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# WELCOME TO ISSUE 14

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# EDITORIAL

BY IEP JOURNAL GUEST EDITOR MIGUEL PEROMINGO, CONSULTANT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEER LEARNING AMONG EMPLOYMENT SERVICES FROM THE PUBLIC, PRIVATE AND THIRD SECTOR.

As an international consultant Miguel's ambition is to share examples from employment services in different countries. The Journal showcases how initiatives in Lithuania, Belgium, the USA, the UK and other countries support returning citizens on their journey back to the labour market and into society.

The World Population Review states<sup>1</sup> that at least one third of released individuals return to prison within two years. In the USA, the country with the highest incarceration rate globally, current research indicates that more than 80% of released citizens are likely to be rearrested within ten years. This bias of keeping people who have committed a crime in their past in a downward spiral of social exclusion and the push to re-offend, impacts the life of all those that have left their criminal behaviour behind.

Gary Bolles, international expert on the future of work reports about his experience in working with prison reintegration that in one counselling group he attended, the 28 men present calculated their total sentences as adding up to 728 years, whilst the time in which they committed the actual crime added up to a total of less than five minutes. Seconds of unmanaged anger and poor decisions at a young age (most violent crimes are committed in late adolescence with a quick decrease in the 20's) put them on a track that will cost a potential lifetime struggle to live a worthy life in society.

A proportion of the people who are in prison are dangerous and should be kept away, but the majority, particularly in countries with high incarceration rate of which the UK is one, are ready and apt to return to society including those that have served minor sentences but are still stigmatized for having been sentenced.

What can thus be done to help improve inclusion of returning citizens?

A fundamental step for the society is to practice active empathy. The common picture of returning citizens is that of inmates, de-humanised, faceless people in monochrome prison uniforms, perpetuated in the risk they bring to society. To overcome this damaging simplification, it seems crucial to change mindsets and acknowledge that every single returning prisoner is a human being with a story, with aspirations and skills as well as challenges and need for help. Intentionally applying empathy is a competence that can be learned, also collectively, by getting to know individuals, understand their journey and work together to help. Support networks are important to tackle the needs of returning citizens for well-being, many of whom might suffer physical and mental health conditions, for affective relationships, housing and work.

01



MIGUEL PEROMINGO  
Freelance Consultant and Writer

→ Miguel Peromingo is a freelance consultant and writer advising government institutions, private employment services and third sector providers on support to the most vulnerable groups on the labour market, use of advanced matching technology and human-centered employment service delivery.



<sup>1</sup> World Population Review (2022), available online at <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/recidivism-rates-by-country>.

The OECD highlights<sup>2</sup> that case management for people leaving prison can only be successful if it takes a human-centered approach instead of emphasizing managerial processes in different silos, what the OECD calls a “pass-the-parcel case management”, in which the returning citizen is sent from one institution to the other repeatedly going through the same procedures. In employability support for instance, a case management that already starts in prison and builds trust and continuity through a journey of motivation, skills assessment, skills training and job matching will be a better support than fragmented service components. Much like leaving school and starting a job or coming back to work from unemployment spells or illness, starting back on the labour market after prison is a journey, not an isolated event and has therefore to be approached holistically.

Furthermore, the growing skills shortages in Europe and beyond create a need to look for untapped and hidden skills pools. Returning citizens might have skills and potential that can benefit labour markets too, if employers are engaged at the right time and vocational education and training is applied systematically.

Employability professionals are in an important position as well. The more they know about the needs of returning citizens and the quicker they can respond with holistic case management, the higher the chance they can help with labour market and social integration.

This Journal gives several examples from public, private and third sector employment services of what works and what does not in the integration of returning citizens. We hope it serves as inspiration, sparks discussion, and continues building support networks.



<sup>2</sup> OECD (2024). An integrated approach to service delivery for people with multiple and complex needs, OECD Publishing Paris

# WHEN YOU GO TO PRISON, YOUR FAMILY GOES TO PRISON WITH YOU

## Interview

02



**Inside Connections supports individuals who have experience of the Criminal Justice System with training opportunities and links to the labour market to provide a pathway into sustainable employment.**

**MIGUEL PEROMINGO**  
Freelance Consultant and Writer

**They also work pro-actively with young people who need a positive intervention to avoid showing criminal behaviour. John Burton, founder of Inside Connections has been in prison himself and shares his journey.**

### **JOHN, IF YOU COULD TALK TO YOUR YOUNGER SELF, WHAT WOULD YOU TELL HIM?**

I would tell him everything that has gone wrong in my life. Not listening to my dad and to all the grown up people that tried to put me on the right track was wrong. I ignored them all, went down a crazy path and ended up in a lot of trouble right until I was 40 years.

If I listened to them, I would probably be a top manager now, instead of working for years with drug cartels and mafias all over the world and then going to prison for 20 years. When you are young you think you know best, but you don't.

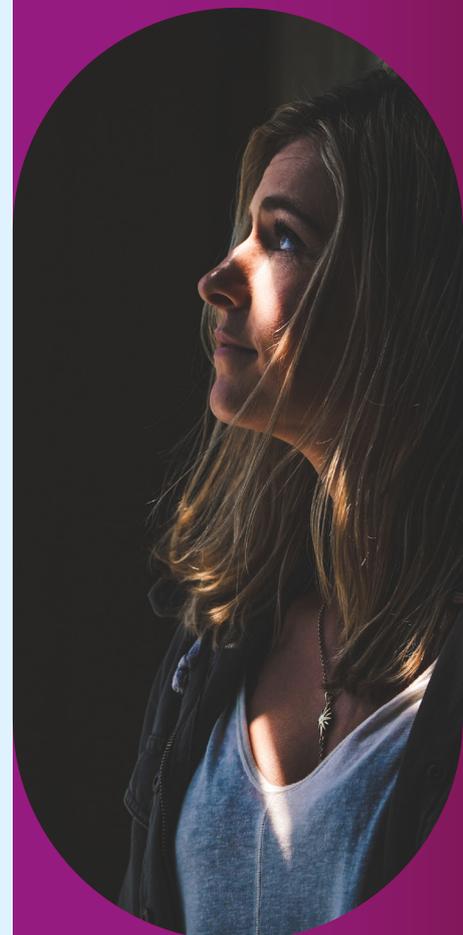
### **HOW IS THE DAY-TO-DAY LIFE IN PRISON?**

Your life in prison very much depends on your security clearance. When I went in, I was deemed high risk. My day-to-day was totally different to anyone else's there. I had to wear a blue and yellow suit on the prison wing every day. You cannot move freely between units. Anytime I went to a different part of my unit, I needed to be ticked off in a yellow book I had with me.

When I went to meet a visitor, I was escorted by two guards. When going to the yard by four guards with Alsatians. Every 20 days I had to move cells. My children could not see me in the first four months after I went in. The police went to my home to check everybody out in person before they could come and visit me. I was in this high-risk unit with murderers, terrorists, robbers, and gun runners. We were 17 guys and I did not get my risk reassessed in 14 months. Only then they lowered it. Later, I eventually got into a category where I was allowed to work and support my family.

You know, when you go to prison, your family goes to prison with you. They are the ones who need to send you money. They have to look after the bills, look after themselves. In prison, you have food and light and water, but your family might not have that. So, getting back to work and earning money is a pivotal moment during your sentence. And you have to stay away from the illegal stuff in prison.

There are always inmates trying to sell drugs or make money out of something and get into fights. I have seen people getting hit with boiler nuts, slashed across their face, butt, and back. I have seen stuff that I am just glad I do not have to see anymore. It's not a life for anyone.



## IS IT POSSIBLE TO MAKE HUMAN CONNECTIONS IN PRISON?

Prisons are overcrowded. I have been to wings that hold 500 to 1400 people. It is very full everywhere. You are surrounded by people like yourself, some of them with a heavy drug addiction. People also rotate a lot. Remember that there are more than 100,000 people in the UK justice system. It is difficult to get to know people that stay, but you can find mates, that you will keep in touch with.

## WHY DID YOU CREATE INSIDE CONNECTIONS?

I saw first-hand which support people were not getting when they got out prison. I had people leaving their stuff in my cell on day of release asking me to keep it for them. When I asked them if they were not going home, they answered that they don't have a home. They went out on their day in freedom, spend their little money, ate, got drunk and in the evening, they were back in prison. I thought, there needs to be a way to get around this. So, I developed an app that helps returning citizens to find the right places for housing, medical care, education, and work. I started doing that in prison and now it is on all major app stores called Inside Connection.

## Who are your clients?

We help people who get out of prison, they can use our app, and we can also put them in touch with employers, some of which also provide labour in-prison. We do not work with all convictions, though. We cannot work with sex offenders or multiple murderers. If you got into a fight and hit somebody on the head and that person dies, we look at what we can do. It is difficult to place people sentenced for arson.

People who worked in gangs and had knife fight, someone dies, the other one goes to prison for 20 years. These might be people who changed and will be great workers. They made a big mistake, and we are the company that gives them a chance. We work with charities, with probation, with prisons. We have put more than 5000 people into lasting jobs.

## HOW DOES THAT FEEL?

Back in prison, I did not think for a minute I would be where I am today with what I have done with myself and my children. I made my children travel for 18 hours to come to see me in prison. I am glad I am not doing this to them anymore.



# STEP BY STEP: THE EXPERIENCES OF PRISONER REINTEGRATION IN LITHUANIA

03



MRS. INGA BALNANOSIENĖ  
Director of Lithuanian Employment Service

**Paulius was released on one of the weekends in March 2024. By Monday, he had already visited the Public Employment Service (PES) office in Kaunas. After registering for job search assistance, he explained that his goal was to find work as quickly as possible and expressed a preference for a job as a Loader.**

**Before being incarcerated in 2017, Paulius had worked for a long time in this role at a shopping centre in Kaunas. He was advised to reach out to his former employer. Considering his past work performance, his positive attitude, and the goodwill of his colleagues, the company said yes. Paulius has been successfully employed there ever since.**

This is just one of several such stories from Lithuania where people returning from incarceration manage to find employment or create their job opportunities – often with the help of PES consultants. However, the journey is not always as smooth or quick as it was for Paulius.

“The integration of these individuals into the labour market is not easy, and success depends not only on their determination and realistic assessment of their situation. Often, our specialists’ support is needed,” said Inga Balnanosienė, Director of the Lithuania PES. “By selecting the right path for returning to the labour market, we create opportunities to celebrate intermediate achievements, which boost self-confidence, strengthen trust in others, and motivate individuals not to give up halfway.”

According to long-term data from the Lithuanian PES, individuals in this group often lack high career ambitions. Even if they have acquired some qualifications during their time in

prison, they often tell specialists during interviews that they are looking for unskilled work. They most commonly choose sectors such as construction, services, or manufacturing. In general, some of them are reluctant to mention their qualifications during registration and this arises because social stigma is one of the main barriers: society’s perception of former prisoners is often negative, which directly impacts their self-esteem and confidence. Additionally, the need for security and the desire to avoid pressure is a natural reaction when a person feels vulnerable. They choose jobs that seem less socially risky and do not require constant proof of their worth.

The emotional and psychological exhaustion experienced during imprisonment can also be a significant obstacle – it reduces their motivation to plan for the future or pursue long-term goals.

A common characteristic of this group is the limited desire to integrate into the labour market. The biggest recurring risks are the temptation to return to their previous, often toxic, environment. Some individuals, unable to adapt in Lithuania, choose to move abroad.

“We are well aware of all this. The solutions are clear. Therefore, targeted consultations with a specialist help to increase motivation to work and to hold on to life. Offering the opportunity to retrain, acquire new

→ Mrs. Inga Balnanosienė is the Director of the Employment Service under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour of Lithuania and the First Vice-Chair of the European PES Network. With over 20 years of experience in public employment services and project management, she specializes in labour market policy, employment services, and workforce development. Mrs. Balnanosienė has extensive expertise in employment policy, vocational guidance, and youth employment initiatives, actively contributing to EU employment strategies and international best practices.

Mrs. Balnanosienė actively participates in drafting new employment service methodologies and policies, assessing performance indicators, and her contributions extend to the preparation of the National Reform Program, aligning Lithuania’s employment initiatives with the EU Employment Strategy and the National Program for the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF).



skills or qualifications at the right time allows individuals to take pride in the positive results they achieve,” said Inga Balnanosienė.

## THE MISSION IS TO HELP ESTABLISH ONESELF

Jonas walked out of the prison gates on 19th July 2023. By the following day he had already arrived at the PES office in Druskininkai. He expressed a desire to find unskilled work in the construction sector. All his work experience had been gained while in prison. The first step was to create a CV with the help of a specialist. Then came more useful advice Paulius was eager to learn. Not only did he diligently participate in training, but he also asked questions about how to conduct himself during a job interview.

He realistically assessed employers' views on his work experience and the negative responses he received. Understanding that finding work in the construction sector in the short term would be difficult, Jonas took a temporary position as a general worker in several shopping centres. After a few months, he was offered a position at a construction company. He has been working there ever since.

Another case comes from Prienai region in central Lithuania. Marius returned from prison at the end of 2022. When he registered at the PES, he informed them that he wanted to work in the construction sector. At that time, he obtained a category B driving licence for a car, as his remote rural home made it difficult to find work. Despite failing in securing a job after contacting employers based on the specialist's suggestions, his motivation remained strong. By the spring of 2023, Marius started his own business in the construction sector under a business licence. He works like this up till now.

Darius, who lives near the industrial town of Jonava, served his sentence and, upon returning from prison, registered with the PES at the start of 2023. He had debts and was eager to start working as soon as possible. Unfortunately, he was unable to find permanent employment right away. He was offered the opportunity

to participate in the Employment Promotion Program. For six months, Darius worked on temporary jobs at the local municipality office. Later, he was employed by a municipal company for temporary environmental maintenance work. Although he has not yet found permanent employment, he remains hopeful, active, and motivated. Thanks to his responsible approach to work, he earns a living through temporary jobs and is gradually paying off his debts.

## HOW TO ASSIST THEM?

Similar stories can be found throughout Lithuania, but the Kaunas region stands out based on the integration indicators of returning individuals and other beneficial experiences – partly due to a few specific characteristics. The Department serves the area where the Alytus, Marijampolė, Pravieniškis 1 and Pravieniškis 2 prisons of the Lithuanian Prison Service are located. Employment market services are provided to employers in this area, including those working in these institutions.

The PES portal ([www.uzt.lt](http://www.uzt.lt)) posts job vacancies for prison officers, social workers, psychologists, and others, which are often difficult to fill due to the specific nature of the work, the qualifications and physical requirements for candidates, and the need for training before employment. Specialists from the Kaišiadorys, Alytus, and Marijampolė offices participate in activities organised by the prisons for inmates, presenting the services of the Employment Service to individuals nearing the end of their sentences.

In 2024, the staff of Alytus Prison organised an introductory visit to the facility for employees of the city's PES office. This was a very productive meeting, during which employment market services were presented, and collaboration was discussed from various angles, including assistance in finding employers for the employment of individuals with convictions. It was agreed to work closely together in the future.

One of the key tools helping individuals returning to freedom adjust and avoid past mistakes is vocational training. The number of people from this target group in the Kaunas region who have participated in such programs and successfully found employment continues to grow each year. For example, a man in the Jonava office completed a non-formal vocational training program in decorative plant cultivation and landscaping at the Kaunas Botanical Garden, where he undertook an internship. He later chose to pursue self-employment. Meanwhile, a client returning from prison in the Kaišiadorys office acquired a carpentry qualification and was employed under a labour contract. In the Marijampolė office, a man returning from prison is participating in vocational training to gain a qualification as a Painter.

“The most important and common detail in all success stories is the inner mindset, personal motivation, and ability to adapt to the changed environment of the person returning to freedom, and their ability to recall social skills. Their state of mind and inner readiness to face changes and challenges after some time of imprisonment is obvious, both in the sense of daily routines and in feelings of being ‘a stranger’ among the others. Of course, support from loved ones and family members also plays a crucial role, as does timely, high-quality professional assistance,” explained Inga Balnanosienė, outlining the key elements of the success formula.

For the processes of labour market integration to run more smoothly and efficiently, continuous collaboration with social partners is essential. Therefore, all PES offices across the country maintain close ties with the divisions of the Lithuanian Probation Service operating in their respective areas and participate in consultative meetings. They also maintain connections with other social partners who provide support to vulnerable individuals and implement resocialisation projects.

Years of effort are bearing fruit. Slowly, but steadily, employers' attitudes towards individuals returning from incarceration are changing.

Naturally, employers primarily assess how hiring such a person might affect the overall team dynamic. However, it has been observed that when evaluating a potential future employee, they are increasingly considering the candidate's professional skills, social abilities, and motivation, rather than focusing on their past.

In the regions, groups of employers are emerging who foster this positive attitude, conducting job interviews with individuals returning from incarceration in a friendly and professional manner, and hiring suitable candidates. Those returning from prison are employed in companies participating in the Employment Promotion Program for temporary work. Farmers are also willing to hire motivated individuals from this target group for seasonal work, particularly those who face mobility challenges and live in remote areas.

## THEORY AND PRACTICE

The Lithuania PES has developed and effectively uses several key tools to assist socially vulnerable individuals trying to reintegrate into the labour market after serving a prison sentence. One such tool is Case Management.

A person returning to freedom faces challenges from the very first days and requires services that are somewhat different from those offered to other job seekers. The application of the Case Management principle at the Employment Service for this target group allows for the provision of comprehensive support. Its aim and purpose are to address the specific barriers that hinder individuals from finding employment.

A specially trained Case Manager evaluates not only the client's professional abilities but also the key obstacles they face at this stage of life. These include social isolation, the ability to rebuild trust, and establishing relationships in the labour market. The process involves standard assessment and planning, as well as continuous monitoring to identify issues in a timely manner and help resolve them together.

How does it work? First, an individual employment action plan is created. This plan is tailored to each person's specific needs, abilities, and circumstances, considering any potential barriers. It includes various services and activities designed to help overcome these obstacles and ease the individual's adaptation to the labour market.

There is close collaboration with local authorities, which allows for the coordination of services and the provision of personalised support, ensuring that everyone receives help tailored to their needs. Working together strengthens the consistency of services, as specialists can adapt flexibly to each individual situation.

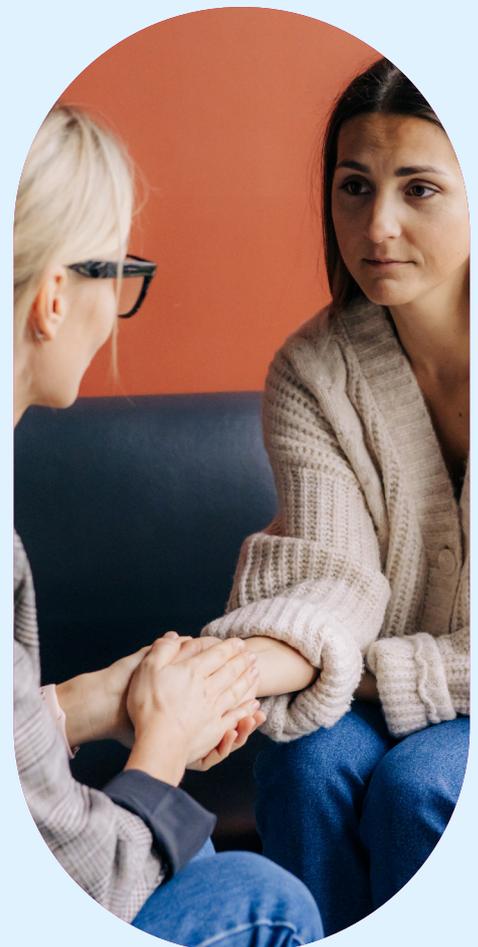
If the consultant sees a need, they can recommend active labour market policy measures that increase employment opportunities by matching job supply and demand. These include vocational training services: skills development, training, career guidance, and job skills enhancement. All of this not only helps to update professional knowledge but also enables individuals to acquire new skills, thereby increasing their chances of securing the desired job as quickly as possible.

In early 2024, the PES began working more closely with the Lithuanian Prison Service (LPS). A cooperation agreement was signed with the aim of promoting the smoother social and professional reintegration of prisoners after serving their sentences. It includes joint efforts to improve communication skills of the PES specialists, as well as practical and professional competencies in working with inmates preparing for release. It also aims to organise informational consultations that will help this target group better prepare for integration into the labour market and society. In this work, Lecturers from the Lithuanian Prison Service will conduct training for Employment Service employees aimed at improving the communication skills, practical, and professional communication competencies of specialists working with inmates. After the training, specialists will be able to choose the appropriate communication

style and forms when working with inmates, assess factors that may complicate communication, apply open-ended questions and active listening skills, manage and interpret non-verbal communication signals properly, recognize various emotions and feelings, express empathy appropriately, provide feedback, as well as reinforce professional ethics standards and knowledge about positive professional relationships in the workplace.

The goal is also to foster the professional growth of PES specialists, ensuring the quality of services provided to individuals preparing for or who have already been released from prison, and improving their integration processes into society, thus reducing social exclusion.

In 2025, several events are planned, including informational meetings in correctional facilities with inmates. During these meetings, inmates will receive individual or group consultations on labour market, career, and vocational guidance topics.





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## THE PORTRAIT OF UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE IN LITHUANIA RETURNING FROM PENAL INSTITUTIONS

On December 1, 2024, the Public Employment Service registered 95 unemployed individuals who had returned from penal institutions – the lowest number in the past five years. Compared to the same period in 2023, the number of such unemployed individuals was almost halved.

As of December 1, 2024, the most unemployed individuals returning from penal institutions were registered in Vilnius City Municipality, with 25 individuals recorded, followed by Kaunas with 13 individuals.

Most (or 95.8%) of unemployed individuals registered after returning from penal institutions are men, and only 4.2% are women.

Three-quarters of the unemployed individuals registered after returning from penal institutions are aged 25-39, a fifth are over 50, and only 4.2% are younger than 24. Compared to the situation a year ago, the number of unemployed individuals returning from penal institutions decreased across all age groups: the number of young people aged 16-24 decreased by 60%, the number of individuals aged 25-39 dropped by more than half (or 48.9%), and the number of unemployed individuals aged over 50 decreased by 44.7%.

One in two unemployed individuals returning from penal institutions has vocational training, while 42.1% have no vocational training, meaning they have not obtained vocational or higher education.

More than half (or 58.9%) of the registered unemployed have limited employment opportunities, while 40% have moderate employment prospects. Compared to December 1, 2023, the number of unemployed individuals with moderate employment prospects decreased by 41.5%, and those with limited opportunities fell by more than half (or 51.7%).

Returning from penal institutions where the period of incarceration was no less than six months, registered with unemployed status		Difference from the previous year, number	Difference from the previous year, percentage
2019-12-01	165	-	-
2020-12-01	233	68	41,2%
2021-12-01	166	-67	-28,8%
2022-12-01	117	49	-29,5%
2023-12-01	185	68	58,1%
2024-12-01	95	-90	-48,6%

Top 10 municipalities	2019-12-01	2020-12-01	2021-12-01	2022-12-01	2023-12-01	2024-12-01
Vilnius City Municipality	42	37	>>	>>	>>	>>
Kaunas City Municipality	13	26	>>	>>	>>	>>
Klaipėda City Municipality	10	3	>>	>>	>>	>>
Vilkaviškis District Municipality	1	5	>>	>>	>>	>>
Panėvėžio City Municipality	7	19	>>	>>	>>	>>
Panėvėžis District Municipality	2	2	>>	>>	>>	>>
Visaginas City Municipality	-	9	>>	>>	>>	>>
Vilnius District Municipality	5	11	>>	>>	>>	>>
Kupiškis District Municipality	2	1	>>	>>	>>	>>
Kaunas District Municipality	2	3	>>	>>	>>	>>

	2019-12-01	2020-12-01	2021-12-01	2022-12-01	2023-12-01	2024-12-01
By gender						
Women	24	26	21	6	17	4
Men	141	207	145	111	168	91
By gender						
16-24 years old	>>	>>	>>	>>	>>	>>
25-49 years old	>>	>>	>>	>>	>>	>>
50+ years old	>>	>>	>>	>>	>>	>>
By education						
Higher education	>>	>>	>>	>>	>>	>>
Vocational education	>>	>>	>>	>>	>>	>>
Without vocational training	>>	>>	>>	>>	>>	>>
By employment opportunities						
High employment opportunities	>>	>>	>>	>>	>>	>>
Moderate employment opportunities	>>	>>	>>	>>	>>	>>
Limited employment opportunities	>>	>>	>>	>>	>>	>>
N/D	>>	>>	>>	>>	>>	>>

Nearly half (or 48.4%) of the unemployed individuals returning from penal institutions would like to work in unqualified jobs. At the same time, one in seven did not specify the profession they would like to pursue. A third (or 35.8%) would prefer qualified jobs, with half of them (or 50%) wanting to work as skilled workers and craftsmen, and one in four (or 23.5%) wishing to work as equipment and machine operators or assemblers:

Qualification and main occupational groups	2019-12-01	2020-12-01	2021-12-01	2022-12-01	2023-12-01	2024-12-01
	165	233	166	117	185	95
<b>Of them:</b>						
<b>AS SKILLED WORKERS</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>High-skilled jobs</b>	0	8	3	2	6	5
Managers			1			
Specialists		4		1	5	3
Technicians and junior specialists		4	2	1	1	2
<b>Medium-skilled jobs</b>	34	49	28	33	52	29
Clerks,					1	2
Service workers and salespeople,	3	4	2	1	2	2
Skilled agricultural, forestry, and fishery workers					1	
Skilled workers and craftsmen,	19	28	15	20	33	17
Equipment and machine operators and assemblers.	12	17	11	12	15	8
<b>UNQUALIFIED WORKERS</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>N/D</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>15</b>

Top 10 jobs sought by unemployed individuals returning from penal institutions as of December 1, 2024.

	The number of job seekers
Auxiliary workers not elsewhere classified (Guard, watchman, boiler room worker, etc.)	13
Auxiliary general workers (e.g., general auxiliary worker, seasonal auxiliary worker, etc.).	9
Loaders	8
Drivers of passenger cars, taxis and vans	5
Building construction support workers	3
Manufacturing support workers not elsewhere classified	2
Painters and related trades workers	2
Advertising, marketing and sales professionals	2
Packers (by hand)	2
Janitors and workers in related professions	2

From January to November 2024, 197 individuals who had returned from places of imprisonment were employed

Over the period	2019 m.	2020 m.	2021 m.	2022 m.	2023 m.	January-November, 2024
Individuals who have returned from places of imprisonment, where the period of imprisonment was longer than 6 months	309	264	217	270	490	276
Of which: employed	157	113	184	126	239	197
Started activities under a Business Licence	39	16	11	14	47	22
Referred to the active labour market measures	16	23	18	43	24	24

# LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION AS SMART BUSINESS: THE CASE OF JUSTICE IMPACTED INDIVIDUALS

04



**MENNO BART**  
Head of Policy Advocacy, Adecco Group

The latest annual conference of the European network of Public Employment Services was focused on labour market inclusion of people with a distance to the labour market. One of the six thematic priorities of the ILO's Global Coalition for Social Justice is to address "inequalities, discrimination and exclusion".

And companies around the world are investing in their own initiatives to bring more people into the labour market. These examples show that inspired both by social justice imperatives as well as by sizeable skills and labour shortages, there is an ongoing need to tap into new talent pools. Despite what is happening in the US, it is clear that inclusion is a hot topic – although much still remains to be done.

Unfortunately, it seems that in all these efforts, one group is systematically overlooked: those euphemistically called "justice impacted individuals". In other words, people who serve or have served a prison sentence and face a return on the labour market. In reality, this may even be considered a "conscious blind spot". After all, we know it's there but for many it may be rather uncomfortable to face the issue. Could it be that labour market integration of former criminals does not align well with the idea that "prison is for punishment"?

Be that as it may, as a matter of principle, once the sentence is finalised, we believe people do have a right to reintegrate. As a society, we cannot continue punishing people after the end of their sentence. Helping them (re)enter the labour market is right for three reasons: It is socially just, we know it helps prevent recidivism (and as such it is the most cost-effective intervention for society), and it could help alleviate talent scarcity.

## WHAT CAN WE DO?

At Adecco, we see ourselves as labour market intermediaries. Our stated purpose is to Make the Future Work for Everyone. We therefore see a role for ourselves to help and promote labour market integration for these people. As our Group CEO Denis Machuel notes, remembering his time supporting an organisation which aimed to connect students with incarcerated individuals through various educational and support activities:

"I have warm memories of my years in the Genepi at the Varcès prison, near Valence. [...] We all have a responsibility to ensure a more inclusive society. At the Adecco Group, that includes offering jobs. Accessing employment is the first step towards reintegration.

"There is also another pillar, equally essential: sustainable investment in integration. Creating solid and lasting conditions that will enable integration is, once again, our collective responsibility".

Luckily, there are some good practices that we can build on at Adecco and other companies. Below, we have highlighted a number of examples of how we work with this target group in Spain, France and the UK.

→ Menno Bart is a labour market expert, working as Head of Policy Advocacy at the Adecco Group. Menno's areas of expertise include labour market flexibility and diverse forms of work, skills, labour mobility, and the impact of the digital and green "twin transitions" on the world of work.

**BRUCE ROCH**  
Global Head of Inclusion and Diversity, Adecco Group

→ Bruce Roch is the Head of Inclusion and Diversity at Adecco, with expertise in developing diverse talent pools and fostering inclusive workforce solutions. He holds a Master's degree in Management with a specialisation in Human Resources and Marketing.



Before delving into the lessons we can learn from those examples, it is important to note that business should not sit on the seat of the judge. It is up to the justice system to determine the appropriate sentence, and to determine whether someone is ready to fully or partially re-enter society. What seems clear though is that opening the prison door for work has a number of benefits and is a key driver of reducing risk of recidivism.

We see this, for example, in France: Upon their release, former inmates face numerous difficulties: isolation, lack of housing, lack of qualifications, etc. Without support, the chances of finding a job and building a life project are very low. According to French NGO Wake-Up Café, studies conducted in Europe show how much access to employment helps prevent recidivism: 70 to 85% of former inmates without training or work return to prison, while this rate varies from 15 to 33% for those who have a job.

We strongly believe that business and the justice chain should get closer to better understand each other and see where there might be potential versus risk.

## CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME

The road to building meaningful integration programs is not without obstacles.

One challenge we have encountered is that in our view, preparing for reintegration starts already during prison time, but there isn't always enough attention on the side of the justice system. We believe more attention to reintegration is needed. We call upon those responsible to be open to social innovation. One example of such innovation would be by experimenting with work experience during a person's sentence, or alternatively, by taking a more skills-based hiring approach.

Once a person is released from prison, they face a chicken-and-egg problem: before they can even begin to think about work, they need to be sure that housing and other framework conditions are at least temporarily ensured as first prerequisites for

reintegration. Society should step in to give them that secure basis from where to apply for a job. It is hard to be a reliable and dedicated colleague when you don't have a place to stay. Public authorities could for example support by making the connection to housing providers, employment agencies like Adecco, mental health support and other relevant players.

Offering housing and other support does highlight another challenge that people may face: public bias and a negative public perception. While this is not easy to change, we should have a public conversation about changing our attitude to people with a criminal past. This conversation should be a multi-stakeholder dialogue involving policy makers, employers, employment services, workers' representatives and others. A right to re-start is much needed.

The other side of this coin is that there may also be reluctance from the side of the individual that needs to be overcome before any labour market integration is possible. Some people may need to be supported to change their mindset. A life in crime could offer high risk but also offers the possibility of high reward. This is quite a contrast with a life that may at first offer less immediate reward but could instead offer longer term security and career opportunities. Not everybody may immediately see and understand that longer term prospect without the proper guidance. Agencies like Adecco could support this mindset shift by raising awareness, sharing information, and showcasing opportunities.

## WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT CAN WE OFFER?

Adecco offers support to millions of jobseekers every year. These include people who may need a little help in being hired. After all, being a great cook or an amazing coder does not automatically mean that you're good at building an appealing CV or presenting yourself in a job interview. Our recruitment professionals offer their support, but we also have dedicated tools available, such as our AI-powered CV Builder.

At Adecco, within our "inclusion" solutions, we do not have a dedicated approach specifically for justice impacted individuals. First of all, we believe that we want to support all individuals, regardless of their specific background. Second of all, there is not a one-size-fits-all solution. We need to provide tailored support to people trying to integrate in the labour market.

Once someone is ready to enter the labour market, it helps to have someone by your side who knows their way around. Local labour market insights can help people understand what type of jobs are available, and what industries might be open to someone with a certain skillset or even certain personal preferences.

Not everybody has the right skills to be successful immediately though, and especially people who have been away from the labour market for a longer time may need some re- or upskilling. Here, reskilling implies learning a new skill or a new job, whereas upskilling is more focused on refreshing your skills in an area where you already have some experience. Adecco often has access to training that fits labour market demand and knows how to get funding for those training courses.

Finally, Adecco and agencies like us also perform another function on the labour market. As recruitment experts, we are better able to assess and assume the risk of hiring justice impacted individuals. Acting as employers ourselves, our clients do not have to worry about the risk of hiring someone with a certain history. This may offer the individual an opportunity to prove themselves.

## CONCLUSIONS

Together we have a responsibility to ensure we do not ignore prisoners.

First and foremost, we need to ensure adequate support, both during the time in prison, and after that. In the end, we know that prevention is more cost-effective than recidivism and can help alleviate labour scarcity.

Reintegration can only be successful when we create strong ecosystems. Civil society, state services such as

the justice system but also Public Employment Services, and business & business alliances all have our role to play. And we can only play our role when we collaborate.

At Adecco, we strive for skills-first hiring. What is most important is if someone has the skills and the mindset to perform a particular job well. When that is the case, there is no need to dwell on past experiences. As a matter of principle, we will not speak about prison time towards clients unless required for practical or safety reasons.

Only then, we can truly Make the Future Work for Everyone.

## EXAMPLES

### The United Kingdom

Adecco UK are forming a partnership with key stakeholders in offender reform to create pathways and opportunity for those who can participate in work prior to release i.e. Release on Temporary License (ROTL) giving them the experience of the work environment & developing soft skills. For those that aren't on the ROTL program it is important to provide skills in a simulated environment that can lead to meaningful & sustainable work upon release thus making the future work for everyone. The success of this is tripartite & reliant on Prison Education, Adecco & employers.

### Spain

At Adecco, our branches are fundamental to making the future work for everyone. Last month, we caught up with Sara Villalba Sanchez, Director of Onsite Knorr Bremse in Getafe, near Madrid, who told us how she is making a difference to the lives of ex-offenders.

"Adecco is not just about recruiting.

"In my case, I have had the opportunity to collaborate with three different prisons (Ocaña I, Ocaña II and Navalcarnero) in Madrid in order to help people who have not been lucky in life and, after hitting rock bottom, are looking for a second chance in society.

"From Adecco we have assisted them in this process by teaching them how to create their own CV and

accompanying them in their job search - and even on their first day at the new job!

"The client that hires this type of profile is Knorr-Bremse, a railway sector company that collaborates with the prisons having production lines in their facilities. The inmates work doing simple jobs and, once they complete their sentence, they have enough experience to work in the factories. We currently have eight active workers, but in total we have hired about 20.

"Thanks to these initiatives we have managed to take a step further in reintegration and social work."

### France

The French Adecco Group Foundation has been celebrating the 10-year partnership with Justice Deuxième Chance (Justice Second Chance), a French NGO we have been involved with since its very beginning.

Justice Deuxième Chance aims at facilitating social and professional reinsertion for persons having been convicted for up to one year of prison. Through dedicated coaches and also through corporate volunteering, offenders are being prepared for their return on the labour market. Adecco colleagues go to prisons to prepare individual sessions on CV, interview process and opportunity search.

Improved field relations with the administration, NGO and employers facilitate return to a new life after prison and secure a lower recidivism.

Together with involved corporate members, we take part in the board of the NGO, company mirror groups, on top of the job coaching volunteering from 10 colleagues in 2024.



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# EMPOWERING THOSE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM VIA SELF-EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

05



**DAISY MILLS**  
Head of Business and Enterprise,  
RIFT Social Enterprise

The journey from prison to meaningful employment can be a long and difficult one for those who have found themselves caught up in the criminal justice system. For many, the barriers to successful reintegration into society can feel overwhelming, hopeless and even impossible.

**At RIFT Social Enterprise (RSE), we're on a mission to change that. Our goal for the work we do within the prison and probation space is to support those with lived experience of the criminal justice system in discovering new opportunities for self-employment, providing the tools and guidance necessary to build successful, sustainable careers.**

We feel that changing the narrative for people in prison is key to keeping those in custody employable. By encouraging self-belief, confidence and providing educational tools to give people hope for the future and something to look forward to upon release, we're creating an environment where people can thrive. Through initiatives like our workbook, holistic "through-the-gate" program and WISE Project, we are helping participants overcome the challenges of transitioning from prison to self-employment, ensuring that the barriers to success are not simply endured, but overcome.

We recognise that the road to employment for prisoners begins long before they are released from prison. In fact, the story of RSE begins inside the prison gates with our CEO, Andy Gullick. Having worked in the criminal justice sector for almost 25 years. Andy could see first-hand the need for an intervention that enabled people to do something they had a passion for, could apply their existing skills to, and not have the continuous worry of their past impacting their future. Many of the men would comment that they

wanted to "be their own boss" or run a business that meant they could utilise skills or vocations they'd learnt inside, work flexibly and see maximum benefit from their efforts.

Our "Through-The-Gate" program was designed with those in custody in mind and takes participants through a carefully structured journey, both in and out of prison. We've curated a "journey" that takes into consideration some of the biggest barriers that the prison population face, including high levels of neurodiversity, low reading age and low self-confidence, and have co-created resources with participants to understand what is important for them when starting a business. A resource we're incredibly proud to have co-created is our Business Start-Up Workbook. Initial research highlighted that there was a real lack of gender-specific resources in women's prisons. In response, RIFT Social Enterprise collaborated with the women we support to create a dynamic 54-page workbook designed to guide them on their self-employment journey. We used tools such as interviews, surveys and group sessions to understand what was important to include, what common barriers were and how we could work together to overcome them, as a result our workbook is able to be independently completed and is fully inclusive with needs, such as a high percentage of neurodivergence in prison, and low literacy levels taken into consideration. To evaluate the workbook's effectiveness, we have also piloted it in

→ Daisy has year-long experience in the social housing sector and background in the public procurement & construction industry. She has previously been the project lead for a cross border, EU-funded project which supported individuals into self-employment, traditional employment or further education.



a male prison. This allows us to assess its adaptability and identify specific challenges faced by men. Through this collaborative process, we've developed both a generic workbook and a gender specific version tailored to women. The key findings for us is that content was able to remain the same, just that each study group had a preference on inclusive language and imagery that they felt represented them best. We have also found our workbook to be an incredibly effective tool in assessing business viability across wider contracts, and a great learning resource when used with young people in a further education setting, especially those on a vocational course that lends itself well to self-employment, such as hair and beauty, construction and the creative sectors.

We begin by working with individuals while they are still in custody, helping them to plan for their release, build business ideas, and prepare for the transition into self-employment. This work includes developing soft skills, such as communication and problem-solving, and working on confidence, as well as more practical business skills such as how to start thinking strategically about starting a business, preparing a business plan and giving thought to next steps upon release.

One of the most inspiring parts of our work is watching real people transform their lives through self-employment. We met Sam\* in 2021 when he was coming to the end of his time in prison after being sentenced at a young age for a murder charge. Sam knew that he wanted to start his own painting and decorating business upon release, so in his final three months of his sentence, he was referred to RSE for support. We worked with Sam via PurpleVisits, a secure video calling platform used within the prison system, to match him with a suitable Business Start-Up Advisor, unpick his business idea, develop a clear business plan, build his personal brand, and understand the financial aspects of starting a business. All of these were tasks he could start thinking about whilst still inside to equip him to start on the right foot upon release. He completed our workbook and told us that it was great to have something that made him feel so inspired and

excited for what was next.

Our program covers not just business support, but also support around confidence, emotional resilience and wellbeing, which are key parts of rehabilitation and also really important aspects of becoming a business owner. This was very important as Sam reintegrated into society after such a long time inside that he knew that his dedicated Business Start-Up Advisor was at the end of the phone when needed. We worked with Sam on his digital literacy skills, to teach him how to use Microsoft Teams, how to build a logo and a website and how to get his business online via social media.

Throughout the 12 months on program with us that began upon release, Sam went from strength to strength with his business and found so much value in his monthly support sessions, our interactive webinars and e-learning platform, as well as our free of charge tax return at the end of the year as Sam was a sole trader.

Towards the end of time on program, Sam told us: "I would like to take the time to say thank you so much, so far and beyond. I really appreciate how you've helped me and taught me how to be self-employed. I really couldn't thank you more, you've given motivation and boosted my vision. I'm staying driven now and only way is up for me, thanks to you."

For us, it's always been key that we stay in-the-know on the day-to-day of prison life. Two thirds of our Senior Leadership Team have a place on Prison Employment Advisory Boards (EABs) which are committees designed to advise, support and challenge prisons on their training and employment offer to prisoners and prison leavers. We're also really proud to say that twenty percent of our customer facing staff have lived experience of the criminal justice system themselves. This involvement allows us to stay informed about the latest trends, policies, and innovations that could impact individuals we support, ensuring that our work is always in line with the most up-to-date best practices and needs of participants.

We strive to put participants at the heart of our service and are currently working on a program called WISE (Women Into Self-Employment) specifically across female prisons in the UK. This program is an action learning initiative dedicated to empowering women through self-employment. With this project, our aim is to bring positive change to the prison system and advocate for the integration of self-employment support into core prison education programs. By adapting the action learning approach, we are taking a dynamic approach to problem solving and social learning by encouraging groups to come together to focus on real opportunities and challenges faced by women in prison. By using a collaborative approach, we're able to work together with those we support to shape the future of our service delivery and use insightful questioning, reflecting and collaborative learning for a shared goal of improving education for women in prisons. We're hoping to influence national practice by listening to what our participants themselves say that they would like from a self-employment service, and us adapting and refining our service delivery accordingly.

As we continue to expand our impact, we look forward to working with more individuals, businesses, and communities to make lasting change. If we can provide the tools, mentorship, and belief in their potential, we know that people with lived experience of the criminal justice system can not only enter the workforce – they can change the game entirely. For more information on our work and to get involved, visit [www.riftse.co.uk](http://www.riftse.co.uk) or get in touch via [dmills@riftse.co.uk](mailto:dmills@riftse.co.uk).



# BRIDGING THE GAP: EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT FOR FORMER INMATES

To mitigate the risk of recidivism, smooth reintegration into society following a period of detention is crucial. Sustainable employment is a key factor in this process. Experts suggest that preparation for reintegration should begin on the first day of detention.

Addressing the causes of criminal behavior through specialized services like substance abuse rehabilitation, deradicalization programs, psychological follow-up, and debt mediation is essential. Additionally, time in detention should be used productively to acquire skills for future employment.

Employment plays a crucial role in the successful reintegration of (ex-)detainees and is often a prerequisite for early or conditional release. In Belgium, a network of public and multidisciplinary private actors collaborates to support this reintegration process. Among these actors, Actiris, the Public Employment Service of the Brussels Capital Region, stands out by funding three private organisations dedicated to guiding detainees, ex-detainees and other justice impacted jobseekers towards employment

The funding is done through a call for proposals, which was first launched in 2016 for implementation over the period 2017-2021 and again in 2021 for 2022-2025. It aims for a comprehensive, integrated, and flexible guidance pathway for job seekers facing significant barriers to labor market entry due to specific circumstances. In addition to the above mentioned target group, the call also focused on three other target groups: illiterate individuals, people living in extreme poverty, and those with disabilities or other (psycho-) medical issues. Vulnerable individuals

often belong to multiple of the 4 subgroups simultaneously and face various hindering factors such as social isolation, discrimination, debt due to their situation, and depression. The approach to addressing these phenomena differs per subgroup, as social service providers have developed expertise and a network of social actors around what can be considered the primary issues for each individual.

In reaction to the project call, prospective partners submitted detailed project proposals for the guidance of (only) one of 4 target groups, in which they had to demonstrate their expertise. Prospective partners submitted detailed project proposals in a template dossier with targeted questions and were carefully selected by an experienced selection committee. This committee evaluated the proposals based on relevance, quality of design, quality of execution, coherence, effectiveness, and efficiency.

Although each partner has a unique approach to a custom-made guidance trajectory for its chosen target group, Actiris demands that the process starts with a thorough analysis of the job seekers' situation. The guidance should offer at least the following four stages, included in the trajectory depending on the beneficiary's needs: addressing preconditions and/or barriers related to the target group's issues, taking stock and developing the

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Operations Manager, Public Employment Service  
Brussels

→ After 16 years working in sales, marketing, and events in the private sector, Muriel started working for Actiris in 2015. Here, Muriel has always worked in Partnerships, first as a coordinator of partnerships at a local level ("jobhouse-coordinator") and then as manager of the Network Support Unit. Muriel's team oversees providing access and training to partners in tools designed to register activities with jobseekers directly in their digital files with Actiris. It provides methodological support to partners in terms of executing their contracts with Actiris and is responsible for monitoring the registered partnership activities.



socio-professional project, developing tools for and promoting job searching, and following up with the person after securing a job/internship/ placement/training/studies. All stages of the guidance are registered in the jobseekers' digital file with Actiris by his or her caseworker.

Providing a guidance trajectory for justice-impacted job seekers requires knowledge of the penitentiary system and an understanding of the target audience's situation, whether they are in or out of prison. Service providers must have a well-developed methodology taking into account the specific situation of this target group and must be flexible. They also need a robust network of social organisations that cater to the same target audience, such as providers of temporary housing post-release, mental health centers, debt mediators and rehabilitation centers.

It is crucial that the job goals of the job seekers are realistic, meaning they should be aware of the types of jobs where a criminal record might be a barrier, while also not unnecessarily discriminating against themselves when opportunities do exist. Our partner organisations prospect employers in view of placing their future clients and case workers know where to look first, often in critical sectors known for labor shortages or in social economy. It is illegal to demand a clean criminal record from a prospective employee unless explicitly permitted by law and so in some cases, caseworkers encourage their clients to assert their rights and inform employers about anti-discrimination laws, especially if the job or sector in question is not exempt. Unfortunately, the lack of flexibility for individuals on conditional release or with an electronic bracelet serves as a valid argument for some employers to reject them.

As mentioned before, Actiris has selected and contracted 3 experienced multidisciplinary organisations to provide guidance to a total of 400 justice impacted jobseekers per year. Two of these partners often begin personalized guidance within the prison (intra-muros) to prepare for early release,

and continue this support post-release. The third organisation focuses on providing intensive, individual guidance outside the prison (extra-muros), including to detainees under electronic monitoring or on penitentiary leave. This guidance frequently involves immersion in a real work environment, particularly in the construction sector, which is experiencing significant labor shortages in the region.

Even without considering their criminal record, the majority of the target group is significantly distanced from the labor market due to low educational levels, poor language & digital skills and a lack of understanding of workplace norms. It is not surprising that all 3 of our partners combine guidance with (vocational) training activities. During the process, when discussing the determination of a realistic career project, attention is given to any additional competencies that may need to be acquired. As clients – caseworkers encourage their clients – in view of increasing their chances on the job market- to develop soft (social-) skills or/and vocational skills, but also digital and language gaps are common obstacles being tackled. Often, there are some educational programs available in prison but sometimes prisoners prefer to spend their time in prison on paid work so they can start paying off their debts.

Enrolment in a training program (outside) or starting a job is an important condition for obtaining conditional release. Unfortunately, the timing of the court appearance must be right to take advantage of this. From our partners we learn that the unpredictability of the system, which is most likely due to the staff shortages courts and prisons are known for, is a major frustration for caseworkers and their clients. Frequent postponements often make it too late to enroll in the program or start the job on time. Additionally, caseworkers' appointments for coaching clients in prison are often canceled due to a lack of available prison guards needed for the practical organisation thereof.

However, despite the many challenges they face, we observe tremendous dedication and passion among the caseworkers involved in this project

with our partners. Most of the people active on this project have been working with (former) detainees for over ten years.

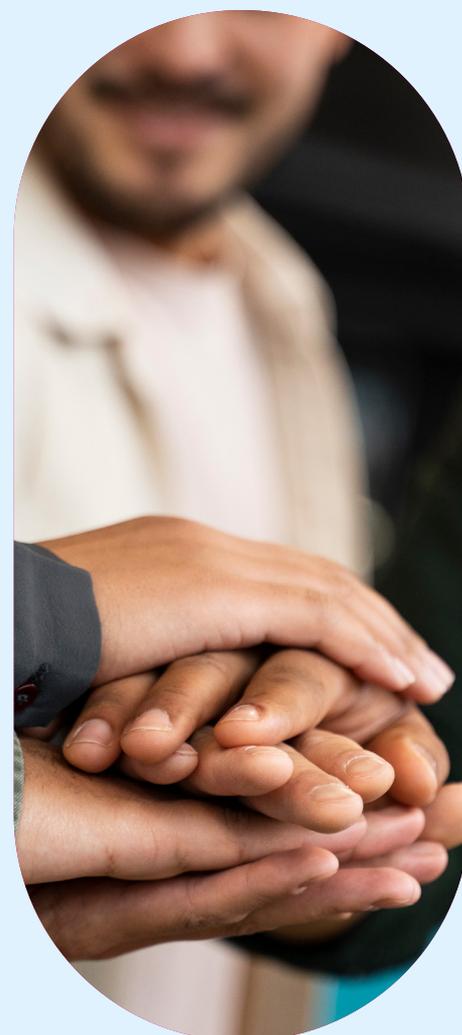
Currently, Actiris is conducting an intermediary evaluation of the first 3 years of the partnership, and we can cautiously report an average employment outflow rate of just under 30% per year for this target group.

I do believe that through the combined efforts of Actiris and its private partners, (ex-)inmates are given a better chance in the job market and a successful reintegration into society.

**Info:** [actiris.be](https://actiris.be)

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# EXPANDING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR JUSTICE-IMPACTED INDIVIDUALS

## The persistent challenges of Reentry and Recidivism

Each year, roughly 600,000 individuals are released from prison across the United States, with nearly **93% seeking quality employment**<sup>1</sup>. Despite these intentions, individuals often struggle to find work after prison due to several factors: a lack of education, non-existent or inadequate job skills, and the stigma of having a criminal record, which **often leads to higher rates of recidivism**.

According to the [Bureau of Justice Statistics](#)<sup>2</sup>, nearly 448,400 justice-impacted people were released from state and federal correctional facilities in 2022. However, research indicates that **roughly 82% of these individuals**<sup>3</sup> are likely to be rearrested within 10 years of their release.

Addressing recidivism effectively requires tackling several key barriers such as lack of education or life skills, unemployment, substance abuse, and mental health issues. While traditional reentry programs can help improve their success rates, their implementation is often hampered due to limited staffing, funding, and resources in many organisations and government agencies.

### INNOVATIVE WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS FOR JUSTICE-IMPACTED INDIVIDUALS

To address this issue, software developer [Geographic Solutions](#) developed the Virtual OneStop Reentry Employment Opportunities (**VOS REO**)<sup>4</sup> to not only break this cycle of recidivism, but also provide soon-to-be-released individuals with the online tools and resources needed to connect with employers, find high-paying employment opportunities, and

ultimately reenter society with a plan to stay out.

While the correlation between pre-release employment and reentry success has not been tested nationwide, the introduction of VOS REO enables state correctional departments to explore this concept on a deeper level. This approach shifts the focus from solely investing in job training to also providing justice-impacted individuals with modern job search tools and resources - emphasising the importance of pre-release job exploration and skills development.

In 2024, this system became the foundation of a multi-organisation partnership between Geographic Solutions, the [California Prison Industry Authority](#) (CALPIA)<sup>5</sup>, and the [California Employment Development Department](#)<sup>6</sup> to create the [Entry to Employment \(E2E\) Network](#)<sup>7</sup>.

### NAVIGATING TECHNOLOGICAL AND SECURITY CHALLENGES

Throughout the development process of the E2E Network, Geographic Solutions was faced with two primary challenges: first, how to securely bring modern online job search tools to justice-impacted individuals,



PAUL TOOMEY  
CEO, Geographic Solutions

→ Paul Toomey has over 33 years of experience of developing integrated software for government agencies and educational institutions across the United States and overseas. In 1992, Paul founded Geographic Solutions, and has served as the company's president since inception. He also holds multiple patents for software inventions that manage all federally-funded partner programs under WIOA, labor exchange, job aggregation, labor market information, service and fund tracking, human services, and unemployment insurance benefits.



1 <https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/data-deep-dive-the-workforce-impact-of-second-chance-hiring-3>  
 2 <https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/prisoners-2022-statistical-tables>  
 3 [https://bjs.ojp.gov/BJS\\_PUB/rpr24s0810yup0818/Web%20content/508%20compliant%20PDFs](https://bjs.ojp.gov/BJS_PUB/rpr24s0810yup0818/Web%20content/508%20compliant%20PDFs)  
 4 <https://www.geographicsolutions.com/VOSREO>  
 5 <https://www.calpia.ca.gov/>  
 6 <https://edd.ca.gov/>  
 7 <https://go.geographicsolutions.com/casestudies-calpia>



and second, how to assist them in overcoming social stigmas and employment barriers.

Geographic Solutions' web-based software solutions are usually designed for public-facing state and local government agencies. With the E2E Network operating within prisons, Geographic Solutions had to adapt its workforce development software suite, VOS Sapphire, to meet the strict security requirements of CALPIA and any correctional facility across America.

To meet these requirements, Geographic Solutions designed the E2E Network's infrastructure to operate off a secure desktop connection. The company also configured the platform to allow justice-impacted individuals to use the state's workforce system, while also restricting internet, direct messaging, and public email access.

All searches made by inmates are monitored by authorized staff facilitators, who can control search results, exclude key phrases or words, and block visibility to certain employers. To address security concerns with certain documents, such as résumés and cover letters, all communications – whether between the individual, staff member, or employer – are handled internally, under correctional staff supervision.

Another challenge the Geographic Solutions' team faced was helping justice-involved individuals overcome social stigmas around incarceration. To help break this stigma and further increase employment outcomes, Geographic Solutions worked with CALPIA and state officials to build a database of trusted employers who want to provide individuals with a second chance.

### **MAKING AN IMPACT WITH SECOND CHANCE OPPORTUNITIES**

Unlike other reentry platforms, this second-chance employer list is directly connected to CalJOBS, the state of California's labour exchange system<sup>8</sup>. This enables users to securely search for occupations that align with their interests, skills, and values even after their release.

The platform also analyses their work experience and training they completed during incarceration to provide more accurate job matches. Labour market data helps individuals consider income potential and growth, helping to determine if their desired profession will meet their earning needs. For employers, the E2E Network opens access to a new talent pipeline that is trained yet often overlooked. The platform not only benefits employers and state officials but also the broader community.

The positive impact that the E2E Network can have on an inmate's life was demonstrated when several incarcerated individuals tested the platform launched on 12 June 2024. These tests were highly successful and ultimately helped these individuals

secure gainful employment. One example is Douglas Woodall, the first participant who was hired using the E2E network while incarcerated at California State Prison, Solano. Woodall was hired by a leading manufacturing company in mid-April.

"The E2E system helped me land a job," said Woodall. "I was able to build a professional résumé (CV) and get an early start applying for jobs in prison which was beneficial in the job hunt."

To date, the [E2E Network](#) has been implemented in 12 state prison facilities, enabling nearly 242 registered inmates to search for quality employment before their release. In the coming months, CALPIA and its partners plan to deploy the E2E Network throughout the entire state of California which maintains over 30 prisons.

With the addition of the E2E Network, VOS REO has been deployed in 22 prisons across California, Virginia, and Connecticut. In 2025, Geographic Solutions will continue to expand its footprint across the nation and globally.

The E2E Network represents a step forward in addressing one of the most challenging aspects of the corrections sector: successful reintegration into society.

This platform offers more than modern job search tools, it provides tangible pathways from prison back into society and ultimately into the workplace. This collaborative initiative demonstrates that with the right tools, support, and opportunities, justice-involved individuals can rebuild their lives, contribute meaningfully to their community, and break the cycle of recidivism.

[Click here to learn more<sup>9</sup>](#) about how the E2E Network is creating second chances for justice-impacted job seekers.

<sup>8</sup> [https://edd.ca.gov/en/ Jobs\\_and\\_Training/Caljobs](https://edd.ca.gov/en/ Jobs_and_Training/Caljobs)

<sup>9</sup> <https://go.geographicsolutions.com/casestudies-calpia>

# A SECOND CHANCE SOLUTION

08



JEFFREY D. KORZENIK  
Chief Economist, US Banking Sector and Writer

**We have a structural labor shortage and a resulting economic challenge. The solution to that challenge is both a financial and societal opportunity: improving the economic inclusion of people with criminal records.**

**The intentional hiring of people with such a background, known as ‘second chance’ or ‘fair chance’ hiring, is a key solution to labor shortages that also promotes public safety, and for those ready, is the path to rehabilitation and full participation in society. Even those who have had a negative experience hiring from this group should examine whether they approached this pool with a strategy that recognized the need for a differentiated talent acquisition and talent support tactics appropriate for this population.**

Most countries of the industrialised world shared a similar demographic trajectory: a high rate of births following World War II and a subsequent sharp rate of decline in recent decades. The pace of births has fallen so much that, of the 38 countries in the OECD, only Israel has a fertility rate sufficient to even replace its native-born population. For different reasons, this is also occurring in emerging economies, whether in the aftermath of China’s one-child policy, or through strong preference shifts in populous nations like Brazil. While there is no inherently ‘right’ fertility rate, economies and societies suffer dislocation when birth rates decline at this speed.

We have no modern peacetime precedent for the ageing of so many countries and the outright declining populations already starting in nations as diverse as Japan, Uruguay, Spain and elsewhere. Understanding the

economic implications and potential opportunities should be on the mind of business leaders and policymakers everywhere.

Workforce growth is fundamental to aggregate economic growth. Economists agree that the building blocks of economic growth are the ability to increase both the number of workers and their productivity. But our history of falling birth rates holds back growth. Moreover, when older workers retire, they don’t stop being consumers – but they leave a hole in the workforce that is getting harder to fill as working age populations are shrinking relative to the total base of consumers. This labor shortage slows overall global growth and can drive inflation. At the company level labor shortages mean that firms struggle to meet the staffing needs to service their existing customer base or grow.

While we cannot do anything to change the birth rates of twenty and thirty years ago, we can ensure that we ‘leave no worker behind.’ That is, make sure no individual or group faces unnecessary barriers to working and advancement. When individuals are marginalized, either involuntarily unemployed, are undertrained, or for whatever reason can’t contribute to their full potential, all of us suffer from worse economic growth. Conversely, creating pathways for advancement benefits us all.

→ Jeff Korzenik is a prominent advocate for the intentional hiring of people with criminal records. A member of the U.S. Council on Criminal Justice and chief economist for a large American bank, Korzenik is the author of ‘Untapped Talent: How Second Chance Hiring Helps Your Business and the Community’ (HarperCollins Leadership, April 2021).



While varying from country to country, few groups are as marginalized as workers who have a criminal record. While the U.S. may lead among free nations in rates of incarceration, it is by no means just an American problem; the UK has the highest rate in Western Europe and both share remarkably similar rates of unemployment and recidivism among those impacted by their justice systems<sup>1</sup>. Many Eastern European, South American and select other countries have criminal justice systems that leave sizeable segments of their population with criminal records and curtailed economic opportunities<sup>2</sup>.

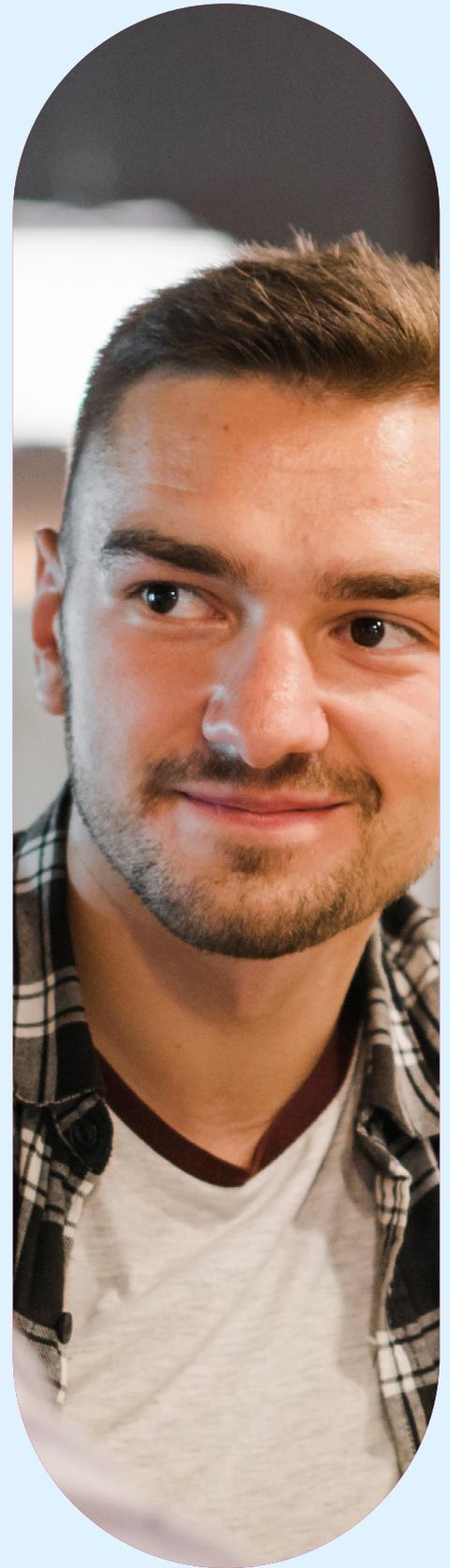
Second chance or fair chance hiring – tapping and developing the talent of those who have, yes, earned a criminal record, but have also fulfilled their judicial obligations, is a tremendous labor opportunity. In the US, for example, it is the single largest category of overlooked worker, a recognition of both the size of this potential source of human capital (70+ million<sup>3</sup> with some sort of criminal record, some 19 million<sup>4</sup> of which have a conviction for a more serious crime, known in the US as a ‘felony’), and the degree to which this group has been overlooked. Other countries may have smaller opportunities with this population, but virtually every country can improve talent practices.

The first step is to recognize that this nontraditional talent pool requires a different approach, both in terms of finding people who are a good fit for the hiring company, and ensuring that the employee can thrive. Successful ‘second chance employers’ typically partner with community-based organisations to help them find viable candidates and help provide wraparound services, such as finding affordable housing and transportation.

Such services recognize that many people with records are in dire poverty and may have lived lives without mentors or coaching.

While many employers partner with outside service providers, some augment this by providing internal staff with roles variously described as social workers, life coaches or navigators. While this is surely an investment of effort and often money, people who are ready to prove they are more than their worst mistakes can be incredibly engaged and loyal workers, offering a strong return on any investment<sup>5</sup>.

Why should companies establish second chance hiring practices? For the reason businesses should consider any other talent strategy: to broaden their pool of applicants and ensure that they can hire the best candidate for the role.



1 <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/global/2024.html>

2 <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmworpen/58/58.pdf> and <https://bjs.ojp.gov/data-collection/recidivism-state-prisoners>

3 cited estimate of the National Employment Law Project

4 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5996985/>

5 The evidence is largely through the experience of small companies and case studies.

<https://www.hbs.edu/faculty/Pages/item.aspx?num=57027>

<https://secondchancebusinesscoalition.org/>

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/10XQzhqYnFpd4CvT5z5c9xpN\\_IPP4G8K/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/10XQzhqYnFpd4CvT5z5c9xpN_IPP4G8K/view)

In terms of return on investment of support services, there's a private social worker network in Michigan that tries to measure the return on investment – they estimate 330% ([https://www.grsource.org/\\_files/ugd/ed831c\\_d4062bff6c634f9d899901423069f20f.pdf](https://www.grsource.org/_files/ugd/ed831c_d4062bff6c634f9d899901423069f20f.pdf))

# HOW RECYCLING LIVES IS CHANGING THE FUTURE FOR EX-OFFENDERS

09



KATIE UPTON  
Communications at Recycling Lives

“Recycling Lives gives you the things you need to build yourself up,” says Michael, an ex-offender who’s turned his life around with the help of Recycling Lives Charity & Social Enterprise.

The Charity delivers one of the most successful offender rehabilitation programs in the country. It empowers people like Michael to change their lives for the better, by equipping them with all the skills, opportunities and resources they need.

Its prison program is unique in its approach and results, working alongside complementary community-based programs for ex-offenders, people in recovery from addiction, and those who have been, or are at risk of, being homeless.

Working in eleven prisons across the North West, North Wales, Yorkshire and the Midlands, it achieves reduced reoffending rates of <5% and supports up to 70% of its participants into employment – according to its 2023/24 Impact Report<sup>1</sup>.

It runs seven recycling workshops across six of these – HMPs Kirkham, Lancaster Farms, Buckley Hall, Hatfield, Sudbury, and Styal. Participants are supported for at least six months prior to release, receiving guidance and advocacy for every area of their life with a view to moving into work and independent housing on release. The same wrap-around support is available to men and women working in prison-led workshops in HMPs Humber, Wealstun, Berwyn, and Foston Hall, too. And in HMP Preston, the Charity offers through-

the-gate support for men as they prepare for release and then resettle in the community

## REAL-WORLD WORK EXPERIENCE

Work is key to the offering, giving people the chance to improve skills, gain work experience, and earn an enhanced wage within prison. This also sets people up with the steady routine and structure that supports reduced risk of reoffending on release. The Charity has built up a network of employer partners who then take on participants on ROTL (Release On Temporary License allows inmates to leave prison temporarily, under license conditions, to attend work, home visits, or healthcare appointments) or after release, including businesses across the construction, manufacturing, logistics and care sectors.

## ACCESS TO SAVINGS

Another central tenet to the Charity’s offering is access to a savings scheme, for participants to set aside at least 40% of their earnings ready for release. This sees participants save up at least £10 per-week, with those working in the Charity’s recycling workshops or completing ROTL ‘day release’ work placements tending to save much more.

The savings scheme was pivotal for **Michael**, who was supported into work and housing after leaving HMP

→ Katie Upton is a communications consultant and journalist. She has worked with social enterprises in the rehabilitation, criminal justice and youth work sectors for 10 years, helping organisations to share their stories and impact to connect with partners, supporters, and funders.



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.recyclinglives.org/our-impact/impact-report-2023-24/>

Hatfield. He was apprehensive of Recycling Lives's (RL) offering to begin with, though: "I was really worried about release so Recycling Lives sounded really good, but I did take it with a pinch of salt because I'd had bad experiences with people who've offered support before," he explains.

He began working in one of RL's recycling workshops before being put forward for a ROTL work placement. He worked there in the lead up to release, saving up £1,200, and has stayed on since: "I had to stay in a hostel at first but I could afford to go to watch the football, buy myself some clothes and the other bits I needed. Then I found my own housing and I could use my own earnings to pay for that," he says.

"RL gives you the things that can build you up."

The savings scheme helped **Peter** to seize a work opportunity on release from HMP Wealstun.

He signed up to work with RL to give him hope and a goal after he'd been knocked back by parole for release, as an IPP offender – meaning he was handed an indeterminate sentence under the Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) scheme so did not have a release date to work towards. Being supported by RL's team, while working in a prison-led workshop, not only gave him access to the savings scheme, but helped to build a case for his next parole board hearing.

Peter later completed a traffic management training course which led to a full-time job.

Using the £700 he'd saved up, he got his car back on the road after release, while RL secured him grant funding to put down a deposit on a flat.

"Now I've got money, my own place, a new girlfriend, and my kids are in my life. Everything's perfect," he reflects. "I'll never forget that when I really needed it, RL helped me."

## PERSONALISED WRAP-AROUND SUPPORT

RL's team comprises a range of professionals, including mental health, employment and housing workers, some with lived experience of the challenges facing participants. The support they offer empowers participants to maintain abstinence, improve wellbeing, work with statutory services, complete training, undertake volunteering, secure paid work, move into stable housing, settle debts, rekindle family relationships, and much more.

Having a wide range of support was essential for **Tim**. He was determined not to end up back in prison, but knew - with a long history of offending, drug addiction and street homelessness - he needed help: "I was in a hostel with no job, not loads of money, and no family around me. So to get some help was massive."

He was referred to the Charity's community-based rehabilitation program by his probation worker and completed an eight-week paid work placement with one of RL's employer partners. This gave him real-world work experience, new skills and a good reference, but it was the personal support and guidance he valued most.

"At the placement, they gave me a lot of support. I've never had that before - people giving me time of day. They gave me a shot and a chance to show that I can work."

He's now working part-time: "I've still got a way to go, but if it wasn't for Recycling Lives, I'd be back in prison."

## RESIDENTIAL AND PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT

As well as the prison- and community-based rehabilitation programs, Recycling Lives Charity also delivers a residential program for men at risk of homelessness, and professional and peer-to-peer support for people with histories of addiction.

**Mick** was referred to the latter's weekly mutual aid group when he was moved to Preston by probation: "I'm not from round here so I needed to build up connections. I went along and got a nice warm welcome," he says.

He is now part of a volunteer team giving talks to students, healthcare professionals and young people about addiction, offending and recovery: "My story's nothing to be proud of, but if sharing it can change someone else's future - stop them from hurting others, using drugs or ending up in jail - that's good.

"I still go to the group every week, too. It's built my confidence up, and I've made friendships and good connections."

## CHANGING LIVES

All of these elements combined allow the Charity to deliver its unrivalled results for hundreds of people every year. For **Mandy**, the combination of different services and consistency of support has been life-changing since being released from HMP Foston Hall: "To have that constant in my life, people who cared and wanted to help, meant so much. I had no-one and nothing when I left prison, but RL was always there for me with everything from homewares and housing guidance, to mental health support, advocacy with the courts, or just catching up for a brew. The approach they offer can really, really help people."

To learn more, visit:

[www.recyclinglives.org](http://www.recyclinglives.org)

# THE TWO-PRONGED APPROACH TO SECURING EMPLOYMENT AFTER PRISON

10



NICOLE GRAINGER-MARSH FIEP  
CEO, Asuria Australia

**Supporting ex-offenders into sustainable work requires a sophisticated dual approach: providing comprehensive support to participants, while actively guiding employers through inclusive hiring practices.**

**This two-pronged strategy, when executed effectively, creates transformative outcomes that benefit individuals, employers, and communities alike.**

“Employment service providers must recognise that successful placement of ex-offenders depends equally on participant preparation and employer support,” says Nicole Grainger-Marsh, CEO of Asuria. “Our approach centres on building confidence and capabilities on both sides of the employment equation.”

## A CASE STUDY IN TRANSFORMATION

The journey of Anthony, a Workforce Australia participant in Ballarat, Victoria, demonstrates how this dual-support model can create lasting change. Facing the complex challenges of previous incarceration and drug addiction while caring for a child with special needs, Anthony’s path to employment showcases the power of comprehensive support frameworks.

Today, Anthony has moved beyond simply finding a job – he is building a career. No longer reliant on unemployment benefits, he is achieving financial independence while creating a stable environment for his family. “I find the work really satisfying and fulfilling,” Anthony shares. “Every day, I’m helping families during their difficult times, even if they don’t see me directly.

Working here has taught me a lot about compassion and the importance of treating everyone with dignity.”

## SUPPORTING EMPLOYERS THROUGH CHANGE

Cory, Manager of HH Webb Funeral Home in Ballarat, Victoria, exemplifies how employers can thrive when supported through inclusive hiring practices. “When you’re willing to look beyond traditional hiring criteria, you often find incredibly loyal and motivated employees,” Cory explains. “An important part of that is having employment services professionals who understand your business needs and provide ongoing support.”

The success of the placement was enhanced by Cory’s progressive approach to management, choosing to focus on Anthony’s attitude and desire to improve his life and move on from his time in and out of prison, rather than a list – or lack of – prior employment. “What impressed me most was Anthony’s commitment to personal growth,” Cory shares. “When an employee shows that level of self-awareness and determination to succeed, it makes taking a chance on them much easier. The support from Asuria gave us confidence that we weren’t alone in this journey.”

Employment service professionals play a vital role in outcomes such as these by implementing a range of strategies

→ Nicole has extensive experience operating global, market leading brands, as well as smaller challenger organisations. She is an experienced leader in the Human Services sector responsible for overseeing programs that support vulnerable customers through the delivery of programs in Employment, Disability, Education, NDIS, Entrepreneurship and Youth. Besides her CEO post at Asuria, she is a Non-Executive Director and Advisory Board member for the University Admissions Centre (UAC) in Australia.



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.recyclinglives.org/our-impact/impact-report-2023-24/>

designed to support both employers and participants.

## EMPLOYER SUPPORT STRATEGIES

Asuria's employment consultants begin with thorough consultations to understand each business's specific needs and concerns, laying the groundwork for strong, trusting partnerships. This trust makes it easier to present candidates who may face barriers, as the mutual understanding built during these consultations paves the way for successful placements. Equally important is the preparation of candidates for their new roles and workplaces, which involves highlighting and leveraging their transferable skills. With the candidate's permission, transparent conversations are initiated to advocate on their behalf.

## RISK MITIGATION AND ONGOING SUPPORT

In addition to these initial steps, risk mitigation planning is integral to the process. Asuria is able to offer financial support to participants to facilitate upskilling, ensuring that ex-offenders are properly equipped to fulfil their roles. Recognising that many ex-offenders excel in structured environments, Asuria's employment consultants also work closely with employers to ensure that roles are designed to incorporate routine and clear expectations, as much as possible.

### Regular Check-Ins and Development

During the early stages of employment, regular check-ins are conducted to address any challenges that may arise. These meetings provide mediation and support for issues ranging from a lack of self-confidence and difficulties in establishing a routine, to transportation and interpersonal challenges in the workplace. There is also a focus on overcoming fears of rejection and a lack of acceptance, with the support of Asuria's in-house Allied Health team to help participants manage these situations. Alongside this, targeted guidance on training and development opportunities is provided – always ensuring that training is purposeful, building on transferable

skills that meet the key requirements of the role.

## PARTICIPANT SUPPORT FRAMEWORK

Pre-employment preparation involves a two-fold approach: first, identifying both vocational and non-vocational barriers; and second, developing a clear understanding of the role and the employer's expectations. Detailed walkthroughs of the job are sometimes arranged to ensure that the first day is not met with uncertainty.

In collaboration with employers, pre-employment programs are developed to pinpoint the key skills required. Pre-employment onboarding and on-site information sessions, where employers are invited to speak directly to potential candidates, further prepare participants for their new roles. Asuria's open hiring events – where candidates are invited to have informal face-to-face conversations with local businesses – have also played an important part in reducing recruitment bias, enabling candidates to focus on the value they add rather than their employment history.

## CREATING SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

The ripple effects of successful employment for former offenders extends far beyond the workplace. For Anthony, stable employment has meant financial independence and family stability, improved self-worth and confidence, positive role modelling for his child, reintegration into the broader community, and ongoing career development and training opportunities.

According to an Australian Institute of Criminology report, employment has a significant impact on reducing recidivism. Studies indicate that finding and retaining a job lowers the risk of ex-offenders returning to prison. A steady income reduces reliance on welfare and alleviates the financial pressures that might otherwise push individuals back towards criminal activity. Moreover, employment provides a sense of purpose, responsibility, and structure, reminiscent of the routine experienced during incarceration.

## PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE INSIGHTS

Building strong employer relationships is fundamental. This begins with developing a deep understanding of each business through activities such as business and site tours, which offer insight into what success looks like for both the company and its employees. It is not just about understanding the job role – it is also about appreciating the organisational culture and ensuring that candidates fit well within the team dynamics. Asuria's Employment Consultants also consider the ideal employee profile to ensure that the right candidate is selected.

Concerns are addressed proactively through intensive in-work support, with regular check-ins and the creation of channels for early and frequent feedback. An in-work support plan is established, taking into account potential risks such as transportation challenges or health issues, so that unexpected delays or absences are managed with understanding.

Regular communication is maintained throughout the placement, with successes celebrated and documented. Setbacks are treated as learning opportunities, prompting a review of whether additional support or training might be required to prevent future challenges.

## SUPPORTING PARTICIPANT SUCCESS

A focus on participant success is achieved by ensuring that preparation extends beyond job-specific competencies to include strengths-based attributes. Clear accountability frameworks are established, both for the employer and the participant, and necessary support services are coordinated. Long-term career development plans are also put in place to ensure ongoing success.

## MANAGING THE PARTNERSHIP

Effective management of the partnership involves facilitating open communication between all parties, monitoring progress closely, and addressing challenges as they arise. Supporting ongoing skill development and career progression is key, as is

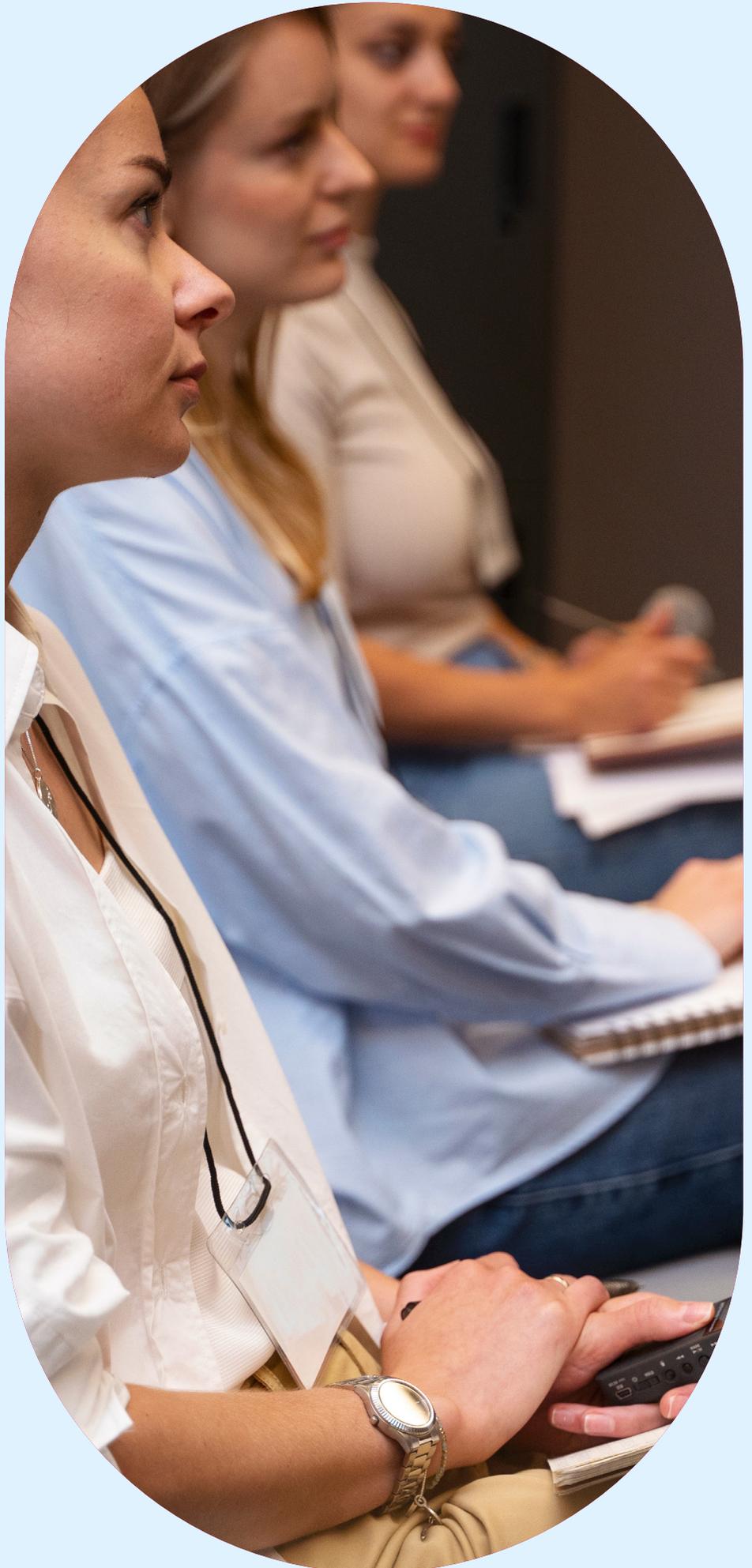
documenting successful practices so that they can be replicated in future placements.

Recognising that no problem is too small, Asuria's approach ensures that multiple, tailored check-ins occur throughout the initial six-month period. Initially, these meetings are held at least fortnightly – or more frequently if requested – with the schedule stabilising to fortnightly after about six weeks. Participants are always free to contact their Employment Consultant for support, and if someone is not fully reaching their employment goals, Asuria remains connected to help increase their hours, offer further training, or source supplementary work based on individual circumstances. Where a strong ongoing relationship with an employer is established, and there continues to be a regular supply of new team members, this naturally facilitates a longer follow through of support for candidates placed more than six months ago, once again underlining the importance of establishing and maintaining strong employer relationships.

### **ACKNOWLEDGING ANTHONY**

Anthony reaching his six-month milestone at HH Webb demonstrates the power of comprehensive employment support services, and the importance of allowing trust to be built and nurtured on all sides of the relationship. His success, supported by understanding employers like Cory and dedicated professionals like Brad, provides a template for effective practice in ex-offender employment services.

For the Employment Services Sector, such outcomes highlight how professional support can break down barriers and create pathways to meaningful employment while helping employers access untapped talent pools, driving transformative change for individuals, employers, and communities.





# WE SHALL HAVE RETURNING CITIZENS, NOT EX-JAILBIRDS

Interview by Miguel Peromingo



LADY VAL CORBETT  
Founder of the Corbett Network

The Corbett Network for Prisoner Reintegration is a coalition of charities, social enterprises, CICs, non-profit organisations and businesses with a social mission to bridge the gap from custody to community, thereby trying to support routes to employment and integration back into society.

We spoke with the founder Lady Val Corbett

## LADY VAL CORBETT, HOW DID THE CORBETT NETWORK COME TO LIFE?

I come from a very different world. I am a media person. I was working for national newspapers, the BBC and other television broadcasters. When my husband Lord Robin Corbett of Castle Vale – who was passionate about prison reform – died in 2012, my life changed in many ways. A few weeks after he died, I was watching a golf program on TV. I am not really interested in golf, but the winner of the tournament that was on, looked in the sky and dedicated the win to his deceased friend, a Spanish golfer, and he said these words that would impact my life. He said: “All men die, but some men live on.” I sat up and thought, that’s what I need to do. I need Robin’s legacy in prison reform to live on. So, all I’ve done is really establish two networks in his name. The first one is the Robin Corbett Award for prison reintegration, which is an annual award presented at the House of Commons, awarding prize money to three charities who do the most in supporting people releasing from prison. Through that I kept meeting people in the prison reform sector who were working in their own little pond, and I thought, wouldn’t it be a good idea to work in a sea and commonly tackle the tremendous problems in the UK prison system. This is how we organised the Corbett Network

for Prisoner Integration. Today, we have over 140 members from the non-profit and also profit sector. I don’t mind people being commercial if they’re doing it for the right reason. We started from a very low base, but increasingly I became aware that the prison system is unworkable in this country.

## WHY IS IT UNWORKABLE?

The reason is that it has not changed its format for a very long time. We are like the US system of mass incarceration: huge prison warehouses with men and women doing nothing, and they go out being either the same as when they got in, or much worse. And when you think of these people being released eventually into the community, do you want to live in a community with people who are unchanged, or worse than they went in? Or do you want to look at a person who has been changed because he/she went to prison?

## CERTAINLY, THE LATTER

So that’s what we have to aim for. We need to look at other countries. The Netherlands had 150,000 people in prison, then they had a reform in 2009 and today they have 50,000. They mainly did this by changing public perception, fight the stigma. I am supporting a returning citizen who was in prison for one week because of a minor tax fraud which he paid back instantly. Still, he had to sit in

→ Since 2013 Lady Val Corbett has established three networks to honour her husband’s passion about prison reform: the Robin Corbett Award; The Corbett Network for Prisoner Reintegration, which has 160 + members, and Lady Val’s Professional Women’s Network which fundraises for the prison reform work.



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.recyclinglives.org/our-impact/impact-report-2023-24/>

prison for a few days and now nobody wants to give him a job. It's ridiculous. Let's change, where possible, from incarceration to community service, like in the Netherlands. 70,000 people are released from UK prisons every year, but only 17% get support, and that support has got to be absolutely increased as well.

### **WHO WOULD BE TAKING CARE OF COMMUNITY SERVICES AND SUPPORT?**

Well, the Minister of Justice Dave Simpson has gone on record saying that two-thirds of people in prison shouldn't be there. Only 6% of people in prison are violent now. They should be there, and they should be kept. They are bad people. They need to be in prison for life. I understand that, but most prisoners need not be there. They've got addictions. They've got mental health problems. They've got trauma. They need help. Members of our network give them the support either for finding health support or a job mentoring, coaching, education, or training. This work is very hard. It's often two steps forward and nine steps back, but they persist. I'll give you an example: Frankie was in prison in Peterborough, which is in the north of England, and he was released one cold December with very little money, nowhere to live, no future, no job, nothing. He went to live with his grandmother, but he had done an in-prison coding course with one of our member organisations and is now coding for Lloyd's Bank in Leeds.

### **THE BANK DID NOT TAKE ISSUE WITH EMPLOYING SOMEONE WHO HAD BEEN IN PRISON?**

They were hesitant, but also desperate to find the right skills. They had never ever employed anyone from prison before. They tried after consulting our member organisation and six months later the organisation got a call from the Bank, where they asked if they had more people like Frankie, who recently got promoted. That's the message: If you give people a chance and support them, some people need more support than others, they thrive. We shall have returning citizens, not ex-jailbirds.

### **HOW CHALLENGING IS IT TO TRAIN PEOPLE WHILE IN PRISON?**

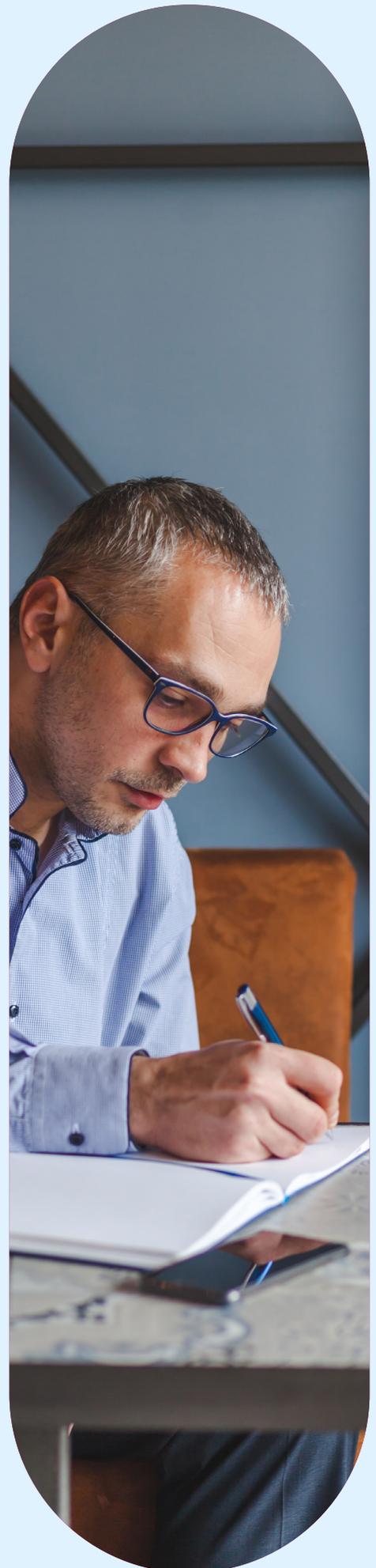
Some of our members have started employability boards within prisons to upskill men and women. They actually get employers into the prison to interview and certainly some of them have got jobs through that before they are released. I'm not saying that the prison itself doesn't do anything, but they are just overwhelmed at the moment. In 2010 the Government made lots of experienced prison officers redundant to save money, so the new prison officers are inexperienced. The turn-over factor is high because the job is not easy, although I think that the salary is fine. Still the system is short of 10,000 staff. Staffing is a general issue. There are various courses you can do in prison. I went to one prison where they had a stonemason course and the quality was incredible, but there were only 10 or 12 prisoners in the course with two prison officers watching over tools and keeping down violence potential. Many courses end up with long waiting lists and lost potential.

### **DO YOU USUALLY STAY IN TOUCH WITH PEOPLE YOU'VE HELPED?**

Yes, I do. I helped one woman who is a solicitor with 25 years spotless service. She was put in prison because two of her assistants embezzled some money, and because she was the head of the department, they thought she knew about it, although she didn't, or suppose she should have. She went to jail, and for 17 months she tried to get a job, and then came to me after seeing me on LinkedIn. I got her a job with one of our members, and she's extremely happy there, about to be promoted as well, because she is really good. If you give people a second chance, they grab it.

### **WHAT DO YOU THINK YOUR HUSBAND WOULD SAY IF HE SAW WHAT YOU HAVE ACHIEVED?**

Well, I hope he would be very pleased. He used to say: "Prison isn't full of bad people. It's full of people who've done bad things." Most need a task to change. A prison shouldn't be society's revenge. We need to change people, and that's the whole point. I'm very proud of the work the Corbett Network does.



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