

# An international perspective of how other countries prepare their prisoners for release

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“The penitentiary system shall comprise treatment of prisoners the essential aim of which shall be their reformation and social rehabilitation.”

*ICCPR, Article 10. The ICCPR is a legally binding convention (as of Oct 2012 it had 74 signatories; 167 parties)*



# International Standards on Reintegration

- **From the beginning of a prisoner's sentence consideration shall be given to his future after release** and he shall be encouraged and assisted to maintain or establish such relations with persons or agencies outside the institution as may promote the best interests of his family and his own social rehabilitation. (*Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, Rule 80*)
- Before the completion of the sentence, it is desirable that the necessary steps be taken to ensure for the prisoner a gradual return to life in society. This aim may be achieved, depending on the case, by a pre-release regime organized in the same institution or in another appropriate institution, or by release on trial under some kind of supervision which must not be entrusted to the police but combined with effective social aid. (*Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, Rule 60 (2)*)
- With the participation and help of community and social institutions, and with due regard to the interest of victims, **favourable conditions shall be created for the reintegration of the ex-prisoner into society under the best possible conditions.** (*Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners, Principle 10*)



# International Standards on Reintegration

- **The duty of society does not end with a prisoner's release.** There should, therefore, be governmental or private agencies capable of lending the released prisoner efficient **after-care directed towards the lessening of prejudice against him and towards his social rehabilitation.** (*Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, Rule 64*)
- (1) Service agencies, governmental or otherwise, which assist released prisoners to re-establish themselves in society shall ensure, so far as is possible and necessary, that released prisoners be provided with appropriate documents and identification papers, have suitable homes and work to go to, are suitably and adequately clothed having regard to the climate and the season, and have sufficient means to reach their destination and maintain themselves in the period immediately following their release. (2) The approved representatives of such agencies shall have all necessary access to the institution and to prisoners and shall be taken into consultation as to the future of a prisoner from the beginning of his sentence. (3) It is desirable that the activities of such agencies shall be centralized or coordinated as far as possible in order to secure the best use of their efforts. (*Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, Rule 81*)



“I’ve spent over 33 years in the British prison system and I can honestly say that there is no rehabilitation offered in the British prison system as standard. **If you want rehabilitation in the British system you have to search for it and believe me there is not a lot of it...**When I looked for rehabilitation it was few and far between. You had to actively seek rehabilitation out in the prison system... Anger management and various behaviour management courses and **in my opinion none of these courses work, they are all tick-boxes.** For example, my last sentence I had to do anger management, thinking skills, relationship skills, and all that 3 or 4 times. It’s just a cash-cow for the psychologists in the prison system, once you do one of those courses you tick the boxes and they make you do it again 3 or 4 years down the line and you remember your answers and that’s how they look as though they’re actually helping when they’re not...Those courses don’t work, they’ve certainly never worked for me and I’ve never met anybody who they have worked for and to find rehabilitation in prison is very difficult”.

*Noel Smith (ex-prisoner)*

# Challenges for Implementing Standards

- Inadequate resources - prison overcrowding strains resources and results in a focus on managing the prison population on a day to day basis rather than longer term rehabilitation programmes.
- Drug and alcohol treatment programmes may not be available or get interrupted.
- Education and employment facilities and opportunities inside prison may be limited so that prisoners do not improve the skills they need in order to find work outside.
- Contact with family may be broken by time inside prison as visits may be few and far between.
- Such problems are particularly acute for women, who because there are fewer women than men prisoners may be serving a sentence very far from home, and have less access to education or work opportunities, as well as problems with childcare inside and outside prison.



# Importance of reintegration and preparing prisoners for release

- Re-entry planning as a crime reduction strategy
  - Begins in prison with programmes throughout an offender's sentence. Prison officials must be aware that reintegration is a core part of their work, it should be included in mission statements, training curriculum and job descriptions (a good example of this is the mission statement of the Singapore prison service – discussed later).
  - Management of reintegration comes under more than one jurisdiction so coordination, partnerships and effective joint working is essential.
  - Need to effectively manage prisoners' transition back into the community on completion of their sentence.



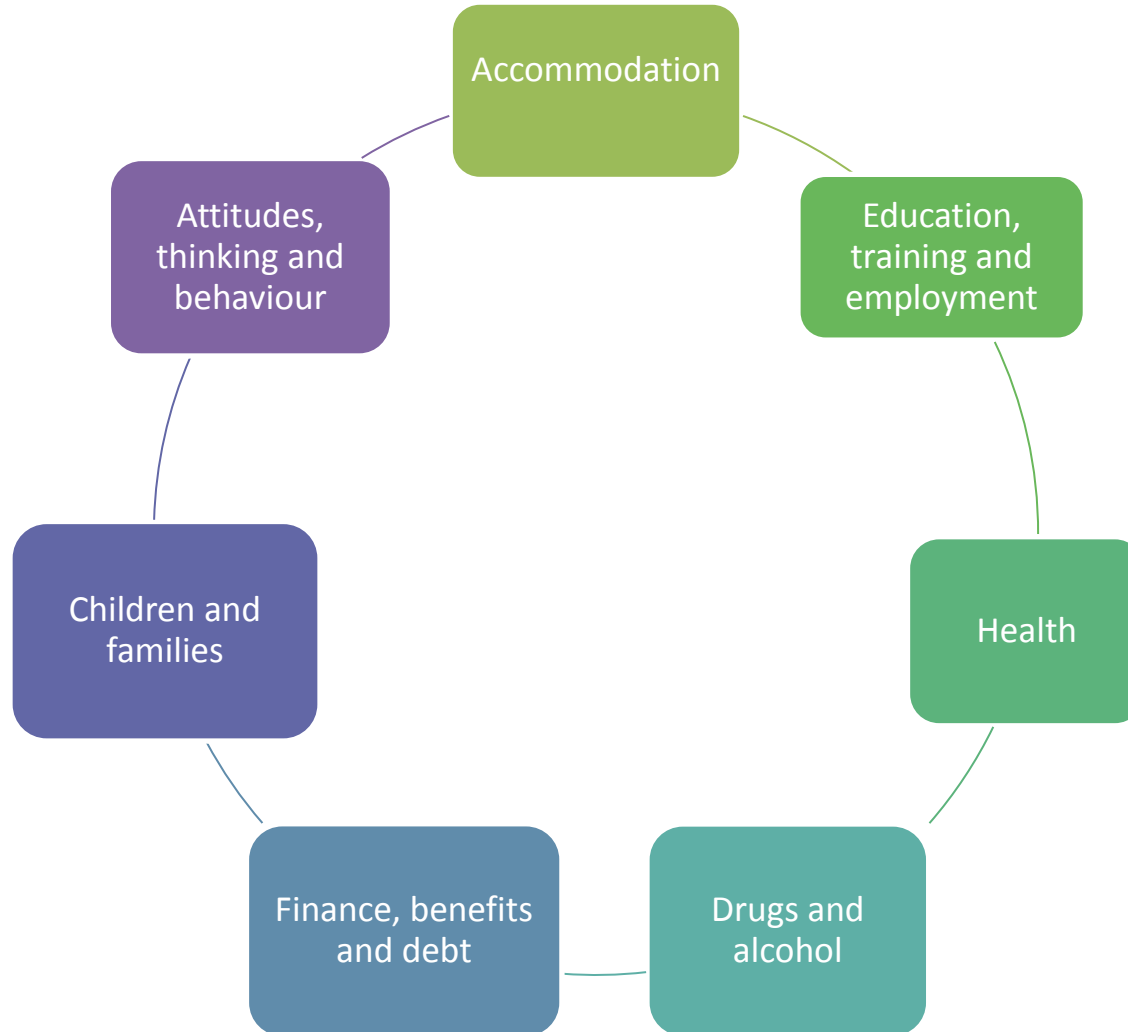
# Three main issues for programmes to prepare prisoners for release

- 1) What programmes/services should be available?
- 2) Are these programmes/services available?
- 3) Do they work to achieve the ultimate goal of reducing reoffending?





# The 7 pathways to reducing re-offending all need to be addressed to ensure effective preparation of a prisoner for release



“A significant number of people enter and leave prison homeless, unemployed, or both. Even ex-offenders who had homes and jobs before prison may not do so upon release. Having access to adequate, affordable accommodation and suitable employment opportunities can dramatically affect an ex-prisoner’s chance of successful resettlement. In England & Wales, 58 per cent of women and 53 per cent of men in prison identified unemployment and lack of skills as contributing to their continued offending.”

*The Social Reintegration of Ex-Prisoners in Council of Europe Member States (QCEA 2011)*



- Typical of issues found around the world, a survey carried out by the German EU funded project with PRI office in Amman found the most anticipated difficulties for prisoners on release in Jordan was:
  - Getting employment
  - Stigma from others
  - Getting back to the family
  - Drug use
- Around 47% anticipated getting no support on release; with 43% expecting help from family.

# How to prepare prisoners for release?

- Preventing reoffending by addressing unemployment
  - Studies show steady employment is one of the best guarantees against recidivism so prisons should enhance employability of prisoners.
  - This includes improving mental health and substance abuse problems which may be preventing an offender finding employment.
  - Individualising plans – including tackling learning disabilities, education and training.
  - Building relationships with employers and creating legal/financial incentives for companies that hire offenders. Limiting access to criminal records – limiting situations where employers have access to records, restricting the type of information they see and requiring records also report any positive progress by than offender.



# Good practice from Europe

- In **Turkey** the Labour Law obliges companies that employ more than 50 staff to include a fixed percentage of ex-prisoners among their staff. If companies do not fulfil this obligation, then they must pay a fine to the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. The Employment Institution of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security has a mandate to help former prisoners with vocational training and appropriate rehabilitation programmes to enable them to find suitable employment and assist with their social reintegration. The Ministry uses the fines to fund vocational training programmes in prisons, the education of and training of probationers and prisoners, and post-release assistance. Further, companies with fewer than 50 employees are offered a financial incentive to employ former prisoners, whereby the employer's obligation to pay the social security of these former prisoner employees is halved with the other half being paid by the state treasury.
- In **Finland**, some prisoners in open prisons who are nearing the end of their sentences will undertake 'civilian work' while on day release, for which they are paid a normal market rate.
- Prisoners in **Luxembourg's** Givenich semi-open prison participate in the 'Défi-Job' manufacturing programme. This pays them the full Luxembourg minimum wage for their work, whereas those in the Schrassig closed prison are paid slightly over a fifth of the minimum wage for compulsory prison work such as cleaning and catering.

# How to prepare prisoners for release?

- Community and family ties
  - These ties provide support and structure during transition back to society but are difficult to maintain while serving a prison sentence.
  - Encouraging NGOs, counsellors, probation officers, social workers, health care professionals etc to visit the prison regularly and participate in the rehabilitation of the offender throughout his or her sentence.
  - Especially important for women offenders who are often held further away from families and communities and may have to deal with additional stigma on release due to the non-conformity with gender stereotypes.
  - Short sentences: difficult as does not allow for proper programmes or preparation for release so offenders must be connected with community-based services that can assist with the transition back to society.



# Maintaining community and family ties in Russia

- Big issue is Russia as prisoners are often held a long way away from their families.
- Through Criminal Executive Code , all prisoners have a right to short term and long term (up to 3 days) family visits – although amount depends on the regime of imprisonment. Under the general regime, the allowance is 4 long term visits per year.
- However, phone calls are very limited with only one per month and paid for by prisoners or their relatives.
- New initiative from Krasnoyarsk region uses computer technology to improve maintenance of family ties including:
  - Electronic applications for visits
  - Ability for families to send electronic letters to their incarcerated relatives
  - Internet shop where family members can buy products for those in prison to be delivered
  - Video calling; length restricted at 15 minutes, paid for by the relatives at a rate of 35 US cents/minute.



# Some good practice from Sweden

- Swedish probation branch of the Prison and Probation Service is responsible for the planning of sentence implementation and treatment measures not only for probationers and parolees but also for prisoners: this provides for early preparation for release from prison.
- There is also an organisation called KRIS which consists mainly of ex-prisoners who have become well-established law-abiding citizens. They offer help to incarcerated prisoners to prepare for conditional release and offer to meet and provide lodging to prisoners at the moment of release in order to ensure that they do not drift back into offending. (Similar to the St. Giles Trust 'through the gate' project)
- The Prison Code allows prisoners to leave prison for a period of time in order to participate in off-site programmes that might contribute to their rehabilitation. This provision is most often used to temporarily place drug and alcohol abusers in therapeutic group homes, where they receive treatment, peer support, and non-punitive supervision.





# In-depth: Good practice from Singapore

Mission of the Prison Service: “As a key partner in Criminal Justice, we protect society through the safe custody and rehabilitation of offenders, co-operating in prevention and aftercare. **The main motivation for the Singapore Prison Service’s efforts is the rehabilitation and re-entry management of prisoners whilst they are still in prison, with the aim of reducing harm in society post-release, contributing to a safer Singapore”**



Singapore Prison Service's Rehabilitation Framework consists of three distinct phases

## 1: In-care

- Prisoners are assessed and classified with programmes targeted at those with the highest security risk and rehabilitation needs to give the best returns with the resources used. The recidivism rate (percentage of every cohort released who reoffend and return to prison) is a key performance indicator for the Singapore Prison Service.
- A prison officer will be assigned as a Personal Supervisor to the prisoner on admission, to monitor and review the rehabilitation plan of all prisoners placed in his or her charge throughout their periods of incarceration.



## 2. Halfway Care Phase

- Suitable prisoners are allowed to serve the tail-end of their sentences in various community-based programmes:
  - Home Detention Scheme: early release of low-risk prisoners with good family support; requirement to wear electronic tags, and fulfil set conditions, such as curfew hours and mandatory reporting.
  - Halfway House Scheme: for those who have little or no positive family support, the scheme provides hostel-like lodging for up to a year, in a safe environment for gradual reintegration, prisoners are required to work during the day and return to their assigned hostels for evening curfew.
  - Work Release Scheme: allows suitable prisoners to leave prison premises for employment during the day, while requiring them to return to a low-security prison in the evenings. Work and electronic tagging are mandatory under this scheme.

## 3. Aftercare Phase

- The Community Aftercare Programme (CAP) is a voluntary post-release programme aimed at supporting ex-prisoners up to a period of six months. Prisoners who sign up are assigned Aftercare Case Managers to help them deal with their reintegration challenges including employment, finance, accommodation, coping skills and family/social support.



# Yellow Ribbon Project

- The Yellow Ribbon Project was launched in 2004 to promote a more accepting society for ex-offenders and has three goals:
  1. Generate **awareness** of the difficulties ex-offenders face after release, of giving second chances to ex-offenders
  2. Encourage **acceptance** for ex-offenders from families and the community as they return to free society
  3. Inspire public **action** to support their reintegration and continued rehabilitation.
- Some of the key achievements include:
  - 94% of the population is aware of the Yellow Ribbon, with about 60% expressing willingness to accept ex-offenders as either a friend or colleague;
  - Approximately 300,000 members of the Singaporean public have attended at least one Yellow Ribbon event, with more than 900 signed up as new volunteers and 400 ex-offenders mobilized for each campaign;
  - More than 1,800 employers are willing employ ex-offenders, with more than 2,500 ex-offenders having benefited from such employment opportunities;
  - More than \$7 million has been raised for the Yellow Ribbon Fund, benefiting more than 26,000 clients; and
  - The project received honourable mention at the 2007 United Nations Grand Award for campaigns deemed to be forward looking.

# Yellow Ribbon Project

- In line with the Yellow Ribbon Project, several laws were changed to make it less discriminatory for ex-offenders trying to find a job. The Registration of Criminals Act was amended in May 2005 to render the records of first time offenders who are fined less than \$2000 and/or imprisoned for less than three months and who have remained crime and drug free for at least five years as spent. It is estimated that about 30,000 such offenders have benefitted since the law took effect.



# Some good practice from Norway

- In 2005 the government introduced the 'Reintegration Guarantee' which gives the Norwegian Correctional Services two specific legal responsibilities: to keep up-to-date records of a convicted person's likely reintegration needs, starting immediately after their imprisonment; and to communicate these needs to other agencies (for example housing authorities) early enough that these services are available upon release. This guarantee defines responsibilities and how reintegrative services should be coordinated.
- In practice, the Reintegration Guarantee entails that anyone who leaves prison or probation should be able to stand on their own and helped to obtain housing, work, school, health care and things such as debt counselling.
- The guidance of the prisoners starts before their release. The inmate must know the date and time of his or her release but also what is waiting for them with regard to housing, work, finances, education and health. There are 25 especially educated 'release coordinators' working in the prisons to help the guards and others involved in the release-process. They work to establish all necessary contacts with the local authorities, who are and will be, responsible for the ex-inmate from the first day after release.
- Implementation of the Guarantee is not easy and there are potential obstacles at the legal level, the structural and organisational level, the financial level and at the human level as the attitudes towards offenders are not always favourable.

# Putting reintegration programmes in context

All prison programmes must be placed within the context of the country within which it works.

- Eg, Sweden works with a small prison population (c.6700) within a low-populated country (9.4m). Also important to take into consideration public attitudes and opinion (and to attempt to change these where they aren't favourable to reintegration policies).
- Eg, Singapore works with a prison population of around 12,500 within a country of 5.2 million inhabitants. While its reintegration approach is relatively progressive, its criminal justice system as a whole is incredibly punitive including the retention of the death penalty for a range of offences.



# Importance of reintegration programmes in context





- Country context is important for implementing successful reintegration projects. PRI's work in Central Asia has shown that in this region:
  - Careful research of the prison population is always needed for drafting good strategies of integration
  - It is important to involve religious groups/representatives in reintegration as these are proven to be most successful
  - While small NGOs can implement successful reintegration projects, their work can only affect a small number of people
  - Big re-socialisation centres which provide accommodation are often not effective as they face a lot of social problems, such as drug use.
  - Local society must understand the necessity of reintegration otherwise it becomes difficult to establish successful processes – eg in Kazakhstan local communities are always against the establishment of re-socialisation centres in their neighbourhoods.

# What has PRI been doing?

**Penal Reform International** has worked with prison and corrections departments in a number of countries on reintegration initiatives. We have:

- Provided vocational facilities and training for men and women in prison
- Managed small grants programmes for NGOs working with women prisoners and ex-prisoners to develop their skills and expertise and help them find work
- Supported probation services for juveniles through provision of computer and vocational training, life skills development and family counselling
- Developed and implemented a programme of psychological counselling and support for juveniles in detention
- Implemented programmes to reduce and prevent the incidence of HIV/AIDs/TB in prisons
- Improved accommodation and arrangements for women to look after their babies accompanying them in prison, so that there is joint accommodation and the mothers develop their skills in looking after the children
- Prepared information resources for women about to be released, informing them of the services that are available to help them
- PRI in Jordan has begun working with the authorities to develop an aftercare programme with work starting with prisoners at least six months before their release – recently a focus group was held with positive feedback from the private and industrial sector who will play a crucial part in providing jobs for released offenders.



## Further reading:

- PRI (2010) *Making Law and Policy that Work*
- QCEA (2011) *The Social Reintegration of Ex-prisoners in Council of Europe Member States*
- Tang, S., for UNAFEI, *Effective Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Offenders (Singapore)*; and [www.yellowribbon.org.sg](http://www.yellowribbon.org.sg)

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online, please go to:**

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Thank you for listening

