

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE SURVEY

Prepared by a group of authors
within the project “Education Opens Doors”



Survey on educational needs of the persons sentenced
to limitation of freedom or imprisonment, and availability
of educational services in penitentiary institutions

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Executive summary of the survey on educational needs of the persons sentenced to limitation of freedom or imprisonment, and availability of educational services in penitentiary institutions (within the project “Education Opens Doors”).

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The survey “On educational needs of the persons sentenced to limitation of freedom or imprisonment, and availability of educational services in penitentiary institutions” was conducted within the project “Education Opens Doors”. It is targeted at the analysis of the existing legislation and other legal documents in the sphere of prison education¹, accumulation and generalization of data regarding the accessibility of educational programmes in penitentiary institutions, educational needs of prison inmates, attitude of both personnel and prison population to systematic learning, availability of resources needed for the development of education in correctional institutions.

Within the study, the following activities were conducted: overview of legal acts and regulations on prison education and analysis of the practice of providing educational services in penitentiary institutions of Gomel Region; questionnaire survey of 538 prison inmates serving sentences in 6 correctional institutions of Gomel Region (3 penal colonies, 2 open-regime correctional institutions and 1 detention facility) and 21 prison staff members from the mentioned institutions.

1. Analysis of international regulations and national legislation on the education of persons held in penitentiary institutions of the Republic of Belarus

The analysis of the regulatory and legal framework of prison education shows that the legal provisions for the persons sentenced to limitation of freedom or imprisonment to get education are laid down in the Education Code and the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus. Their regulations, in general, comply with the international standards ensuring prisoners’ right to education. Provision and delivery of general secondary education (basic and secondary) and vocational education are addressed quite comprehensively. The law offers the possibility to get specialized secondary or higher education – a more accessible form of the latter in conditions of imprisonment is distance learning, whereas people sentenced to restriction of liberty may resort to extramural (correspondence) studies. The legislation also allows for retraining and upskilling of prison population. Nevertheless, the statutory and legal regulation of specialized secondary, higher and other forms of education needs further elaboration as regards organization of educational processes and fulfillment of prisoners’ right to education.

One of the issues of improving the regulatory and legal framework of prison education concerns the search or creation of more effective incentives for inmates to participate in educational processes. It presupposes, first and foremost, the transition to a progressive system of serving a sentence where prison inmates may get improved confinement conditions, and the remaining part of the sentence may be substituted for a softer one or even parole. In this case, diligent participation in education can be regarded as a positive indicator in the process of evaluating the degree of a person’s reformation, which may serve as a basis for applying the above-mentioned measures of the progressive system of justice administration.

It is also advisable to supplement the legislation with the norms and principles that impose on penitentiary bodies and institutions of the Ministry of Education the duty to create favourable conditions for prison inmates to get education and to actively engage them in educational processes at the level of general secondary, vocational, specialized secondary, higher and adult education. Education regulations should have provisions for short-term courses for persons with general basic and secondary education as a form of regulated educational process that may be provided free of charge.

¹ According to the Education Code of the Republic of Belarus, education in this survey is regarded as “enlightenment and upbringing in the interest of people, society and the state which is aimed at mastering knowledge, skills and competences, and formation of a harmonious, versatile personality of a learner”. The Code identifies the following forms and levels of education: general secondary education, vocational education, specialized secondary education, higher education, postgraduate education, children’s and youths’ “supplementary” education and adult (“supplementary”) education.

2. Practice of provision and delivery of education in penitentiary institutions of Gomel Region

There are 9 penitentiary institutions of different regime in Gomel Region where specific categories of prison population are held: detention facility of the penal colony Nr 20, Mozyr Town (men sentenced to an arrest – short-term strict isolation from society for up to 3 months); penal colony Nr 20, Mozyr Town (men who were previously imprisoned and are sentenced to imprisonment again); penal colony Nr 4, Gomel City (women sentenced to imprisonment for the first time); penal colony Nr 24, Zarechje Settlement (women who were previously imprisoned and are sentenced to imprisonment again); penal colony-settlement Nr 21, Shubino Village (men and women who, by a court decision, were sentenced to imprisonment in a colony-settlement as a “softer” form of punishment); open-regime correctional institution Nr 17, Gomel City, open-regime correctional institution Nr 21, Mozyr Town (first-time male offenders sentenced to restriction of liberty in an open-regime institution); open-regime correctional institution Nr 22, Zalipje Village (men who were previously sentenced to freedom limitation and are sentenced to restriction of liberty in an open-regime institution again); open-regime correctional institution Nr 19, Zhlobin Town (men whose remaining part of imprisonment was, by a court decision, substituted for a “softer” limitation of freedom in an open-regime institution).

The analysis of educational services offered in correctional institutions of Gomel Region shows that the existing educational system ensures the fulfillment of prisoners’ right to education to a large extent. In penitentiary institutions of Gomel Region, prison inmates have access to general and vocational education, as well as supplementary educational programmes and self-education. For example, penal colony Nr 4 has a secondary school on its premises where prison inmates may get general basic or secondary education. In this sense, the inmates in penal colony Nr 4 find themselves in more favourable conditions than those in penal colonies Nr 24 and Nr 20 that have no schools on their premises, so the only way for inmates to get general basic or secondary education is to take exams on an external basis.

Vocational schools are functioning on the premises of penal colony Nr 4 – subsidiary of educational establishment “Gomel State Vocational Household College” – and penal colony Nr 20 – branch of educational institution “Mozyr State Vocational Construction Lyceum”. Each correctional institution provides vocational training through direct participation in production activities. This presupposes apprenticeship and tutorship throughout the training period with the subsequent acquisition of a specific skills category.

In open-regime correctional institutions (including penal colony-settlement Nr 21), prison inmates are largely integrated in the educational environment of the “free” society and have an opportunity to do correspondence (extramural) courses in secondary specialized and higher education institutions located within the boundaries of the district/region where the correctional institution is situated. In practice, prison inmates mostly attend educational establishments of Gomel City (F.Skaryna Gomel State University, Gomel MITSO University, Gomel Machine-Building Technical College). Their learning is organized similarly to that of “civilians”. In their free time, the inmates of open-regime correctional institutions may also attend educational courses, among which driving courses are especially popular. The practice of providing secondary specialized or higher education for inmates of open-regime correctional institutions or penal colonies-settlements is not that widespread.

Acquiring blue-collar professions by prison inmates in open-regime institutions or colonies-settlements mostly takes place on the premises of large enterprises and organizations (through on-the-job training).

Within the correctional process, penitentiary institutions conduct enlightenment activities meant to contribute to the development of knowledge and skills necessary for further social rehabilitation. They are targeted at raising legal literacy on the issues of work-related rights and

obligations, social provisions, moral and psychological aspects of social interaction. Before the release, prison inmates are engaged in the studies of the “School of resocialisation” aimed at comprehensive preparation of prisoners for future life. At those “schools”, the studies are conducted not only by prison staff but also by specialists of institutions accountable to the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus.

On the premises of open-regime correctional institutions Nr 17, 21 and 22, antidrug and antialcohol campaigns and educational events on promotion of healthy life-style are conducted by the representatives of Gomel Regional and Mozyr District Narcological Clinics.

Prison inmates also have opportunities for self-education, which is possible, primarily, thanks to the libraries on the premises of penitentiary institutions and subscriptions to periodicals published on the territory of Belarus.

An important role in adult education and correctional work is assigned to the personnel of penitentiary institutions (first and foremost, those responsible for organization of correctional process and psychological assistance). A significant factor of improving educational practices is the cooperation between correctional institutions, civil society organizations, religious and faith-based institutions and other social partners.

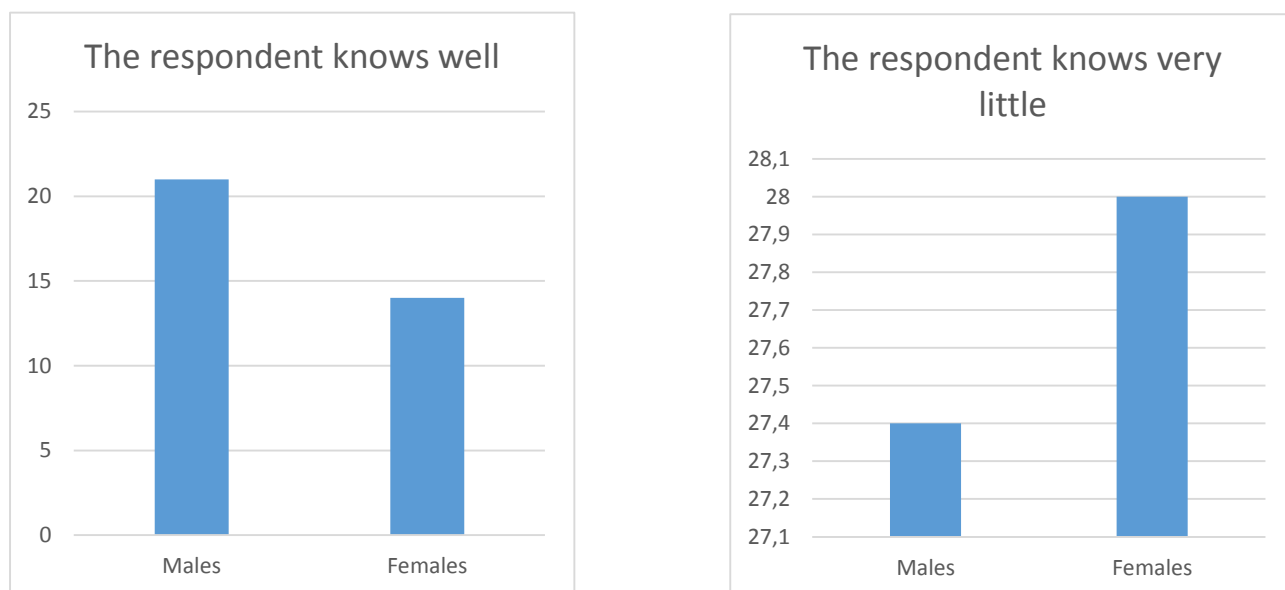
For instance, within the project “Adult Education for Professionalization and Resocialization of Prison Inmates in Correctional Institutions”, Gomel regional public association “Community Development Projects” organized and conducted “certified” computer literacy, hairdressing and manicure/pedicure courses on the premises of penal colony Nr 4 and open-regime correctional institution Nr 18(17).

3. The analysis of prisoners’ need for educational services

The questionnaire survey of 538 prison inmates sentenced to limitation of freedom or imprisonment in 6 correctional institutions of the city of Gomel and Gomel Region yielded data about their demand for education, its preferable content and forms.

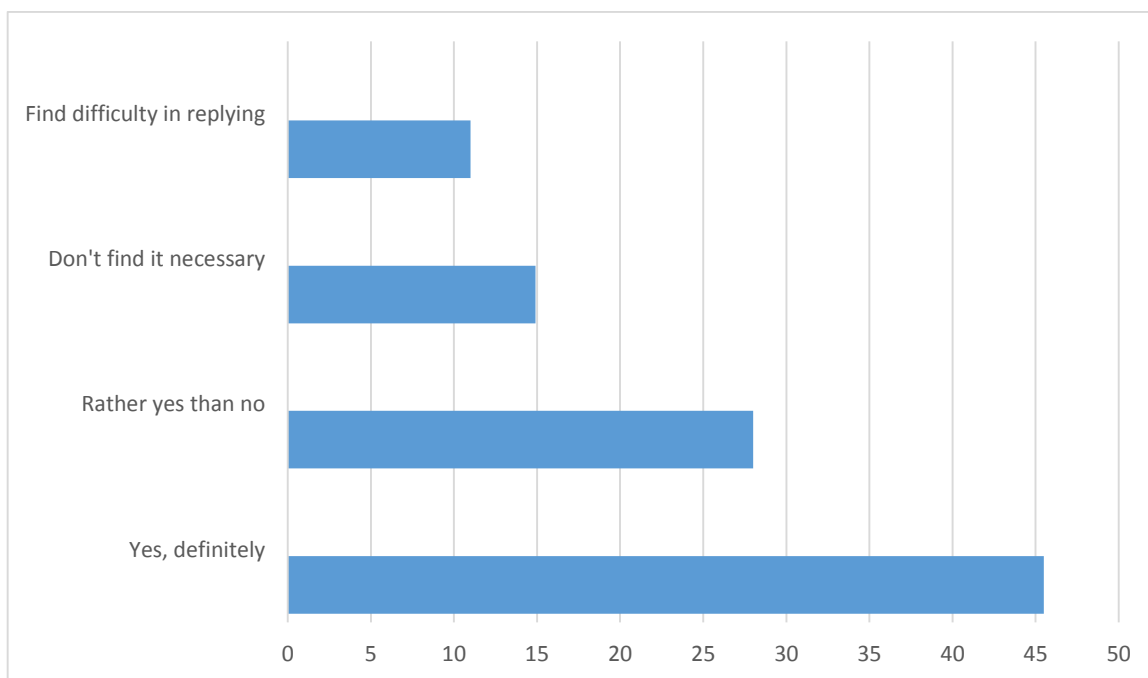
It is determined that the majority of prisoners know their right to education and existing opportunities to receive education in the correctional institution where they serve their sentences.

Figure 1. Answers to the question «Do you know the rights of prisoners to education?»



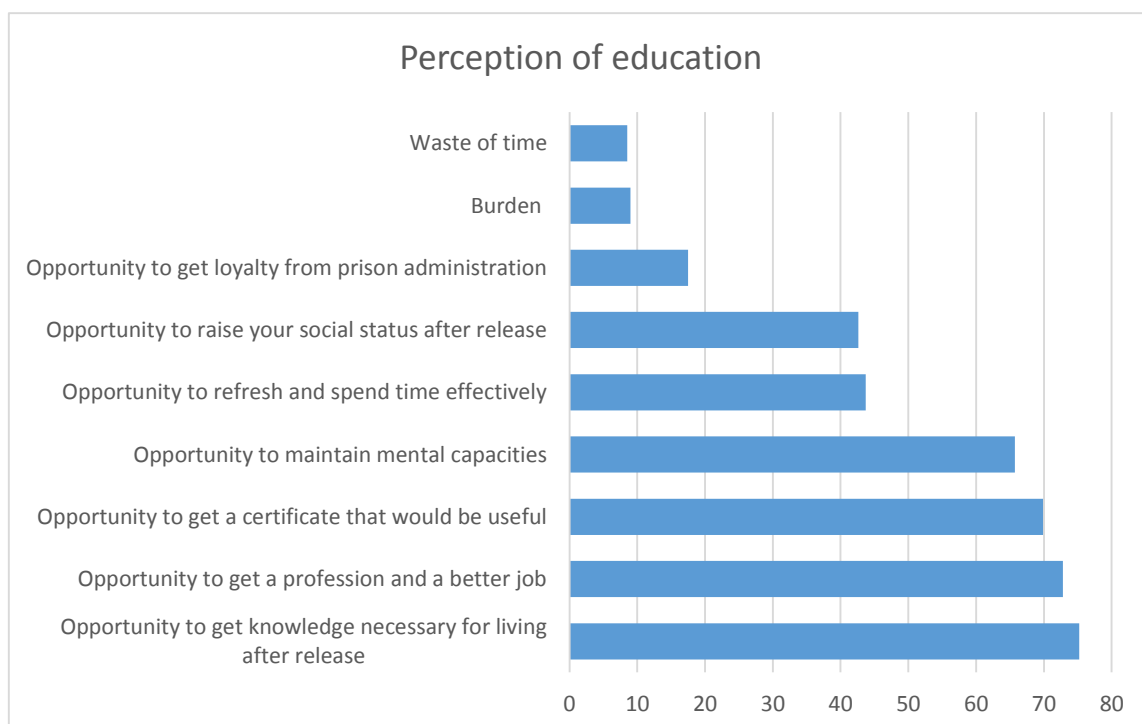
Their demand for educational services is relatively high. 73.9% of respondents expressed the desire to improve their level of education, get some professional skills or raise their professional level. Moreover, the desire to improve educational or professional basis was expressed by 82.3% of male respondents and 69.1% of female respondents. Speaking about age distribution, such a desire was expressed by 78.9% of prisoners aged between 18 and 29, by 74.5% of prisoners aged between 30 and 49, and by 54.2% of prisoners over 50.

Figure 2. Answers to the question «Would you like to improve your level of education, get some professional skills or raise your professional level in the correctional institution?»



The prisoners see education as *useful for their future life after release*. The absolute majority of the prisoners shares this view.

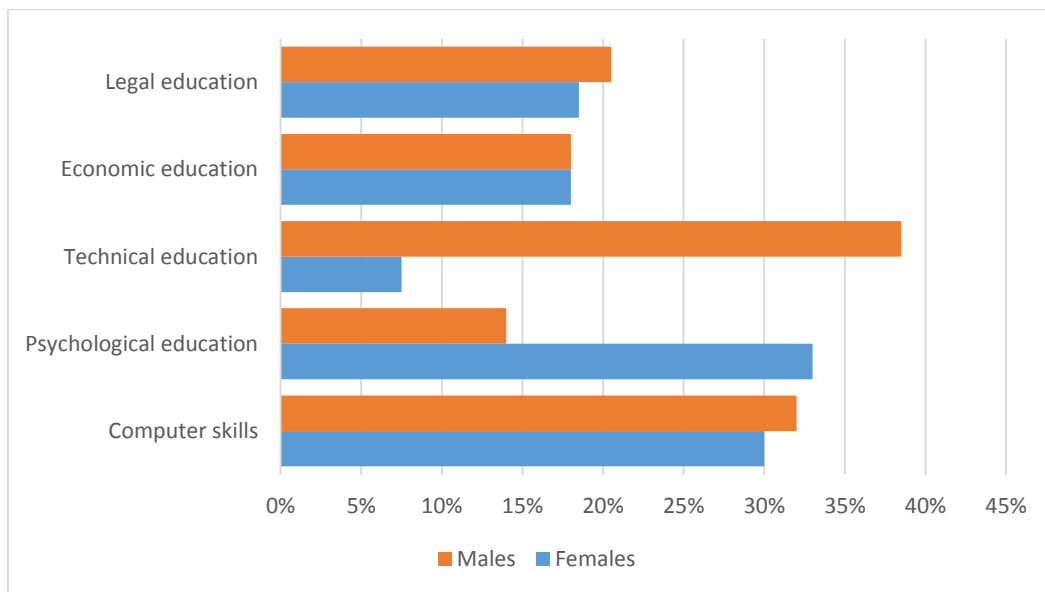
Figure 3. Answers to the question «You see prison education as:»



More than a half of respondents (54.6%) intend to continue education after release. Those who intend to get education after release pay more attention to the following levels of education: higher education (17.1%), training courses in specific areas (12.3%), and vocational education (7.6%). Moreover, 7,1% of respondents want to get specialized secondary education, 5.4% want to retrain in some other area already having higher education and 5.2% want to get general secondary education including 3.9% – general secondary and 1.3% – general basic education.

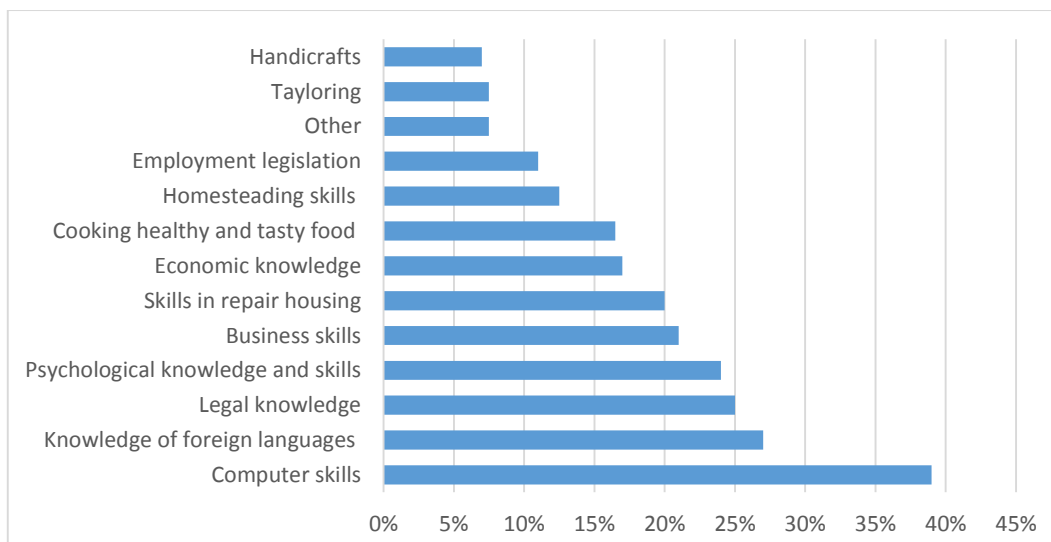
Two profiles are most popular with the respondents who want to get education: IT education («computer» education) (30.4%) and «psychological» education (25.4%) with psychological education being more popular with females (32.4% of female respondents and 13.5% of male respondents). 19.6 and 19.4% respondents respectively chose «legal» education and «technical» education. Every 6th respondent (18.4%) would prefer «economic» education.

Figure 5. Answers to the question «What educational profile would you chose in college or higher education institution?» taking into account gender differences



The analysis managed to reveal the prisoners’ demand for short-term education programmes within penitentiary institutions. The prisoners were highly interested in computer skills (39.0%), legal (24.9%) and psychological (24.3%) knowledge, as well as in learning foreign languages (26.4%), acquiring business skills (20.7%) and repair of housing (19.9%).

Figure 6. Answers to the question «What educational courses are you interested in and would take if they were provided?» (all possible options mentioned)

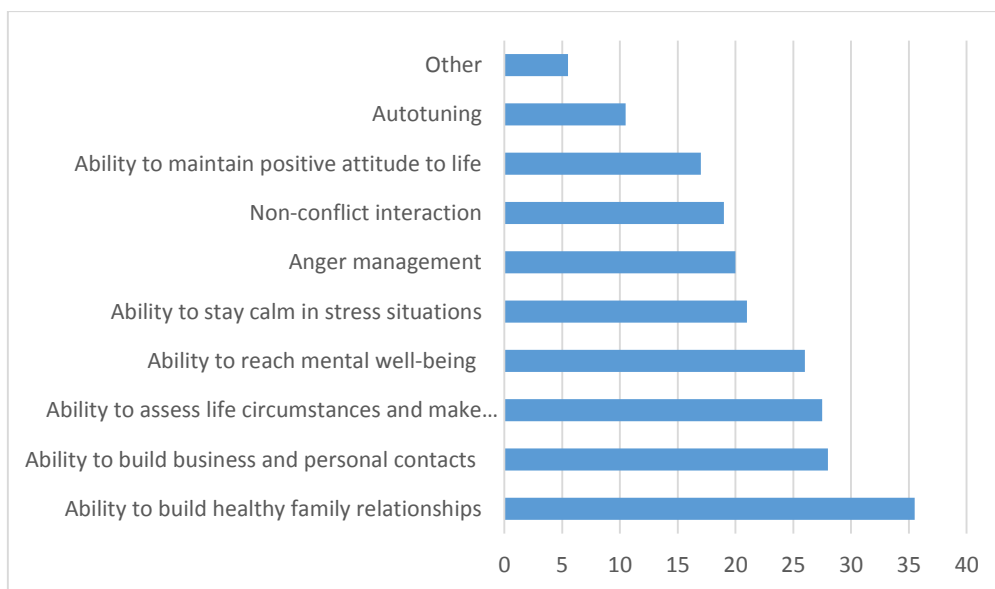


Male prisoners prefer computer skills (38.7%), skills in repair of housing (30.9%), upgrading their legal knowledge (29.3%), knowledge of foreign languages (25.1%), and business (24.6%). Females: computer skills (39.1%), knowledge of foreign languages (27.2%), psychological knowledge and skills (26.6%), cooking healthy and tasty food (22.6%), business skills (18.3%).

As for age distribution, prison inmates aged between 18 and 29 are interested in knowledge of foreign languages (36.7%), computer skills (35.4%), psychological knowledge and skills (29.9%), legal knowledge (27.9%), business skills (25.2%). Inmates aged between 30 and 49 are interested in computer skills (41.9%), legal knowledge (25.0%), psychological knowledge and skills (25.0%), foreign languages (24.0%), skills in repair of housing (20.3%), cooking skills (18.9%). Prisoners over the age of 50 are interested in computer skills (45.8%), legal knowledge (29.2%), cooking skills (33.3%), economic knowledge (20.8%), foreign languages (16.7%), homesteading skills and knowledge (16.7%).

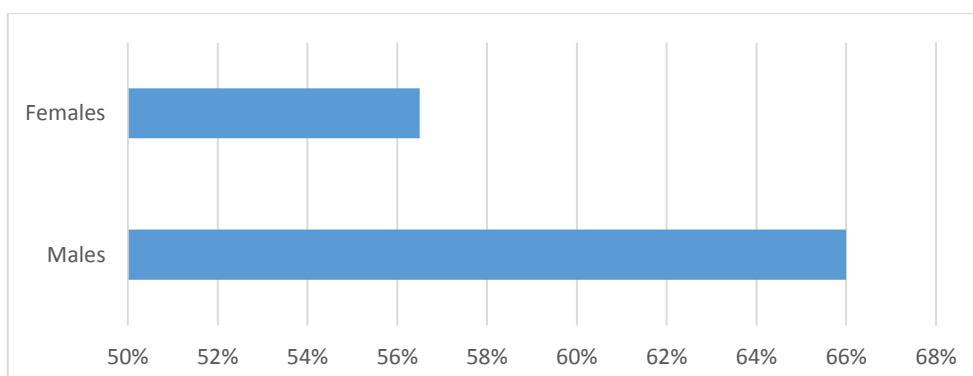
Prison inmates' interest in different aspects of psychological education is distributed as follows. Four of the nine offered aspects of psychological education are most popular: ability to build healthy family relationships (35.4%), ability to build business and personal contacts (28.4%), ability to assess life circumstances and make rational choice (27.6%), ability to reach mental well-being (26%).

Figure 7. Answers to the question «What aspects of psychological education would be useful for you?»



The questionnaire revealed positive attitude of the majority of prisoners towards professions provided within the scope of voluntary education in penitentiary institutions. Thus, 60.3% of prisoners are satisfied with the list of professions offered to them in penitentiary institutions. Two thirds of the respondents (60%) have positive attitude towards continuing their education in penitentiary institutions, one third (27.1%) don't.

Figure 8. Answers to the question «Are you satisfied with the scope of professions offered to you in the penitentiary institution?» taking into account gender differences



As the questionnaire revealed, almost every fourth prison inmate (24.5%) (30.4% males and 21% females) thinks he/she can cover the cost of their distance learning in college or higher education institution on their own or with the help of their relatives. Speaking about age, the following percentages of prisoners are ready to pay for their education: 35.2% of inmates aged between 18 and 29; 19.5% of prisoners aged between 30 and 49, and 17.4% of people over 50.

The prisoners' proposals about improving the circumstances of provision of education in penitentiary institutions are aimed at: extension of the list of educational programmes; improvement of provision of education; offering more information, training aids and teaching books; creating an opportunity to use computers (laptops, electronic books) and the Internet, as well as teaching to use them; cancellation of compulsory submission of Certificate of General Secondary Education when entering vocational college.

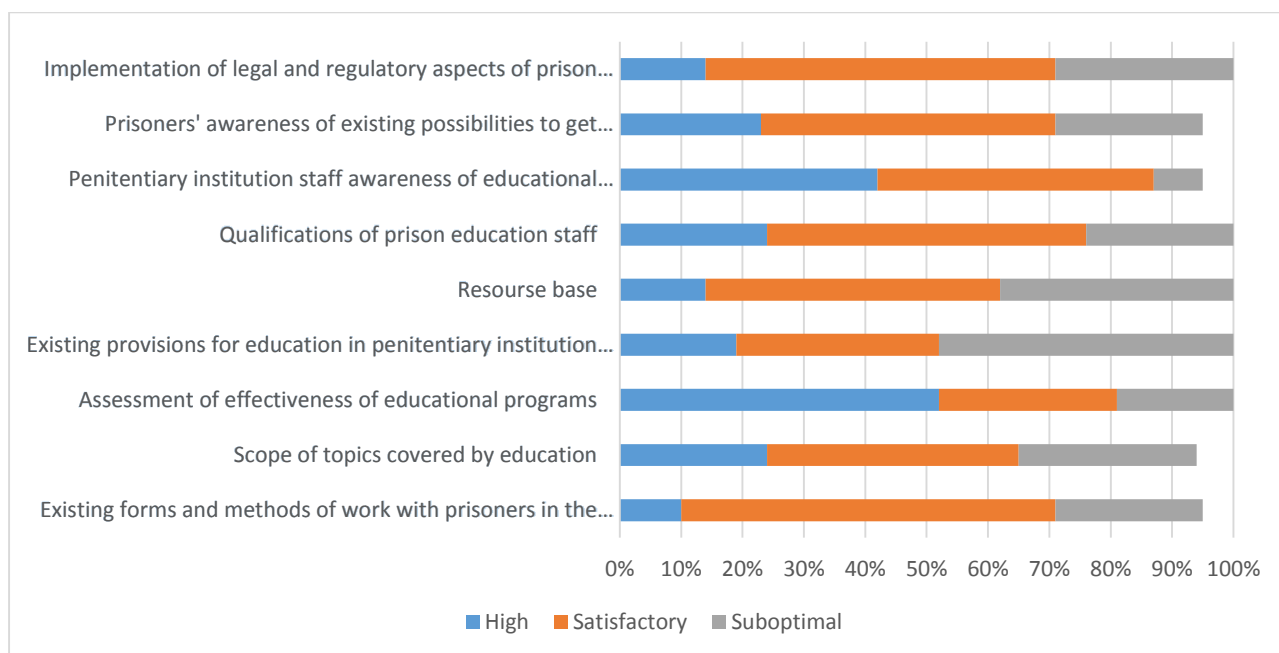
4. Expert analysis of the state of education provided to prisoners in penitentiary institutions and prospects of its improvement

The majority of specialists interviewed assessed the state of education as “satisfactory” according to three aspects of regulatory environment for education provided in penitentiary institutions: observance of regulatory and legal conditions of education in penitentiary institutions, inmates' awareness of existing opportunities to get education in a penitentiary institution; and penitentiary institution staff's awareness of educational rights of prisoners.

The majority of respondents assessed two aspects of provision of education in penitentiary institutions as “satisfactory”: specific qualification of specialists engaged in educational processes in penitentiary institutions and the state of resources necessary for the organization of educational processes in correctional institutions.

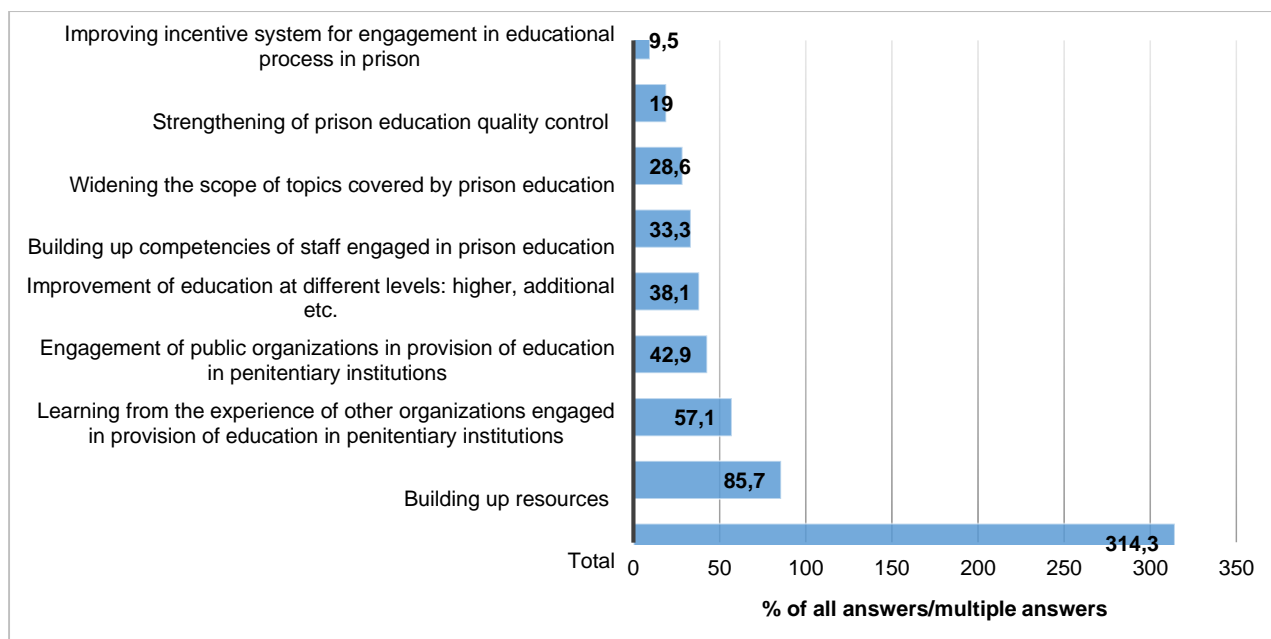
Two thirds of the respondents marked “satisfactory level” of existing forms and methods of work with prison inmates in the sphere of education. About a half of the respondents mark as “satisfactory” the scope of topics covered by education. Respondents were also very positive about the practices of assessing the effectiveness of educational programs – more than a half of respondents found it “high” and almost every third thought it was “satisfactory”.

Figure 9. Assessment of several aspects of existing educational system in penitentiary institutions



The results of the survey helped to determine priorities in eight areas of improvement of educational system in penitentiary institutions. Most experts consider three factors to be the key opportunities for improving educational system in penitentiary institutions: building up resources necessary for educational process; learning from the experience of other state, public, non-governmental, international organizations engaged in provision of education in correctional institutions; engagement of public organizations in provision of education in penitentiary institutions. They trust that collaboration of penitentiary institutions with civil society institutions is an important prerequisite of improving educational system.

Figure 10. Answers to the question «What aspects of improving provision of education in penitentiary institutions do you consider to be the most important?»



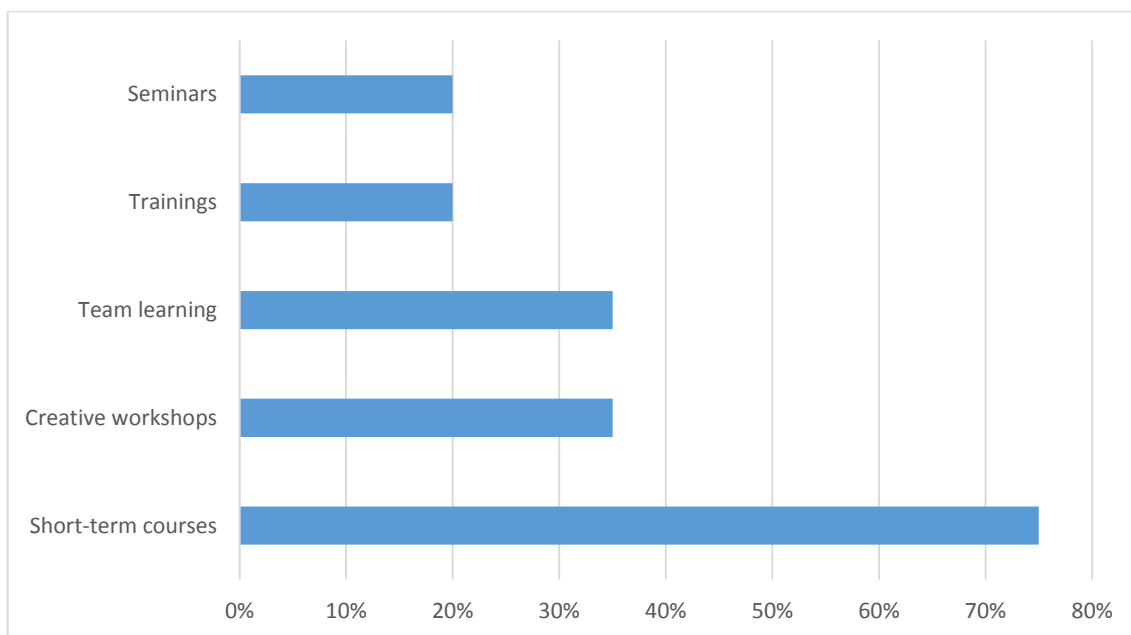
The results of the survey provided an insight in experts' understanding of the prison inmates' main motives of being involved into educational process and courses preferred. The first group includes four motives known as motives of readaptation: obtaining a profession, receiving a certificate, gaining knowledge, strengthening social relations with family and environment after release. The second group of motives for obtaining education in prison is linked to the possibility of commuting the sentence and get loyalty from penitentiary institution administration.

In addition, the rating of possible areas of prison education was made. The first three positions, according to the majority of experts, belong to getting qualification from a vocational college of a more popular profile, attending courses of self-sufficiency in case they were provided, and attending psychological trainings in case they were organized. Those are followed by four types of education: getting general secondary education, getting qualification from one of the offered vocational colleges and getting secondary vocational education in a college provided that it was distant, and getting higher education provided that it was distant. The following three aspects of education close the list: retraining, personal development and self-education with the help of electronic books.

Two thirds of the respondents find the state of vocational education and training in penitentiary institutions to be acceptable.

According to the respondents, "additional" adult education in penitentiary institutions should be organized in the form of short-term courses and be less formal; workshops, trainings and clubs could facilitate the creative and communication development of inmates to a greater extent.

Figure 11. Answers to the question «What forms of “additional” adult education do you find to be more relevant in penitentiary institutions?»



The answers allowed for better understanding of inmates’ needs in the sphere of “additional” adult education and teaching activities in penitentiary institutions. The proposals received touched upon building up resources, developing educational programmes, sharing experience, mastering psychological knowledge and being informed about new forms of getting education.

5. Proposals on improving prison education

The following is recommended to improve regulatory and legal framework of prison education:

- 1) oblige correctional system facilities and Ministry of Education to create all the conditions necessary for prison inmates to get general basic, general secondary and vocational education as internal students;
- 2) provide an opportunity for prisoners to be transferred from one correctional institution to another where conditions are created to let them get general basic, general secondary and vocational education;
- 3) create an opportunity for prisoners willing to get higher education to take part in centralized testing;
- 4) create an opportunity for prisoners to get post-secondary and higher education in part-time and distance forms;
- 5) amend penitentiary institutions’ regulations and provide for space, time and resources necessary for self-tuition of inmates engaged in educational process;
- 6) amend correctional institutions’ regulations and let inmates use personal electronic books and have access to information needed;
- 7) organize short-time courses in penitentiary institutions in areas important for inmates’ social rehabilitation as well as provide a framework for funding of those courses;
- 8) make an incentive scheme sensitive to inmates’ engagement in educational process and their success.

The following is recommended to improve provision and content of prison education:

- 1) develop a network of general education and vocational education institutions, educational centers that would enable the provision of extramural post-secondary and higher education, adult education;
- 2) inform the inmates about their right to get education, the possibilities it gives and to motivate them to take part in educational processes;
- 3) develop short-term courses and trainings in different areas of social education important for inmates' readaptation after release including training on legal issues in the sphere of employment, housing and family relations, social affairs as well as building up a knowledge base on self-reliance and moral and psychological preparedness to social interaction and autonomous living;
- 4) develop, test and use video courses as a part of social training courses;
- 5) organize training courses for psychological unit staff of correctional institutions in the sphere of effective information work in areas important for social rehabilitation of inmates after release;
- 6) monitor the state of prison education and inmates' educational needs, their perception of educational programmes, adjust them according to the results of the monitoring;
- 7) improve the technical base of prison education and possibilities for self-education using information tools and technologies. Initiate the project for using electronic books with information necessary for self-education, social and cultural development;
- 8) learn from international experience in the sphere of prison education and apply best practices in educational processes in penitentiary institutions;
- 9) initiate an international project on creating a team of experts in developing educational and correctional programmes aimed at preparing inmates to social rehabilitation after release.



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