

RASMORAD - Preventing and countering violent radicalization in prison/probation

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Presentation of the

**Activities of UCOII in PREVENTING AND COUNTERING VIOLENT RADICALIZATION  
IN PRISON**

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### **UCOII's objectives to prevent and counter violent radicalization in prison**

- Promote the engagement of the Islamic communities in the fight against violent radicalization
- Prevent the formation of violent extremism based on wrong religious assumptions where people risk to come in contact with proselitists, stigmatised readings of the Scriptures and, in general, risk to develop extremist ideologies in the context of Islamic ideology.
- Creation of a team within the probation centres, formed by prison personnel that are aware of the real Islamic practices and therefore can recognize early or ongoing signals of radicalisation.
- Support of the Islamic religious assistants and spiritual guides operating in prisons
- Building and foster partnership among stakeholders (Muslim community, judicial institutions, municipal officers, NGOs).

### **U.CO.I.I.'s action plan to fight against violent radicalization in prison**

It includes four projects, three of them are ongoing:

5. Memorandum of understanding with DAP (Italian Prisons Service)
6. Training of prison officers and staff in Italy
7. Training of Islamic ministries that operate in prisons – *contribution to RASMORAD project*
8. Campaign for the giving of halal food in Italian prisons (to be initiated)

The Union of the Islamic Community in Italy has studied with growing attention the phenomenon of violent radicalization in Europe. Prisons have been identified as the place where people can undertake radicalisation in the context of Islamic ideology. Even if it is a restricted phenomenon, it is likely to cause a potential high risk to the security; therefore, in a such vulnerable environment UCOII decided to adopt prevention policies by its means.

#### **1. MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH DAP (ITALIAN PRISONS SERVICE)**

Since many years UCOII's representatives, imams and religious assistants, enter Italian prisons to

provide religious assistance to Muslim detainees. UCOII's representatives in prisons operates under our supervision, which is an extra security measure. With these premises, UCOII undertook an intense dialogue with the institution to promote the access of cultural mediators and Islamic ministries in prison and to make the process as the more transparent as possible. In 2015 UCOII and the Italian Ministry of Justice undersigned a memorandum of understanding, establishing that Islamic ministries and cultural mediators operating in Italian prisons must be authorized in advance by the Italian Ministry of Justice. Since that moment, UCOII's operators in prisons are known and authorized by the Italian State and are properly trained to work in the probation context.

### **Activity description**

Through the Memorandum of understanding with DAP (Italian Prisons Service), UCOII selects the operators to work in prisons as religious and spiritual assistants, it sends the list of the selected operators to the Italian Ministry of Justice, which verifies their credentials and, when appropriate, approves and authorizes the operators to work in prisons. After that, those selected operators participate in a training to be prepared to work in prison context. At the end of the process, UCOII mediates between the prisons directorates and the Islamic operators to start smoothly the service.

## **2. TRAINING OF PRISON OFFICERS AND STAFF**

Another relevant action plan that UCOII promoted is the training of prison staff and officers (at the National School of the Penitentiary Administration - S. F. A. P. P.) on Islamic religious practice, behaviours and on the influential aspects of Islamic ministries.

### **Activity description**

UCOII has identified some experts in Islamic practice and sociology, which are also bringing about studies on the phenomenon of violent radicalization in prison. These experts bring about training courses in the Italian Schools of the Penitentiary Administration.

Another important step in these projects is the meeting of the prisons directorates and their staff with the local Islamic community, which takes place usually in the mosques. UCOII, in fact, considers pivotal that the penitentiary administration is aware also of the Muslim community activities and reality in the territorial context and, on the other side, that also the local Muslim community is engaged in the fight against violent radicalization.

The training module is organized in three parts:

- Theological notions on Islamic religion to know the islam
- Cultural notions to know the cultural context of origin of the detainees
- Debate to address issues that most interest the penitentiary staff about their relations with the Muslim detainees, in order to develop the tools to interpret some socio-cultural and rereigious aspects and behaviours.

### **3. TRAINING OF ISLAMIC MINISTRIES THAT OPERATE IN PRISONS – *contribution to RASMORAD project***

In the context of the RASMORAD project, UCOII, in collaboration with the University of Padua, activated in January 2017 a training course for those Islamic ministries (religious guides) that were selected by UCOII and authorized by the Italian State to operate in prison, as a contribution. The title of the course is “*Religious Assistance in Prison: Experimentation*”.

The objective of the course is to provide Islamic ministries and Islamic spiritual guides with the tools to operate their role of spiritual assistant and mediator in prison. The contents of the course are:

- Presentation of the training course and of the Memorandum of Understanding with DAP (Italian Prisons Service);
- notions and operational language for the action of the social operator in Welfare place;
- introduction on the structure of the prison; Muslim inmates in Italian prisons;
- the role of the imam and of the Islamic spiritual guide in prison;
- the legal and administrative vocabulary to operate in prison.

The methodology of the training is lecture and debate integrated with the direct experience in prison.

### **Activity description**

Each participant is expected to participate in the lectures for the training with the professor and participate in the activities of religious assistance in prison to develop their experience. During the activities in prisons, participants are required to take notes of their conversations with inmates and draft activity reports with the contents of their assistance and their feelings while performing it.

## **4. CAMPAIGN FOR THE GIVING OF HALAL FOOD IN ITALIAN PRISONS**

As know from the research on the presence of Muslim detainees in the prisons of Europe, there is the risk that immigrant detainees are socially, culturally and ethnically marginalized and disadvantaged, which can provoke situations of solitude and inward-looking tendencies. As the sociologist Khalid Rhazzali explains in “Islam in prison” (2010): “With the disorientation that the Muslim encounters in prison the relation with the religion emerges, often, as the only resource capable of guaranteeing a point of reference to understand his condition”. The Italian penitentiary system is slowly conforming to this new multicultural society, posing the attention also on the aspect of a diet respectful of religious regulation, as we can read in the Presidential Decree of 30.06.2000, n. 230, art. 11: “In the formulation of the food charts, the regulation of the different religious faiths should be considered”.

Nowadays, those regulations are observed at the level of the organization of the kitchen, trying to eliminate almost completely, for instance, the giving of pork meat. In Italy there are no cases of the possibility to consume halal food in prisons, unless the detainee has the possibility to spend his/her money for meat slaughtered with the Islamic ritual.

### **Activity description**

Bearing in mind that the halal meat has not increased costs and that today you can easily find it everywhere on the national territory, given that high presence of Muslim detainees in the penitentiary institutes, given the many requests from detainees of Islamic faith for halal food,

especially during the period of Ramadan, UCOII launched a project for the request of distribution of halal food in the Italian prisons, beginning with the prison of Sollicciano (Florence).

Our proposal can acquire a high value for its pioneering nature. Furthermore, if the project goes ahead in Sollicciano, it can become a model for all the other penitentiary institutes in Italy, promoting a project of high current, civil and social value that successively can be presented at the Italian Prison Service as a Best Practice to be disseminated.

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### **The experience in the Turin establishment**

While the project supporting the giving of halal food in prison is still at the embryonic stage, the Memorandum of Understanding with the DAP is in force by 6 months so far and the projects of training are ongoing.

Today, we want to focus on the activities within the context of the Memorandum of Understanding with the Italian Prison Service. As already explained, Islamic ministries and cultural mediators selected by UCOII can operate in Italian prisons prior authorization by the Italian Ministry of Justice. The pilot programme is active in eight Italian penitentiary institutes of the Northern Italy, where the concentration of Muslim inmates is higher: Modena, Florence Sollicciano, Cremona, Milan-Opera, Milan-Bollate, Verona, Brescia and Turin.