



TO EMPLOYMENT

HANDBOOK FOR BUSINESSES ON EMPLOYING EX-OFFENDERS



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WAYBACK

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01 INTRODUCTION

Why should you say YES to ex-offenders employment?

Between 2013 and 2019, labour shortages increased in the EU. The largest shortages were reported in the manufacturing, construction and services sectors in eastern Europe. ~40% of companies in manufacturing and construction claim labour shortages to be a factor limiting production (Eurofund, 2021). Thinking outside the box about recruitment and exploring new talent pools can help overcome such challenges.

And by new talent pools, we mean ex-convicts. Especially those who are under 30 years old. Research conducted in Lithuania, Poland, Norway and Czech Republic has shown that young ex-offenders are especially in need of employers who would openly state that they are open towards people with criminal past.

Looking for a job after prison is a difficult task for many reasons, but when the employer comes across as welcoming towards people with criminal record, young ex-convicts know that this is a safe space to be and work.

The main aim of this handbook is to present the benefits of employing ex-convicts, explore the negative presumptions towards ex-convicts in the labor market and show the businesses how they can be supported in their mission to be open towards people with criminal past.

The handbook is based on partners research among employers, (ex-) criminals and career specialists, which were all conducted in 2020-2021.

This handbook is created by association Active Youth (Lithuania), Slawek Foundation (Poland), Rubicon Centrum (Czech Republic) & Wayback (Norway) as part of Young Ex-offenders Support project and is supported by Erasmus+.

02 WHAT BUSINESSES

THINK about ex-offenders employment

Research conducted in Lithuania, Poland, Norway and the Czech Republic in total has surveyed 80 employees about their attitudes and practises towards ex-offender employment. This is what they have said.

Ex-offenders have the same opportunities in our company as everyone else

Across all countries, the majority of respondents (on avg. above ~60%) claim that criminal past is not a barrier to employment in their companies. Yet the majority of ex-criminals still find it hard to find job after release. This might show that employers don't communicate their openness towards ex-convicts well, thus people with criminal past abstain from applying to open positions.

Criminal past shouldn't appear on the CV, but could be introduced during an interview

The dominant view towards when a person should announce about their sentence was that a job interview is a good place to open up and share your criminal past. While the survey shows that employers would appreciate people opening up about their conviction eventually, this might be a difficult task for a person and may vary depending on how much an ex-offender is willing to talk about his/her past.

Most companies have no clear rules regarding ex-offender employment

Regular recruitment practices can exclude ex-offenders from employment opportunities. For instance, to be fairer, consider what documentation will be required by the HR department before appointment; some forms of ID, such as proof of address, may be very difficult for prisoners to obtain and if possible this should be taken out of the process.

Business representatives disagree that ex-offenders would make the workplace unsafe or that it may harm companies image

These attitudes were prevalent in a similar research done by University of Pheonix (2019. US). In contrast, our research found that employers in partner countries & their teams have no such fears.

Employers do not cooperate with local prisons or NGOs working with ex-offenders

Having strong links between your HR department and organizations/institutions that work with ex-offenders will help to reach this group. Some NGOs might also offer selecting the right people for your vacancy and work like employment agencies, which eases up the hire process.

03 COMMON CONCERNS & WAYS TO COUNTER THEM

Lack of skills

Our survey has shown that businesses believe prisoners have poor qualifications and lack skills for the job.

However, prison programs offer a range of self-development programs and qualification building. Recognizing education and qualifications gained in prison might help to see ex-offenders as skilled workers. In addition, by accepting skills gained in prison, employers help ex-offenders stay motivated to abstain from criminal life.

Work history

The second most common concern among employers about hiring an ex-convict was that they don't have consistent work history.

This is especially true for ex-offenders under 30 years old. Since being in prison from the young age, makes it almost impossible for teenagers and young adults to collect their first job experiences. As an employer, one should recognize that each sentence creates a gap in your professional history. But also one should recognize what jobs and responsibilities ex-offender had while in prison.

Education

Finally, the third most common concern among employers was that ex-offenders have poor education.

Prisons provide offenders with an opportunity to finish graduate school and some even offer university courses and/or VET training. Recognizing diplomas gained in prison send a positive message to current prisoners as well, for knowing that your diploma gained in prison has value outside is a great incentive to learn.

04 BENEFITS OF RECRUITING AN EX-OFFENDER

GET EMPLOYEES THAT ARE COMMITTED TO THE WORKSPACE

Evidence from employers (Marks & Spenser, UK) ex-offenders place a higher value on having a job because of a desire to stay out of prison. This often means ex-offenders have higher levels of loyalty and retention, which keeps institutional knowledge within your business.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN SOCIETY AND BUILDING SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Hiring ex-offenders can help businesses to become more socially responsible. Actively hiring former prisoners is proven to reduce reoffending. Most offenders want the opportunity to turn their backs on crime and having a job helps them get their lives back on track.

RECEIVE GOVERNMENT INCENTIVES FOR HIRING EX-OFFENDERS

Most governments in EU offer some form of support for employers who recruit (ex-)offenders. Check the possibilities with your local government office responsible for labor.

FILLING THE SKILLS GAP

Eurofund statistics show that countries across Europe are facing labor shortages, which is likely to have a knock-on impact on productivity and performance. Many prisons teach a variety of industry level skills, with prisoners achieving professional qualifications. Employers can tap into this talent pool to resolve skills shortages, as well as helping prisoners and ex-offenders get their lives back on track.

05 EXPERIMENT

was conducted in Lithuania, Poland, Norway, and Czech Republic

Having a job is crucial for almost everyone. It brings economic stability, hence it minimizes stress since people are able to afford the essentials, such as a living space, food, clothes, health care, hygiene products, and so on. For some people, the job search is easy, for others it takes time. However, for ex-convicts it can take even longer due to the prevailing discrimination of their past, meaning their criminal history and other factors such as seeing them as unreliable, uneducated, or lacking work experience, therefore, they are seen as unable to do certain jobs. This type of attitude and unwillingness to employ ex-convicts adds to them relapsing and committing crimes again since they cannot sustain themselves without a job. As well as that, they find it hard to integrate and be part of communities, which can lead and often leads to social exclusion.

To see how employers view ex-offenders an experiment was conducted in Lithuania, Poland, Norway, and Czech Republic, where 60 CVs with criminal records were sent out to job openings via popular job search platforms in the mentioned countries. Similarly, 60 CVs without any criminal records were sent out to the same job positions in each country. In total, 120 CVs were sent out in each country in order to gain a better understanding of how people who have been convicted are perceived today by employees and how likely they are to find a job.

It is important to mention that a similar field experiment was conducted in Sweden. During the experiment pairs of applications were sent out, "<...> one from an applicant with a conviction of assault and one from an applicant without a conviction of assault, were sent during a 4-month period in 2016 to employers with available job vacancies posted on the Swedish Public Employment Office website" (Ahmed & Lång, 2017).

The outcome of the experiment showed that the willingness to employ an ex-offender varies based on the field of work, position, and even gender that dominates the specific field. During the experiment, in total 2078 job applications were sent out. The results showed that employers responded positively to non-offenders in 28% of cases, while ex-offenders received positive responses in 16% of cases. Meaning that people without any criminal background received 72% more positive responses when compared with people who had criminal backgrounds in their job applications.

This experiment has revealed that discrimination against ex-offenders in the hiring process still existed, especially in such job positions as preschool teachers, software developers, restaurant workers, sales person, etc.

However, no statistically significant discrimination was noticed in the work fields such as auto mechanic, truck driver, or enrolled nurse. Such an outcome could have been due to the severity of the offense that was written in the job applications that were sent out. Hence, in this experiment in the 4 countries, a slightly different route was taken. The CVs did not indicate a specific reason for the conviction of the person, as well as that, all the CVs that were sent were male CVs, therefore, different results occurred compared to the results of the Swedish experiment. Nevertheless, it did allow us to see the situation of ex-offenders in the said countries.

The results of the experiment in the earlier mentioned four countries were a bit surprising. Meaning that employees showed some willingness to employ people with criminal records. There were some occurrences where employees responded to the people whose CVs were with criminal records rather than those with no criminal records.

Norway, the employment of ex-offenders is the highest (see table 1) and the results of the experiment show that of the 60 CVs with criminal records sent, 34 were positive and only 5 were negative, the other 21 got no response. In Lithuania, the situation with ex-offenders' employment is also upstanding. Of the 60 CVs sent, 26 were positive and only 4 were negative, 30 did not receive any response. In Czech Republic results were also good, of the 60 CVs sent, 20 were positive, 6 were negative, and the other 24 had no response. In Poland results were the lowest but still good enough, of 60 CVs sent, 19 were positive, 5 were negative and 36 got no response.

The number of responses for CVs without a criminal record (see table 2) was a bit surprising. In Norway and Lithuania, there were fewer positive responses on CVs without indicating a criminal record and in the Czech Republic, the number was the same.

Table 1

NUMBER OF RESPONSES FOR CVS WITH CRIMINAL RECORD				
	Lithuania	Poland	Norway	Czech Republic
Positive	26	19	34	20
Negative	4	5	5	6
No response	30	36	21	24
Total	60	60	60	60

Table 2

NUMBER OF RESPONSES FOR CVS WITHOUT A CRIMINAL RECORD				
	Lithuania	Poland	Norway	Czech Republic
Positive	22	28	30	20
Negative	9	6	8	10
No response	29	26	22	30
Total	60	60	60	60

The numbers show that societies are changing. Most likely employees are more educated about this matter and know the benefits of employing ex-offenders, as well as want to fight against the stereotypes that surround this vulnerable group and give them an opportunity to fix their current situation. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that the ex-offenders themselves still find it difficult to get employed because once they are ready to leave the correctional facility or prisons they do not get a lot of information on which companies/organizations will be willing to employ them which is something that EU countries have to work on to ensure greater integration of ex-convicts and minimize the stress that they might be dealing with.

In conclusion, employment issues among ex-offenders should be considered seriously, since it can help the ex-offenders and the society as a whole. Meaning that it can break the vicious circle of committing crimes again amongst ex-convicts and can make society more accepting of them.

06 GETTING SUPPORT

ex-offenders friendly network

ACTIVE YOUTH:



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