

ICONET

Activity Report Romania



Institutul de Educatie, RO



Ministerul Justiției, Administrația
Națională a Penitenciarelor, RO

Institute for Educational Sciences
„Leonardo da Vinci” ICONET Project

REPORT ON
THE APPLICATION OF THE ICONET TOOL

AUTHORS:

Phd. Magdalena BALICA, Phd. Ciprian FARTUȘNIC, Phd. Irina HORGA, Phd. Mihaela JIGĂU

Researchers, Institute for Educational Sciences

Acknowledgement and recognition of informal and non-formal learning can stimulate the motivation and interest of young people in participating in educational processes and can help them achieve much better results in their training or on the labor market.

Promoting informal and non-formal learning becomes even more important for those young people whose degrees and certificates are insufficient for guaranteeing the successful integration into the labor market. The disadvantaged youth acquire, in different informal and non-formal contexts, some skills and competencies which are relevant for vocational education and training, but which cannot be used systematically. In order for these competencies to be used, the young people themselves should be aware of the learning experiences they have gone through and should be able to convey them to the others.

In order to achieve this, the ICOVET Project “Informal competencies and their validation” (2007-2008) developed, by way of a European partnership, a methodology for the validation of these informally or non-formally gained competencies. This methodology includes: an interview guide for young people, a user’s manual and a training module for those who want to use the interview guide.

In order to continue the activity in the ICOVET project, the European partners involved in the project decided to extend the network to other potentially interested institutions. This is how the ICONET Project “Informal competencies network” (2008-2009) came into being. Two Romanian institutions are part of this European network: the Institute for Educational Sciences and the National Administration of Penitentiaries. Within the ICONET project, the methodology developed in the previous project shall be improved, transferred and developed in order to become operational in various institutional contexts. Therefore, ICONET is a project intended for the transfer of innovation, funded by the European Commission by means of the Leonardo da Vinci program. Eleven partner institutions from seven European countries contribute to this project.

***The implementation team of the ICONET project
October 2008
<http://www.iconet-eu.net/>***

Foreword

This report has been written by the research team of the Institute for Educational Sciences involved in the implementation of the Romanian ICONET project based on the piloting reports of nine specialists who work in penitentiaries and reeducation centers for minors. The piloting reports were drawn up after applying the ICONET tool in September-December 2008, on a number of 44 young men who were incarcerated or in reeducation centers.

The final report includes the main findings as the result of piloting the ICONET tool and is structured along the following dimensions: general information concerning the young men who were interviewed; the preparation and organization conditions for the interview; the benefits and limits of the ICONET tool in penitentiary context; the appropriateness of using the ICONET tool in penitentiaries and reeducation centers; proposals for the adaptation and use of the ICONET tool.

We thank all our colleagues – psychologists, educators, sociologists and social workers – who were patient enough to understand and explore the usefulness of this tool in order to increase the chances of socio-professional reinsertion of the young prisoners and to apply it by means of an open and empathic dialogue with the youth they assist daily.

Alina Angela ARON

psychologist, Craiova Juvenile and Youth Penitentiary

Nicolae BANU

officer specialist – social assistance Mărgineni Penitentiary, Dâmbovița county

Ionela DINU

social worker, Slobozia Penitentiary

Daniela MĂRCULESCU

educator, Găiești Reeducation Center

Daniela NAGY

psychologist, Bucharest Penitentiary - Jilava

Marian NICOLAE

officer psychologist, COLIBAȘI PENITENTIARY

Lavinia Luminița SOLOTCHI

educator, Buziaș Reeducation Center

Anișoara TUDORAN

Tichilești Juvenile and Youth Penitentiary, Brăila county

Nicușor UDREA

educator, Giurgiu Penitentiary

We also thank our colleagues in the National Administration of Penitentiaries who made sure that this project was implemented in good conditions.

Denisa GANEA

officer, Craiova Penitentiary

Gabriela SOREANU

officer, the Department of International Cooperation and Programs,
the National Administration of Penitentiaries

Emanuela TIRON

officer specialist with the Education and Psychosocial Assistance Division,
the National Administration of Penitentiaries

Cristian PLEȘA

Head of the Department of International Cooperation and Programs,
the National Administration of Penitentiaries

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. The staff who piloted the ICONET tool – general information.....	5
2. The youth who were interviewed – general information.....	6
3. Interview preparation.....	10
4. Organization conditions for the interview	13
5. Confidence and participation levels.....	14
6. Relevance of the interview fields.....	15
7. Benefits of using the ICONET tool.....	17
8. Difficulties in interviewing the young men.....	19
9. Relevance of the ICONET in penitentiaries and reeducation centers...	20
10. Proposals for the adaptation of the ICONET tool.....	21
11. Conclusions and recommendations.....	24

1. The staff who piloted the ICONET tool – general information

The staff involved in piloting the ICONET tool was selected by the representatives of the National Administration of Penitentiaries. The main selection criterion was experience and the characteristics of their activity in direct relation with the youth in penitentiaries or in reeducation centers. Another criterion was qualification, each of the selected specialists having competencies in using personality investigation tools.

Therefore, nine specialists with the following backgrounds were selected: social worker (3 persons), psychologist (3 persons), and educator (3 persons). Their basic qualifications are the following: social assistance (3 persons), psychology or pedagogy (5 persons), and sociology (1 person). The seniority level of the specialists involved in piloting varies between 2 and 6 years, which proves that, at the time the interviews began, they already had some information and a history of relating to young prisoners.

Generally, the specialists who took part in the piloting stage of the tool carry out such activities as informing, counseling and forming pro-social skills of young convicts. Specifically, among the most important activities carried out in penitentiaries are:

- get acquainted and conduct a psychological evaluation of prisoners by means of methodological tools (psychological tests, biographical analysis, interview guide, clinical interview, case study, etc.);
- systematize and record information in specific work documents;
- draw up the personalized evaluation and psychotherapeutic intervention plans;
- carry out some personal development and self-knowledge programs for high-risk convicts;
- individual and group psychological counseling of prisoners, upon request and in crisis, vulnerability or risk situations;
- carry out activities included in the release preparation program;
- set out the educational track of prisoners, contributing, by means of their recommendations and conclusions, to the drawing up and periodical reviewing of the personalized evaluation and psychosocial intervention plans;
- take part in the multidisciplinary committees / teams (for instance, the multidisciplinary anti-drug committee) which are made up of specialists in different business sectors, in order to present the psychological conclusions with respect to the psychological and behavioral profile of prisoners and the adaptation to the characteristics of penitentiary life;
- conduct studies and research concerning the criminal phenomenon and the evolution of the penitentiary system;
- attend symposia, colloquia, continuing education courses, seminars, scientific sessions, exchanges in Romania and abroad in the field of psychology and educational sciences.

In order to conduct the interviews, the selected specialists participated in a training session regarding the use of the ICONET tool, which took place in AMARA in September 2009. Also, the group of specialists continued to share the piloting experience within the framework of a virtual community of practice moderated by the Institute for Educational Sciences (<http://training.ise.ro>).

2. The youth who were interviewed – general information

The pool to which the ICONET tool was applied is composed of a number of 44 subjects who, depending on their age, come from different types of institutions: *reeducation centers*, *juvenile and youth penitentiaries* and *adult prisons*. These are located in 7 out of the 42 Romanian counties and in Bucharest. The subjects have some characteristics which will be presented in what follows.

➤ Subjects' age

The youth who participated in the testing of the tool are in the 15-20 age bracket. The representation of each age within the pool is different; the most numerous are the 19-year-olds and the 20-year-olds – 22% and 37% respectively.

Table 1. Distribution of subjects according to age

Age	Number of subjects	% out of the total number of subjects
15	1	2.5
16	2	2.5
17	8	17.5
18	8	17.5
19	9	22.5
20	16	37.5
Total	44	100.0

➤ Sex

All the subjects in the pool to which the interview was applied are males, given that the tool was administered only in institutions that are specifically dedicated to males.

➤ Length of prison sentence

With respect to the length of prison sentence, the pool has a non-homogeneous distribution. Thus, two of the young men who were investigated are held in custody, another five were subject to the *educational procedure of being admitted to a reeducation center* where they shall remain *until the educational procedure fulfills its goal, but not beyond the age of 20*, while most of the other interview subjects were serving 1 to 3-year sentences (34%) and 4 to 6-year sentences (32%).

Table 2. Distribution of subjects according to the length of prison sentence

Length of prison sentence	Number of subjects	% out of the total number of subjects
Under 3 years	15	34.1
4-6 years	14	31.8
7-9 years	2	4.5
10 years and more	2	4.5
Short length (in custody)	2	4.5
Various lengths (educational procedure of being admitted to a reeducation center)	9	20.5
Total	44	100.0

➤ **Time left to the end of prison stay**

Over half of the subjects (55%) have at the most 2 years left of their prison sentence. For the other subjects, the time left to the end of prison stay cannot be specified, because:

- either they are in custody or subject to the educational procedure of being admitted to a reeducation center where they shall remain until the procedure fulfills its goal (11 cases, that is 25%);
- or they have been conditionally released or are undergoing examination with a view to conditional release (6 young men, that is 13.6%).

Table 3. Distribution of subjects according to the time left to the end of prison stay

Time left to the end of prison stay	Number of subjects	% out of the total number of subjects
1 year	11	25.0
2 years	11	25.0
3 years and more	5	11.4
In custody	2	4.5
Until the educational procedure of being admitted to a reeducation center fulfills its goal, but not beyond the age of 20	9	20.5
Conditionally released or undergoing examination with a view to conditional release	6	13.6
Total	44	100.0

➤ **Education level**

The analysis of the pool of young men who are serving different liberty-depriving sentences points out that almost all of them left the education system before finishing the 10-year compulsory education cycle and with no professional qualification. A significant number of these young men (36%) only completed part of their primary education or have not received any schooling. 55% of them, that is 24 subjects, have not completed their lower secondary education. Only one subject has graduated from high-school, and 3 subjects have attended the classes of the first grade of vocational education (9th grade).

Table 4. Distribution of subjects according to their education level

Education level	Number of subjects	% out of the total number of subjects
No schooling	4	9.1
Primary education (1-4 grades)	12	27.3
Lower secondary education (5-8 grades)*	24	54.5
9 grades	3	6.8
High-school	1	2.3
Total	44	100.0

* Only 6 subjects completed the 8th grade.

➤ **Pursuit of studies**

Over half of the young men who were interviewed (56.8%), including those with no schooling, pursue their studies in prison: almost 48% are enrolled in primary or lower secondary education, while 9% in vocational education.

Table 5. Distribution of subjects according to the pursuit of studies

Pursue their studies	Number of subjects	% out of the total number of subjects
Yes, primary or lower secondary education	21	47.7
Yes, vocational education	4	9.1
No	19	43.2
Total	44	100.0

➤ **General health status**

In the case of most young men who were investigated (93%, that is 41 subjects), the result of the evaluation of the general health status was *clinically healthy*. The other subjects, who present alterations of the health status, exhibit:

- heart diseases;
- behavioral disorders that are manifested by hetero-aggressiveness, associated to previous drug consumption.

➤ **Social status**

• **Family social status**

Over half of the young men on which the ICONET tool was tested come from families which are disorganized following divorce or death, are not legally constituted (concubinage) or in which the relationships between the two parents and/or between parents and children are characterized by serious and permanent conflicts. The other subjects have been, permanently or periodically, in one of the following situations:

- abandoned by their parents (sometimes as a result of their parents' leaving to work abroad);
- with both parents deceased;
- in grandparents' custody or in foster care centers;
- street children.

In addition to the aforementioned situations, in the case of 17% of the total pool of subjects, their father, their mother or another member of their family had been / was in prison.

Such families had a low educogenous potential, did not offer the young men a reassuring emotional climate, and these situations may have been one of the causes of their criminal behavior.

• **Family education level**

The young men who were interviewed come, for the most part (70%), from families with a low education level; only one subject has parents with a high education level.

• **Family income**

Almost three quarters of the subjects have families with low incomes, most of them usually coming from unskilled work, agricultural work (sometimes paid in kind) or forest exploitation, welfare, state allowance for the minors in the family, pensions (for reaching the legal age for retirement or on medical grounds), etc. In some of these families the incomes are even less satisfactory, given the fact that the subjects' families are very large (4-5 and even 7-8 children). Only 2 subjects in the interview pool reported an income level above average.

• **Housing conditions**

Most subjects' housing conditions (irrespective of whether they live in individual houses or in apartments in apartment buildings) are either average – relatively enough room compared to the number of family members, *with inexpensive appliances and furniture* (over 40%) or precarious – *destitute, promiscuous conditions, without electricity, without central heating* (almost a quarter).

- **Work experience**

Most young prisoners (73%) have some work experience, gained either through employment on a work contract basis or in carrying out occasional activities, without a work contract.

Table 6. Distribution of subjects according to work experience

Work experience	Number of subjects	% out of the total number of subjects
Was employed with a work contract	14	31.8
Worked occasionally, without a work contract	18	40.9
Has never worked	12	27.3
Total	44	100.0

The young men in the first category were employed as unskilled workers (given that they had not acquired any qualification as a result of their previous education) in such fields as building industry, automotive mechanics, forest exploitation, wood industry, textile industry, agriculture (vegetable growing, animal husbandry), etc. The other subjects worked in almost the same fields (building industry, agriculture, forestry, textile industry, food industry, baking industry); their jobs / occupations are also similar: mason, tiler, plumber, painter, carpenter, auto mechanic, tinsmith, shoemaker, cook, waiter, zootechnician, delivery person, etc.

Both categories of young men who have some work experience (gained in carrying out occasional activities or through employment on a work contract basis) have some professional competencies, some of them even in different fields, more or less connected, but which are not recognized and for which they have no certification.

A very small number of subjects (3) also have new basic competencies – foreign languages (English, Greek).

- **Support measures which the young men are currently enjoying with a view to social reintegration**

All the young men in the investigation pool are enjoying a series of measures designed to facilitate their social reintegration, namely: psychological counseling, psychological therapy, educational programs, work programs, participation in sports and artistic activities, competitions, etc. Here are some examples of programs and activities in which the young prisoners or the young men in reeducation centers participate:

- psychotherapeutic program of self-knowledge and personal development – *Who am I?*;
- psychotherapeutic program for aggressiveness reduction and anger management – *The Challenge*;
- educational programs on *Values clarification, Social skills and competencies development, Assuming one's own identity, Education for health*;
- study programs;
- vocational training programs (mason, carpenter, pottery, painting, etc.);
- moral and religious programs;
- activities carried out collectively – sightseeing, competitions, shows, trips, camps;
- productive activities in the penitentiary / reeducation center;
- school contests on different topics and sports competitions;
- cultural and artistic activities (for instance, the break-dance band of the reeducation center);
- participation in radio shows on “Juvenile delinquency prevention” and in writing the reeducation center magazine, etc.

3. Interview preparation

Interview preparation was a distinct stage, prior to the application of the ICONET tool, and took into account the following aspects: the identification and selection of the young men who were to be included in the investigation; the preparation of the appropriate setting for the investigation by means of identifying the young men's motivation for participating in the interview; obtain their consent for the interview; establish a set of common goals for the interviewer and the interviewee with respect to the application of the ICONET tool.

➤ Selection of the participants in the ICONET interview

The young men included in the investigation were selected based on a **single set of criteria**, established by common consent during the previous training session with the people who applied the ICONET tool (the interviewers):

- young men in the 18-24 age bracket;
- young men with low schooling levels / low qualification levels (or with no professional qualification);
- young men who were about to be released from prison.

Other criteria used by certain penitentiaries / reeducation centers in the selection of the participants in the ICONET interview took into account the following aspects:

- young men in a therapeutic relationship with respect to the specific activities carried out in penitentiaries – Argument: these young men were selected because of the relationship based on trust and congruence already existing between them and the interviewer, which was the premise for the optimum application of the ICONET tool.
- the type of offense that they had committed – Argument: they selected young men convicted for certain offenses which require a series of specific skills (relevant to the ICONET tool), in the absence of which they would not have succeeded in committing those offenses. For instance: car theft requires fine locksmithing skills, technical knowledge in automotive electricity and driving.
- the type of behavior inside the institution.

The selection of the young men was accompanied by a preliminary preparation stage when some relevant information on the following **aspects** was collected:

- the young men's legal situation – the minor's disciplinary situation at the time he was admitted to penitentiary; the type of offense he had committed; the sentence; the time left to the conditional release;
- the young men's psychological status;
- the young men's socio-familial situation (social history) – the familial environment they come from (legally constituted families / disorganized families following divorce or concubinage); the type of family climate (favorable / tense).

In most cases, **the relationship between the interviewer and the young interviewee** had been a long one, prior to ICONET (psychological evaluation, psychological counseling, psychosocial therapy and intervention, etc.), which ensured good mutual acquaintance between the two and was the premise for the optimum application of the ICONET tool. In very few situations did the application of the ICONET tool represent the first contact between the interviewer and the interviewee.

➤ Young men's motivations for participating in the interview

In a preliminary stage, the young men to be included in the investigation were informed of the characteristics of the ICONET project: the context in which the interview will be conducted (within the ICONET project), the objectives of the interview, the circumstances in which the interview will be conducted (duration, place, data recording methods, and ways to ensure data privacy).

Since any activity involving liberty-deprived persons can only be carried out with their consent, the interviewers used in most cases a **consent form for their participation** in this activity. Here is an example:

CONSENT FORM	
<i>The undersigned, , imprisoned in, born on, I agree to participate in an individual interview within the ICONET project and I am aware of the privacy limits of this procedure among third parties. I agree to the electronic use of the results thus obtained and to the presentation of the information acquired through this procedure, providing it is kept confidential. I was informed of the characteristics of the objectives and activities of the ICONET project.</i>	
Date	Signature

Generally, **the staff had no difficulty** in applying the ICONET tool concerning the young men's consent and motivation for participating in this activity. In some cases difficulties concerning the **time necessary to conduct the interview** were reported. In most cases, the interview was divided into several sessions, which led to some constraints with respect to the interviewers / interviewees' available time.

The young men exhibited various **motivations** for participating in the ICONET interview. In numerous cases, the interviewers mention that, in the first stage, the young prisoners reported an **extrinsic motivation**: the desire to spend as much time as possible outside their cell. After the preliminary stage, when they were informed of the objective of the ICONET interview, the young men reported **intrinsic reasons** for participating in the interview.

- **the desire to know themselves:**

<i>Interviewer 1: Many saw in this interview an opportunity to know themselves better.</i>
<i>Interviewer 2: By providing them with more details about the ICONET tool, we stimulated the young men's desire for self-knowledge, due to the possibility to identify and use their competencies, which they knew or did not know that they possessed.</i>

- **the desire to participate in the dialogue:**

<i>Interviewer 6: They were motivated by the fact that they were able to communicate in other contexts than the regular, daily ones.</i>
<i>Interviewer 4: The young men agreed to participate in the interview, were not reluctant, because they are open to the idea of telling someone about certain childhood events and aspects.</i>

- **inducing positive perception:**

<i>Interviewer 3: They thought: „I was chosen from so many other young men for a different kind of activity”.</i>
<i>Interviewer 5: What made them participate in the activity was the fact that, out of approximately 80 young men, they were the selected ones, they were “the special ones”, whom the counselor will help establish their personal abilities and skills and the job for which they have already gained competencies, not necessary by schooling, but in different other contexts.</i>
<i>Interviewer 1: They were also motivated by the awareness of the fact that the participation in this activity will boost their popularity within the group.</i>

- **the desire to experience new situations:**

Interviewer 7: With respect to the young men's consent for their participation in the interview, they were very open, since they saw it as something new, and in penitentiaries everything new is attractive.

Interviewer 8: Curiosity and their openness to novelty were two more reasons for which they agreed to participate in the interview.

Whether extrinsic or intrinsic, the reasons underlying the decision to participate in the interview led, in some cases, to numerous requests: *In our center, the number of minors who would have wanted to participate in the interview was much larger than the number of those who were actually selected* (one interviewer's statement).

➤ **Establishing the objectives of the interview in collaboration with the young men**

During the **preliminary preparation stage**, the interviewers' objectives were: to present the ICONET project and the ICOVET interview guide, to set up the privacy limits and to have the young prisoners sign the consent form.

For the **interview stage**, the interviewers, by common consent with the interviewees, established that the **main objective** is the identification of the young prisoners' skills and competencies / abilities, gained in different informal and non-formal learning contexts. There were **other** connected **objectives**, concerning the following aspects:

- to identify the self-introduction techniques at a job interview;
- to learn how to write a EuroPass resume, with a view to looking for a job and going to a job interview;
- to establish realistic personal goals as far as school, the profession and personal development are concerned, in line with one's own possibilities and competencies;
- to identify the needs and the vocational training classes, in line with their formally or informally gained skills.

Besides these "observable and measurable" objectives, the interview had **other categories of objectives, related to different aspects of the young prisoners' personal development:**

- practice some activities related to introspection, self-knowledge, boosting one's self-confidence and self-responsibility, promoting one's self-image;
- develop their self-evaluation capacity (for instance: to describe themselves in positive terms – qualities, existing skills and abilities; to acknowledge and improve their weak points, which have not been developed nor practiced; to make the best of their strong points).

4. Organization conditions for the interview

The analysis of the organization conditions for the interview started from the premise that these directly influence the results of the application of the ICONET tool and took into account the following aspects: the place where the interview will be conducted and its appropriateness, the diversity of the tools used for recording the data.

➤ The place where the interview will be conducted – privacy conditions

All interviews were conducted in **locations specially designed** for carrying out social and psychological activities with the young prisoners, having different names depending on the characteristics of the institution in which the questionnaire was applied (prison, reeducation center): psychology consulting room, psychotherapy consulting room, educator's consulting room, social worker's consulting room in the juvenile and youth section, social counseling consulting room.

These locations, given the very purpose for which they were created, offered a favorable climate for the application of the ICONET tool and ensured the participants' **psychological comfort** and the necessary material conditions (adequate space and furniture, air conditioning, protection against sound and light stimuli, security in order to avoid unpleasant events). The interviews were conducted individually, which ensured the **privacy conditions** necessary to apply the interviews.

➤ Instruments used for recording the interviews

In all cases, the information collected by applying the ICONET tool was recorded **in writing**. The work instrument used for collecting information was the **ICONET interview grid**, along with **other instruments** used to get further information: individual work sheets, social questionnaires, social counseling record book.

➤ Time allocated to one interview

The time resource was planned from the very beginning. In most cases, the interview with the young prisoners took place over **three or four sessions**, each of 1-2 hours:

- 1 session for the interviewer to establish rapport with the interviewee;
- 1-2 sessions with discussions on the constituent elements of the instrument;
- 1 final session in which the information about the skills and competencies mentioned in the ICONET tool was reviewed and synthesized.

Generally, the interviewers consider that the **time allocated for conducting the interviews was sufficient** to fulfill the objectives. In some situations, the interviewers think that certain interviews took longer than estimated because:

- either more time was needed in order to transpose the young prisoners' accounts in terms of the skills and competencies specified in the ICONET tool;
- or more time was needed in order to develop the dialogues between the interviewer and the interviewee on connected topics, upon the latter's request.

5. Confidence and participation levels

➤ Young men's interest to participate in the interview

The young prisoners were greatly interested in participating in the ICONET interview, for various reasons:

- **Get out of one's daily routine** – The participation in the interview allowed the young men to do something different from the regular activities carried out in penitentiaries and foster care centers: *The young men showed great interest to participate in the interview, they did something different from what they usually did and they wanted to be involved again in such activities in the future* (one interviewer's statement).
- **Discussion topics** – The young prisoners were captivated by the topics tackled by the ICONET tool, since they do not have many opportunities to discuss such things: *The young men enjoyed talking about themselves, about their family, their friends, whether good or bad, about their interests and frustrations* (one interviewer's statement). *The young men were open in the accounts of their childhood. Most of the time, they are the ones who want to talk about family and friends* (one interviewer's statement).
- **Goal of the tool** – The identification of one's own skills aroused the young men's interest: *The young men were thrilled about the ICONET tool; thus they became aware of the fact that some things they did or used to do on a regular basis could enhance certain skills* (one interviewer's statement); *The identification of the young men's skills and competencies led to their desire to obtain a letter of recommendation that they could use for a future job. This is not possible, but the young men were presented with the possibility to translate these skills under the form of a EuroPass resume and they found this extraordinary* (one interviewer's statement).

➤ Challenges and apprehensions expressed by the young men with respect to the interview

Generally, the young men were very open to communication and to the ICONET interview. Some of the subjects were more reluctant in the beginning; as the sessions unfolded and they realized that the interview was confidential, they exhibited positive attitudes towards the interviewers and the topic of the interview and offered the necessary feedback.

The most important apprehensions and challenges expressed by the young men with respect to the interview had to do with a wide range of aspects:

- The apprehension / the challenge **to talk about personal aspects**, intimate topics: *They sometimes found it difficult to talk about themselves, their families, their friends, their love life, their expectations and dreams* (one interviewer's statement). *Another challenge was to admit to the fact that, at home, they, the strong ones, who are respected by their peers, cook, make their bed, take care of their little brother or of their own child* (one interviewer's statement).
- The apprehension / the challenge **to evaluate themselves**, to acknowledge their own qualities: *The young prisoners were very interested in the self-evaluation. Despite the fact that, in the beginning, they tended to present their weak, negative points, as the activity unfolded, they managed to describe themselves in positive terms* (one interviewer's statement).

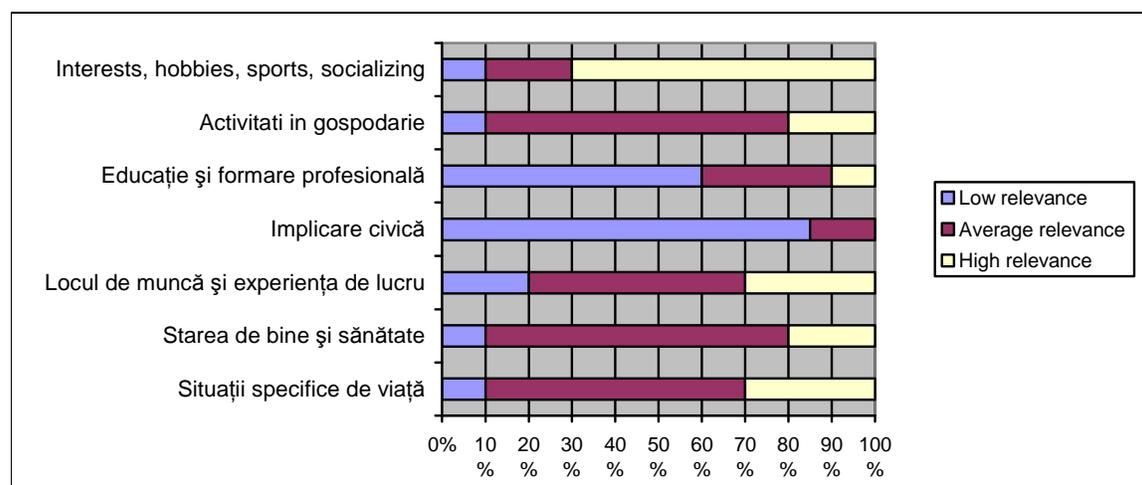
6. Relevance of the interview fields

The most important area indicated by the specialists who conducted the interview as being highly relevant to the young men included in the research has to do with *interests, hobbies, sports and socializing activities*. The average score obtained in this case is 2.6 on a 1-3 scale, where 1 is slightly relevant and 3 is highly relevant. This proves that the ICONET research tool is directly relevant when approaching the topics specific to these young men's leisure and professional development activities.

At the opposite pole is the relevance of the instrument to issues related to *civic, social and political involvement* (the average score obtained is 1.15, very close to the inferior limit of the interval). By analyzing the information provided by the specialists who conducted the interviews we inferred that the main explanation could be the interviewees' little experience of these types of activities. Thus, the low level of civic, social and political involvement led to a low relevance level.

Another field that the ones who used the ICONET tool find highly relevant is the one related to *specific life situations* (average score 2.2). This result confirms the applicability and usefulness of this tool when we want to capture some situation related to daily experiences, since it is in direct relation to the area of interests and socializing.

Figure 1. Assessment of the interview fields



Fields	% out of the total number of subjects				Average score
	Low relevance	Average relevance	High relevance	Total	
Interests, hobbies, sports, socializing	10	20	70	100	2.6
Home chores and family activities	10	70	20	100	2.1
Education and vocational training	60	30	10	100	1.5
Civic, social and political involvement	85	15	0	100	1.15
Work place and work experience	20	50	30	100	2.1
Well-being and health status	10	70	20	100	2.1
Specific life situations	10	60	30	100	2.2

The fields related to professional activity and work place, home chores / family activities and well-being / health status are close to the average relevance level (score 2.1). This situation indicates that we need to make some changes in order to make our tool address these issues in a better way.

Our analysis also shows some limitations of the applicability of the ICONET tool with respect to the interviewees' *formal learning experiences* (educational and vocational training activities). In this case, an average score of 1.5 was obtained, which represents a relevance level midway between *low* and *average*.

7. Benefits of using the ICONET tool

All the experts who applied the ICONET tool appreciated its benefits. They identified three areas which the added value can be assessed against: the direct beneficiary (the young men), the expert involved in applying the tool (social worker, psychologist, sociologist, educator, trainer, etc.), and the organization to which the expert belongs.

In what follows we have synthesized the main categories of benefits / gains brought about by the ICONET methodology, according to the three main areas which we identified:

➤ to the young man

In the area of self-knowledge:

- a better understanding of the self and of one's own abilities, acquiring the ability to analyze one's own behavior;
- improving one's self-image: positive attitudes towards oneself, correct evaluation of personal qualities and flaws, positive perception of life experiences, projecting positive experiences for the future;
- increasing the self-evaluation capacity and acceptance of one's self, as well as promoting one's self-image;
- awareness of competencies gained outside the formal learning system;
- stimulating the desire to know oneself.

In the area of skills and positive attitude development:

- a more objective evaluation of personal situations of success and failure; a more adequate understanding of the causes which lead to these situations;
- increasing resistance to frustration, temporary marginalization, criticism, non-inclusive treatment;
- acknowledging values and the consequences of assuming values;
- creating a way of repressing the accumulated stress, enhancing the well-being.

In the area of socializing and communication::

- acquiring self-esteem by the external confirmation of one's potential and personal qualities; openness to communication / dialogue;
- stimulating the desire to communicate / to have a dialogue with the others.

In the area of personal management (education, job):

- developing some basic competencies related to the involvement in an interview, directly relevant to future experiences (for instance, participating in a job interview);
- developing some professionally useful skills (for instance, translating the interview results under the form of a EuroPASS resume, identifying the strong points with a view to future employment);
- using the abilities identified during one's orientation and vocational training;
- establishing realistic objectives as far as school, the profession and personal development are concerned, for the period following the release from prison.

➤ **to the person conducting the interview (social worker, psychologist, sociologist, educator)**

Developing relevant professional competencies in the relationship with the young men:

- developing professional experience by acquiring new knowledge and by developing some specific skills with respect of the use of new work instruments;
- support in the development and implementation of a personalized recuperative intervention program and of social reintegration programs, in general; reviewing the personalized psychosocial intervention plan and filling out the personal development file;
- a better understanding of the young men's skills, experiences, abilities and adaptive resources; developing the competencies necessary to identify these competencies;
- developing the competencies which are specific to the field of school and vocational orientation, including young people in educational or vocational programs or in lucrative activities which can make systematic use of the competencies which were identified;
- acknowledging the advantages and developing the competencies to use narrative methods;
- developing general scientific research abilities, which are essential to the adequate understanding of the factors which lead to criminality and to its prevention among citizens, especially among young people.

Developing relevant personal competencies in the relationship with the young men:

- getting familiar with a tool which succeeds in creating an adequate framework for the development of the relationship with the young man (therapeutical relationship, mentorship, etc.);
- developing relevant personal competencies in order to reinforce competency enhancement behaviors and the young men's learning experiences;
- developing communication and negotiation skills in learning situations.

➤ **to the organization**

In the short and medium run:

- developing the competencies that the organization possesses by implementing and experimenting new work methods and instruments (for instance, getting to know the young men, enhancing their competencies, providing better vocational and professional orientation services or preparing them for conditional release, etc.);
- positive impact on future strategies and educational programs coordinated by the organization (for instance, activities that are specific to "educators among peers");
- making systematic use of new collaboration experiences with external project partners; creating opportunities for future collaboration in the relevant areas.

In the long run:

- reducing the number of incidents during educational activities addressed to young people;
- positive impact on the strategies and educational programs coordinated by the organization (for instance, activities that are specific to "educators among peers");
- stimulating research into the criminal phenomenon and the efficient prevention / intervention strategies;
- promoting innovation and good practice exchanges when deciding on the minors' / young men's execution track.

8. Difficulties in interviewing the young men

The analysis of the difficulties that the interviewers encountered indicates situations of poor understanding of the meaning of some questions related to areas of which the young men had little experience (especially concerning civic involvement and education). Thus, the opinions analyzed above with respect to the relevance level of the ICONET tool are confirmed.

Another important difficulty in conducting the interviews with the young men is related to their low active communication competencies and to their reluctance to answer questions. In many cases, the interviewers were forced to use different communication and motivation strategies in order to overcome these barriers and this aspect should be taken into account when drawing up the interview guide and the user's manual.

According to the interviewers, sometimes the young men showed distrust in the utility of the interview, in the way it could help them in real life situations. Also, the time necessary to go through all the questions in the interview increased as a result of providing further explanations, and some interviewees lost their concentration and were not able to finish the interview.

The interviewees were very reluctant to describe the criminal or antisocial activities which they carried out in their circle of friends. The interviewers also noticed their desire to make a good impression, to present the positive aspects, their achievements and competencies.

The ICONET tool is also demanding on the interviewer, so the interviewers quasi-unanimously believed that there should not be scheduled more than two interviews in one day. The interviewers also complained about the lack of alternative information sources which would enable them to verify / validate the data.

Although there were no major difficulties in the administrative issues related to the interviewers, there were some situations when the transfer of the minors to other penitentiary units during that period resulted in the impossibility of conducting all the stages of the interview.

9. Relevance of the ICONET tool in penitentiaries and reeducation centers

In almost all cases, the persons who applied the ICONET tool find it appropriate to use it in the institution to which they belong, given, first of all, the impact it can have on young people. From this point of view, all interviewers appreciated its benefits to self-confidence, its utility for self-knowledge and social enhancement.

Interviewer 1: *I find it appropriate to use the work tool in reeducation centers, since it is of great help in establishing the social intervention plan during internment, as well as in identifying and making use of these young men's potential.*

Interviewer 2: *I find it appropriate to use the ICONET tool in penitentiaries, because its application improves the self-knowledge activity / the identification of socio-professional skills among the prisoners.*

Interviewer 3: *Yes, I find it appropriate to use this tool. I have had the opportunity to get to know different personalities better and to perceive the emotional side, different from the criminal one.*

Some interviewers find it appropriate to use this tool to the extent that it is included in the school orientation and vocational counseling programs which are carried out in penitentiaries, as well as in the social skills development programs.

Interviewer 4: *The ICONET tool can be used within the institution in the school orientation and vocational counseling carried out in penitentiaries, as well as in the social skills development programs.*

Other interviewers have some reservations about the appropriateness of using this tool as part of current penitentiary activities. These reservations are mostly related to the amount of time needed in order to apply the ICONET tool, which is quite significant compared to the volume of work of a psychologist or social worker within the institution.

Interviewer 5: *The ICONET tool can be partially used in our institution, since the amount of time allocated to the tool for each young man or minor is quite high, given the small number of specialists.*

Interviewer 6: *I do not find it appropriate to use this tool, because the application of the questionnaire requires several sessions, the time allocated to the questionnaire is quite high compared to the volume of work of a penitentiary psychologist or social worker.*

Other reservations about the appropriateness of using this tool are related to the structure and relevance of some aspects of the tool for the categories of young people in penitentiaries or reeducation centers, which were analyzed in the previous chapters of this report (see chapter 6).

Interviewer 7: *We appreciate that the tool can be used in the specific activities in the institution, but only after having restructured its contents. We think that the interview is open, and, in our opinion, it should be transformed into a semi-structured one. The fields are very well chosen, except for area 4, in which prisoners seem to show very little interest. Also, the interview is designed to address a disadvantaged, unschooled population, and, in these circumstances, the understanding level is quite low compared to the average in the general population.*

10. Proposals for the adaptation and use of the ICONET tool

➤ Replacing some activity fields in the ICONET tool

As we have already seen in the chapter devoted to the relevance of the instrument, most interviewers suggest replacing the *Civic, social and political involvement* field with a new one, *Educational and therapeutical programs and activities*. Thus, according to the interviewers, the young prisoners can make systematic use of the skills developed within different programs carried out in the penitentiary institution in which they participated out of their free will. As one of the interviewers stated, this new field is relevant to the penitentiary and reeducation center population.

Interviewer 1: *The educational and therapeutical programs and activities are optional, but the manifestation of interest and receptivity is seen as a desire to change the antisocial behavior; the young man's involvement is positively appreciated, favoring him when analyzed by the Proposal Committee for conditional release.*

Interviewer 2: *The "Civic, social and political involvement" area can be turned into a field which takes into account the activities carried out while being in the reeducation center (the following helping questions can be used: "In which activities in the reeducation center did you participate?", "How much time do you allot to these activities?", etc.).*

Interviewer 3: *I suggest changing point 4 concerning civic, social and political involvement, since these minors and young men never carried out activities within organizations, community service, political activities, etc.*

Interviewer 4: *Following the application of the ICONET tool, I noticed the low relevance of the "Civic, social and political involvement" area. I consider that the ICONET tool could be used successfully in group programs, for instance in release preparation, in order to identify the possibilities of social reinsertion.*

➤ Including the ICONET tool in the school orientation and vocational counseling programs carried out in penitentiaries, as well as in the social skills development programs

Many interviewers suggest including the ICONET tool in the school orientation and vocational counseling programs carried out in penitentiaries, as well as in the social skills development programs. The interviewers argue that the ICONET tool can stimulate *a positive attitude towards work, education and vocational training*.

Interviewer 1: *This work tool can be used in the school orientation and vocational counseling programs carried out in penitentiaries, as well as in the social skills development programs, since I find it necessary for young people to become aware of their competencies and skills, as well as to develop a positive attitude towards work, education and vocational training. The underlying reason is that these young people usually come from disorganized families, exhibit deficiencies of moral socializing and, unlike people who manifest socially desirable behavior, they have not internalized some familial, economic and social responsibilities.*

Interviewer 2: *This work tool can be used in the school orientation and vocational counseling programs carried out in penitentiaries.*

➤ **The last part of prison stay – the optimum period for applying the ICONET tool**

Another important suggestion made by those who piloted the ICONET tool is related to the optimum period in which this tool can be used. According to some of them, the ICONET tool could be applied in the last part of prison stay, when prisoners are getting ready for social and professional reintegration. On the other hand, other interviewers suggest that the ICONET tool could be useful in the period devoted to getting to know the prisoner and within the framework of the current professional counseling and orientation programs, providing it is adapted to the prisoners' specific characteristics.

Interviewer 5: Also, what is characteristic of using this tool in penitentiaries could be the fact that highlighting the competencies which the young people gained all along their life, outside the formal learning system, becomes relevant mainly in the last part of their prison stay, in the release preparation period, since the young person can apply the skills that he / she has discovered / gained, without being “contaminated” by the conceptions which are characteristic of penitentiary life.

Interviewer 3: We appreciate that the instrument can be used in the specific penitentiary activities, but only after having restructured its contents. We think that the interview is open and, in our opinion, it should be transformed into a semi-structured one. The fields are very well chosen, except for area 4, in which prisoners seem to show very little interest.

➤ **The ICONET tool can be adapted under the form of a social program for skills / abilities identification**

Interviewer 2: The ICONET tool can be adapted under the form of a social program for skills / abilities identification, so that, when released from prison, the young men should be directly employable and immediately productive, because it is important to learn to know what you can do and what you cannot.

➤ **Including the ICONET tool among the work instruments used for getting to know the prisoners and planning the subsequent educational measures – “The education and psychosocial assistance file”**

Interviewer 6: The skills discovered following the application of the work instrument could be recorded in the minor's Individual development file, under a separate heading. The information which was obtained could be recorded under the form of a letter of recommendation which could be useful to the young man in case he wants to enroll in a vocational training course or to his potential employer. Also, the minor's family could be informed of the skills that have been identified in order to become aware of the minor's potential.

Interviewer 7: The work instrument used for getting to know the prisoners and planning the subsequent educational measures is “The education and psychosocial assistance file”.

➤ **Other remarks**

Other final observations made by the interviewers range between appreciations with respect to the difficulties encountered in the application of the tool, especially concerning time or the structure of the tool, and appreciations related to the usefulness of the ICONET tool for getting to know the prisoners better.

Interviewer 1: *Very good results can be obtained by applying the interview guide to persons who have graduated at least from the 6th grade, since it is necessary to have an average understanding level in order to be aware of the role of this interview guide.*

Interviewer 2: *I suggest that other such projects should be applied in penitentiaries, for the prisoners to get familiar with new, relevant and efficient work methods, which would help identify new features, states, behaviors, with a view to reducing the number of crisis situations or conflictive relationships among them.*

Interviewer 3: *We appreciate that the administration of the guide in the current form is cumbersome because of its form. We think that the interview should be structured according to areas, activities, competencies, all of them expressed by items, organized under the form "if Yes or if No", where each item is approached or is not approached, by going to the next item or to x.*

Anyway, the interview guide is useful, whatever the form it is applied in, and we think that it can be used in the activities with prisoners, in the following fields:

- *getting to know the young people;*
- *identifying their interests in order to usefully plan the education and psychological assistance intervention throughout the prison stay;*
- *the school, vocational and professional orientation of the young people when entering the penitentiary and throughout the prison stay;*
- *release preparation, under the form of learning how to write a resume and how to behave at a job interview;*
- *for psychotherapeutical purposes, in order to establish the therapeutical relationship, identifying the weak and strong points in order to enhance their confidence in their own qualities.*

Interviewer 4: *It is a cumbersome piloting tool, which cannot be used in daily work.*

Interviewer 5: *I want to emphasize, once again, that all young men were extremely happy that they had been able to participate in this interview, and, when the others found out about it, many of them were willing to be selected too. That is why, within the available time frame, I think that the application of the ICONET tool is very useful.*

11. Conclusions and recommendations

After piloting the ICONET tool in penitentiaries and reeducation centers and based on the results of the analysis above, the main conclusions and recommendations from the research team of the Institute for Educational Sciences – partner of the National Administration of Penitentiaries in the ICONET project – are the followings:

- 1) Most specialists from the penitentiaries and reeducation centers which participated in the piloting of the ICONET tool find it appropriate to use this tool in their institution, given, first of all, the impact it can have on young people. From this point of view, all interviewers appreciated the remarkable benefits of the ICONET tool to self-confidence, its utility for self-knowledge and social enhancement.
- 2) According to the specialists who participated in the piloting, the ICONET tool could be added to the set of psychological tools used in the activities which aim at knowing the prisoners better and in the current professional counseling and orientation programs. More specifically, the ICONET tool could be useful in the last part of prison stay, when prisoners are getting ready for social and professional reintegration
- 3) For an optimum use of the ICONET tool in penitentiaries and reeducation centers, the tool should be adapted and improved, so that it should become relevant to the profile of young prisoners. The most important suggestions on the adaptation of the ICONET tool which have been made by the specialists who did the piloting are the following:
 - Replacing the *Civic, social and political involvement* field with a new one, *Educational and therapeutical programs and activities*. Thus, according to the interviewers, the young prisoners can make systematic use of the skills developed within different programs carried out in the penitentiary institution in which they participated out of their free will.
 - Adapting the ICONET tool under the form of a ***Social program for the identification of the prisoners' skills / abilities***. The aim of this program is that, when released from prison, the prisoners should be directly employable and immediately productive. Such a program also presupposes a specific cooperation with employers who should be familiar with the characteristics of the ICONET tool and be willing to acknowledge the prisoners' competencies.
 - Adapting the structure of the ICONET tool under the form of a synthetic report which should include the main interview results. The need to structure the tool can be covered according to the specific characteristics of the work of each specialist who uses it and along with other psychological knowledge tools which are used while working with the same subject.
 - It is necessary to modify the language used in the ICONET tool, so that it does not represent a communication barrier while talking to young people who often have a low education level and low communication competencies.
- 4) Some of the specialists who applied the interview have some reservations about the appropriateness of using this tool as part of current penitentiary activities. These reservations are mostly related to the amount of time needed in order to apply the ICONET tool, which is quite significant compared to the volume of work of a psychologist or social worker within the institution. This situation could be solved by acknowledging the specialists who use this tool and including them in a rewards system.

- 5) In order to disseminate the experience of piloting the ICONET tool, as well as in order to improve and adapt the tool to the specific characteristics of young prisoners and young people in reeducation centers, it is necessary for the specialists who conducted the interviews (but also for those who are interested in using this tool in the future) to get involved in a series of dissemination, research and innovation activities (seminars, conferences, experience exchanges in Romania and abroad).
- 6) If there is enough interest in future activities related to the adaptation and use of the ICONET tool in penitentiaries and reeducation centers, the Institute for Educational Sciences can provide the necessary training and dissemination expertise. In order to do this, a financing source should be identified, which shall support this activity by means of a national or European project.
- 7) Given the results obtained following the application of the ICONET tool, this could become (with subsequent adaptations and improvements) a work instrument included in the “Education and psychosocial assistance file”.
- 8) We also recommend piloting the ICONET tool on adult subjects who are about to be released from prison and who take part in social reintegration preparation programs.