

## Co-producing desistance from crime: The role of social cooperative structures of employment

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### Introduction

Prison numbers have risen across the UK over the last decade despite a reduction in crime rates. Yet, prison is costly and, by its nature, poorly positioned to support desistance and social integration (MoJ 2010a). Each prison place costs an average of £39,573 in England and Wales (MoJ 2011) and £32,146 in Scotland (Scottish Prison Service 2011) and exerts enduring effects on the social opportunities that enable desistance, and its maintenance, such as employment (Trebilcock 2011). The austerity programme has added impetus to arguments towards reconfiguring criminal justice if only to reduce the costs of re-offending, estimated at between £9.5Bn and £13Bn per year (MoJ 2010b).

UK penal policy tends to focus its efforts more on encouraging employability rather than enabling employment, yet most prisoners want to work and see this as critical to supporting their efforts to desist (MoJ 2012). Audit Scotland (2011) estimated that helping one former prisoner into employment for five years would yield a net saving of £1Mn. Desistance research also recognises a significant relationship between participation in employment, the accumulation of human and social capital and desistance (Barry 2006; Savolainen 2009; Uggen et al 2004), and the importance of citizenship and reciprocal relationships (Maruna and LeBel 2009; Uggen et al 2004; Weaver 2015).

This research study, [\*Co-producing Desistance\*](#), examines the ways in which social cooperative structures of employment, as an example of co-production, can support social integration and desistance. Social cooperatives which encourage prisoner rehabilitation have gained ascendancy in Europe and North America, but have yet to be properly explored in the UK. This project uses more established social cooperatives in Italy and in Sweden to inform emerging allied structures of employment in the justice system in the UK.

Italian social cooperatives have a longer history than their counterparts in Sweden and are more embedded in the country's infrastructure. Indeed the expansion of these structures in Italy, enabled by legal recognition and favourable financial measures, provide a useful source of learning for the UK in an economic and political climate of a declining welfare state, insufficient work programmes in prison and a lack of employment on release.

### Co-production and social cooperatives

Studies of desistance argue for innovative and sustainable means of supporting the development of human and social capital, and for the reconceptualisation of the role of service users, families and communities in rehabilitation (Armstrong and Weaver 2013; Weaver 2015). The policy discourse promoting the involvement of ex/offenders, volunteers and community groups in justice

services (MoJ, 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2010) is consistent not only with desistance research but with concepts of co-production, an approach to governance 'that emphasizes greater citizen engagement in and co-production of public services and greater third sector provision of the same' (Pestoff 2012: 365).

However, there has been little consideration of what role social cooperatives might play in penal policy agendas in the UK (Weaver and Nicholson 2012). The report, *Reducing Re-offending Through Social Enterprise*, conflates social cooperatives and the wider social enterprise sector as 'independent businesses that trade for a social purpose' (NOMS 2009: 17), which obfuscates the critical 'ownership' feature of social cooperatives where service users, providers and, sometimes, the wider community co-own and co-produce multi-stakeholder social cooperatives, whereas social enterprises are owned by their employees. The social enterprise model of the NOMS report does not distinguish between these democratic structures and global corporations (like Kalyx) which are motivated by private investment concerns rather than the resettlement of prisoners.

Through-the-prison-gate social cooperatives provide continued access to paid employment and resettlement services for their members both in prison and in the community. As the process of desistance extends beyond the practices and proclivities of the justice sector, supporting resettlement and desistance requires collaborative multi-sectorial

approaches (Weaver 2011, 2014, 2015).

Social cooperatives provide a structure through which to deliver these collaborative responses, based on the values of self-responsibility, mutual-aid, democracy, equality and solidarity (Majee and Hoyt 2010) and can circumnavigate some of the systemic obstacles to employment, such as criminal records and employer discrimination (McEvoy 2008) that people with convictions routinely encounter. As part of a cooperative, former and serving prisoners and professionals can potentially 'co-produce' the social supports and associated relational or public goods (Donati 2011, 2013) that can assist social integration and desistance. They have the potential to support integration, citizenship and reciprocal relationships (Magee and Hoyt 2010, 2011), the very factors that are suppressed by the repetitive routine and minimally stimulating environment of prison and its aftermath (Armstrong and Weaver 2013). However, not only are social cooperatives a rarity in the justice system in the UK, but their potential has never been explored. Indeed, social cooperatives, comprising an equal partnership of professionals, ex/offenders and community members, arguably pose particular conceptual and practical challenges in a penal context that has traditionally been the sole domain of professional actors and where service provision is framed by legal statute, risk and compulsion: dynamics which will be investigated further in this project as it progresses.

This paper discusses the very early findings of this ongoing research which is funded through the ESRC's Future Research Leaders scheme and runs from January 2015-2018. I am going to very briefly report on the first phase of this work undertaken in northern Italy in June this year, and I will make occasional reference to my very recent fieldwork, completed in October, in Sweden, with the caveat that I am in the early stages of data analysis.

One of the key questions underpinning this research is 'how and why does work matter – and what does it mean to 'matter'?' The idea for the study was to get at the complicated, whole-greater-than-parts qualities of how work can give us a sense of identity, place, belonging and hope. While there is no systematic evidence identifying a relationship between having a job and giving up crime, I think it is safe to argue that employment itself does not produce desistance in a deterministic sense and may, in and of itself, not play a causal role. Instead, what emerges as significant in enabling or reinforcing efforts to desist are the meaning and outcomes of the nature and/or quality of the work or simply participation in employment and how these experiences influence an individual's self-concept and social identity – as well as how they interact with a person's priorities, goals and relational concerns (Weaver, 2015).

While current penal policy in the UK recognizes the significance of employment-as-occupation-of-time in their focus on 'working prisons' (MoJ 2010), the aim is to enforce tough and rigorous punishments, to instil both discipline and a work ethic

among the prison population. Unlike Italian prisoners<sup>1</sup>, prisoners who work in prison in the UK do not receive the national minimum wage (around £6.15 an hour for older adults); rather, they average 30p an hour.<sup>2</sup> While on release, former prisoners in the UK receive some financial assistance from the State, upon release they are also mandated to engage in more unpaid work programmes for which there are substantial financial sanctions for failure to comply. However there is little evidence to date that these programmes actually lead to participation in employment. Just 12% of people leaving prison and referred to the work programme have found a job which they have held for six months or more (DWP 2015). Of these, one in five has subsequently gone back to Job Centre Plus. It is true that some social enterprises operate within the criminal justice system in the UK; however, they tend to be focused on encouraging employability and training rather than offering employment.<sup>3</sup>

If we accept that there is a substantive and substantial difference between participation in employability programmes and participation in paid employment, then it seems timely to investigate alternative strategies for supporting access to meaningful work. At present, there are no social cooperatives oriented to providing paid work and facilitating integration into 'mainstream' work for those with criminal convictions in the UK, either within prison or on release. This research intends to use the learning from Italy and Sweden to inform the development of such structures in the UK.

## Research questions

The aim of the research is to examine the ways in which social cooperative structures of employment can support social integration and desistance from crime. The research questions are as follows:

1. What kind of legislative and policy contexts enable the development and implementation of social cooperatives?
2. What factors enable or constrain different types of social cooperative in facilitating the social integration and desistance of their members?
3. How can social cooperatives inform and influence criminal justice and wider policy and practice, and influence new ways of working to promote social integration and desistance?

## Methods

This study is primarily qualitative though a range of quantitative data has been gathered (still to be analysed) to illuminate the size, scope, productivity and outcomes of the participating cooperatives. Considerable time was also spent in and around the cooperatives in Italy and Sweden – watching, listening and feeling what was happening.

While this paper is based on early findings from three Italian cooperatives, the next step is to continue this analysis and to analyse the data from interviews with a range of cooperatives, under one consortia, in Sweden (n =24 interviews) before taking the learning to the UK context (n= 50 interviews) in order to explore and inform related and emerging structures in the UK (see [www.coproducingdesistance.org.uk](http://www.coproducingdesistance.org.uk)) In Italy, in June 2015, I interviewed 40 people of which 22 were workers

who were also prisoners or former prisoners (hereafter workers/worker participants) and 18 who were professional employees engaged by the cooperatives.

Of the worker participants:

- 8 worked inside the prison
- 8 were on an alternative sanction (which means they worked out-with the prison but returned to the prison at the end of the working day) and
- 6 were former prisoners who were no longer involved in the criminal justice system but who still worked for the cooperative.

In terms of demographics:

- 6 worker participants were female and 16 male
- 78% (n=16) were of Italian origin, one person was of Roma origin, two people were Romanian, one person was Tunisian, another was Columbian and another was Dominican
- The average age of the worker participants was 41. The youngest was 22 and the eldest 65.

Some participants (n=4) declined to discuss their criminal histories but of the others:

- 8 participants were serving their first prison sentence
- 5 participants were serving their second prison sentence, and
- a further 5 participants had served multiple periods of imprisonment.

Offence types varied and the offences for which they were serving a sentence for included robbery (n=5), drug related offending (n=7), homicide (n=6), violence (other) (n=2), property offences (n=1).

The age of the sample is interesting. In desistance terms, this age range is one in which desistance is more

or less expected; the relationship between age and crime, while not without its critics, does show that, for many (and for various reasons), advancing age is accompanied by a reduction in offending. In employment terms however, and leaving to one side the challenges surrounding youth unemployment, many former prisoners are entering the formal labour market in their thirties and forties with a criminal record and low skills – and this necessarily brings distinct challenges. Yet, beyond giving up crime (desistance), employment is an important indicator of and pathway to social integration (Ager and Strang 2004). Indeed, it has been suggested that participation in and commitment to employment (and other constructive and civic-minded activities) might serve as important signals of desistance (Bushway and Apel, 2012).

### **Early findings: A brief insight**

#### ***The Cultural Significance of Work and Cooperation***

One of the distinctive contributions that social cooperatives make is to provide paid employment (as well as social support and practical assistance) for those disadvantaged in the labour market and that includes prisoners and former prisoners – those in custody, on partial release (i.e. semi-liberty) and post release. ‘Social solidarity co-operatives’, as they were first known, became institutionalised *after their emergence* by Law 381/1991; in this regard there exists something of a culture of cooperation and indeed, cooperatives are part of the fabric of Italian economic life.

This law distinguishes two types of social co-operatives: those

supplying social services (A-type), and those integrating disadvantaged people into work (B-type). Prisoners and former prisoners are classified, alongside others, as persons disadvantaged in the labour market and so, in the cooperative, no distinction is made between people with or without convictions in this regard. ‘Disadvantaged’ people must comprise at least 30% of all employees (while there are no such requirements in Sweden, the cooperatives I studied were primarily comprised of disadvantaged persons from a range of diverse backgrounds). In Italy, the other 70% of employees come from a range of professional backgrounds as is required to run a given cooperative i.e. an agricultural specialist, an accountant and so on. They are independent from prisons and probation services and the underpinning rationale is not about criminal justice and reducing reoffending – but about social justice and solidarity.

The law in Italy conceptualises social co-operatives as collective organisations that invest in and engage the local community and represent the interests of different groups of stakeholders; so there is a strong co-productive element to cooperatives – public authorities, private business, social firms, and civil society organisations not only co-produce the cooperative process, but its culture and its outcomes. Indeed, social cooperatives are shaped and influenced, to a large extent, by their social networks and the culture in which they are embedded. As Borzaga and Depredi observe,

*Network relationships and external ties can influence the internal equilibrium of the [co-operative],*

*because internal norms develop in connection with the social values prevalent in the community*  
(Borzaga and Depredi forthcoming)

In terms of social values, the people I spoke to cited work, home and family as the 'social values prevalent in the[ir] community'. These were, in their view, the integral ingredients of social integration of a 'normal life', consistent with social/cultural norms, as these two professional participants express:

*'Work' with 'family life' and 'house' – this is a cultural norm of this area. These are the three values that have been chosen by the coop to respect the community culture*  
(Professional\_9)

*Work is much more important even than the value placed on family and the home because article 1 of our constitutional law said that our republic is based on work*  
(Professional\_12)

The significance of work was echoed by professional and worker participants in the Swedish cooperatives but, as in the UK, there is no specific legislation underpinning social cooperatives in Sweden, and thus they remain unregulated. There are no tax reductions either. In Sweden, the social cooperatives can, however, draw on government subsidised salaries to support the generation of and opportunities for work; there is no such equivalent benefit in the UK. It is clear then that different economic and social policy contexts can be more or less enabling or constraining and this is an area that this study will further investigate.

### **What it means to work: workers' views**

#### *Instrumental incentives and outcomes*

While the significance of work, family and the home is a cultural norm in northern Italy, it also reflects, at least partly, the social welfare<sup>4</sup> and penal context. In addition to opportunities to undertake paid work in prison, prisoners can be released for rehabilitative purposes, which includes participation in work, on 'semi-liberty' (semiliberta) (day release) under article 48-51 of Law no. 354/1975; they can also be released on 'Outside Work' (lavoro all'esterno), Article 54 of the same law. Obtaining an income and participating in work-as-occupation, as something to fill time, was the initial instrumental incentive and identified outcome – particularly for people in prison in closed conditions.

#### *The relational context and outcomes of work*

For others (as the quotes below indicate) their motivations for continuing their employment with the cooperative and the perceived outcomes or benefits were expanded, over time, to include more personal and relational concerns. Personal outcomes included the acquisition, development or maintenance of work skills and a sense of accomplishment. The relational aspects included the relational context of work as well as the relational outcomes that participation in work and in specific work contexts heralded.

*To be working alongside others is really important and working together makes you feel connected to something. Before I felt so*

*isolated. There is a sense of togetherness among the women working in here*

(Worker, Female, Age 32\_6)

*...providing a job is not the only thing but through work, we put the person at the centre of our relations inside the co-op. The social relationships within the cooperative and the feelings that develop among people who belong to the coop are the most important part of the rehabilitative journey*

(Professional\_1)

*A symbolic or communicative aspect to work*

What also emerged was a symbolic or communicative aspect to work, in terms of what it signifies to and about oneself:

*I had the need to show myself that I was able to work and so it is that I am*

(Worker, Male, Age 33\_18)

But it is more often about what it signifies to others:

*To show that I am able to change my behaviour and that I can behave responsibly and reliably...It shows that when I am released, I can be trusted, I am reliable*

(Worker, Male, Age 45\_4)

*I have to show to my family that I am a different person and I have noticed that they are looking at me with different eyes*

(Worker, Male, Age 43\_10)

The negative aspects attributed to employment in a social cooperative related to the level of pay, although this varies between cooperatives. Some, for example, mirror that of the private sector; for others it can be 200 euros less per month. Overall self-reported job satisfaction

was high. While I have yet to undertake a full analysis of the data from the Swedish cooperatives, the preliminary analysis indicates that there are strong parallels emerging.

### ***What it feels like to work for a social cooperative***

In prison, people wanted to work for the social cooperative because this was the only significant opportunity to participate in work. For these participants, having a job and getting an income to save for release were the principal incentives. Prison-based social cooperatives operate in a secondary setting, with all the constraints that operating in a secure environment bring with it. For some, particularly those working in prison, the cooperative context of their work was of no consequence. I discovered significant differences in experiences of cooperation between those working for a social cooperative in prison and those working for a social cooperative in the community. It is not only more difficult to experience the cooperative culture in a 'secondary' and secure environment where there is limited or no interaction with others outside the prison and no engagement with the wider environment in which cooperatives otherwise operate, but the working hours (and therefore income), levels of productivity and access to the relational outcomes referred to before are significantly curtailed. The [cooperative values](#) of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity and the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others shape the cooperative culture and, importantly, how it is experienced. Although the concept of responsibility emerged

across participants' accounts, in the main, the idea of 'responsibility' as a *value* - rather than as an instrumental and narrowly conceived connection to one's offence, as in the UK for example, was more frequently expressed by those working outside of the prison (on day release or post-release), and by former prisoners and by professional employees. What emerged strongly was a culture of solidarity, 'of inclusion', which, as the woman speaking the second quote below expresses very clearly, means sharing a common or mutual responsibility through reciprocity which implies interdependence.

*The ethics of the co-op is one of inclusion; it is to move toward, to develop, active citizenship. It is a way of acting – or being'*

(Professional\_2)

*In the cooperative, we all have to cooperate with each other and so the way we relate to and interact with each other is different – the whole experience is different. **It is a matter of responsibility.** We are all part of something that together is collectively owned. A boss [in a private firm] can instruct you to do something but, whatever way, the final product belongs to him or to her. You produce it for them. It is not yours. In a co-op the final product is yours, so you are invested in the whole process. **A cooperative depends on cooperation.** It cannot function any other way so unlike the private sector, **there is a chain of responsibility rather than a chain of command...**so, if I make a mistake, there is no sanction or punishment – we work together, all of us, to find the solution.*

(Worker, Female, Age 40\_5)

The cultural and relational environment of a social cooperative appears to be as significant as the opportunity for paid work in supporting desistance and integration. Indeed, in Sweden in particular, the cultural and relational environment generated the resources through which desistance, recovery and integration were enabled.

### ***The role of the cooperative in supporting social integration***

The people I spoke to said that being integrated meant not feeling or being seen to be different in the sense of feeling stigmatised and marginalised. People felt 'socially integrated' when they had work and were a part of a family, community and/or social network. 'Normal' meant 'being' and 'doing' in the same way as others around them – but it also meant feeling no worse, or better, than anyone else, but both capable and allowed to do anything anyone else would want – to work, be in company, earn a living.

*Working for the coop has given me a sense of what it is to be normal and to take responsibility... [it] has taught me how to live normally, within the rhythm of life*

(Worker, Male, Age 35\_11)

*I feel that I am well accepted by people for what I am, as a normal person and not as a former prisoner. This is a very important element to improve your self-confidence... people from the area, not only from the coop, treat me as a normal person*

(Worker, Male, Age 46\_20)

In terms of public attitudes, participants – professionals and workers – acknowledged and recognised the stigma attached to

prisoners and former prisoners in Italy, as indeed there is in the UK, and, in terms of supporting reintegration, this can be a considerable challenge. However, the different cooperatives engaged with and invested (differently and to different degrees) in the local communities in which they are embedded.

Various strategies for enhancing community cooperation and support include: holding social events for workers, professionals and members of the community, which are aimed at breaking down barriers and stereotypes; developing community facing features to the cooperatives in order to be community-inclusive i.e. running a café or shop; engaging in and/running charitable initiatives and services that benefit local people; providing social services to meet local unmet need; and providing – and generating - work for people from the community. More often than not, the ‘professional’ people who worked for the cooperative came from the local community.

The social cooperatives I sampled are all affiliated to or provide NGO facilities (as well as Type A cooperatives). The NGOs serve three aims: a) they provide support to prisoners, former prisoners and their families; b) they provide support to and invest in their communities; c) they offer the opportunity to workers and members to volunteer as a means of providing structure, reinforcing cooperative values, developing new social relationships and supporting social or community integration. There exists, then, a strong relationship between cooperative and community which is carefully

maintained by the cooperatives – but the impact on public attitudes towards these social cooperatives and those working for them is local, rather than political or widespread.

As previously noted, work and family were, almost without exception, proposed as key indicators of integration – the spaces or social spheres from which one feels variously included or excluded and which are often threatened, if not damaged, by lengthy and frequent periods of imprisonment. As such, the social cooperatives also provide support to the families of imprisoned workers; some facilitate family mediation, for example, and most create the space for family contact to occur in more natural and private environments. They also provide work within the co-operative as well as supporting access to ‘mainstream’ employment, drawing on their network of professional relationships. However, what seems to be emerging as equally significant to participating in work for its own sake is the re-socialising experience that the cooperatives afford, in terms of supporting people to acclimatise to a life on the outside, in a safe and protected space. In this regard, worker participants referred to the opportunities that the co-operative offered in terms of learning new or remembering old norms of interaction – a process of readjustment and re-socialisation, a means of (re)building a life and opportunities to (re)learn how to interact differently than the relational norms to which they had grown accustomed to after years in prison.

*Work is central to re-socialisation into the outside world and this means that you need this re-education of the outside world while you are in prison...I mean in terms*

*of being in the world and building a life*

(Worker, Female, Aged 41\_7)

*You need to pass through the co-op to start being reintegrated into society. The co-op is the right mechanism for coming out of prison because you need to start down a different path ... [it] helps you learn how to cope with the demands of work...and how to manage social relationships.*

(Worker, Male, Aged 43\_10)

*The most important fact is the capacity to feel, to be part of a group, a sort of family. In this way they start to rebuild or build positive relationships*

(Professional\_2)

### **The recidivism question**

Do social cooperative structures of employment reduce re-offending? According to Ann Hoyt (2010) the average recidivism rate of prisoners involved in prison co-operatives has been 1 to 5 percent; Pellerossi (2015) cites statistics from the Ministry of Justice which place the average recidivism rate among former prisoners at 80%. By contrast, Pellerossi estimated that the recidivism rate for those employed by social cooperatives was less than 10%. However, one of the major difficulties encountered by research on re-offending in Italy more broadly lies in the absence of reliable mechanisms for monitoring people after their release from prison; they do not measure recidivism rates per se. Moreover, the cooperatives do not collect data on people's criminal histories – they don't even ask about them – nor do they maintain follow up data on the people that formerly worked with and for them. The Swedish cooperatives do not collect follow up

or outcome data either. However, there was consensus, informed by experience, that recidivism rates were low.

*In [our] experience, the recidivism rate is very low: 2-3%*

(Professional\_4)

*I don't have a percentage in my mind but it is well known that the employment opportunities provided by the cooperative help to stop recidivism*

(Professional\_6)

*We don't have an absolute percentage ... we can see that of the people we work with in the cooperative, 70% of people don't commit crime again, while the percentage is the other way round in the case of people that aren't involved in the coop*

(Professional\_8)

I am still analysing the data and exploring potential reasons for this substantially lower rate of post-release recidivism. However, the absence of a pre-occupation with measuring recidivism perhaps reveals a commitment to a way of 'doing' services that is inherently more inclusionary and empowering than much of what we see in UK prisons and criminal justice services. It is a belief (whether substantiated or not) that the manner-of-relating has material consequences, and this manner of relating is about solidarity and subsidiarity. Subsidiarity is a way to supply the means or a way to move resources to support the other without making him or her passive or dependent but in such a way that it allows and assists the other to do what must be done in accordance with his or her personal priorities.

### **Concluding comments**

So what do social cooperatives achieve that employment in other structures doesn't? What is the value added? It provides a route into employment, in the first instance and it can help overcome the stigma of a criminal record and discrimination in the labour market by providing access to work for some of those who are disadvantaged in this arena and supporting integration into 'mainstream' work.

Social cooperatives provide a protected environment that puts people before profit. In this vein, the cooperative culture, the relational environment, is as important as the provision of paid work in contributing to the outcomes. Moreover, people can work at their own pace and their needs as a person, rather than the needs of the employer, are prioritised. They provide holistic and individualised resettlement support for both former/prisoners and their family – people also receive a range of supports from financial assistance, family mediation, access to legal support and so on. Working for a cooperative is more than just doing a job. The networked and cooperative culture and practice provides a range of concrete opportunities for social integration. They are embedded in and inclusive of their community – they create opportunities for social participation.

Admittedly, this project is in its early stages, but cooperatives provide a structure through which to deliver collaborative responses, based on the values of self-responsibility, mutual-aid, democracy, equality and solidarity. As part of a cooperative, former and serving prisoners and professionals can potentially 'co-produce' the social supports and

associated relational or public goods that can assist social integration and desistance. Beyond contemporary concerns with risk and recidivism, the integration of marginalised persons, the provision of opportunities to engage in [active] citizenship and the maintenance or emergence of significant and reciprocal relationships is at the centre of social cooperative principles and practices.

If we, in the UK, are serious about supporting social integration and desistance, we also need to develop collaborative approaches that engage constructively with and invest in the communities that we are trying to support integration to - but those approaches need to be grounded in particular values, principles and practices if they are to generate the experiences and achieve the kinds of outcomes here. I would suggest that work, family and home are as significant here as they are in Italy. I would suggest that, with the will, we can create the conditions and contexts in and through which we might better support desistance and social integration. I would also suggest that we get more realistic about what does support desistance and integration and that we get more courageous about the creating the conditions that can enable it.

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## End notes

<sup>1</sup> The Smuraglia Law (n.193/2000) recognised prisoners and former prisoners as a new category in article 4 of Law 381/1991 and provided that imprisoned employees receive a wage not inferior to two thirds of that stated for the same job by the national contract. Some of this salary is used to pay for food in prison and fines. The law, revised in 2013-14, also increased fiscal incentives for the cooperatives employing prisoners in the form of tax credits and as much as a 95% reduction of social security and national insurance contributions. Much of the

prison population is without work however, of over 52,000 prisoners, (<http://www.prisonstudies.org/country/italy>), only 1 in 5 has access to work (Marietti, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> The Prison Service Order 4460 states that prisoners are not entitled to the minimum wage. The minimum rate is £4.00 per week although the average wage is £9.60 for a 32 hour week.

<sup>3</sup> A recent exception was the self-employment programme or 'enterprise' pilots which provided support for prisoners pending release to start their own business. The evaluation (published by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2015) identified little evidence, however, showing how programme objectives, which included the reduction of re-offending are or would be achieved.

<sup>4</sup> To qualify for ordinary benefit (indennita ordinaria) you must have worked for at least a year and contributed for at least the previous two years. Benefits are calculated as a percentage of one's recent wage and are available for up to six months.

## About the author

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Anita Dockley, the Howard League's Research Director is a member of the advisory group for the research she describes in this article.