

Towards a Sustainable Penitentiary System: Education, Rehabilitation and Restorative Justice in the 2030 Agenda

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Abstract

The Prison System is a key element of Criminal Justice, but it has numerous critical issues related to overcrowding, structural deficiencies and the difficulty of implementing effective re-education programs. This article analyzes the role of detention not only as a punitive measure, but as an opportunity for the rehabilitation and social reintegration of prisoners. Through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular with Goals 4, 10 and 16, the importance of a fair and sustainable approach to the Prison System is highlighted. Innovative strategies, including education, vocational training, and psychological support, are explored to reduce recidivism and promote restorative justice. The article proposes a critical and constructive vision on prison policies, emphasizing the need for structural reforms that guarantee respect for human rights and collective security.

Keywords: Penitentiary system; Rehabilitation; 2030 Agenda; Recidivism; Restorative justice; Education.

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Introduction

The Prison System represents a fundamental element for the protection of public safety and the application of justice, but at the same time raises issues of great social and ethical relevance (Santoro, 2022). The condition of prisoners, often characterized by overcrowding, structural deficiencies and limited access to re-education programs, constitutes a significant obstacle to

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social reintegration and the reduction of recidivism (Basilisco, 2024). Detention, in fact, should not be exclusively a punitive measure, but an opportunity to rehabilitate prisoners and prepare them for a constructive re-entry into society. However, the difficulties in ensuring effective rehabilitation paths are aggravated by a lack of attention to the individual needs of prisoners, insufficient economic resources and a legal system that often struggles to combine the concept of punishment with that of social reintegration (Bertaccini, 2021).

In this context, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the United Nations, offers a framework to promote a fairer and more sustainable approach to prison management. Goals such as Goal 16 (Peace, justice and Strong institutions) and Goal 10 (Reduction of inequalities) underline the need to reform the prison system so that it respects human rights and promotes paths of social inclusion. In addition, Goal 4 (Quality Education) highlights the importance of access to education as a tool to reduce inequalities and provide new life opportunities for prisoners (Ismail et al., 2021).

A sustainable prison system must therefore consider the implementation of strategies that favor not only respect for fundamental rights, but also the creation of conditions that make the period of detention a concrete opportunity for a better future. The adoption of effective re-education models, based on education, vocational training and psychological support, is essential to ensure that punishment is not just a punitive measure, but an opportunity for change (Castro-Martínez, 2021). Re-education must include literacy programmes, specialisation courses and work inclusion projects, with the involvement of companies and institutions that promote social reintegration. At the same time, psychological and social support plays a crucial role in strengthening individual resilience and counteracting the factors that can lead to recidivism.

Another central aspect in the sustainability of the prison system is the promotion of dignified living conditions within the penitentiary institutions. Respect for human rights, the protection of prisoners' physical and mental health and the reduction of prison overcrowding are key elements for a more humane and effective approach to detention. Good practices adopted in some European countries show how investing in rehabilitation programmes and adequate infrastructure can contribute significantly to social security and crime reduction. The adoption of a model based on restorative justice, involving not only the prisoner, but also the community and victims, could represent a turning point for a fairer and more effective system (Martinez, Lima, & Celes, 2023).

This article explores the challenges and opportunities of a sustainable prison system, analyzing strategies and good practices to promote the social reintegration of prisoners with a view to restorative justice and sustainability. The aim is to offer a critical and proactive vision of Penitentiary Policies, highlighting the role of the Community and the Institutions in ensuring that detention represents a path of growth and not an experience of permanent exclusion. In addition, possible reform models that could make the prison system more efficient, respectful of rights and truly capable of returning aware and empowered individuals to society will be analyzed, thus reducing the recidivism rate and improving collective security.

Sustainability and the Penitentiary System: A Regulatory Analysis

Talking about sustainability in the Penitentiary System means going beyond the simple management of prisons and addressing a deeper issue: the role of punishment and the treatment of prisoners (van Zijl-Smit, & Dünkel, 2021). To understand how to guarantee dignified detention conditions and effective reintegration paths, it is essential to start from the rules that govern the system, both at European and Italian level. Understanding the current legal framework allows us to assess the extent to which the principles of dignity, rehabilitation and social reintegration are effectively protected and applied in prisons.

The European Union and the Council of Europe have developed several regulatory instruments aimed at ensuring respect for fundamental rights in prisons and promoting a fair and sustainable penitentiary system (Kemp, & Tomczak, 2024). At the European level, the protection of human rights in prisons is mainly guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), a treaty that protects the fundamental freedoms of people, including prisoners. In particular, Article 3 prohibits any inhuman or degrading treatment, a principle that has proved central to the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). Several times, in fact, Italy has been condemned for the overcrowded conditions of its prisons, considered incompatible with respect for human dignity (Della Morte, 2013).

An emblematic example is the Torreggiani judgment of 2013, with which the ECtHR ruled that the situation in Italian prisons constituted a systematic violation of Article 3 of the ECHR. The Judges pointed out that the problem did not only concern the lack of space in the cells, but also the poor quality of services, limited access to training and work activities and the often inadequate hygienic-sanitary conditions. This ruling forced Italy to take

urgent measures to improve the penitentiary system, even if the problem of overcrowding persists today.

In 2006, the Council of Europe adopted the European Penitentiary Rules (RPE), a set of Guidelines to ensure minimum standards of treatment of prisoners (Chiola, 2022), which include:

1. Respect for human dignity and the prohibition of inhuman treatment.
2. Access to education and vocational training to promote social reintegration.
3. The right to adequate medical care, including psychological assistance.
4. The need to reduce the use of detention through alternative measures, such as probation or home detention.

In particular, Recommendation R (2006)2, which concerns the treatment of prisoners, stresses the importance of ensuring access to education, vocational training and employment as essential tools for the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners. The recommendation also highlights the need to ensure access to mental and physical health, as detention can often result in significant harm to prisoners' health (Archibong, & Obikili, 2023).

Another important recommendation of the Council of Europe is Resolution 87(3), which sets minimum standards for the treatment of prisoners. It includes guidance on how to improve living conditions in prisons, prevent violence between prisoners, and ensure that prisoners have access to educational and employment programmes. Council of Europe Resolution 73(5) also suggests measures to encourage the use of alternative measures to detention, such as probation and community treatment, to reduce the number of prisoners and promote social reintegration. These rules, although not binding, represent an important reference for Member States in improving prison policies (Pech, 2022).

Furthermore, the European Union, although it does not have direct competence in criminal matters, promotes cooperation between Member States to improve detention conditions and promote the social reintegration of prisoners. To this end, the EU has funded a number of programmes, including the Justice Programme (2014-2020), which supports initiatives related to the protection of prisoners' rights, vocational training and the reduction of recidivism. The European Union has also developed networks for the exchange of good practices to foster cooperation between Member States and improve reintegration policies (Martufi, 2024).

In Italy, the Penitentiary System is based on a key principle established by the Constitution. Article 27 states that *"punishments may not consist of treatment contrary to the sense of humanity and must aim at the re-education of the convicted"* (Della Casa et al., 2023, p. 89). This means that prison

should not only be a place of punishment, but also a space for growth and change.

Starting from this principle, in 1975 the Penitentiary Ordinance - Law 354/1975 was introduced, a law that regulates prison life and the rights of prisoners (Menghini, 2024). This legislation represented an important step forward, introducing concepts such as:

1. The right to education and vocational training.
2. The possibility of working inside or outside the prison.
3. The granting of alternative measures to detention, such as probation or entrustment to social services.

The treatment of prisoners, in fact, must be oriented towards re-education, and this implies that education and vocational training programs are offered, as well as opportunities for work. Article 15 of Law 354/1975 provides that education and professional training courses are organized within the Penitentiary Institutes, in order to equip prisoners with skills that can facilitate their reintegration into the world of work once they leave prison. Alternative measures to detention, such as home detention, community service, semi-liberty and suspension of sentences with probation, are important tools to facilitate the reintegration of prisoners into society. Italian law provides that prisoners who show signs of repentance can benefit from these measures, in order to facilitate a gradual transition to social life (Rosati, & Vaccarelli, 2024).

In the years since, the legislature has tried to make the system fairer and more effective. A key moment was 1986, with the approval of the Gozzini Law, which expanded the use of alternative measures and introduced incentives for prisoners who participate in re-education courses. This reform marked an important change, demonstrating that detention is not always the best solution, especially for less serious crimes (Testa, 2010).

However, despite these advances, the Italian prison system continues to face many difficulties. Overcrowding is still a serious problem: Italian prisons regularly house more inmates than they can actually accommodate, with negative consequences on the well-being of inmates and on the possibility of carrying out training or work activities.

To try to improve the situation, a Reform of the Penitentiary System was introduced in 2018, which aimed to strengthen reintegration programs and make alternative measures more accessible. However, many of these measures have not been fully implemented, due to political resistance and lack of resources (Della Bella, 2018).

The analysis of European and Italian legislation therefore highlights the need to rethink the prison system in a sustainable way. The sustainability of

the prison system requires greater alignment with international standards, through:

1. Investments in education and training for prisoners to promote social reintegration.
2. Structural reforms to reduce overcrowding and improve detention conditions.
3. Increased use of alternative measures to detention for minor crimes.

Only through an integrated approach between legislation, social policies and investments in rehabilitation programs will it be possible to guarantee a sustainable, fair and effective prison system.

The Sustainability of the Prison System in the Context of the 2030 Agenda

The prison system represents one of the most complex challenges in the legal, social and economic fields (Cavotta, & Rosini, 2021). Penitentiary structures, although they are fundamental tools for the application of justice, are not always able to effectively pursue the objective of reintegrating prisoners into society, but rather, in many cases, end up perpetuating a vicious circle of exclusion and marginalization. In this context, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development offers a framework that can guide a profound reform of the penitentiary system, promoting a more humane, equitable and sustainability-oriented approach.

The 2030 Agenda, adopted by the United Nations in September 2015 (UN, 2015), is a global plan of action to improve people's lives, protect the planet and promote prosperity. With its 17 Sustainability Goals (SDGs), it seeks to address the most serious issues of our time, including poverty, inequality, climate change and peace. Although many of these goals may seem far removed from the topic of the prison system, a deeper analysis reveals how prison management is closely interconnected with the principles of social justice, education, human rights and sustainability.

Goal 16 of the 2030 Agenda is explicitly dedicated to the promotion of peace, justice and strong institutions. This goal recognizes the importance of building peaceful, just and inclusive societies, and ensuring access to justice for all. The prison system plays a crucial role in this process, as prison management should not only be geared towards punishment, but also towards the recovery and reintegration of prisoners. Detention should not be seen as a goal in itself, but as a tool to foster the recovery of people who have committed crimes, preparing their return to social life in a positive way (Fabris, & Longobardi, 2023).

In this sense, Goal 16 calls for a reform of the prison system that not only respects the fundamental rights of prisoners, but also promotes their psychological, social and economic recovery. The promotion of restorative justice, which includes the active participation of victims, prisoners and the community, can be an effective model of sentence management. Restorative justice is based on the idea that crime harms not only the state, but also the people involved, and therefore it is necessary to repair such damage so that all actors can contribute to the construction of a more just society (Hope Sr, 2020).

In addition, the creation of stronger and more efficient prison institutions, capable of guaranteeing respect for human rights and access to educational and therapeutic pathways, is a fundamental condition for achieving this goal. Countries that have invested in restorative justice-oriented prison reforms have seen significant improvements in their societies, with reduced recidivism rates and increased community trust in the justice system.

Goal 10 aims to reduce inequalities, both within and between countries. Social, economic, and cultural inequality is one of the main factors contributing to crime and incarceration. People from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds are often more vulnerable to involvement in criminal activities and, once incarcerated, face additional difficulties in accessing opportunities for reintegration into society. These inequalities are amplified by the prison system, which is not always able to offer equal opportunities to all prisoners (Artyukhov et al., 2022).

The sustainability of the prison system therefore also passes through the elimination of these inequalities. Investing in programmes that offer all prisoners, regardless of their origin, the opportunity to access education, vocational training and psychological support is a key step in reducing inequalities within prisons and preparing prisoners for social reintegration. The inclusion of prisoners from marginalised backgrounds in vocational education and training can reduce the risk of recidivism and increase the likelihood that they will become productive and positive members of society after release.

Prison policies, therefore, should include measures to ensure equal treatment opportunities, not only in terms of access to educational and employment resources, but also in relation to the mental and physical health of prisoners. The health of prisoners, in fact, is another crucial aspect in the fight against inequalities, since psychological care and support inside prisons are often insufficient.

Education is one of the most powerful tools to break the cycle of poverty and crime (Colglazier, 2015). Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda, which promotes quality and inclusive education for all, is of fundamental importance in the

context of the prison system. Imprisoning a person without offering him or her the opportunity to study, train or acquire skills means drastically reducing his or her chances of reintegrating into the labour market and society. Prisons, therefore, must be places where education is not only a right, but a concrete opportunity to build a different future for prisoners.

Targeted educational programs, ranging from primary school to vocational specialization courses, are essential to improve the quality of life of prisoners and to adequately prepare their reintegration into society. Countries that have adopted education-oriented prison policies have seen lower recidivism rates and a greater ability of prisoners to reintegrate into the labor market (Barros Filho et al., 2023). In addition, education in prison also has a positive impact on prisoners' families, as often, through education, the cycle of poverty and inequality involving future generations is broken. Investing in prisoners' education not only fosters individual growth, but also contributes to collective prosperity by reducing inequalities and improving social security.

To make the prison system truly sustainable, a radical change is needed that goes beyond simply building new facilities or increasing staff. The sustainability of the prison system must be understood as a continuous process that integrates social innovation, the search for creative solutions and collaboration between institutions, non-governmental organizations and local communities. The adoption of models of restorative justice and social inclusion, such as prison work in communities or the inclusion of prisoners in environmental rehabilitation projects, represents a form of innovation that can benefit both prisoners and society. The creation of spaces for dialogue between prisoners and the community, in addition to reducing social isolation, makes it possible to build a culture of collective responsibility and solidarity (Imandeka et al., 2024).

In summary, the sustainable prison system, which is inspired by the principles of the 2030 Agenda, not only respects human rights, but also promotes social inclusion, education and rehabilitation of prisoners, contributing to the construction of a more just, secure and prosperous society. The real challenge, therefore, lies in the transition from a punitive prison system to one oriented towards re-education and reintegration, which not only reduces recidivism, but also favors the creation of opportunities for all.

Targeted Educational Programs in the Penitentiary System: From Primary School to Professional Specialization Courses

Education within the penitentiary system is a crucial element for the

social reintegration of prisoners. The possibility of accessing training programs ranging from school to professional specialization courses offers inmates an opportunity for redemption and retraining, reducing the risk of recidivism and favoring a path of social and work reintegration (Giordano et al., 2017).

Education in the penitentiary is an essential tool to fill the educational gaps of many prisoners, many of whom have interrupted their school career early. In Italy, the education system in prisons provides access to literacy programs for those who have not completed primary school, secondary education and, in some cases, university courses in collaboration with national universities.

The main objective is to provide prisoners with basic and advanced skills that can improve their ability to enter the world of work once their sentence has been served. In addition, education helps to develop critical and reflective skills, promoting a positive change in the approach to life and respect for rules. Learning contributes to the construction of personal identity, increasing awareness and confidence in one's abilities.

In addition to school education, many prisons offer vocational training courses in specific sectors, such as carpentry, catering, tailoring, agriculture and IT. These paths allow prisoners to acquire technical and practical skills that can be spent in the labor market, reducing the risk of post-prison social exclusion.

Some prisons collaborate with companies and cooperatives to offer internship and job placement opportunities, creating a concrete bridge between the period of detention and the return to civilian life. Work experience in prison not only helps to develop professional skills, but also teaches the value of discipline, respect for rules and teamwork (Giuseppini, & Infurna, 2021). A further important aspect is the promotion of craft workshops inside prisons, where prisoners can create products for sale. This activity not only has a positive impact on their training, but also helps to generate a sense of responsibility and belonging, providing concrete feedback for the efforts made.

A fundamental aspect of educational programs in prison is the inclusion of Motor and Sports Activities. Sport is not only a means of maintaining good physical and mental health, but also represents an important educational and rehabilitation tool (Latino, & Tafuri, 2024). The integration of Motor and Sports Activities in the Penitentiary System is one of the practices that has been shown to have positive impacts on the rehabilitation of prisoners. Physical activities, in addition to improving the physical health of prisoners, contribute to the improvement of psychological well-being, promote self-discipline and socialization, and have a positive effect on self-esteem. In

several European countries, including France, Germany and Italy, models have been tested that use sport and physical activity as tools for social reintegration, aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda, in particular with Goal 3 (Good health and well-being) and Goal 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions). Through involvement in structured sports activities, inmates learn core values such as respect for rules, stress management, and teamwork. Disciplines such as football, volleyball, basketball and gymnastics help to reduce tensions within prisons, improving relations between prisoners and between them and the supervisory staff (Libbrecht et al., 2024).

In some facilities, specific programs are promoted that involve collaboration with sports instructors and psychologists to use motor activity as a tool for personal growth. These paths promote awareness of one's body, control of emotions and the ability to manage conflict situations in a non-violent way. A successful example is represented by initiatives involving prisoners in tournaments and sporting events organized with external teams. This type of interaction with the outside world helps to strengthen the sense of belonging to society and to build relationships based on trust and collaboration (Norman, Sonoda, & Ricciardelli, 2024).

Targeted educational programmes in the prison system are a key element in the social reintegration of prisoners. Education provides the tools for a new life, professional training opens up concrete job opportunities and sport teaches respect for the rules and the value of collaboration. Investing in these pathways does not only mean improving the quality of life of prisoners, but also contributing to the safety of society as a whole, reducing the recidivism rate and promoting real social inclusion (Conway, 2024).

A further step forward could be the creation of even more personalized educational paths, based on the attitudes and previous experiences of prisoners. Psychological and pedagogical support could be intensified to accompany prisoners on a path of personal growth that goes beyond just technical training. Finally, greater synergy between institutions, companies and associations could further expand the opportunities for work and social reintegration for those who have served their sentence.

Best Practices: Successful European Experiences

The European Penitentiary System has seen significant evolution over the last few decades, with many countries adopting innovative models to improve detention conditions, promote the rehabilitation of prisoners and ensure their social reintegration. Such models of prison reform can serve as

an example for other states. In these countries, prisoners have access to training programs, psychological assistance and support for reintegration into the labor market (Atuase, & Filson, 2024). The approach, which combines respect for human rights with a strong commitment to rehabilitation and re-education, has led to very low recidivism rates compared to the European average. The United Nations 2030 Agenda, with its commitment to sustainable development and social justice, has offered a regulatory framework that has pushed penitentiary systems to reform. The aim is to improve the living conditions of prisoners, reduce recidivism and strengthen the role of justice as a tool for equity and social inclusion (Hogan et al., 2024).

Education as a Tool for Change: The Case of Finland

Finland stands out for its approach oriented towards education inside prisons. Finnish prisons are designed to foster the re-education of prisoners, and access to educational programs is considered essential for recovery and social reintegration. Education in prison is part of a broader vision of prison reform, which considers punishment as a transitional phase, not aimed at humiliating, but at fostering change (Rautanen, Harald, & Tyni, 2024).

In Finland, educational programs are very varied and include literacy courses, general education and even university courses. Some prisons also have agreements with universities and colleges to allow inmates to obtain diplomas and degrees. This approach allows prisoners to acquire useful skills to reintegrate into society after release, decreasing the likelihood that they will return to commit crimes. Education is therefore seen not only as a mode of recovery for the individual, but also as a tool for the reduction of crime at the social level (Rantanen, Järveläinen, & Leppälahti, 2021).

The Finnish approach aligns perfectly with Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education by promoting learning opportunities for all. Education within the penitentiary system is not only a human right, but a factor that facilitates social integration, reducing the marginalization of ex-prisoners.

Work as a Tool for Reintegration: Norway's Model

Norway has developed a prison system that places great emphasis on work as a rehabilitation tool. Norwegian prisons, especially Bastøy, are examples of how work can be positively integrated into the recovery process. In these facilities, inmates are involved in a variety of work activities,

including farming, crafts, and running small businesses, such as shops and workshops (Abdel-Salam, & Kilmer, 2023).

The job is not only a means of keeping inmates busy, but it is thought of as an opportunity to develop practical skills that can be useful once inmates are released. The ability to earn a salary while in prison helps inmates develop a work culture, which prepares them for reintegration into the labor market once their sentence is over. In addition, work offers an opportunity for social responsibility: many programs involve inmates participating in projects that benefit the community, such as maintaining parks, building infrastructure, and managing natural resources. These projects are seen as a form of giving back to society (Martens, & Crewe, 2024).

The Norwegian approach is reflected in Goal 8 of the 2030 Agenda, which promotes decent work and inclusive economic growth. The Norwegian prison system has shown that prison work, if well managed, can significantly reduce recidivism, improving the possibility for prisoners to reintegrate into the social and economic fabric after release.

Mental Health and Psychological Well-Being: the Netherlands Model

Another central issue for the improvement of prisons in Europe is the treatment of prisoners' mental health. According to numerous studies, a significant percentage of inmates suffer from psychological disorders, such as depression, anxiety, and psychosis. These problems can be exacerbated by difficult detention conditions, creating a vicious cycle that increases the risk of recidivism.

The Netherlands is an example of how an integrated approach to mental health can make a difference in the rehabilitation of prisoners. In many Dutch prisons, inmates have access to psychological and psychiatric support programs, which include individual counseling, group therapy, and medical interventions. If necessary, inmates are transferred to specialized psychiatric facilities, where they can receive intensive treatment (van de Rijt, van Ginneken, & Boone, 2023).

This focus on mental health is part of a broader approach that aims to ensure the psychological well-being of prisoners, reducing the conditions of stress and trauma that often characterize detention. Mental health management thus becomes a fundamental element in improving rehabilitation prospects and reducing the risk of recidivism (Bosma, Groenhuijsen, M. & de Vries, 2021).

The Dutch approach aligns with Goal 3 of the 2030 Agenda, which aims to ensure health and well-being for all by reducing inequalities in access to

health care. Properly treating prisoners' mental health problems not only improves their quality of life, but also represents an investment in the safety and health of society as a whole.

Human Rights and the Dignified Treatment of Prisoners: The Case of Sweden

Sweden is an example of how human rights principles can be integrated into the prison system. The Swedish system is based on the idea that prisoners also have the right to live with dignity, to receive fair treatment and to be treated as human beings, regardless of their prison status. Swedish prison facilities are designed so that inmates can maintain a certain level of autonomy and self-determination, with living spaces that reflect a more community-like environment (Svensson, 2021).

In Sweden, prisoners have access to a wide range of activities, including training, cultural activities, sports, and volunteering. The aim of these activities is to promote their well-being and prepare for their social reintegration once their sentence has been served.

The Swedish approach aligns with Goal 16 of the 2030 Agenda, which promotes peaceful, just and inclusive societies, and which includes strengthening justice and treating all fairly. Treating prisoners with respect and dignity is not only a fundamental right, but also helps to prevent marginalisation and promote an effective reintegration process into society.

The “Sport and Rehabilitation” Program in France

One of the successful examples of the integration of physical activities into the prison system is the “Sport and Rehabilitation” programme launched in France. This program has as its main objective the use of sport as a tool for social rehabilitation. It has been introduced in a number of French prisons, with the support of physical educators, coaches, and psychologists, who work together to promote physical activity as a means of positive change for inmates (Müller, Meek, Blessing, & Mutz, 2023).

The proposed activities range from general gymnastics to the practice of individual and team sports such as football, basketball, volleyball, and running. In addition to promoting physical health, these activities also aim to develop important values such as cooperation, emotional management, stress management and the ability to work in a team, which are crucial for reintegration into society. The program also offers learning opportunities on healthy and correct lifestyles, educating inmates on the importance of physical activity and psychophysical well-being.

The program has given good results, reducing the recidivism rate among participants and improving the psychological conditions of prisoners, who have found in sport a means to vent tensions, deal with discomfort and improve their emotional well-being (Sempé, 2021).

The French programme aligns with Goal 3, which promotes health and well-being. Physical activity in prison, in fact, not only improves physical health, but also contributes to the prevention of psychosomatic illnesses and depression, reducing isolation and stress related to detention.

The “Physical and Sports Education” Program in Germany

In Germany, several prisons offer physical education and sports programmes as part of social reintegration activities. These programs are designed to provide inmates with not only an outlet for energy, but also a set of psychological and social tools that can help them overcome the difficulties of prison life. The main focus is on promoting physical education that is not only limited to physical exercise, but also encourages behavioral change, self-confidence, and cooperation (Herold et al., 2023).

In addition, in some German prisons, professional training courses have been activated to become sports instructors, which allow prisoners to acquire a qualification that can be spent in the world of work, once their sentence has been served. The program has led to greater collaboration between inmates, reducing internal conflicts and improving the management of violence in prison.

The German programme responds to Goal 16, which aims to promote peace, justice and build inclusive institutions. Sport becomes a tool for social inclusion, promoting the construction of a more cohesive community within prison facilities, reducing violence and promoting mutual respect.

The “Sport in Prison” Project in Italy

In Italy, the “Sport in Carcere” project, promoted by the Ministry of Justice in collaboration with the University of Milan, is an example of how physical activity can be used to promote the reintegration of prisoners (Bozzuto, 2022). This project involves several Italian prisons, where inmates have the opportunity to participate in motor activity programs, ranging from gymnastics to the practice of individual and team sports. The project also includes training courses for prisoners interested in becoming sports technicians, through training courses that allow them to acquire professional skills that can be used in the labor market. One of the most interesting aspects of this program is the integration of sports activities such as football, which

has been shown to promote social inclusion, collaboration and self-discipline. Sport, in this context, has become a metaphor for change and hope, offering prisoners an escape from the stress of prison life and a concrete possibility of improving their psycho-physical condition (Lovecchio, Zago, & Mainardi, 2022).

The “Sport in Prison” project aligns with Goal 3, which promotes health and well-being, but also with Goal 4, which encourages quality education for all. The inclusion of physical activities in prison programs not only improves the mental and physical health of prisoners, but also provides educational opportunities, helping prisoners acquire new skills that can aid their reintegration into society.

Conclusions

Creating a fairer, more humane and sustainable prison system is a complex challenge, but necessary to ensure public safety and respect for fundamental rights. Policies that promote education, vocational training, psychological support and restorative justice can transform the period of incarceration into an opportunity for growth and change. Only through an integrated approach that combines re-education, respect for human dignity and the promotion of social reintegration will it be possible to reduce recidivism and build a more just and inclusive society. A more sustainable prison system not only cares about the material conditions of detention, but places rehabilitation, respect for human rights, prevention of recidivism, reduction of environmental impact and promotion of the well-being of prisoners at the center of its transformation.

European experiences of success in the Penitentiary System show that the adoption of good practices in line with the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda not only improves the lives of prisoners, but leads to a wider benefit for society. Educational rehabilitation, work, mental health and respect for human rights are essential elements to build a Penitentiary System that does not punish, but promotes recovery, reintegration and the prevention of recidivism. The adoption of these practices can contribute to a more just, inclusive and peaceful society, in line with the sustainable development goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda.

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