

ITALY

Judging by the documentation available on Internet, the voluntary sector is very much present in public life. Per an enquiry in "Repubblica" of 1/2008, 71 % of Italians trust the voluntary associations, but only 49 % the Church, 25 % the Government and 14 % the parties. The co-operation of a great variety of religious and non-confessional associations on regional and national level and the consequent discussion on prison matters, is very lively.

In a dissertation, Maria-Chiara Costa (It1) describes the "Volontariato nel carcere; le associazioni presenti in Toscana" (Prison Volunteers: the associations working in Tuscany). From its origins in the middle ages via the work houses in England, the Salpêtrière in Paris, the social and legislative situation at the time of the Italian Unification in 1861 and up to the Second World War, the author describes the evolution of the attitude of society and governments towards prisoners . The penal reform of 1975 introduced article 27 into the Italian Constitution which says that "the expiation of a sentence must never be carried out by treatment contrary to human dignity". The supplement "Gozzini" of 1986 and the legislation concerning the prison volunteers of 1991 were all passed at a time of great social and political unrest and instability (Ginsborg: Storia d'Italia dal dopoguerra ad oggi"). She describes the 2 types of prison visitors according to law No. 266, the diversification of the voluntary organisations and their conflicting relationship with the prison authorities, and presents in detail 10 associations operating in Tuscany.

As in other countries, Italy has many prison problems: overpopulation, decaying buildings, lack of a coherent concept for the re-socialisation of detainees, too many remand prisoners due to the very slow working of the whole justice system, a high portion of drug-dependent inmates for whom it is difficult to find adequate alternatives to incarceration. It is not easy for the administration to conform to law No. 27 which obliges the authorities to offer suitable schooling, professional formation and work to a prison population composed of a high portion of illegal immigrants and the special background of organized crime and political favouritism (Mafia, Camorra, `Ndrangheta, sacra corona unita, institutionalized corruption under the Democrazia Cristiana and the Craxi governments uncovered by the magistrate Di Pietro in what has become known as the "Mani pulite"). In Italy too, there is the permanent conflict between the logic of suspended sentences, probation and community service on one side, and the demand by the public for more security and harsher sentences on the other.

Together with Spain, Italy seems to be the only Western European country in which most voluntary prison associations are regrouped (It2). The initiative for a "Conferenza Nazionale Volontariato Giustizia- CNVG" goes back to 1993, with the first national congress in 1996 and its formal foundation in 1998. The evolution towards a more centralized Confederation was, of course, accompanied by the fears of the religious , lay and specialized volunteer organisations of "losing their autonomy". The problem was largely solved by the foundation of "regional delegations" (which is easy in Italy, because the 23 "regioni" are historically grown and fairly autonomous administrative entities). Agreeing on innovative aims and defining them in the federation's articles which would also encompass, for example, Restorative Justice, the effective formation of 7 regional associations and a research project on prison volunteers organisations, sponsored by the Ministry for Social Affairs, were the next tasks. In 1999 a protocol of understanding was signed with the Ministry of Justice which stipulated that the CNVG members could work in Italian prisons in culture, sports, education and general support with the aim of a better re-integration of the detainees into society.

Mediation between perpetrators and their victims which had been reserved until then to the Judiciary, became a matter for volunteers too after signing an understanding with the state and regional legal entities. The more diversified role of the “volontario di assistenti” in the penal, mediation and prison systems explains the longer preparation of the Italian volunteers for their tasks.

In 2000 FIVOL, the state organisation for all voluntary activity, documented that the contribution of the prison volunteers, particularly when trained and organised in associations, was indispensable, because it could address the individual needs of the detainees for a better integration into society. The government had envisaged a vast amnesty to relieve the overcrowded prisons, but the CNVG insisted that such an act would be reasonable only if accompanied by adequate re-integrative measures. To raise public awareness of the true penitentiary situation, the CNVG organised a series of art demonstrations under the slogan “Oltre il muro del sogno – beyond the wall of dream” which aimed at explaining new ways of successful re-socialisation and that they were in the interest of the whole society. Associations other than those involved in traditional prison activities, such as those promoting legal reforms, the fight against the mafia and helping the young, joined the CNVG. In 2000 the prison administration sent a circular notice to all social services confirming that co-operation with the voluntary sector was recommended. The creation of the CNVG is rooted in the specific Italian social environment around 1990 and the realisation that only through unification of the voluntary prison organisations, could enough strength be obtained to make an impact on the prevailing, rather desolate situation. The driving force behind this unification was Livio Ferrari, former president of SEAC and first president of the CNVG.

The importance of the CNVG can be measured by their last 3-day General Assembly in May 2007 in Rome which was organised around the theme “Percorsi di giustizia, codice penale e inclusione sociale – evolutions in the judiciary, penal law and social integration” (It3). 5 ministers and undersecretaries of state, professors, the prison administration, the social services of Rome, the RAI and, of course, delegates of many member associations participated in 5 working groups and general presentations. In contrast to the usually short and business-like general assemblies of most prison volunteer organisations, this most impressive program was amply discussed in the media.

Nationally operating members of the CNVG are for example:

- ARCI ARIA di ORA which is part of the ARCI organisation (Associazione Recreativa Culturale Italiana), works for re-socialisation through debates, cultural projects, call centres (pronto intervento detenuti) and “kits” of information (corredi) for people in need.
- ANTIGONE has a kind of watch dog function which verifies that the laws are applied inside the Italian prisons. With the permission of the administration, inspectors of Antigone visit prisons and publish reports and books such as “il carcere trasparente – the transparent prison”. Strong links with the European CPT in Strasburg.
- SEAC (Segretariato Ente Assistenza Carceraria), is a federation of more than 80 catholic prison visiting associations (It4 /4A) founded in 1967 and divided into 14 regional delegations. In the texts published by SEAC, recurring key words are social peace, fight against social exclusion, the meaning of sentencing and the fallacy of imprisonment as a deterrent, understanding prison as a prolongation of society and the benefits of alternatives to incarceration. The principle of Restorative Justice

plays a great part in their reflections and actions towards meaningful and lasting re-socialization. SEAC regrets the stop-gap, secondary role the volunteers have been attributed by the professional sector and with which many voluntary workers are quite content, instead of intervening more actively in the debate and action concerning the marginalisation, misery and poverty of whole layers of society. As the major organisation of the Italian prison volunteers, SEAC reflects repeatedly on their hinge-function between prisoners and society outside and their sometimes strained relationship with the state institutions which follow their own logic and interests.

From the basic traditional Christian vocation of prison visiting, this organisation developed after the prison reforms of 1975 and 1986 into a militant organisation in dialogue with the state and regional authorities for a better medical service in prison, more restorative justice for adults, more re-socialisation measures and a more active contribution of the voluntary sector within the Judiciary.

Prime Minister Prodi attended their Annual Assembly in 2006 (It5) during which he stressed the importance of alternatives to prison sentences. The wish for stimulating public debate in their annual assemblies and seminars is evident, as for example the one in 6/2007 at Asiago with the theme “Quale giustizia tra vendetta e perdono – la società di fronte al carcere” - what justice between vengeance and forgiveness – society confronted with prison” (It6).

- ASSOCIAZIONE SAN VINCENZO DI PAOLI is part of the world-wide organisation and works with more than 100 volunteers in 8 of the 20 “regioni”. They have launched the initiative “adotta un detenuto – adopt a detainee” to involve people outside more in what happens in the prisons. Their magazine is called “La San Vincenzo” (It7).
- CARITAS ITALIANA has been working since 1971 in Italian prisons through the chaplains and volunteers. With the weight of the catholic church behind it, Caritas denounced the misery in prisons very early. In 1998, together with other associations, they created the “Fondazione Carcere e Lavoro” with the particular intention of restoring the dignity of (ex-) detainees through work.
- LIBERA regroups more than 600 associations in and outside prison all over Italy. It informs the institutions and the public about the working methods of the mafia, its involvement in the national economy, the recuperation of confiscated property from the mafia and, for implicated individuals, how to get out of the system.
- FIVOL – (Fondazione Nazionale per il Volontariato), founded in 1991, is a national research institute for the general promotion of the voluntary sector which establishes for the CNVG studies and annual reports on the activities of prison volunteers (rivelazioni). This Institute will cease its activity in its present form.
- “COMMITATO PER IL TELEFONO AZZURRO” - Founded in 1987, this association defends children’s rights in general and children in jail with their mother in particular. Advice by telephone and denunciation of abuses.

The CNVG comments frequently on prison matters through its website and through releases to the press as, for example, in 2005 when it complained openly (It8) that the prison administration did not recognize how useful the voluntary prison visitors were for the whole

of society and that the volunteers still depended largely on the good will of the individual prison directors. According to the CNVG, the prisons, as they are organised at present, are incapable of humanizing themselves without the help of civil society. Other interventions were in 6/2007, on the disappointing proposals on alternative methods of sanctioning (commissione Pisapia) and the rejection of the government's intention to transfer the control of the "open" penal system to the "polizia penitenziaria". The social workers of the UEPE (Ufficio per esecuzione penale esterna) rejected the integration the prison police into an essentially "reconciliatory" social service (It9/10).

Per a FIVOL study (It11) there are some 351 associations working for detainees and ex-prisoners of which more than half were founded after 1988. 45 % of them are active in the Northern regions and 62 % of them are faith-based. 40 % of these associations comprise less than 10 volunteers. 8500 people work for these associations of which 50 % are active volunteers. They work 11700 hours per week with 27000 detainees involved. The "4th and 5th "rivelazioni" (= enquiries/annual statistical report - It12/13) are available for consultation on internet. They comprise all movements in and out of jail of approved prison visitors in 2004/2005 in 85 % of Italian prisons (171 of 200). According to Law No. 120, there are 2 categories of "non-institutional" prison visitors:

- a) Those per Article 17: simple admission procedure; these visitors organize or participate in cultural, sports, leisure and educational activities; promotion of contacts with the world outside. These visitors can be admitted as individuals or as part of an association, they can be remunerated professionals or unpaid volunteers. Their visits may be sporadic, because they are part of certain projects which are often limited in time.
- b) Those per Article 78: they are called "volontari di assistenti or assistenti volontari". They usually work on an individual basis with the detainees, "listen and give moral support" (attivo di ascolto), and prepare them for re-entry into normal life. They may accompany their detainees for administrative visits outside prison, be in contact with their families, intervene with the social services for better conditions of detention, be consulted in case of early or conditional release. Long approval procedure. They have a more active and official role than British and French prison visitors and also follow more intensive preparatory courses.

The computer program in place permits the identification of every voluntary prison visitor and his activity, the individual organisation, frequency and duration of the visits, how many detainees are involved, whether the project is financially sponsored or not. With time, the yearly variations will show certain statistical tendencies. The system has been in place since 2001 and has functioned fully since 2004. Some of the data:

- 7800 (2005 = 8300) visitors per Art. 17 and 78 worked in 2004 in 98 % of the Italian prisons (= less 1,7 % compared with 2003).
- 100 prison visitors per Art. 78 abandoned their work in prison to become active for prisoners after release (looking for jobs, helping families). Nevertheless, there was an overall increase of the prison volunteers of + 28,3 % between 2001 and 2005.
- In 2003 there were 54.659 detainees = 273 on an average per prison
in 2004 " 58.388 = 292 "
in 2005 " 59.523 = 298 "

- They are now geographically more equally located:
 - . In 2001, with 34 % of the prisons, the North had 48% of the volunteers – which fell to 35 % in 2004,
 - . In 2001, with 45,5 % of the prisons, the South had only 15,2 % of the volunteers. In 2004, the part of the volunteers increased to 25.5 % and to 30,1 % in 2005.

- Other statistics:

	<u>2004</u>	<u>2005</u>
. Number of volunteers per Art 17	6661	7064
. “ “ 78	1.181	1279
. Ratio of detainees per volunteer	8.7	7.0

- The average number of visitors per prison per art. 17 (16 men, 17 women) is 33 working in 85 % (2005 = 87 %) of the prisons. In 23 % of the prisons only volunteers per art. 17 work. The “volontari di assistenti” work in 75 % of the prisons (in 2005 = 86,6%). Of the 1181 “assistenti”, 40 % are men and 60 % women (reduced to 51,4 % in 2005). As only 181 of the 200 prisons have participated in this enquiry, it can be estimated that the total number of “assistenti” is around 1500.

The age range of the prison visitors:

	Art. 78 only				Art.17 and 78 together			
	-30	40-45	45-64	65+	-30	30-45	45-64	65 +
In %	----	-----	-----	-----	----	-----	-----	-----
Italy average	4,5	17,4	46,1	32,1	18,7	31,5	46,4	13,4
Men	3,5	20,1	46,2	30,2	15,6	34,0	37,9	12,6
Women	5,1	15,3	45,9	33,7	21,2	29,1	35,1	14,5

Non-institutional visitors, volunteers and professionals:

	Art. 87	Art. 17	Total
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Non-remunerated work	100 %	60 %	66,8 (2005 = 72 %)
Remunerated work	-	20,1 %	16,7 %
Non specified	-	19,9 %	16,5 %
Number of people taken into account	983	4845	5828

With regard to the FREQUENCY of the visits, we are told that 27 % (2005 25,2 %) of the “assistenti” and 18 % of the visitors per art. 17 enter prison at least twice a week. 81 % (2005 = 75,8 %) of the “assistenti” and 56 % (2005 = 59,9%) of the visitors per art. 17 go at least once a week to the prison. The details concerning the frequency of the visits are documented on 3 tables.

Another table shows the associations to which the visitors belong. 70 % of them are part of voluntary organisations. There are altogether 500 local associations involved and 660 if one counts the multiple membership of some visitors:

	Total	average No. of members	Total	%
Voluntary organisations	188	67	259	38,9
Associations for social promotion	63	28	91	13,7
Cultural associations	19	2	21	3,1
Social co-operatives	67	-	67	10,1
Other associations	35	13	48	7,2
Religious associations	35	31	66	9,9
NGOs	2	-	2	0,3
Ass. for professional training	11	8	19	2,8
Unions	8	19	18	2,7
Institutional organisations	60	-	60	9,0
Commercial organisations	15	-	15	2,2
	507	159	666	100

Table No. 10 which specifies the activities of the prison visitors, is particularly interesting:

	Art. 17		Art. 78		Total replies	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Cultural activities	856	19,0	97	8,9	953	17,0
Religious support and teaching	896	17,6	112	10,3	908	16,2
Psy. and moral support, listening	640	14,2	353	32,6	993	17,6
Leisure activities	605	13,4	72	6,6	677	12,1
Professional formation	491	10,9	4	0,4	495	8,8
General schooling	386	8,6	32	3,0	418	7,5
Sports activities	250	5,5	16	1,5	266	4,8
Professional Counselling	148	3,3	63	5,8	212	3,8
Family links	96	2,1	16	1,5	112	2,0
Correspondence (job, admin.)	74	1,6	22	2,0	96	1,7
Information, prevention, orientation	31	0,7	5	0,5	36	0,6
Clothes, first necessities,	22	0,5	165	15,2	177	3,3
Soc. reinsertion,	20	0,4	95	8,8	115	2,1
Intern. admin. (clothes, library)	17	0,4	14	1,3	31	0,6
Cultural mediation for foreigners	16	0,4	0	0	16	0,3
Pedagogical help	12	0,3	2	0,2	14	0,2
Discussion and "self-help" groups	10	0,2	11	1,0	21	0,4
Others	39	0,9	5	0,5	44	0,8
Total	4510	100	1084	100	5594	100
Unspecified	700	13,5	187	19,2	887	14,4
Total number analysed	5195		1271		6466	

The enquiry of 2004 tries for the first time to evaluate the acceptance of the pedagogical and educational volunteers by the professional sector and the detainees themselves (most of the replies came from the detainees). 46 % of the volunteers were considered of a “high” level, 26 % as “average” and 7 % as “insufficient”.

For the volunteers involved in a “project” by the administration, the valuation was as follows:

	Art. 78	%	Art. 17	%	Total	%
	Number		Number		Number	
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Optimal, very good	125	12,8	599	10,8	724	24,0
Positive	343	35,1	1825	32,8	2168	72,0
Average	2	0,4	33	0,6	35	1,2
Insufficient	10	1,0	74	1,3	84	2,8
Not evaluated	486	50,7	3934	54,5		
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	976	100	5565	100	3011	100

“Ristretti orizzonti” is a most complete website administered by male and female detainees of the Padua prisons assisted by the prison volunteer association “Granello di Senape Padova”. It contains general prison news, information on volunteer organisations (It14) and their latest actions, background information such as “Volontari dietro le sbarre – volunteers behind bars” (It15), a dossier on suicides in prison and 175 websites of Italian and foreign volunteer organisations (It16).

Among them are all kinds of associations such as:

- Associazione “la libellula”, Villafranca Veneta
- La cooperativa sociale “Giotto”, Padova
- Progetto “Un tetto per tutti, alternative al cielo a scacchi” (a roof for all, alternatives to a sky with bars”, Milano
- “Apriamo i muri”, (open the walls), Venice
- “Granello di Senape”, (Mustard grain), Venice which in 2003 obtained the first prize for “national solidarity” (premio Liciano Tavazza) together with a cheque of Euro 15000.
- “Sesta Opera San Fedele” is a Jesuit-linked volunteer association founded in 1923 which has been most influential in shaping a more positive attitude on the public and the authorities towards prisoners. It publishes “Dignitas” (It15A).
- NAGA, Milano is a lay association whose members visit prisoners, give legal advice and find accommodation,
- “l’Altro diritto” is a documentation centre for prison, deviance and marginality attached to the University of Florence,
- “Fuoriluogo.it” is a centre for information on drugs, their treatment, the social implications, facts.
- “Gruppo Abele” was founded in 1965 and fights against the marginalisation of any kind of people (foreigners, dependents, people on the road, mental health, prisoners etc.). Street work.
- LILA – Information on AIDS in and outside prison.
- “Brother Keeper” Movimento Missionario Penitenziario (It17) – seems to be the only US Evangelist Prison Visiting Organisation in Italy. They started in 2000 and say that 15 chaplains and 70 volunteers are working today for the organisation in 7 regions.
- GAVAC, Rome is a typical prison visiting organisation in Lazio (It 18),

- The “Assistenti Volontari Penitenziari”, Piemonte (It19) comprise 13 local volunteer organisations with 250 “assistenti” who perform 25.000 visits (100.000 hours of work) per year. 3 of the members are called “ Associazione San Martino”, “Carlo Castelli” and “Cittadinanza attiva”.

Among the more than 80 Christian visiting groups united in SEAC, there are original names such as:

- “Liberi dentro” (free inside), Savigliano
- “Il Bivacco” (the Bivouac), Milano
- “Utopie Fattibili” (Feasible Utopia), Vicenza
- “Opera Pane dei Poveri” (charity bread of the poor), Padova
- “Associazione Girasole” (sunflower), Rovereto
- “Porta aperta al Carcere” (open the door of the prison), Modena
- “Ultimi degli ultimi” (last of the last), Rome
- “Insieme per ricominciare” (Together to recommence), Bari.

The regionally-active “Associazione Volontariato Penitenziario - AVP” is attached to the Florence Judiciary and comprises most of the voluntary organisations working in Tuscany (It20), such as the catholic Caritas, ARCI (non-confessional), AMPAS, Associazione per l’altro (documentation), AISME (mental health), (Nessun) No Mobbing, Il Varco, CIAO, etc. They cover a wide range of activities from prevention in schools, to job hunting for released prisoners, moral and material support and “group counselling”. Among the common projects of the past or in preparation, one can find:

- theatre “l’epidemia del bene” written by an ex-detainee and performed by “high-security” prisoners,
- “Free at last” gospel choir composed of prisoners who gave several public concerts,
- Involvement of the Tuscan Universities to help imprisoned students in their studies (in 1/2007 there were 81 university students of whom 25 were foreigners),
- “Per il trattamento intenso del lupo - For Wolf” intensive treatment of Detainees condemned for paedophilia and sexual crimes,
- “Storievasive” – intercultural project for young immigrants of the second generation, etc.

The AVP, Florence also runs “ATTAVANTE”, (It20) a recreation centre for ex-detainees and people serving alternative sentences which is open every day between 15 and 21 hours. The centre is organised by 5 full-time employees and 15 volunteers. It serves as meeting place with the families, is equipped for leisure activities, education of all types, psychological advice and legal assistance. “Attavante” (It21) is a joint project of the City of Florence together with specialized local associations. AVP, Toscana is typical for a regional Italian federation, as there are others in Veneto, Liguria, Lazio and other “regioni” . The definition of their projects is contained in the document “Il volontariato penitenziario in Toscana”, (It22) a clear and realistic analysis of their position and their aims .

In 7/2007 Lucia De Siervo, “assessore” of the Florence City Council Social Department announced the inauguration of the “Giardino degli Incontri” (Garden of the encounters) inside the Sollicciano prison (It23) , an architect-designed addition, which will allow more pleasant family visits and cultural manifestations in future. She gave then a rather extensive run-down of the social prison activities in Florence together with the projects and associations involved.

CESVOT (It24), the “Centre of the Tuscan Volunteers”, indicates in 1/2008 that Tuscany with 19 jails, has the highest prison concentration in Italy, that 60 volunteer associations are active in that region, 11 magazines are written by detainees and 15 theatre companies are active in prisons (of which the “Compagnia della Fortezza” in Volterra with their 50 detainee-actors and 21 performances in the last 20 years is probably the best known (It25).

As in Germany or Switzerland, the prison administration is very much decentralised and so are the prison volunteers. “Le due città”, the magazine of the central prison administration (It26), publishes the “Protocol of intentions” between the regional prison administration of the Veneto region and the Judiciary for minors of Venice with the regional federation “Voluntariato penitenziario del Veneto”. In Venice and Mestre, 2 voluntary associations (Incontro e Presenza and Don Lorenzo di Milani) have been charged with carrying through the project “SOS: oltre il carcere – after prison”, a reintegration project for ex-prisoners in 4 phases (It27).

In 17 of the 206 Italian prisons there are no volunteers and 7 of them are in Sicily. ASVOPE, the Prison Visiting Association of Palermo said in 4/2007 that only 201 volunteers work in the 26 Sicilian prisons with 3712 inmates; and that they are present in the big prisons only. The reason is that “solidarity is not in the culture of the Sicilians and the people live in fear”.

The “Centro di Ascolto Francese” at Rovigo (a provincial town of 60.000 inhabitants) could serve as an example of the diversity of voluntary social services to the needy in general and (ex)prisoners in particular (It28):

In 1988, the founders of this association wanted to offer “proximity and presence” to marginalized people. As the local authorities failed to provide valid solutions, a group of young people, following the Franciscan example of “undertaking courageous initiatives”, carried out their project, because “what the leper was to Saint Francis at his time, are the aids-infected, drug addicts, homeless, disabled and prisoners today”. The authorities and society in general were disposed to help the “easily improvable” people, but turned a blind eye on the others. Today the “Centro” offers the following services (see also their very complete website):

- **a 24-hour service** which gives simple information and addresses for immediate help. On a longer term basis are offered accommodation, treatment for dependencies, work, education, medical advice. Specialized staff is available certain days for advice on a variety of problems such as aids, alcohol, mental problems, prison etc.
- **Prison Service** – In the Rovigo prison, volunteers work in both the men’s and women’s section. Apart from the usual services for prisoners and their families, they run an outside prison project of professional education with authorized detainees. Co-operation with specialized prison services for health and social problems. The local prison volunteer association is located at the “Centro” where they meet once a month exchanging views and receiving information. Since 1997, the detainees of the local prison publish the magazine “Prospettiva Esse”.
- **Service foreigners/immigrants** – Due to its geographical location, Italy is swamped with legal and illegal immigrants. Specially trained staff advise on work, accommodation, administrative help, social security, language.
- **Laboratorio di studi** is a documentation centre at the service of its clients (the poor and needy), state and local social services and the public in general. It serves as a multicultural and multi-social meeting place for those who are open to the Christian message. Studies, consultancy, a library and data base are available.

- **Sportello luna** (for all those who do not want to come at day light) for immediate problems such as people living in illegality, prostitution, fear from the authorities, advice on health, matrimonial violence, debts, etc.. They are made welcome, advised and cared for.
- **Sportello “Avvocati di Strada”** – This association of lawyers and legally trained personnel has worked since 2006 in several Italian towns and gives twice a week free-of-charge-legal advice to anyone who needs it.
- **Sportello a colori** is a new service which tries to help transsexuals with qualified advice and practical help. On 17.4.08 the “Centro francescano” invited to a public round-table discussion on “Transsessualità – oltre lo specchio: parliamone”.

Italian Prison Visitors, and in particular those who become “volontari di assistenti” have to undergo formation courses which last between 6 and 12 days over a period of 6 months and which look rather demanding. These courses are usually offered by “Regional Volunteer Organisations”, as for example :

- in 2004 by the AVP, Torino (It29),
- in 2006 by the associations “Speranza” and “Icaro”, Udine (It30),
- in 2007/8 by the CRVG-Trento-Alto Adige, “Non solo sbarre” (It31),
- in 2008 by LiberaMente, Cosenza, “Essere volontari dentro e fuori” (IT32),
- and several other courses organised in Tuscany by Cescvot (It33) and “l’altro diritto”; il Gruppo volontario Carcere di Lucca; Controluce, Pisa and Pantagrue, Florence, etc., etc.

In Italy, as in most other European countries, the prevailing discovery is that “alternatives to incarceration - diversion” and community work are valid forms of re-socialisation, not only because they are cheaper than costly detention, but because they cause less re-offending too. The re-offending rates for Tuscany, are, it appears, 68,45 % following incarceration compared with only 19 % in case of accompanying measures. “Meno carcere e più impegno sociale” (less detention and more social measures) is the often repeated slogan. As already in 1994 in France, the prison health service was transferred in 2005 to the local hospitals.

“L’Indulto” (general pardon for sentences up to 3 years except for terrorism, child prostitution, drug trafficking etc) was a spectacular action in July 2006 when the Prodi government (It33) reduced the prison population from 60.710 to 38.847 in one month (available capacity 42.000 places). Accompanying measures (It34/35) were foreseen for only 2000 ex-prisoners with 2700 Euros state funding per person over 18 months plus 1000 Euros for the employer for professional training. Pushed by the right-wing media in the name of public security, the prisons keep filling up again. With 800 detainees in 1/2008, the Sollicciano/Tuscany prison had arrived almost at the “pre-indulto” level.

The national Confederation CNVG discussed in 2000 the project “Forum Europeo Volontariato Giustizia” (It36) in which the reasons for the foundation of a “European Association of Prison Volunteers” are defined. At the end of an integrative effort which led to the creation of the CNVG, the author wanted to carry the reflection on social and penal reforms into neighbouring countries. The reasoning was that, if some national features of society are and should remain, other aspects, such as ethnicity and marginalisation of people which leads to delinquency, are international. Never before have people migrated so much and never before have there been so many foreigners in European prisons. To guarantee their legal and human rights is part of the volunteers’ task.

Therefore, a sort of “round-table of social well-being” of European social and prison volunteers was proposed to arrive at a common understanding and concerted actions beyond

national boundaries. Some of the goals were the creation of a European network for the exchange of on-line information on prison matters with the aim of obtaining better conditions for incarcerated people. Another objective was the attainment of a consultative status by the European Institutions. His 8-page project goes into details for the creation of a “Permanent Office” and its projected operating cost. With the larger perspective of social justice, of which prison is just part, he wanted to involve organisations working in the field of social exclusion, such as The Penal Reform Trust (London), OIP (Paris), the “European Committee for the Prevention of Torture” (Strasbourg) and several Universities involved in social studies. Livio Ferrari’s project covers a wide range of activities. Should a “European Federation of prisons volunteers” become reality, his project should certainly be taken into account.

For Italian speakers, there are several articles available on internet which could interest the “Prison Volunteer”. Examples:

- “Vicino ai detenuti” by Claudio Sarzotti (Antigone) about the role of the associations in the Italian penal system (It37) .
- “Il volontariato per la persona e la giustizia”, a summary of the 2007 SEAC General Assembly by Bruno Oliviero which addresses the attitude of society, prisons and the reinsertion of offenders (It38).
- “Perché una persona sceglie di fare volontariato in un carcere – why would someone chose to be a prison visitor?” in which Don Sandor Spriano, a prison chaplain for many years and president of the “Volontari in Carcere – VIC” tries to give reasons for it. He develops his “visione della giustizia riconciliativa - the vision of a reconciliatory justice system (It39).
- In 2007 Livio Ferrari, journalist, ex-president of SEAC and the CNVP, wrote a 160-page book “In carcere, scomodi. Cultura e politiche del volontariato giustizia” (edizioni Franco Angeli) which could be translated as “Prison is no fun”. The book contains 6 chapters in which he describes, based on 17 years of experience, the ways volunteers work in prison, its environment, how the volunteers fit into the prison administration and how they interact with the staff. He talks of violence, drugs, racism and the value of poetry, the contacts with the families and ex-prisoners, the relationship with the victims, alternatives to incarceration and the occasional loneliness of voluntary prison visitor. He presents different forms of prison volunteering and the main Italian organisations and federations. This is a most complete analysis of the main aspects of voluntary prison work which he projects frequently into the greater picture of social environment, justice and politics. An addition to this book is planned which will deal more specifically with the relationship of the prisoners and the voluntary visitors (It40).
- In a 1-page article “Da che parte vogliamo stare – on which side do we want to be?” (It41), Livio Ferrari qualifies prisons as places of social vendetta, he talks of the impossibility for long-time prisoners to find a place in society again, because their psychological integrity is irretrievably lost. He says that possibly 25 % of the present detainees are dangerous and should be kept in prison for that reason, but the rest could be released. A real manifesto.