



Asturia vzw



MUSIC FOR FREEDOM

**VADEMECUM FOR SOCIAL REINTEGRATION
THROUGH MUSIC-BASED TRAINING**



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The fourth project result has been developed under
the guidance of **Aufbruch**
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INTRODUCTION

This *Vademecum* is a unique tool within the European landscape. To date, no comparable instrument exists that combines the pedagogical requirements of prison-based training with the broader responsibilities of the cultural and creative industries. While isolated initiatives have been carried out at national level, they remain fragmented and limited in scope. No EU-wide framework has previously codified such practices into a transferable and policy-relevant tool. This *Vademecum* therefore serves both a practical guide for educators and prison authorities, and a roadmap for music companies, labels, and cultural organisations seeking to align their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) commitments with concrete social impact.

By formalising this model, the *Vademecum* demonstrates that music-based training in prisons is not a marginal initiative but a replicable, policy-relevant practice that strengthens social cohesion.

The central focus of the document is the implementation of music production workshops within correctional facilities. These activities have been tested and refined through the Music 4 Freedom (M4F) project, which involved diverse European contexts and consolidated insights across pedagogical, organisational, and institutional dimensions. The workshops are built around hip hop music – particularly beatmaking – as a powerful gateway to creativity and expression. Hip hop was not chosen by chance: it is a genre rooted in resistance, identity, and commentary on social realities, making it especially meaningful in environments defined by exclusion and control.

The cultural relevance of hip hop further supports the wider ambition of the *Vademecum*. Many internationally successful artists in this genre have personal histories marked by crime, marginalisation, or detention. Their backgrounds illustrate how artistic practice can serve as a pathway to social redemption, professional empowerment, and community recognition. By embedding this potential within a structured training framework, the *Vademecum* connects the lived experience of participants with broader narratives of possibility and resilience.

For the music industry, this represents a distinctive opportunity. Companies, labels, and social enterprises are increasingly expected to demonstrate CSR not only through environmental or commercial initiatives, but also by engaging with disadvantaged communities and fostering inclusion. The *Vademecum* provides a concrete methodology to achieve these goals: by partnering with prisons, NGOs, and cultural institutions, the industry can help transform hidden talent into visible competence, while reinforcing its own role as a driver of social value.

The following chapters provide practical guidelines for implementation. They describe the institutional requirements of working inside prisons, the competences of trainers and learners, the pedagogical framework of music production workshops, and the strategies to support employability and social reintegration. Each section concludes with lessons learned, ensuring that the tool remains grounded in real practice. Together, these elements make the *Vademecum* not only a manual for implementation but also a pioneering European reference point for connecting music, education, and corporate responsibility.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT AND THE STUDENTS

1. Understanding the Context and the Students

1.1 Outline the specific prison regulations

Each correctional institution operates under strict regulations that directly affect the implementation of cultural or educational workshops. Before initiating a music laboratory, it is essential to clarify the institutional context, security procedures, and IT rules.

It is essential to understand the institutional context and the related security procedures as the workshops must comply with a series of duties related to the setting of the correctional facility.

- First of all, external trainers need formal authorization to enter prison premises. This often requires background checks, security briefings, and in some cases the signing of confidentiality agreements. These procedures can take time and, once all the documents are submitted, the association must simply wait for approval. It is thus important to streamline these delays into project timelines to avoid late starts of the workshops.
- Security procedures also cover equipment, imposing restrictions on personal belongings and IT equipment. As general rule, all equipment must be registered and stored securely. For example, in Italy, laptops and MIDI controllers had to be inventoried and locked after each session, while in Germany the mobile lab could only be set up in supervised spaces and dismantled after use.
- IT constraints must be as well clarified, as they have a huge impact on the laboratory. These requirements span from inhibiting USB ports in PCs, to specific hardware restrictions. In Belgium's Merksplas prison, for instance, the use of for-profit programs was prohibited, forcing trainers to use open-source DAWs and audio programs.

1.2 Assess and choose the room

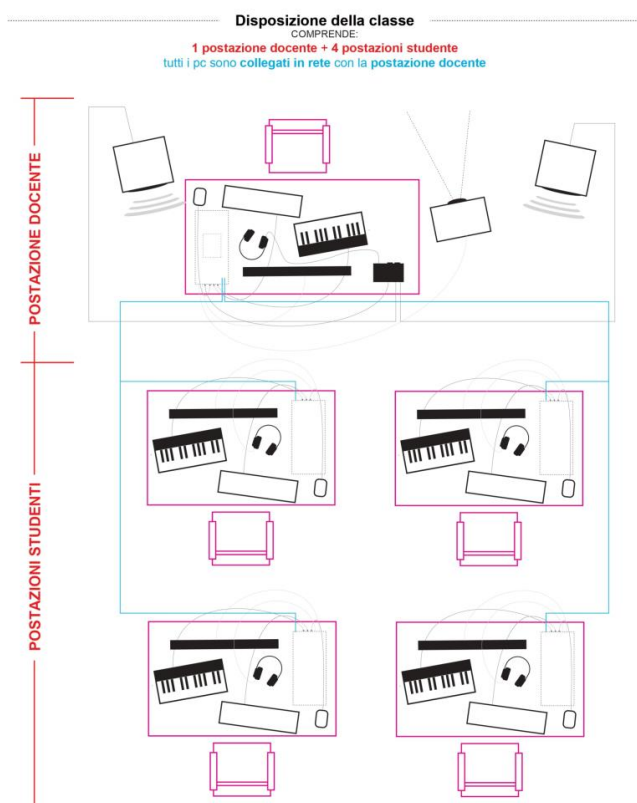
Identifying and preparing a suitable room inside the prison is a pivotal part of institutional coordination. Since this decision has a direct impact on both the pedagogical quality of the workshops and the operational feasibility, we will address the issue in a separate paragraph.

The chosen space must first comply with **security standards**: it should be easy to monitor by prison staff and lockable when not in use. However, it is important to note that most of the time prison institutions are not aware of the technical needs of a music production laboratory, as this remains a pioneering project in the EU context.

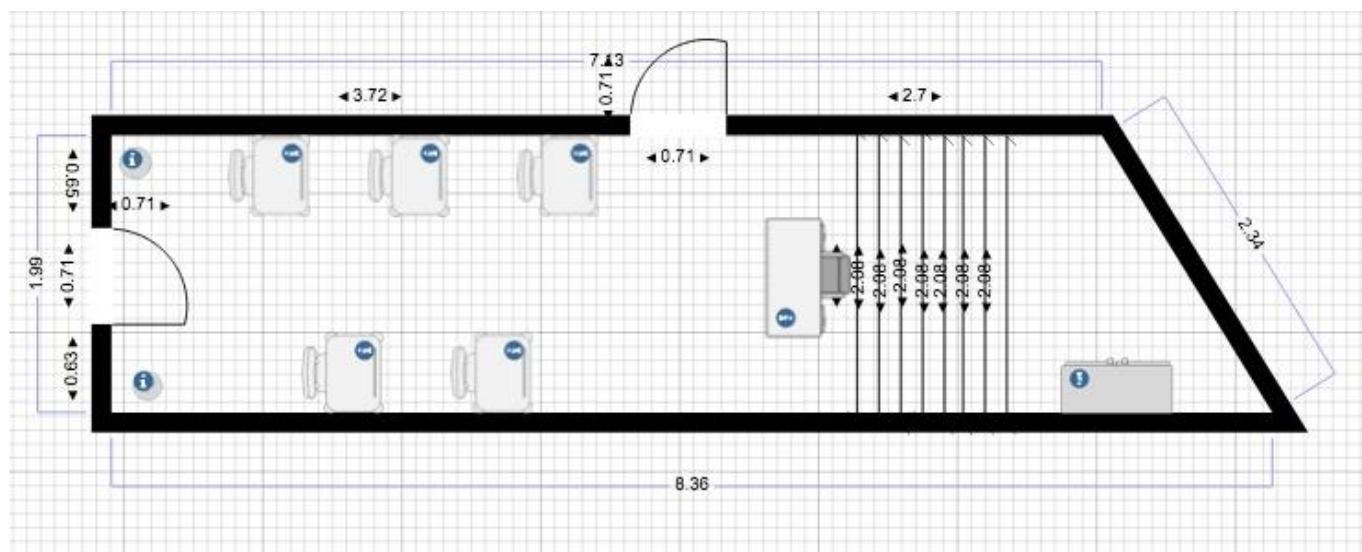
From a **technical perspective**, the availability of a permanent, dedicated space is ideal. The room should include enough space to allow 4/5 workstations for students and one for the trainer/teacher. (Ideally, the teacher's desk should be frontal to the students' one).

The room should have adequate electricity supply and enough space for cable management.

In Italy, this process was facilitated by preparing a simple graphical scheme and planimetry to illustrate the set-up requirements. Here below the scheme, showing the lab set up and the equipment:



This type of graphical representation can be very useful in explaining the lab needs to the prison. Also, we found extremely useful to submit to the prison a planimetry of the lab. The image below is the Italian lab and can serve as an example:



Nevertheless, this ideal situation is not always possible in practice.

In Germany, the absence of a similar space required the use of a **mobile laboratory**, which had to be set up and dismantled for each session in different spaces depending on availability. While this solution offered flexibility, it also created additional logistical challenges. In Belgium, institutional restrictions extended beyond equipment to the **allocation of space and IT usage**, with the prison requiring trainers to adapt to rooms already in use for other educational activities. In Romania, the availability of rooms varied, and limited institutional support sometimes disrupted session continuity, showing how fragile space allocation can be without strong agreements.

Experience across countries shows that clarity, visual communication, and strong written agreements are the best tools to secure workable space.

1.3 Equipment choice

A deeper analysis of the equipment needed for a music production laboratory is presented in *R3- Guidelines for the Management of Audio Music Workshop in Prison*.

The table below summarizes the equipment needed:

Equipment list		
Equipment Item	Function	Specification / Notes
Laptop or Desktop Computer	Central unit for operating DAW software	Minimum 8GB RAM, Windows or macOS
Digital Audio Workstation (DAW)	Music production environment	Ableton Live, Logic Pro, or Audacity (in restricted settings, for restricted operations). In any case, any DAW is fine.
MIDI Controller	Beat making and arrangement input	25- or 49-key, with pads/knobs for flexibility
Audio Interface	External sound card for microphone/headphone routing	Focusrite Scarlett or equivalent
Studio Headphones	Individual monitoring	Closed-back, suitable for shared settings
Microphone and Stand	Vocal or sample recording (where permitted)	With pop filter and stand
Cables, Adapters, Power Strips	Electrical reliability and equipment connection	Fully labelled and inventoried

This represents the “standard” laboratory setup. In practice, adaptations were necessary depending on the prison context: for example, Germany implemented a **mobile version** of the kit for flexible use, while Belgium had to rely on **open-source software** due to IT restrictions.

Regarding the price, it is hard to give a precise estimation, during these times of economic uncertainty. By the end of 2024, the average price of the above equipment list with 5 computers, 5 DAWs, 5 MIDI

Controller, 5 Headphones across project countries was approximately 7.000 EUR.

The priority is not to achieve a perfect professional set-up, but to ensure that every participant has access to a workstation allowing the **complete production cycle**: beat creation, arrangement, and recording.

1.4 Lessons learned

- First of all, **identify the key institutional stakeholders** (directors, security officers, educators, IT managers) and engage them before setting up the laboratory. Discuss with them to understand the prison needs in terms of administrative, security, and IT procedures;
- **Formalize everything in a written agreement/protocol**. Refer to R3 – Guidelines for the Management of Audio Music Workshop in Prison for suggested content of the agreement;
- **Start the external trainers' authorisation process several weeks before the planned start of activities**. Provide trainers with a written briefing on prison rules (what they can carry inside, how to interact with staff and inmates);
- **Use visual communication tools (schemes, planimetries)** to explain room and set-up needs to prison staff. This approach proved effective in Italy to facilitate understanding and approval;
- **Adapt the choice of room to the specific context**: a permanent space is ideal, but mobile labs (Germany) or multipurpose classrooms (Belgium, Romania) can work if supported by clear agreements;
- **Prepare flexible equipment kits**: one "standard" kit (computers, DAWs, audio interfaces, MIDI controllers, headphones, microphones) and one "light" kit for restricted contexts (open-source DAWs, simplified hardware);
- **Negotiate in advance the storage solution for laptops and audio gear and always prepare a clear inventory list for prison staff**. Plan for extra time before and after each session to comply with entry and exit checks;
- **Guarantee one workstation per participant (laptop, controller, headphones)**. This is essential to ensure active engagement and progression through the full production cycle.

2. Students and trainers

The effectiveness of the M4F workshop model relies equally on the competences of those who deliver it and, on the ability to understand the students' needs, personalities, and motivations. Throughout the project we have developed a comprehensive competence framework for trainers and inmates.

In this *Vademecum* we present its core elements, providing a practical reference for implementation. For a further detailed and theoretical analysis, readers are invited to consult R3 – Guidelines for the Management of Audio Music Workshops in Prison. The effectiveness of the M4F workshop model relies equally on the competences of those who deliver it and, on the ability to understand the students' needs, personalities, and motivations. Throughout the project we have developed a comprehensive competence framework for trainers and inmates.

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2.1 Trainers

The role of trainers in music production workshops inside prisons goes far beyond technical instruction. Trainers act simultaneously as facilitators of learning, mediators between inmates and prison staff, and role models capable of inspiring trust and motivation. For this reason, the M4F project defined a dedicated competence framework, captured in the table below:

Trainer / Youth-Worker Competence Map		
R1 Competence Area	Focus in R3 Guidelines	Typical Trainer Outcomes in Workshop
Technical	Advanced use of Digital Audio Workstations, hardware setup, troubleshooting, safe IT configuration inside prison.	Runs multi-track sessions; demonstrates recording, editing, basic mixing; maintains compliant, secure lab infrastructure.
Creative	Hip-hop beat design across genres; arrangement coaching; linking production to lyric writing.	Curates reference beats; mentors participants through structure, hook, dynamics; adapts creative tasks to group culture.
Transversal	Session planning, scaffolding, formative feedback, progress tracking, documentation for evaluation.	Produces modular lesson plans; applies the R1 competence descriptors for informal assessment; keeps monitoring logs.
Social	Trauma-sensitive facilitation, conflict de-escalation, cultural mediation, networking with external stakeholders.	Builds trust and safe space; negotiates rules with inmates and staff; liaises with community partners for post-release options.

Ideal trainers require a blended profile, combining music production expertise with educational and social facilitation skills, adapted to the realities of prison settings and vulnerable learners.

2.2 Inmates

Assessing inmates before and during the workshops is essential, given the diversity of skills, experiences, and educational backgrounds. This framework identifies four competence domains and allows trainers to evaluate entry levels, adapt pedagogy, and track progress.

Inmates are not traditional learners. They operate within a highly structured and often punitive environment, with limited access to technology, inconsistent educational histories, and, in many cases, emotional or behavioural challenges linked to personal trauma or marginalization.

Inmate / Learner Competence Map		
R1 Competence Area	Focus in R3 Guidelines	Observable Learner Progress
Technical	Entry-level DAW navigation; loop creation; basic recording and export.	Can arm tracks, trigger/clap loops, adjust volume/pan, bounce a rough mix.
Creative	Beat construction from sample packs; experimenting with tempo, swing, FX; linking beats to potential lyrics.	Produces an original 8–16-bar loop; varies drum patterns; selects sounds reflecting personal taste/story.
Transversal	Team-work, persistence, problem-solving, following workshop schedules and lab rules.	Arrives on time; collaborates in peer-listening circles; seeks help rather than giving up on errors.
Social	Self-expression, identity-building, respectful collaboration, positive group dynamics.	Shares track origins in group discussion; offers constructive feedback; reports increased confidence and sense of belonging.

Assessment should start with entry interviews, ideally in collaboration with prison educators and psychologists, to map motivation, readiness, and barriers (such as low literacy, trauma, or language diversity). It is essential to have a deeper understanding of the background and personality of the people the project is addressing to.

2.3 Lessons learned

- Prioritise trainers with both technical music skills and experience working with vulnerable populations. Pure technical expertise without social competence creates difficulties; conversely, strong social workers without music training struggle to engage participants effectively;
- As organisation, offer training program covering prison context, trauma-informed practice, and cultural competency.
- Establish ongoing supervision and peer support systems for trainers. Working in prison settings can be emotionally demanding; trainers need regular debriefing opportunities and professional development to prevent burnout;
- If possible, conduct individual interviews of inmates rather than relying solely on prison records. Motivation and musical interest act as strong triggers and are incredible predictors of success that can't struggle with behavioural history.;
- Collaborate closely with prison educators and psychologists for participant selection and throughout the whole laboratory. Mutual insights into individual personalities, group dynamics, and potential conflicts proved invaluable across all sites;

- Establish regular communication schedules with key prison staff (weekly education coordinator updates, monthly security meetings). Consistent communication builds trust and prevents misunderstandings;
- Create shared documentation systems for participant progress that respect both educational goals and institutional requirements. Prison staff need evidence that the program supports broader rehabilitative objectives

THE PEDAGOGICAL / EDUCATIONAL APPROACH

3. The Pedagogical / Educational Approach

At its core, M4F is an initiative aimed at teaching digital music production, specifically within correctional settings. Its primary focus is on empowering participants to create hip hop “beats” - the instrumental backdrops for rap lyrics.

The choice of hip hop is intentional and carries pedagogical significance: as a genre rooted in self-expression, cultural identity, and social commentary, it offers a distinctive educational opportunity in contexts shaped by exclusion, marginalization, and institutional control.

Although M4F emphasizes beat production over lyric writing, the two elements are deeply interconnected. Experience across the workshops consistently demonstrated that integrating writing and production enriched the overall learning process. When beatmaking and lyricism are combined, they offer a holistic creative pathway that engages both mind and voice - an ideal approach in correctional settings, where learners are often disconnected from both.

Based on this pedagogical assumption, the consortium developed a Training Manual (R2 - Manual for the training of audio editing methodologies and technologies in prison), structured into four progressive modules. We present here the main characteristics of each. For further details, please refer directly to R2.

3.1 The manual

The methodology developed within the M4F project was designed with flexibility in mind, allowing adaptation to different literacy levels, technical conditions, and time constraints. It was progressively refined through the input of trainers and correctional institutions, ensuring alignment with the real conditions of prison education.

The structure of the course is articulated in four modules (plus a separate module on Music Business, which is addressed in the final section of the Vademecum), each contributing to a gradual learning pathway. Together, they move learners from an initial introduction to hip hop culture and digital tools towards the independent production of original music tracks. Each module balances pedagogical achievement with the practical constraints of the prison context.

Module 1: Introduction to Hip Hop Culture and Music Technology

The first module serves as the entry point to the training pathway. It connects participants with the cultural foundations of hip hop while opening the door to the tools of digital audio production. Its purpose is to spark curiosity, foster identification with the values of the genre, and demystify the technical

environment. Participants are introduced to hip hop's social origins, its core elements (DJing, MCing, beatboxing, graffiti, breakdance), and its underlying values of resistance, identity, and self-expression. Alongside this cultural dimension, learners begin to explore key concepts in digital music—such as samples, loops, tempo, and patterns—and to experiment with the basic functions of digital audio workstations (DAWs) in a supportive, low-pressure setting.

Module 2: Lyrics Writing and Arranging a Beat

The second module introduces learners to the structured creation of beats. Here, experimentation evolves into composition: participants select drums, arrange rhythmic patterns, and shape their first musical ideas. The pedagogical aims are twofold: on the one hand, to deepen rhythmic awareness and introduce the typical structure of a song (intro, verse, chorus, bridge); on the other, to foster creative intent and self-consciousness through lyric writing. By guiding learners through arrangement and flow, the module empowers them to translate spontaneous ideas into coherent musical forms.

Module 3: Beat Production and Development

The third module represents the creative core of the training process. At this stage, participants refine their compositions and add layers of complexity, enhancing both their technical competence and their artistic sensibility.

Learners are encouraged to work with multi-layered arrangements, combining drums, basslines, melodies, and effects to create richer soundscapes. Focus is placed on texture, mood, and genre conventions - from trap and drill to boom-bap and lo-fi - allowing participants to situate their creations within a broader musical context. This exploration introduces more advanced tools, such as automation, equalisation, filters, and dynamics, while supporting the emergence of a personal style and musical identity.

Module 4: Mixing and Mastering (Post-Production)

The final module focuses on the process of finalising a track through mixing and mastering. Although not always fully implemented across all training labs, it proved to have strong pedagogical value where applied. It allows learners to consolidate technical skills while also experiencing the satisfaction of producing a finished and shareable piece of work. Participants are introduced to the fundamentals of post-production: gain staging, balancing volumes, applying equalisation, and shaping the stereo field. They also encounter concepts such as compression and exporting, which are essential to preparing a track for distribution.

These four modules create a coherent and progressive pathway, moving from cultural exploration and creative experimentation to technical refinement and final production. In doing so, they embody the dual purpose of the M4F methodology: fostering both artistic growth and personal empowerment through music-based training

3.2 Lessons learned

- **Starting with simple and accessible exercises was crucial.** Many participants had limited digital or musical skills and jumping straight into complex composition would have been discouraging. Using loops, pre-made beats, or guided templates helped build early success and confidence, especially in the latter part of Module 1.

- **An informal and process-oriented pedagogy resonated strongly with inmates.** Allowing experimentation, mistakes, and trial-and-error fostered persistence and self-discovery. This learner-centred approach helped participants re-engage with education, even in case of negative schooling experiences in the past.
- **Lyric writing often emerged naturally, even if not systematically planned.** When participants were encouraged to write, it became a powerful tool for literacy, self-reflection, and emotional expression, complementing the technical aspects of beatmaking. Trainers noted that this enriched Modules 2 and 3 significantly.
- **Balancing freedom and structure proved essential.** Clear group agreements and consistent rules created a safe and respectful environment, while leaving room for inmates to take creative ownership of their projects.
- **Peer learning and mentoring developed naturally within the workshops.** Stronger participants supported weaker ones, which not only accelerated the learning process but also reinforced solidarity and reduced conflict. Trainers stressed that this was possible only through a constant effort to create a non-competitive environment. Collaborative projects, especially those involving lyrics, played a key role in this dynamic.
- **Frequent institutional disruptions required modular planning.** Transfers, early releases, or unexpected schedule changes often interrupted the learning process. Designing the course in self-contained stages ensured that each phase of learning had standalone value, so even partial participation led to tangible progress.
- **Music production reshaped how inmates perceived themselves.** Creating beats and tracks offered a sense of authorship and agency, shifting self-image from passive recipients of punishment to active creators of meaning.
- **The rhythmic and repetitive nature of beatmaking supported focus and regulation.** Participants who were initially restless or disengaged often found calm and concentration through arranging sounds, which contributed to emotional stability.
- **Completing a track, even a simple one, was a powerful motivational milestone.** Listening to their own productions and receiving feedback generated pride and reinforced the willingness to continue learning. Tangible outputs were key drivers of motivation and self-esteem

EMPLOYABILITY AND SOCIAL REINTEGRATION

4. Employability and Social Reintegration

Employability in the music sector is a complex and highly competitive matter. Even for experienced professionals, building a sustainable career in this field requires persistence, networking, and constant adaptation. It is therefore essential to clarify to participants that the aim of music-based training is not to guarantee direct employment in the industry, but to provide them with the tools, competences, and self-confidence to pursue opportunities when they arise.

Managing expectations is a crucial part of the reintegration process. Inmates should understand that the pathway towards professional involvement in the music sector is challenging and uncertain. However, by learning to create music, present their work, and connect with networks and organisations, they acquire skills and attitudes that extend well beyond the studio. These include teamwork, digital literacy, creativity, discipline, and resilience; competencies that are valuable across multiple sectors, both within and beyond the cultural field.

At the same time, the role of the music industry should not be overlooked. Companies, labels, and cultural organisations can demonstrate their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) by opening access to networks, offering mentorship, and recognising hidden talent. While such contributions do not guarantee employment, they can reduce barriers and support inmates in building pathways after release.

The Vademecum therefore promotes a realistic yet ambitious vision: equipping participants with competences while encouraging industry actors to share responsibility for turning creative potential into opportunities for reintegration.

This chapter therefore focuses on how music production training can support employability and reintegration, not by promising jobs, but by preparing participants to face the labour market and the “world outside” with stronger tools and realistic perspectives

4.1 Cooperation with support organisations

Reintegration cannot be achieved within the prison walls alone. Its greatest impact emerges when it is embedded in a wider network of social, cultural, and professional actors who can provide continuity and recognition beyond detention. Cooperation with external support organisations is therefore a cornerstone of employability and reintegration strategies.

Partnerships with NGOs, social enterprises, cultural centres, and social music labels extend the reach of prison-based learning. These organisations can provide access to rehearsal spaces, recording studios, or mentoring opportunities that are otherwise unavailable to former inmates once released. In this way, the skills and motivation developed during the workshops do not remain isolated experiences but become stepping stones towards long-term social participation.

The M4F implementation has shown how valuable such partnerships can be in practice. In Italy, collaboration with the regional agency ALFA enabled the recognition of skills developed in prison through existing certification frameworks. In Turkey the establishment of a permanent studio within the İzmir Probation

Directorate has already paved the way for continued creative practice and community collaboration. In Belgium, cooperation with adult education providers allowed participants to continue their training after release, thereby ensuring that learning was not abruptly interrupted at the prison gate. These examples highlight how institutional anchoring and civil society engagement complement each other to ensure sustainability.

From a pedagogical perspective, external cooperation also enriches the workshop environment itself. Inviting artists, educators, or cultural mediators from outside creates moments of exchange that help inmates situate their work within a wider community of practice. This exposure reduces isolation, fosters motivation, and strengthens the sense that the creative expression has relevance beyond the prison microcosm.

For organisations wishing to replicate this model, early and proactive stakeholder engagement is key. Memorandum of Understanding - developed during the project's final year - should be concluded at the outset with prospective partners, clarifying roles, responsibilities, and long-term commitments.

Ideally, the network of partners should not only support the educational dimension but also include reintegration services, youth centres, and music industry platforms.

The involvement of music companies and labels is particularly relevant, as it allows the sector to exercise its Corporate Social Responsibility in a concrete way: by supporting disadvantaged groups, recognising hidden talent, and creating bridges between correctional settings and professional creative environments. Such a multi-actor ecosystem is the best guarantee that competences developed in prison can be translated into meaningful opportunities outside.

4.2 Support in developing CVs and creative portfolios

Reintegration cannot be achieved within the prison walls alone. Its greatest impact emerges when it is embedded in a wider network of social, cultural, and professional actors who can provide continuity and recognition beyond detention. Cooperation with external support organisations is therefore a cornerstone of employability and reintegration strategies.

4.2.1 Standard CV

Inmates should be supported to present their new competences in ways that are legible to employers and institutions. The music production workshops fostered valuable skills, however without proper documentation these often remain invisible. Structured guidance in preparing standard CVs and more specific creative portfolios ensures that learning outcomes are translated into recognised formats and can serve as real assets in reintegration.

The standard CV should not be limited to traditional schooling or work history, which are often fragmented in the case of inmates. Thanks to the course, it should highlight transversal competences developed during the workshops, from soft skills such as teamwork, problem-solving, creativity, and persistence, to more technical skills such as audio editing. Trainers and educators can play an active role in helping participants articulate these achievements in accessible, employer-friendly language.

These competences should, wherever possible, be linked to established frameworks such as the EU Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), or national VET standards. Throughout the project, partner organisations and the consortium collectively explored national

and EU competence-recognition frameworks to strengthen this alignment. Mapping workshop outcomes to these frameworks enhances their legitimacy, making them more credible to employment services, adult education systems, and employers.

4.2.2 Artistic portfolios and DSPs

Alongside the traditional CV, artistic portfolios allow participants to showcase tangible results. These aspects are also covered in *Module 5, Music Business and Distribution, of the R2 of the M4F project*. For further information, please refer to that resource.

We have identified several digital formats commonly used by artists to showcase their work:

- **Personal websites:** Created with platforms such as Wix, Squarespace, Pixpa, or Mobirise, these allow musicians and bands to professionally and personally showcase audio tracks, video performances, biographies, playlists, event calendars, photos, and downloadable materials.
- **EPK (Electronic Press Kit):** An “electronic press folder” that includes audio/video tracks, biography, credits, press quotes, contact details, and visual materials, optimised for promotion and collaborations.
- **Linktree / link aggregators:** Collections of links to music platforms, social media, and streaming services where the artist’s music can be found.

To sustain these portfolios, participants should be introduced to Digital Streaming Platforms (DSPs). Understanding how music reaches audiences through digital streaming platforms is an essential skill for those aspiring to remain engaged in the creative field. Services such as Spotify, Apple Music, Deezer, Amazon Music, and Bandcamp are now the primary channels through which music is consumed worldwide. Introducing inmates to these platforms provides both inspiration and practical knowledge about how creative work can be shared beyond prison walls.

Workshops should explain, in accessible language, the differences between platforms - for example, Spotify’s broad reach compared to Bandcamp’s artist-friendly revenue model. Trainers can then demonstrate, step by step, the distribution process through aggregators such as DistroKid or TuneCore, highlighting the importance of correctly entering metadata (titles, credits, cover art) and ensuring technical quality (bit rate, file format). Where direct upload is not possible during incarceration, the process can be simulated through visual materials or printed guides, and release-ready assets - masters, metadata, artwork, EPKs - can be prepared for use immediately after release.

This knowledge is not only technical but also motivational: when participants see a clear pathway from their track to a potential audience, they begin to understand their work as part of a wider ecosystem. Combined with awareness of copyright and royalties, this equips them with the foundations to manage their creative output responsibly and to imagine future opportunities in the cultural and digital economy. All portfolio and DSP-related work must, however, comply with the safeguards outlined in the following section on dissemination.

4.3 Public events, exhibitions and digital dissemination

Showcasing the work done inside is extremely important and a powerful tool for social reintegration. When inmates have the opportunity to present their work - whether through public events, exhibitions, or internal showcases within the prison - this not only validates their effort but also builds pride and motivation.

The act of presenting music to an audience fosters recognition, establishes positive identities, and demonstrates that meaningful creativity can emerge even within restrictive environments.

In parallel, digital dissemination provides another important pathway. Controlled platforms, prison radio, or streaming via partner organisations allow music to reach audiences beyond the institution. After release, social media and mainstream platforms can be used to extend visibility further, reducing stigma by reframing inmates not as offenders but as creators and cultural contributors. These activities also foster community engagement by showing the broader society the rehabilitative and expressive potential of artistic work in correctional settings.

However, dissemination also carries risks that must be carefully managed. The training manual underlines that no external sharing of tracks, images, or materials should occur without explicit written permission. A formal release form, signed by the inmate, the institution, and the implementing organisation, is essential to safeguard personal rights and prevent misuse. Because these processes require time, dissemination must be planned well in advance of any intended event or release.

Equally, trainers must be attentive to issues of identity exposure and re-stigmatisation. Sharing personal stories, names, or recognisable images without adequate protection can harm participants once released. To avoid reinforcing stigma, music should be presented as valuable cultural production, rather than being labelled as 'prison work'. Attention to copyright is equally important. Many beats and samples are protected by intellectual property law, and disseminating tracks without verifying rights may expose both participants and institutions to legal consequences. Trainers should therefore promote the use of original content or royalty-free material.

Similar caution is required when it comes to lyrics and themes: music that carries violent, discriminatory, or harmful messages risks undermining the rehabilitative objectives of the workshop. Trainers have a responsibility to guide participants towards constructive expression and to ensure that the material selected for public release supports positive social engagement.

Finally, the question of ownership and compensation must not be neglected. All music produced in the workshops remains the property of the participants. Using these works for promotional purposes without informed consent, or without guaranteeing fair recognition and compensation, would amount to exploitation. Where full external dissemination is not feasible, internal listening sessions or controlled circulation within the institution can provide recognition while avoiding exposure risks. Proper crediting, documentation, and clarity on usage purposes are essential to ensuring that dissemination remains an empowering rather than a harmful practice.

4.4 Lessons learned

- **External partnerships are vital.** Reintegration efforts are most effective when embedded in networks of NGOs, cultural centres, adult education providers, and music industry actors. Cooperation agreements and structured collaboration ensure continuity, both during detention and after release.
- **Competences must be visible.** Without proper documentation, skills developed through music production risk remaining invisible. Supporting inmates in building CVs and portfolios linked to recognised frameworks (EU Key Competences, EQF, national VET standards) enhances their legitimacy and makes them understandable to employers and institutions.
- **Artistic portfolios strengthen motivation and credibility.** Preparing professional portfolios, inspired by industry practices such as EPKs, personal websites, or link aggregators, provides par-

ticipants with tools to present themselves as artists. Even when direct online dissemination is not possible in prison, preparing release-ready assets ensures continuity after release.

- **Awareness of the music business and DSPs adds value.** Introducing inmates to digital streaming platforms and distribution processes connects their creative work to real-world pathways. Understanding metadata, copyrights, and royalties not only provides technical knowledge but also gives participants a vision of their potential role in the cultural economy.
- **Dissemination must be carefully managed.** Public events and digital releases are powerful for recognition and identity-building, but they carry risks. Informed consent, copyright checks, and protection against re-stigmatisation are essential safeguards. Without them, dissemination risks exploitation or harm instead of empowerment.
- **Recognition can take multiple forms.** Even when external dissemination is not feasible, internal showcases and controlled circulation within the prison or among partners can provide meaningful recognition. Such alternatives still reinforce confidence, belonging, and motivation, while avoiding unnecessary exposure risks.

5. Conclusions


The M4F *Vademecum* is the first European tool to connect music-based training in prisons with broader strategies for employability, reintegration, and Corporate Social Responsibility. Its value lies in transforming creative potential into visible and recognisable competences and in demonstrating that pathways from detention to participation can be structured, acknowledged, and supported.

By sharing three years of experience and know-how, the *Vademecum* offers a practical framework and a call to action. It invites **music companies, cultural institutions, and social stakeholders** to share responsibility by **launching creative labs, opening access to spaces, providing mentorship, and recognising talent** that might otherwise remain invisible.



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