

The SKILLS4LIFE journey has begun!

The background of the top section is a red brick wall. To the right of the main text, there are blue illustrations of three birds in flight and a horizontal chain link.

Skills4Life is a new European partnership project, conducted across four countries with the support of the Erasmus + Program. The project seeks to develop a comprehensive and structured educational programme that will address the emotional, psychological and social needs of individual young offenders to inspire a major change in their life course. It is about self-esteem, confidence and communication.

Prison education is a powerful tool that can be used to alleviate the effects of social exclusion and tackle some of the huge challenges for young people on their release from a prison setting. The EU treats prison education as a major priority and we seek to create a programme that reflects that level of engagement. This curriculum will be informed by a rigorous, research-led approach and seeks to broaden prison education to encompass a wide range of practical, emotional and social skills. This approach will not only support individuals in acquiring and developing basic skills and key competences but also empower young people and allow them to feel included in the society that they are re-entering.

The content of this curriculum will be developed using existing academic research but also by new, participant research involving young people still in prison settings and those who have recently left. This will enable the teams to create a programme that is dynamic, innovative and highly relevant to the people it is there to support. A total of eight prisons throughout Europe will test and pilot the Skills4Life methodology, while a total of eighty young offenders are expected to participate and benefit from the project's activities.

The Skills4life project also seeks to create skilled and passionate trainers to facilitate the workshop sessions which are the primary delivery vehicles for the curriculum. The young people benefitting from the project will also receive resources to support their future including The Student Handbook which accompanies the programme and helps the young people to navigate the content through vivid illustration and easy-to-follow language. Following completion of the programme, they will receive a Life after Release Plan which supports young people getting back into work, managing their finances and building social networks.

Project partners include the **University of Gloucestershire**, **Institut Saumurois de la Communication (France)**, the **European Prison Education Association (EPEA)**, **Athens Lifelong Learning Institute (Greece)**, and **CESIE (Italy)**. The partnership has a wealth of experience in their own national settings and the project will benefit hugely from the experience each group brings to the table.



Partners recently met in Athens to finalise plans for our data collection phase and we are about to begin the exciting process of interviewing participants! We are currently at the stage of the project where we are trying to capture all the important data, and the views of these young people are critical to the goals of the project; we look forward to creating something truly as impactful and true-to-life as possible from their experiences. This process will take us into the New Year as we interview the people who stand to gain most from the project.

We are always happy to hear from anyone who may know interested young people who are currently in, or who have just left, the criminal justice system and we would invite you to get in touch! The University of Gloucestershire is delighted to be leading on this part of the project and we aim to keep you updated on developments throughout 2022.

The outcomes of this project could make all the difference to a young person trying to get their life back on track. Having an education that includes academic, professional, and emotional skills can be the difference between surviving and thriving; these are **Skills4life**.

More information about the project at <https://skills4life.group>