



# Summary

## Evaluation of the Maatwerk-approach

### Employment guidance with the help of volunteers

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# Summary

## Introduction: Description of the Maatwerk Approach

Maatwerk is a pilot project conducted by Gevangenenzorg Nederland (GNd) between 2021 and 2024 at the Penitentiary Institution (PI) in Alphen aan den Rijn, The Netherlands. The aim of the pilot was to motivate prisoners to engage with their future, through, among other things, labor integration, with a key role being played by volunteers. The Maatwerk approach needed to align with the regular prison routine and be accessible to as many inmates as possible.

The Maatwerk offering consists of several components, which prisoners can participate in based on their needs. These components are divided into three categories: volunteers, labor, and support. **Maatwerk volunteers** are present in the prisoners' living units and in the prison reintegration center, where they can engage with those who are open to it. When a prisoner enrolls in a Maatwerk program, they are paired with a volunteer (a "buddy") with whom they have periodic one-on-one conversations. This contact may continue even after the participant is released from prison (an aftercare program).

In the **labor category**, a prisoner can take the Labor Orientation Course (Cursus Arbeidsoriëntatie; CAO) with a volunteer. This course helps prisoners understand their motivation for work, identify their strengths, and discover what kind of work is enjoyable and suitable for them. GNd, together with the PI, also organizes an event for entrepreneurs (entrepreneurial meetings) where prisoners can meet potential employers. Additionally, GNd's labor integration advisors assist prisoners in finding jobs through job placement services and establishing contacts with potential employers if desired and necessary.

GNd also offers **supportive components** such as the SOS course (Speaking about Guilt, Society and Victim; Spreken over Schuld, Samenleving en Slachtoffer), the Back to the Future course, and network conversations, aimed at the prisoners' personal and relational rehabilitation.

## Research objective

The aim of this research is to evaluate whether the Maatwerk approach has been sufficiently developed to be described as a complete and effective strategy that contributes to the labor integration of participating prisoner. In addition to forming a judgment on the achievement of the direct goals of the approach, the research also examines the side effects that may occur. The study also investigates whether the approach can be shared with other volunteer organizations and penitentiary institutions (PIs).

## Research methodology

This study utilized multiple research methods, including a literature review, analysis of participant data provided by GNd, interviews, and a validation session. Interviews were conducted with the directly involved parties: GNd (including volunteers) (n = 8), PI Alphen aan den Rijn (n = 6), employers (n = 2), and (ex-)participants (n = 9). A validation session was also organized with representatives from GNd, DJI, PI Alphen aan den Rijn, and an expert in reintegration policy.

The literature review and interviews were used to iteratively reconstruct the intervention logic of the Maatwerk approach, which schematically shows the intended mechanisms and objectives behind the program. Data from GNd was used to analyse how many prisoners participated in the pilot and which components they enrolled in. Interviews were aimed at gathering the experiences of (ex-)participants, volunteers, PI Alphen aan den Rijn, case

managers, penitentiary workers, and employers. Based on the literature, the intervention logic, the achieved intake of participants, and the experiences of those involved, an attempt has been made to determine the potential added value of the approach and to explore the possibilities for expanding the Maatwerk approach.

A key caveat of this research is that it is not an impact assessment, this would have required a different research set-up. The pilot has not run long enough to observe long-term effects, and with only 76 participants, no general statements can be made about the impact. Positive outcomes cannot easily be attributed solely to the Maatwerk approach due to the influence of many external factors. This report, therefore, provides a plausible analysis, based on literature and experiences, of whether the Maatwerk approach could contribute to the stated goals and be of added value, but does not make definitive claims about the effects.

## **Research outcomes**

### *Enrollment and selection of prisoners*

Prisoners are informed about Maatwerk through flyers in their units, the presence of volunteers, fellow prisoners, and their case managers. Prisoners can sign up through a form via GNd, or the case manager can sign them up. The latter is the most common method.

GNd and the Multidisciplinary Consultation (MDO) decide whether an inmate can participate in Maatwerk. The following criteria are considered: 1) whether the inmate's expectations and desires align with what GNd offers, 2) whether the inmate has more than five months left of their sentence to allow for meaningful collaboration with a volunteer, 3) whether the inmate is genuinely interested in finding suitable and sustainable employment, rather than just securing a job to meet conditions for transfer to a Lower-Security Facility (BBA), 4) whether the inmate is not already participating in other similar programs, and 5) whether it is the right moment in the detention process for the inmate to join Maatwerk. The inmate's status (basic or plus program) is not a determining factor, but it is important that the environment is safe for volunteers to work with inmates.

Case managers report offering Maatwerk to inmates who they believe would benefit from having a "buddy" or need support finding a suitable job. This suggests two target groups for Maatwerk, which is also reflected in participant data and interviews: one-third of participants took the Labor Orientation Course and sought suitable work, while two-thirds were paired with a volunteer and were not yet focused on labor orientation.

Various stakeholders have expressed concern that there may be (self)exclusion of detainees because GNd is a Christian volunteer organization and its volunteers share this Christian belief. However, this appears to have mainly been a factor during the initial phase of the pilot, and there is currently no evidence that this is still a significant issue.

### *Added value of the Maatwerk-approach*

Literature shows that volunteers can be of significant added value in the reintegration process. Volunteers take their time for detainees, offer a listening ear, and can provide practical and emotional support. Research indicates that they can contribute to the social and personal reintegration of a detainee in this way. The interviewed (former) participants of the programme confirmed these insights from the literature, and staff members from the correctional institution also recognized the clear added value of the volunteers for the participants. Additionally, positive side effects of using volunteers include the ability for volunteers to take on certain tasks from case managers, thereby relieving them in some areas off their work pressures, and the presence of volunteers on living units can change the atmosphere and improve the living environment.



Finding suitable work from within detention generally poses a significant challenge for detainees, both in terms of finding motivation and the practical difficulties involved. The Job Orientation Course (CAO) supports detainees in discovering motivation for work and recognizing their own qualities. This course focuses on the softer aspects and values associated with work. The interviewed (former) participants and case managers expressed positive feedback about the course content and its delivery. Through the entrepreneurial meetings and job placement assistance from the GNd labor integration advisors, detainees can also receive practical help in establishing contacts with potential employers and finding work. In total, the GNd labor integration advisors have placed fifteen participants from Maatwerk into jobs. However, the pilot has progressed slowly, partly due to external circumstances. The initial success stories eventually led to an increase in registrations. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that if the program continues, the number of participants placed in jobs will increase in the coming years.

An additional effect of the entrepreneurial meetings are the impact on employers. The employers receive a tour of the prison and, as a result, learn about the living conditions within the facility and the experiences of prisoners. The employers interviewed indicated that this meeting helped them develop more understanding and empathy for (ex-)prisoners. When these (ex-)prisoners subsequently become employees, there is greater mutual understanding and a higher likelihood of a sustainable employer-employee relationship. Additionally, the labor integration advisors from GNd serve as an extra point of contact for employers. Hiring a detainee in the BBA involves a lengthy administrative process and many uncertainties, such as the starting date of employment. The integration advisors are familiar with the processes within the prison and can provide additional guidance and support to the employer.

Based on the results, we see that there is limited interest among prisoners in the supportive components of Maatwerk (the SOS Course, the Back to the Future Course, and the networking conversations). While nine detainees participated in the SOS Course, only one detainee attended the other two. Personal development and the development of detainees in relation to their families are important for successful reintegration (according to the literature), but there are other options available within the reintegration offerings of the PI. Detainees can request these courses from GNd at any time, but we believe that these supportive components do not represent the added value of Maatwerk. However, based on the literature, the intervention logic, and the experiences of those involved, it is plausible that the involvement of volunteers in reintegration (and specifically the visibility of these volunteers within the prison during Maatwerk and the possibility of aftercare) as well as the employment components of Maatwerk (the CAO course, the entrepreneurial meetings, and assistance from the GNd labor integration advisors) provide additional value beyond the existing reintegration offerings.

#### *Opportunities for expanding the Maatwerk-approach*

The assignment for GNd was to develop an approach that can be made available to as broad a target audience as possible, and therefore can also be offered in other prison environments, for different themes, and by other volunteer organizations.

Maatwerk - where volunteers are involved in the reintegration process with a focus on employment - is sufficiently developed to be shared with other volunteer organizations and prisons. It is important that the organization is a mature volunteer organization that adequately supports and prepares volunteers and can consistently provide volunteers to be active within the program. Additionally, the organization must maintain good contact with the prison and the case managers and be familiar with the processes within the prison. It is also a prerequisite for the prison that management and staff on the ground are motivated to make Maatwerk a success and are committed to the presence of volunteers within the prison.

Initially, volunteers will create more work for the administrative staff (organizing access, guiding volunteers to visiting rooms, etc.) as well as for the prison staff who will have additional people walking about in the prison living units. If there is no sustained effort to ensure the presence of volunteers, the involved parties expect that Maatwerk will not succeed.

Moreover, the Maatwerk approach could also be applied to themes other than employment. By offering the CAO-course, volunteers within Maatwerk specifically contribute to the employment theme. This course, and the manner in which it is delivered, is appreciated by (former) participants and stakeholders from the prison. Organizations wishing to offer courses on other themes could, therefore, also utilize volunteers in a similar fashion to the Maatwerk-approach.

Finally, it remains to be seen whether Maatwerk is suitable for the entire prison population and within the various prison environments. Based on the literature and discussions with prisoners, it is expected that all target groups within the prison could benefit from contact with a volunteer. However, volunteers may not be present in all prison departments due to safety concerns. The components related to employment may not be suitable for the entire detainee population, as they are particularly valuable for the group of detainees who ultimately have prospects for employment, which is not the case for everyone.

## **Conclusion**

This evaluation examined whether the Maatwerk-approach contributed to the goals that were set and whether the approach has been sufficiently developed to be shared with other volunteer organizations and prisons. The intervention logic suggests that it can be plausibly argued that the Maatwerk-approach contributes to securing suitable and sustainable employment for detainees after their release. Thus, the approach could also support successful reintegration and reduce the likelihood of reoffending. To achieve these goals, it is important that the approach complements the existing reintegration offerings within the prison and that prisoners receive adequate support regarding the basic conditions (de basisvoorwaarden) and other issues.

Furthermore, it was also GNd's task to develop an approach that would appeal to as broad a target audience as possible. This research indicates that no criteria or barriers have been established in the registration and selection process that would exclude detainees in advance. Additionally, there are opportunities to expand the approach to other prison environments, themes, and volunteer organizations.