voluntary teachers support the students, for instance by sending letters, correcting homework assignments, and keeping prisoners motivated to continue their study. The prisoners we interviewed appreciated this support. From this we can deduce that the efforts the volunteers undertake to support the students are one of the biggest strengths of EABT. The e-learning courses on the PrisonCloud system of the Beveren prison (Belgium) are also courses that prisoners can study on their own without any formal support.

Kongsvinger prison (Norway) and Weston College (England) use classroom-based learning where a teacher is available to provide support. Weston College not only provides support of a

teacher, but also peer support. This makes them unique in comparison to the other selected organizations. Every prisoner who follows a course through the system of the Virtual Campus gets a peer mentor. The peer mentors are fellow prisoners, who are present in the classrooms where they support the teacher as well as the student prisoners, including FNPs. They help the prisoners complete paperwork correctly and encourage them to follow up their work and progress in other courses. Weston Colleges tries to match earners with a peer mentor who speaks the same language:

So it might not be their first language but it is a language they can speak fluently. So currently we have a peer mentor who speaks Spanish and so far, we have nationals of Spanish and Portuguese who he works with. We also have a Polish man who works with a lot of Slavic offenders that we have. (Teacher, Weston College, England)

The languages in which the courses are offered also differ between the selected organizations. While EABT, the Beveren prison, and Weston College offer courses in the native language of the country, Kongsvinger prison offers all courses in English. In the words of a student of Kongsvinger prison: “The people in this prison will be deported afterwards, so we are all foreigners. So, because of that, all courses are in English.” This underlines that they try to make the educational offer as accessible as possible for a variety of prisoners coming from different countries.

Lastly, there are also differences in the **certification** of the courses. Most of the selected organizations offer certificates to prisoners when they successfully complete a module or course (i.e., EABT, Kongsvinger prison, and Weston College). As the Kongsvinger prison and the prisons in the South-West of England work together with official schools (active in the outside society), they are able to award certificates with the name of the school and not the prison. This

extends the opportunities of finding work after release. The Beveren prison is the only one that does not provide officially recognized certificates. One of the prisoners mentions that it would be better if they could receive an official certificate:

It is always nice if you make an effort for something, that you get a paper that shows appreciation and recognition for successfully completing the course. (Male prisoner, Beveren prison, Belgium)

*Recommendations when organizing distance education provided by their home country for European citizens detained in another European country*

The question “What do you think are the most important recommendations to offer to European citizens detained in another European country concerning education that is provided by their home country through distance education?” prompted respondents to think about this as an opportunity. The majority of selected organizations did not offer this type of education (apart from EABT). For most of the prisoners involved in our research it was difficult to think about how this type of distance education could be organized. The results below are thus mainly (but not completely) based on ideas from the professionals. In general, they mentioned three main points of interest: (1) a European network, (2) organizational opportunities/barriers, and (3) types of support.

First, several educational providers mentioned that building a network across Europe and finding educational organizations who are willing to take care of their citizens detained in another European country is only a first step. Once these organizations are identified, potential students need to be localized. These potential students need to be informed about their educational opportunities, for instance by a professional working in the prison in which they are detained or by embassies. Once a student decides to get involved, the educational

organization of his/her home country needs to be informed as they have to send the educational materials and homework assignments, correct the homework, provide feedback, and so on.

Concerning the organizational opportunities/barriers, respondents of several selected organizations mentioned that studying through distance education is not easy to organize in prisons as not all (foreign national) prisoners have access to the Internet or other ICT facilities. This means that they are not able to, for instance, submit homework assignments through the Internet. Paper-based education is a possible solution, as the experiences of EABT have shown. However, the educational coordinator of the Beveren prison stated that all the educational materials should be available to the students:

Most of the manuals we use now are based on interaction with the teacher and, for instance, some CDs and exercises are only available for the teacher. Having a manual and an exercise book does not mean that you can fully study on your own. You also need the book for the teacher. You need three books: the teachers' handbook, the students' handbook, and the workbook. If you only have the last two and not the teachers' handbook and also not the CD and other educational materials, you are not able to study on your own. (Educational coordinator, Beveren prison, Belgium)

Another aspect related to the organizational opportunities/barriers according to several respondents were finances. The Council of Europe (1989) states that prisoners should not lose out financially by participating in education (referring to the competition between doing prison work and engaging in education). Several professionals mentioned that it is necessary to support FNPs in the same way as national prisoners and to provide an easily accessible offer, meaning that the financial costs for prisoners are negligible or free of charge. This implies the purchase of educational material and supplies such as envelopes and stamps to return assignments. The students of EABT both mentioned that the opportunities of following a course free of charge

was a big advantage. All the organizations involved in our research succeeded in offering their educational courses free of charge. Depending on the legislation, the Ministry of Justice or the educational sector granted subsidies for prison education.

A last recommendation mentioned both by professionals and prisoners concerns support. For instance, in the words of an educational coordinator: “I think that it is important to provide counselling in some way, even by letter, or telephone, or e-mail.” Our selected organizations reveal that support can be provided by the educational institution, but also by for instance volunteers, prison officers, or fellow prisoners. This support does not have to be provided face-to-face; it is also possible via telephone, letter, e-mail, and so on. One of the educational coordinators emphasized that providing support is essential as many FNPs are not used to study and concentration over long periods of time. Offering short modules can be a possible option for follow-up and keeping the student’s motivation high.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

As research has already shown that FNPs participate less in educational programs (Westrheim & Manger, 2014), the aim of our research was to explore the educational opportunities for European citizens detained in a foreign European country and the barriers professionals experience in organizing education for this subpopulation. European citizens detained in a foreign European country are those who have a European nationality other than that of the country in which they are imprisoned. As there are numerous positive outcomes related to participation in education during a detention period (e.g., decreasing recidivism, Kim & Clark, 2013; transforming lives, Behan, 2014; Stern, 2013; retaining a sense of agency within the controlled and coercive prison environment, Behan, 2014; creating a regime of dynamic security, Costelloe & Langelid, 2011), it is important to explore the educational opportunities for FNPs. However, the majority of the academic research about prison education focuses only

on national prisoners (e.g., Rosário et al., 2016; Roth & Manger, 2014). Thus, the question remains whether FNPs have the same opportunity to learn as prisoners detained in their own countries. In this article, we do not take into account the ability of prisoners to link new knowledge to previous knowledge (which is, according to Geek, 2008, an important aspect of opportunity to learn), and the multiplicity of factors that create the conditions for teaching and learning, such as learning facilities, teachers, and educational instructions (Cooper & Liou, 2007), but focus only on the “available educational content.” In addition, attention has been paid to the obstacles professionals experience in organizing education for FNPs, and the different models that exist to organize this education.

A first result of our study highlights that prisons have a (much) smaller educational offering for foreign European national prisoners than for national prisoners. Slightly more than half of the prisons participating in the study offer FNPs language courses to learn the language of the country in which they are imprisoned. These courses help them to understand the information that is given within the prison (Westheim & Manger, 2013) and allow them to communicate with prison staff and fellow prisoners (Ugelvik, 2014). However, the added value for some foreign national prisoners in the long term is arguable. After release from prison, some people will stay in the country where they can effectively use what they have learned during these courses. Others will return to their home country or another country in which they speak another language. Previous research has already indicated that, in particular, foreign national prisoners who have lived in the country in which they are detained before their imprisonment, or those who want to stay after their release, are motivated to follow those courses (Croux, Brosens, Vandeveldel & De Donder, 2018). Besides, somewhat less than half of the prisons offer FNPs psychosocial courses concerning drugs, life skills, parenting, bullying, etc., and primary education. Higher levels of education are less frequently offered. This is not only the case for FNPs, but also for national prisoners. This might be because of the fact that the average

educational level of prisoners is lower than that of the general population (Hetland, Iversen, Eikeland, & Manger, 2015; Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). Based on this, we can conclude that the individual aspirations of foreign national prisoners—which are referred to in the European Prison Rules (Council of Europe, 2006)—are not the starting point to offer education to FNPs. FNPs have some opportunities to get involved in education, but they have fewer opportunities to learn than national prisoners. It is of utmost important to gain insight into the educational needs and aspirations of FNPs and offer them courses that are adapted to these needs and aspirations. Research with national prisoners has revealed that aligning the educational offer with prisoners' individual needs and aspirations is challenging (Delaere, Caluwé & Clarebout, 2013), and this may be even more challenging for FNPs.

From the professionals' perspective, they state that they are particularly confronted with a lack of prison resources to organize education for European FNPs. The main barriers are the lack of educational materials available for FNPs, the limited financial resources, and the lack of knowledge about educating FNPs. These factors may be linked to the fact that policymakers do not regard provision of education to FNPs as a priority (Lemmers, 2015), despite recommendations from the Council of Europe (2012) that member states ensure that the educational and vocational training for FNPs is as effective as possible. In addition, most of the educational courses provided inside prisons are linked with the national welfare system of the host society. As it is expected that (most) FNPs will leave the country upon release, these courses are not considered relevant to them (Atabay, 2009; Ugelvik, 2014). Moreover, it is also clear that professionals consider the fact that FNPs do not speak the language well, a barrier to organizing education for them.

Although the quantitative research in this study demonstrates that organizing education for FNPs is not common, the results of the qualitative research demonstrate that different models

exist to overcome organizational barriers and to organize education for FNPs. In this discussion, we highlight two main findings. First, professionals and policy makers can develop educational activities solely for FNPs. On the one hand, countries can reach out to their detained nationals in a foreign country and offer them distance learning (e.g., Education behind bars abroad—the Netherlands). In particular, a combination of distance learning and ICT can create educational opportunities and make it possible to facilitate cooperation between the foreign prison and educational providers in the prisoners' home country (Hawley et al., 2013). On the other hand, countries can design prisons solely for FNPs and organize education specifically for them (e.g., Kongsvinger prison—Norway). The educational coordinator of Kongsvinger had previously worked in a prison holding both foreign and national prisoners, and felt that it was much easier to have only FNPs as the education offered to Norwegian citizens in other prisons had priority over that offered to FNPs. However, as FNPs in Europe are mostly detained within “normal” prisons (i.e., together with national prisoners), the education on offer does not differ much for national and foreign national prisoners (e.g., Beveren prison—Belgium; prisons where Weston College provides education—England).

Second, the method of organizing education and the formal support given to learning can be organized in different ways. Prisoners can be brought together in a classroom where a teacher is available (e.g., Kongsvinger prison—Norway; prisoners where Weston College offers education—England), but prisoners can also support each other during class. Recently, the added value of peer support in prison, mostly organized in the form of peer support schemes or peer education (Bagnall et al., 2015), has been acknowledged (e.g., Magee & Foster, 2011; Perrin & Blagden, 2016). In the prisons where Weston Colleges provides education, prisoners work with peer mentors. These are prisoners who support learners by completing their paperwork correctly and encouraging follow-up with work and progress to other courses. Working with peer mentors of various nationalities allows prisons to provide support to FNPs

in their own language, if possible. Another method of learning is self-studying in one's cell (e.g., Beveren prison—Belgium; EABT—the Netherlands). While the former does not provide support to their learners, EABT has voluntary teachers who provide support. These volunteers send letters, correct homework assignments, and motivate prisoners to keep on studying. The Confederation of European Probation (CEP, n.d.) acknowledges that it is important to provide support and encouragement to FNPs who are studying through distance learning provided by their home country. The conditions in which they have to study are often difficult and their situation also brings enormous stress.

### ***Limitations and Future Research***

A number of limitations should be considered when interpreting the results. Although the survey was distributed through an extensive network of organizations that have contact with the majority of prisons and prison administrations in Europe (e.g., EuroPris, CEP, EPEA), an initial shortcoming is that our study is not representative of all European prisons as the sample of our online survey was relatively small (N = 108 unique prisons). Besides, we have selected four organizations to investigate their way of working in depth, according to the results of the online survey. As not all prisons participated, it is possible that other inspiring practices and models to organize education for FNPs are available. In addition, only participants who spoke Dutch or English could take part in the interviews owing to the language skills of the interviewers. Hence, several educational providers and FNPs were excluded from the research. Making use of interpreters to attend these interviews could be a way to overcome the language barriers. The results of our study are thus not representative. However, the findings of our mixed-method study offer input for the development of pilot projects across Europe to provide the distance education that is offered to European FNPs by their home country as part of the European FORINER project. These pilot projects have been developed and implemented based

on the results of the current state of play (for the evaluation of the pilot projects, see Brosens, Croux & De Donder, 2017).

Furthermore, our study reveals preliminary insight into the barriers professionals experience in organizing education for FNPs. Future research is, however, necessary to investigate these barriers more in depth. At this moment it remains unclear for instance if teachers, prison officers, and prison managers experience the same or other barriers, which barriers are most important, etc. Local studies can provide a more in-depth understanding of the barriers professionals of a certain prison experience, as well as their effective educational opportunities for FNPs. In addition, these professionals can be asked to reflect about whether it is necessary to invest more in the educational opportunities for FNPs and reflect on how this could be organized and what should or can be changed.

A further limitation concerns the large composite label “European FNPs.” This is not a homogeneous group as people with different nationalities and ethnicities are incorporated under this label. Our study only focuses on FNPs who are citizens of another European country. Aebi et al. (2016) note that these prisoners make up 32% of the FNP population. Our study also does not differentiate between prisoners who are detained in a foreign country in which they have stayed for a long period of time but have not been granted citizenship for various reasons, prisoners who could legally stay in the country for a short period of time, and those traveling from one country to another to smuggle drugs, or traffic in human beings. As research concerning the educational participation among the FNP population is rather scarce, a conscious choice was made to gain insight into the participation opportunities for prisoners with a European nationality other than that of the country in which they are imprisoned. Future research can distinguish between the various groups of foreign nationals. There is already a study on which researchers can build (Westheim & Manger, 2013) in which the educational participation, preferences, and needs of prisoners with another European nationality detained

in a Scandinavian country (e.g., Polish prisoners in Iceland, and Serbian prisoners in Sweden) are discussed. Research about the educational opportunities for those prisoners that do not hold European nationality may also prove interesting.

Another limitation—related with the previous one—is that we do not know how frequently different educational courses are offered and which prisoners, among the heterogeneous foreign national prison population, could benefit from them.

Lastly, our study does not take into account the multiplicity of factors that create the teaching and learning experiences (Cooper & Liou, 2007). It is not when certain educational offerings are carried out, that these can be addressed. Learning is not an individual accomplishment, but a combination of different factors. A first essential step is to inform foreign national prisoners about the educational offer (Westrheim & Manger, 2014). If FNPs effectively participate, the teacher—for instance—is important. Teachers play an important role in engaging foreign national students to take this opportunity to learn and motivate them to keep on studying (Croux et al., 2018). Previous research has demonstrated that although different teachers use identical curricular materials, they can have very diverse personal histories of teaching and different instructional practices (Gresalfi, Barnes & Cross, 2012). We interviewed some teachers, but our research did not have the intention to focus on their teaching differences, which might be an interesting path for future research.

### ***Implications for Policy and Practice***

Notwithstanding the above limitations, the research conducted in the context of the European project FORINER contributes to an understanding of the educational opportunities foreign European national prisoners have in various prisons across Europe. Consequently, this study pays attention to a group that is frequently overlooked in previous research (Yildiz & Bartlett, 2011). It becomes clear that not only research has a limited attention for this group, but also

that foreign national prisoners have fewer educational opportunities than national prisoners in practice, despite the recommendations of the Council of Europe (2012). Below, we offer three suggestions on how policy and practice can meet the current challenges.

First, the European countries in which foreign European national prisoners are detained might take the initiative to develop and organize educational offerings. Limited research within Scandinavian countries has examined the educational preferences of FNPs (Westrheim & Manger, 2014) and it has become clear that FNPs want to follow language courses, vocational training (e.g., cooking, bricklaying, painting), and ICT training (Westrheim & Manger, 2013). Our study has demonstrated that when there is an education on offer to European FNPs, it consists mostly of language courses to learn the language of the host country. One possibility to anticipate the preferences of FNPs could be to use vocational training as an applied language course (Brosens et al., 2015). If these vocational training courses are certified, this might help prisoners in their search for work after their release. FNPs are motivated to participate in education that leads to a diploma or certificate (Westrheim & Manger, 2014).

Second, the home countries could also offer distance education to their prisoners abroad. A possibility might be that in the future, organizations/professionals in all EU countries acquire an official mandate to take care of their citizens detained abroad and provide them with education. According to CEP (n.d.) several issues need to be taken into account in realizing this type of distance learning. For instance, permission should be obtained from prison authorities to bring in course materials. To obtain this, it would be helpful to have a liaison between educational providers or social workers in the home country and the prison in the foreign country. This could be facilitated by having a contact person who has the official task of supporting distance education for FNPs in every European country. Furthermore, providing support and encouragement to the learners may be essential to keep them motivated, and finding

the appropriate level of schooling for each individual, in their area of interest, may be another aspect to keep in mind.

A last recommendation relates to the use of ICT. Outside prisons, more and more educational providers use ICT to communicate with their students and manage assignments (Eikeland, Manger, & Asbjørnsen, 2009). A challenge will be to facilitate distance education through the use of ICT within prison walls.

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