



WORKING ON WORK

(Werken aan werk)

Summary

Jos Kuppens

Juno van Esseveldt

Anton van Wijk

Beke // reeks

Summary

Since 2013, prison labour has been offered at the labour companies of the 22 prisons under the brand name In-Made. Previously, this was organised by each prison separately. In-Made aims to contribute to the reduction of recidivism and to minimise the costs of prison labour. After operating within these frameworks for a number of years, the Custodial Institutions Agency (Dienst Justitiële Inrichtingen, DJI) of the Ministry of Justice and Security wanted to gain insights into the effects of work performed by prisoners while incarcerated. The WODC (Research and Documentation Centre) commissioned Bureau Beke to carry out a study, focusing in particular on the following question:

What role does work play in creating a stimulating living and working environment and what are the effects of the (various forms of) prison labour on the future prospects of prisoners and ex-prisoners with regard to paid and unpaid work after their release?

Research activities

Various research activities were carried out as part of this study. A literature review was carried out to assess whether there is any scientific evidence to support the assumption that prison labour can help improve prisoners' labour market position and thereby reduce the risk of recidivism. This review was used as input for the second research activity, a questionnaire conducted among prisoners (N=424) at seven prisons and among work supervisors (N=345) at almost all prisons. While conducting the questionnaires among prisoners, interviews were also held with them and with work supervisors, heads of labour and case managers. The interviews covered topics such as motivation to work, the provision of training, working conditions and perspectives on life after release. In order

to assess the (employment) situation of prisoners after their release and to see whether they had reoffended, data was requested from the DJI and CBS. This data concerned 935 prisoners who were released from prison in 2017. The year 2017 was selected intentionally, in order to be able to monitor prisoners for at least two years after their release from prison. This then concerns any cases of recidivism in the short term. This study does not address recidivism in the medium or long-term. Furthermore, individuals serving at least three months in prison were selected. This is because for all prisoners with at least a three-month sentence, a plan is drawn up outlining a number of behavioural goals. This so-called Detention and Reintegration Plan therefore serves as a guideline for the structure and organisation of the imprisonment period as well as for the detention stages leading up to release. Consideration is also given to the type of activities that may contribute towards a successful return to society.

The organisation of prison labour

Since 2013, work has been offered at Dutch prisons through prison production companies, under the name 'In-Made' (intramural work) and 'Ex-Made' (extramural work). The objective is to teach prisoners (work-related) skills and possibly professional competences in order to improve their future prospects. Reducing recidivism has also been specified as an additional objective.

Prison labour forms part of the individualised approach to detention. The labour companies are set up and operate as similar as possible to ordinary companies, so that prisoners learn how to take on responsibility for production and the working atmosphere themselves.

The majority of the activities concern production work, such as packing, repacking, assembling, disassembling and recycling. Prisoners also have the opportunity to do more specialist work, such as metal and woodwork, painting and landscaping, and to follow a training programme or a course and obtain certificates. Accordingly, In-Made has developed a form of practical learning whereby prisoners learn on the job. In-Made is, therefore, designated as a recognised training company.

Subject to demonstrable good behaviour, a prisoner may work outside the prison during the final phase of their sentence. This is organised through the Ex-Made scheme, whereby workplaces are sought that match the prisoner's skill set.

Main research findings

In this summary, the research findings are divided into several themes.

Findings from the literature review

In a number of Dutch studies, paid work is regarded as a significant factor for reducing recidivism; however, no research has as yet been carried out in the Netherlands into the impact of prison labour on recidivism. International research shows that prison labour can have both a positive and negative effect on recidivism. If prison labour is connected to work outside the prison and if specialist work and training are offered, it can help to reduce recidivism.

In the Netherlands, several recidivism studies have revealed that various factors can increase, but also reduce recidivism. For example, certain factors increase the risk of recidivism, such as: certain personal characteristics (e.g. male, younger age), the nature of the offence (e.g. a higher number of previous criminal offences/convictions and property offences), a short period of imprisonment (up to six months) and the situation after release (e.g. benefit payments, living alone and a low income).

Research has also shown that certain factors decrease the risk of recidivism, such as: certain personal characteristics (e.g. female, elderly or born in another Western country), the situation after release (e.g. having a job and a partner), certain policy measures (e.g. the ISD measure (Institution for Habitual Offenders) and the cooperation in safety houses) and certain macro factors (e.g. a higher number of dismissals by reason of unlikelihood / acquittals and increased security measures taken by citizens).

Opinions of prisoners and work supervisors

Prison labour is divided into production work and specialist work, and the opinions of prisoners tend to be divided along these lines. Prisoners who do specialist work tend to work more hours and are more likely to follow a training course while in prison. Moreover, they also tend to be more intrinsically motivated. Production workers need external stimuli to perform their tasks. Consequently, work supervisors indicated that they would like to ask prisoners about their level of motivation and their abilities during the intake, so that they can provide more targeted support and training.

However, the two groups of prisoners do not always have widely differing opinions. As far as their perspective on their own future development is concerned, they more or less agree: there are few differences between specialist and

production workers in terms of their desire to obtain more certificates and to work after release from prison.

Both prisoners and work supervisors are rather critical of the nature of the work; they regularly describe it as “mind-numbing”, referring primarily to production work. In general, work supervisors emphasise the importance of more challenging work, but they also appreciate that this is not always feasible for all prisoners due to insufficient motivation and a lack of cognitive ability.

The future prospects of prisoners after prison labour

Despite tentative indications in international literature, the research findings do not as yet provide any basis for assuming that work in prisons has a favourable impact on the employment prospects of prisoners after release. In fact, for the population studied as part of this research, there was a reduction in the percentage of those in work or studying after their release compared to before their imprisonment: 46% worked or studied before imprisonment versus 32% after release.

The study also revealed that prisoners have a relatively low expectation of the effect of prison labour on finding work after release; the prevailing opinion among prisoners is that their future is more likely to be determined by their criminal record than the work they can do while they are in prison.

Recidivism after prison labour

In order to make a comparison regarding recidivism, an attempt has been made to compare the study population with the entire prison population. In this study, analyses were carried out on a prisoner population with a minimum sentence of three months, because this group is offered a so-called Detention & Reintegration Plan and prison labour is mandatory for them. However, research has shown that prisoners who serve short sentences (up to six months) are in fact at a higher risk of reoffending. Furthermore, short-term prisoners are strongly over-represented in the general prison population. As a result, the percentage of prisoners who reoffend after a certain period of time is difficult to compare between the study population and the general prison population. By extension, it is not possible to draw any reliable conclusions about the effect of In-Made and Ex-Made on the risk of recidivism after release.

The role of prison labour in creating a stimulating living and working environment

The literature and other research findings have shown that specialist work in particular contributes to a stimulating living and working environment. It also appears that approximately half of the prisoners in the study population have followed a training course or obtained a certificate; prisoners who perform specialist work are more likely than production workers to do so.

Specialists are also more likely to be intrinsically motivated and to enjoy their work more than production workers. In addition, specialists are more inclined to think that the work will help them to find work after release from prison. But there is a limit to the impact of specialist work; this group does not feel a greater need to follow more training courses and is not more determined to work after release than the group of production workers.

The message from prisoners is clear: the financial compensation they receive for their work is the primary motive for them.

Prison labour in the future

As a result of the new law on punishment and protection (*Wet straffen en beschermen*), work in prisons will no longer be compulsory, but will still be offered. Extramural work will also be offered at more locations throughout the Netherlands. These developments present an opportunity to offer more tailor-made work to prisoners who a) have the abilities to do specialist work and b) are motivated to do so. Prisoners will also have more opportunities to work in the area where they will live once they are out of prison, which will increase the likelihood of them being able to keep their jobs. Conducting intake interviews at the start of the sentence seems to be an appropriate tool for identifying in advance those prisoners who have significant job prospects after release from prison. Based on the research findings, a number of additional characteristics may also be relevant to consider during the intake, for example the nature and extent of previously committed crimes, the duration of the sentence and a (preferably) stable home situation.

For the majority of prisoners, however, production work will be the only option. Such work cannot be expected to contribute to employment opportunities after release or to a reduction in recidivism.



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