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The Integration of Persons Released from Prison into the Labour Market in the Czech Republic

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Abstract: The study is to examine fundamental issues regarding the reintegration of persons released from imprisonment and their ability to obtain and maintain a job, which is a significant aspect toward the successful return to and inclusion into the majority society for these individuals. A key component during integration of persons released from imprisonment is social workers' help to individuals at various stages of penitentiary and post-penitentiary care. For detainees to successfully reintegrate to civilian life, it is important to start the implementation of various programs, such as long-term development programs, especially in employment. The paper focuses on the analysis of the secondary sources and collected evidence as well as the comparison of selected aspects of Czech environment. The article shows that issues regarding the possibilities for released prisoners to integrate back into the ordinary life are not always given much attention to by the public or private sectors, both of which could take greater steps to facilitate a smoother integration. Providing extensive reintegration assistance should be put forth as a challenge especially for the state sector and other employers, but also for the whole society, as the full participation of former prisoners in the society can greatly help to reduce recidivism.

Keywords: *Custodial sentence enforcement; penitentiary care; post-penitentiary care; integration; labour market; criminal record.*

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1. Introduction

Individuals just released from correctional facilities face many difficult social and life situations, one of which is the process of integration into the employment market. To facilitate their integration or reintegration into the majority society, these persons must develop coping strategies to be able to adapt to life outside the detention centre, including adapting to certain societal norms and conventions. It is important to realize in this context that employment plays a vital role in the life of an individual. Work provides an individual with material means of support as well as a sense of usefulness, satisfaction, belonging and self-realization. Gainful employment does not only create material goods or provide services for the community, but it also gives individuals the possibility of social contact, and often comes to bring a greater meaning to their lives. Finding a fulfilling job within a certain period of time and then maintaining it also contributes significantly to positive individuation and to the formation of a well-rounded life for the former detainee within the society. It is precisely during this period of the process of integration of former prisoners into the labour market that two major interrelated obstacles appear. The first is the lack of motivation for the ex-detainee to work legally, and the second is the lack of employers willing to hire persons with a criminal record.

This article seeks to outline the possibilities and challenges regarding the integration of individuals who have served a prison sentence into (or back into) the labour market. Certain programs offered and implemented through the European Social Fund as well as through state or non-profit sector projects will be evaluated in this context.

Treatment programs through which prisoners prepare for life outside the facility are vital. Processes by which the incarcerated acquire sets of socially acceptable behaviours must begin as these individuals are serving their sentences, i.e. through programs of education and even employment within the prison system. Interventions by social workers also play a significant role, not only in working with prisoners in various stages of incarceration as well as immediately post-incarceration, but even after full reintegration into the majority society has taken place. We will also notice certain structural obstacles in the employment process which hinder individuals released from detention from joining the labour market, e.g. the ramifications of the practical requirement that most potential employers require the applicant to submit an official criminal history from the Czech Criminal Records Register (Act No. 269/1994 Coll. on Criminal Records).

Keeping all these considerations in mind, we have reviewed and evaluated a number of expert sources of information from recent publications, including those documenting the results of realized projects and research, as well as legislation and other regulatory instruments within the Czech Republic dealing with related issues, e.g. publications by Biedermanová and Petras (2011), Bushway, Stoll, and Weiman (2007), Černíková (2008), Hudečková, Petrovičová, and Škvrnová (2012), Jobs.cz (2016), Jůzl (2014), Kalauzová (2011), Lešková (2013), Mareš, Horáková, and Rákoczyová (2008), Marešová et al. (2011), Ščerba (2011), Sochůrek (2007a, 2007b), Štěrba (2007), Vágnerová (2012), as well as work by other specialists in the area.

2. Penitentiary care

An important part of the assistance provided to the sentenced individual is penitentiary care, which consists of set of activities whose main task is to guarantee the rights and ensure the obligations of the convicted. These activities have a rehabilitative character by which a social worker helps the prisoner to recover or gain social performance and other skills as well as prepare him for his release. Penitentiary care is a process of human personality formation and development aimed initially at adapting the prisoner to the conditions of the incarceration facility, then on acquiring beneficial habits and abilities that would form the basis for integration into society after the release from custody (Černíková, as cited by Jůzl, 2014).

2.1. The role of the social worker and the provision of social services to persons in detention during the period of incarceration

Coming into the prison environment brings not only to the detainee, but to those closest to him, a fundamental disruption of the structure of life, as individuals from varied social environments come into custody and punishment. Especially in the cases of those serving a sentence for the first time, the separation from family, friends and acquaintances as well as getting used to the new life in unfamiliar surroundings, fear and worry regarding life behind bars in connection with the closed environment, limited movement, systematic control, as well as concerns regarding the behaviour and structures of their fellow inmates, with whom they are in constant contact with both inside and outside of their cell (Lokša, as cited by Lešková, 2013). The admission into and release of a prisoner from custody represents a stressful life situation, the intensity of which depends on the type of personality the detainee has along with his readiness to handle this demanding period. Concerning personality type, the main prerequisite for a

successful re-adaptation is flexibility, which makes it easier to adapt to the changed living conditions that he becomes used to during his stay in the prison. Along with flexibility, Lokša ranks rationality in solving problems and not succumbing to excessive emotional swings as other positive characteristics, including social communication skills.

An important element in the re-adaptation of an individual is the existing and functioning family background, including the support of and access to friends and acquaintances as well as other interpersonal relationships along with the approach of the individual to society as a whole. To aid the detainee in handling the burden of entering and leaving the prison environment, the professional approach and teamwork of the facility staff is the key. Professionalism along these lines is based on the observance of pedagogical principles and in the avoidance of personal and emotional responses, since prisoners must have the impression that they are accepted as people and that their negative actions are not only inappropriate, but finally will be rebuffed or otherwise rejected. In the penitentiary care team, all members work closely together (Mátel et al., as cited by Lešková, 2013).

In many cases, the released inmate is confronted with the situation that after serving his sentence he has no place to return to, as his family relations have been disrupted, he has usually lost his job, and he has often lost his home (Dohnal Zachová, 2017). In this case, a serious problem arises in which thorough ongoing assistance is vital for those who might have serious difficulties in reintegrating into society; counselling and other support must begin during custody well before the prisoner's release (Štěrba, 2007).

An irreplaceable role in working with offenders is played by the social worker who has knowledge in several disciplines and can apply them in practice. This employee of the Prison Service (PS) provides detainees with basic social and legal counselling; this professional is the first staff member to contact the client, assisting him in the formulation of a Treatment Program (TP). The TP establishes criteria for social assessment and social diagnosis; through the TP an individual plan is created which encourages clients to develop positive social skills positively, creates prerequisites for establishing good social contacts, mediates the first contact of the accused or sentenced prison with the warden of the facility, and, finally, identifies the conditions and factors that influence the development of the client (Zapletal, 2008).

In fulfilling all these functions, this assigned social worker for the accused or sentenced prisoner greatly aids the client in orientating himself among various social relationships, including those with friends and family

outside the facility. The goal is a shift towards a more positive attitude for the client to society in general and to its norms and conventions. The work of this staff member also includes administrative activities involving the recording and sorting of records and other information necessary for the management and performance of the various activities of the client. This assigned social worker is required to keep a personal file of the detainee in which he records the client's social problems with suggested remedies and solutions, chronicles a guestbook with visitors of the client, records information on behavioural changes of the client, and documents the client's dealings with individual institutions (Lešková, 2013).

As indicated by Dohnal Zachová (2017), the basic goal of a social worker in a custodial facility is to instruct a detainee and to clarify for him positive ways of re-thinking his own actions with the goal of helping the client determine the most effective ways to solve and manage his problems. In the detention facility, the job of this professional consists primarily of ongoing assistance which focuses on the transition of sentenced persons towards a proper life. The function of a social worker in prisons and other custodial facilities can be considered as to be indispensable and irreplaceable, as this work facilitates many of the specific features with which the PS seeks to rehabilitate the client and help him become a productive member of society upon release.

The social worker is a professional whose main task is to function independently creating and employing activities focused on the smooth transition of the sentenced to a proper life. One effective method of assistance is the organization and implementation of socially educative activities in the form of seminars whereby detainees seek to gain both personal insights into their behaviours as well as larger perspectives with the goal of learning to orient themselves within the legal system as well as acclimate themselves to current developments and common situations in which one can easily find themselves in the larger society. The assigned social worker passes on information to the client regarding where and how to look for a job upon release; instructs clients on following the Labour Code as well as on where and how to obtain a ID card, work permits and a passport if necessary; advises him on how to manage cash, plan for retirement and acquire social benefits, e.g. unemployment, food or housing benefits; as well as many other situations that the detainee will be undoubtedly face after release (Hudečková, Petrovičová, & Škvrnová, 2012).

2.2. Treatment programs

As Nedoma (2004) points out, as the detainee is serving his sentence he is being prepared for life outside the facility by means of procedures and treatment programs that help the individual establish socially acceptable behaviours in the form of self-control and habits to strengthen his positive skills. The concept of treatment is the most frequently used by the PS of the Czech Republic, which defines the goals of educational activities for prisoners during their stay in prison and includes an individual plan of vocational and educational activities, work programs as well as leisure activities (Štern, Ouředníčková, & Doubravová, 2010).

The actual implementation of the prison treatment process is carried out in the custodial system, on the one hand, by the general methods laid down by laws, guidelines, regulations and similar standards ensuring safety, order, discipline and hygiene encompassing the rights and obligations of prisoners and, on the other hand, social and psychological methods that focus on individual and group forms of work with detainees (Štěrba, 2007). The preparation of convicts for return to civilian life takes place inside of detention facilities, but it is also necessary for organizations and institutions to support these individuals in the first period of their lives after release, whether these entities are established by the state or a network of various non-profits and NGOs (Association for Probation and Mediation in Justice, 2008).

The treatment of detainees is based on the principle of restorative justice, i.e. the objective of making the sentenced individual aware of the responsibility for his actions and, after serving the sentence, aiding his endeavours to join society as a common citizen who respects legal norms. For this reason, TP is one of the main priorities of the Czech PS, through which it works with each prisoner individually, and based on his assumptions and needs a comprehensive report on the sentenced person is processed with regard to the length of the sentence, the cause of crime as well as personality characteristics, all of which are carefully described in texts from the Prison Service of the Czech Republic (2016).

The statistics from the Institute for Criminology and Social Prevention show that, although they are not required to do so, the vast majority of the convicted persons will accept TP (Karabec et al., 2004). Sochůrek (2007b: 44) points out that "The arrangement of the treatment program must always be focused on achieving the purpose of the original sentencing." In the functions of the TP, it is necessary to follow several principles such as using an individual approach for each detainee,

motivational activities as well as enhancing strength of purpose, continuity of choices, methodological problem-solving and other positive character traits. Nevertheless, during the course of detainees serving their sentence, custodial staff also encounter individuals suffering from serious behavioural issues, personality disorders, sexual deviations, reduced intellectual development, as well as populations of prisoners with mitigating issues which complicate standard procedures including juveniles, mothers with children, those with various forms of neuroses or long-term substance abusers, and, finally, those sentenced to life imprisonment, for which separate prisons, specialized services and special treatment facilities are established.

The execution of the TP with detainees is processed on the basis of the sentencing report, taking into account the length of the sentence, the cause of the crime and, above all, depending on the character assessment of the individual involved (Dohnal Zachová, 2017). The content is intended as a goal for the sentenced person, the regular part of which is developing strategies for finding and maintaining employment, participation in work therapies, education as well as other alternative activities aimed at creating the fundamental prerequisites for sustaining an independent way of life.

According to Štěrba (2007), TPs are divided into five areas: a) work activities, b) vocational training activities, c) educational activities, d) leisure activities, and e) forming and maintaining relationships with others. Prison labours as well as work in connection with day-to-day prison operations are also included. Educational activities are comprised of training and instruction delivered through a network of elementary, secondary, tertiary and vocational education institutions in the Czech Republic, as well as through other courses and programs of various kinds. Special educational activities include individual and group special pedagogy along with psychological and therapeutic activities with a focus on social skills training, art therapy, movement therapy as well as aggression management training. Many functional and appealing activities are organized and led by staff with the necessary professional education; these undertakings are geared to help develop the capabilities, knowledge and social skills of the detainees. Assessments regarding the achievement of the set goals of the TP become the basis for the prisoner to submit motions of transfer to another type of prison or even for his conditional release.

The choice of the TP objectives and their fulfilment is one of the decisive factors when placing an individual into one of three permeability groups of internal differentiation. The first of these includes detainees who are actively committed to their plan, adhere to the established order, and

conduct their behaviour in line with the internal order of the prison. Another group consists of a part of the facility population with an unclear or fluctuating attitude toward their responsibilities. Finally, individuals who are not working toward fulfilling their TP or other obligations, and generally those who behave contrary to the internal rules of the facility are placed in the third permeable differential group. The director of the prison or his deputy decides on the classification and changes in an individual's group status according to the recommendations of the expert staff (Štěrba, 2007).

2.3. Employment and education opportunities in prisons

Possibilities of gaining experience in employment and improving education can contribute greatly to shaping a detainee's personality and helping him toward a well-rounded life in society. For this reason, employment is currently considered a fundamental positive factor within various detention and incarceration systems. These programs begin from the precept that work occupies an irreplaceable position for a member of society and represents an important condition of a dignified existence, one that brings not only material benefits, but a sense of self-realization as well as feelings of being useful and needed. Fulfilling work obligations play an extremely important role in prison and other custodial systems, as the work done by detainees contribute significantly to helping prisoners reduce aggression, maintain a positive attitude, keep calm and emotionally balanced, and, last but not least, it brings economic benefits to these individuals. A number of mandatory financial deductions are payable from work benefits, such as child support obligations, reimbursements to the state such as for current as well as past institutionalization and for criminal proceedings, along with other standard claims or fees payable to legal representatives and other individuals and organizations involved in the various processes (Hála, 2006).

The main goals of work activities include the creation and consolidation of work habits for detainees who may have not yet formed them in their lives before incarnation (Hála, as cited by Biedermanová & Petras, 2011). Recommendations from the Council of Europe in the European Prison Rules describe the necessity and importance of employing individuals being held in custodial systems. In these recommendations, the performance of prison labour has been extensively regulated, with work considered a positive element of the prison system and an element capable of maintaining or enhancing the capacity of prisoners to provide for them after leaving the detention facility (Biedermanová & Petras, 2011).

The employment of individuals in custody is addressed in the Czech legal system by Act No. 169/1999 Coll., on the Execution of Imprisonment, a law which establishes the obligation of the sentenced person to work when assigned if the individual is not recognized as being incapacitated for the period of time involved (Act No. 169/1999 Coll. on the Execution of Imprisonment). The Czech Prison Service secures the employment of detainees in nineteen Operating Centres of Economic Activity, which are located in the nineteen different prisons.

Employment is also implemented via the internal direction and production activities in each prison; detainees work for private businesses, within the framework of full-time work-study programs, or in the above-mentioned Centres of Economic Activity. In each facility, when employing detainees, it is necessary to maintain employment programs according to the relative physical infrastructure and staff of the institution as well as the internal regulations in effect, and, finally, in line with the requirements of legislation. The goal is to create conditions that ensure safety, risk reduction and the observance of the sentencing provisions for each detainee as well as the guidelines of each facility regarding the work classifications described in the previous section of the present article. Each institution has its own capabilities to employ people, with the key factor being the level of security of the facility, e.g. minimum, maximum, etc. (Lešková, 2013).

The employment of convicted offenders in private businesses is relatively problematic and complicated, as the majority of positions potential employers offer are located outside of the prison area, and obviously the number of detainees who can be offered employment in unguarded workplaces with free movement is greatly restricted. In 2015, the average monthly number of prisoners in all forms of employment was 8,238.

In internal prison operations, 2,533 persons were employed in an average month, while other figures include 1,524 individuals working for non-prison related entities located on the facility grounds, 1,718 outside the prison on the premises of private businesses, and 2,463 in the educational and therapeutic programs and in non-remunerated work. The statistical data of the Czech PS indicate that the employment rate of individuals in state custody is approximately 60% (Prison Service of the Czech Republic, 2015).

The statistics regarding real employment of convicted individuals in Czech PS include those in education and training programs, with temporary jobs as well as with regular full-time and part-time work. One unfavourable impact of part-time work on convicts is low earnings, which are by no means enough to cover the mandatory remunerations prisoners must make to the state for being in custody (Biedermanová & Petras, 2011). The

average monthly earnings for detainees in 2016 was 3,758 CZK, with the highest working remuneration of 4,149 CZK coming by employment in internal operations and the detention centres' own production facilities. For those working for non-prison related business entities, the earnings were CZK 3,631, and the lowest wages of approximately CZK 3,489 were earned in the Centres of Economic Activity.

The right to education is a fundamental human right enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms (European Commission, 1992). Educational activities have been attributed to facilitating the integration of the individual into society, and therefore the education of indicted and convicted persons is made available to all who have not completed compulsory schooling at the secondary or even elementary level. Programs are also available for those who have completed secondary education but have not pursued further studies, or for those who wish education or training in another field, thus ensuring a better chance of entering the labour market after release. Programs provided and supported by the Czech PS make a major contribution to increasing skills and qualifications of detainees at all levels of education, and through practical training for various professions. To this end, conditions for educational advancement and skills upgrading have been created which will ensure a higher chance of ex-detainees securing and maintaining gainful employment after release. Meeting the need to supplement and increase educational levels of those incarcerated is one of the main goals of the Czech PS, with European legislation also allowing for the financial support of instructional and educational activities from ESF funds (Biedermanová & Petras, 2011).

3. Post-penitentiary care

Post-penitentiary care can be understood as an offer of social services to the released individual (follow-up and systematic care which is predominantly socio-educational, for persons completely released from custody or under alternative sentencing programs). These programs encompass certain types of secondary prevention goals, but consist primarily of tertiary prevention programs executed within a wide range of issues, from preventing recurrent criminal and inappropriate social behaviour to counselling on alcoholism and drug addiction. This agenda should be continuously linked to penitentiary care, thereby reducing the risk of the detainee experiencing an adverse "shock of freedom," especially in cases in which the individual has served an extended sentence (Zapletal, 2008).

It can be said that at present follow-up approaches are not limited to the administrative tasks related to assistance with finding accommodation and employment, as was the case in the past. While it remains the case that during the first few days after the detainee has been released the social worker focuses on helping the individual secure accommodation and work, today this assistance is supplemented by providing legal and administrative assistance as well as financial support, including the provision of therapeutic services, family therapy, and social training along with contacts to non-profit and other organizations in place to help newly-released prisoners and those with a history of substance abuse (Sochůrek, 2007b).

In practice, post-penitentiary care actually begins with early intervention and social care programs during the criminal proceedings of the accused, during which the scope and content of assistance is based on the conceptions of social policy within each country. Obviously, these conceptions can change over time as the public takes on new opinions and perspectives regarding criminal activity and prevention (Štěrba, 2007). From the point of view of successful reintegration and abandoning a criminal career, certain individuals have been shown to have the greatest chances for success. These include first offenders as well as those who do not have serious behavioural disorders, who have served relatively short sentences, and who come from a good social background, e.g. from a functional family. Those with positive interests as well as consistent and strong work habits also have an advantage in terms of adapting to life outside the prison gates (Sochůrek, 2007a, 2007b). As stated by Černíková (2008), the urgent need for post-penitentiary care arises under the following circumstances: the objectives of the penitentiary process were not fully achieved or stabilized regarding the need of the released prisoner for professional assistance as he re-enters society; in the critical first few days after release the individual experiences various crises in dealing with common situations; problems occur in re/establishing a relationship with a partner; parental roles and relationships with children must be re-established; financial debts and damage resulting from criminal activity must be compensated for by the individual; work and professional skills must be renewed; risks concerning pathological behaviour must be avoided.

3.1. Social curators and their professional activities

With the adoption of Act No. 108/2006 Coll., on Social Services, certain activities and competences were transferred to the social curator (similar to what is known in Anglophone systems simply as a social care worker or in some cases as a parole or probation officer). After this law was

adopted, the social curator (SC) became important within social affairs departments of individual city offices, who were given extended powers. The SC is a specialized operative who assists adults with the provision of social benefits, coordinates the provision of social services, and provides professional counselling to persons threatened with social exclusion since they have had experiences in some sort of protective care or have served criminal sentences in prisons or in other correctional facilities. The SC collaborates with facilities providing institutional or protective care, the Czech Prison Service, the Probation and Mediation Service of the Czech Republic, labour offices, administrative offices as well as other local public authorities. Further, the SC works with a client's family and assists the client by drawing up an individual plan along with offering help with handling personal documents and negotiating with the authorities. (Act No. 108/2006 Coll., on Social Services). The current legislation defining the work of a social curator for adults includes the aforementioned Act No. 108/2006 Coll., on Social Services, Act No. 110/2006 Coll., on Subsistence and the Subsistence Minimum, and Act No. 111 / 2006 Coll., On Assistance with Material Need, which describes the agenda for granting extraordinary immediate assistance provided in paragraph 6 § 2 of this act.

The amount of extraordinary direct assistance that may be granted is stipulated by the law as 1,000 CZK, a sum which is set to meet the immediate material needs of the client (Act No. 111/2006 Coll., on Assistance in Material Need). A SC for adults focuses on those released from corrective custody or on individuals who are in the midst of criminal proceedings. The SC meets and subsequently monitors the socially excluded and those at risk of social exclusion, applying methods of ongoing social work to advise and support those still in custody or for a set period following a client's release.

Ongoing care involves working with the client at all stages of the criminal proceedings, from the actual hearings and trials themselves, through the execution of the sentence on to the detainee's release from custody. It anticipates and facilitates solutions to the problems of the accused and convicted before their release, in an attempt to minimize the negative consequences for the client to the fullest extent possible (Štěrba, 2007). The main objective is to establish a mutual socio-therapeutic relationship, so that the client's social bond to those in his immediate surroundings is strengthened, and thus social isolation can be alleviated or avoided altogether. Generally, these functions include working with the family, limiting the impact of socially pathological groups on the client, and helping to maintain contact with and support from institutions. Problems of accused

and convicted prisoners are dealt with prior to their release, thus minimizing the consequences of unfavourable circumstances as much as possible (Zapletal, 2008).

Štěrba describes the goals thusly: "A continuity of approach in regard to solving a client's problems is one of the general features of preventive-oriented case work, which therefore does not only concern assisting the client in the context of criminal proceedings, the execution of sentences, and assistance during and after the processes of release, but also focuses to a large degree on socio-educational work with the client as well as in providing social therapeutic and counselling services" (Štěrba, 2007: 120).

3.2. Barriers to integration into the labour market

An essential part of integrating an individual released from corrective custody is entering the labour market (Dohnal Zachová, 2017). During the process of integration of former detainees into the labour market, basically two obstacles should be considered, the first of which is the lack of motivation of released prisoners themselves to work legally, and the second the lack of employers willing to employ persons with a tainted criminal record (CR). Persons released from prison after serving their sentence and who are determined to refrain from returning to crime and have the incentive to work encounter serious problems in finding a job in the form of the CR. If an individual does not already have a guaranteed job from the prison service or cooperating entities, the employment office is the first institution with which he is confronted as he registers as a jobseeker with the right to receive unemployment benefits. As mentioned by the previously-mentioned author, this becomes the first contact with the labour market, the place where former prisoners offer their services to employers who are hiring. This at-risk group of individuals are placed within a special group of job seekers at the labour office.

In the context of integrating those released from correctional institutions into the wider work environment, there are many obstacles. Each individual's situation is different, and can be influenced, e.g. by completing or supplementing education, retraining as well as working on strategies of motivation or desire to work. In practice, however, this means that it is usually harder for this population to find employment because of certain barriers that they carry from their past. Some of these hindrances may be removed or mitigated by the Prison System as well as the Probation and Parole System. While taking into consideration such predominantly immutable factors such as age, health, or the situation in the local labour

market, there is nothing left to do but to find strategies to overcome unfavourable circumstances in finding a job (Dohnal Zachová, 2017).

3.3. Reintegration of persons released from prison

Reintegration entails a complex process of reincorporation back into society. Particularly in the case of prisoners who have been deprived of their liberty for a significant length of time and have acclimated themselves to the social environment in prison it is considered to be the most problematic. The longer the stay the prisoner has had in the correctional facility, the less likely he is to be successful at reintegration (Mareš, Horáková, & Rákoczyová, 2008). As the cited authors indicate, released prisoners are the most socially disadvantaged group not only when entering the labour market, but in society in general. This population faces the most difficult problems with reintegration into society as a whole, e.g. issues relating to financial debt, housing, family problems, as well as often dependence on drugs and / or alcohol. Re-entry into society is based on social inclusion, which in turn lessens the likelihood of recidivism, a process that begins with the entry of the ex-detainee into the labour market. Many benefits and social advantages are potentiated by the inclusion into the work force of those who have been released. This process can be difficult, even for those who possess extensive qualifications or had accumulated abundant work experience before they were imprisoned (Mareš et al., 2008).

According to Mařádek (2003), reintegration is closely linked to resocialization, whereby the former detainee should reintegrate into the group and should be dissuaded from committing criminal offences. This is referred to as social reintegration, as the individual's relationship with the larger society, i.e. the state of integration, was disrupted by the sentenced served in a correctional facility.

In the Czech Republic, the effectiveness of one specific program focused on the resocialization of former prisoners was examined by Biedermanová and Petras (2011). The researchers carried out a survey of 148 prisoners who were to be re-socialized with the help of a program known in the Czech language as 3Z: *Zastav se, Zamysli se, Změň se* (in English "Stop, Think, Change"). A control group of another 148 inmates who did not go through this program was also evaluated, with the hypothesis being that the 3Z group would prove to be more successfully re-socialized and that their recidivism rates would decrease, i.e. that they would commit no further offenses and thus not return to custody. The hypothesis in this case proved to be unfounded (Biedermanová & Petras, 2011). Further, in 2015 the firm LMC published the results of a survey mapping employers' access to

convicted persons as listed in the Czech Criminal Records Register (LMC, 2016). Further research was carried out by the employment website Jobs.cz in 2013, with the result that half of the companies surveyed would offer released prisoners no work at all, not even jobs in unskilled labour. Overall, the results show that 80 % of people who seek regular employment must provide official documentation certifying that they have not been incarcerated in the criminal justice system (Jobs.cz, 2016).

In considering the possibilities of including this disadvantaged population in the labour market, it is necessary to keep in mind the need for resocialization, itself a complex process of redress and changes regarding the previously unsatisfactory socialization of an individual. In correctional practice, resocialization is seen as the *penitentiary socialization* of individuals, a term used to differentiate this process from the resocialization of other populations of individuals who have socialization issues, but not to the extent that their lack of socialization results in criminal activity (Sochůrek, as cited by Biedermanová & Petras, 2011).

In the legal system of the Czech Republic, in the Social Services Act, social exclusion is defined as the "detachment of a person outside of the ordinary life of the society and the impossibility to engage in the society as a result of an unfavourable social situation" (Act No. 108/2006 Coll., on Social Services, § 3, f, p. 1). Social integration is defined by this law as "a process that ensures that socially excluded or socially vulnerable persons are presented with possibilities and opportunities that help them fully participate in the economic, social and cultural life of society, and thus live in a way that is considered to be normal within the society" (Act No. 108/2006 Coll., on Social Services, § 3, e, p. 1). The resocialization of persons after imprisonment is also dealt with to an extent by international institutions, but the focus is primarily at the national level, including both the private and non-profit sector institutions.

In addressing the issue of integrating individuals after release from prison at the international level, it is imperative to mention the European Union, which with its extensive financial resources helps to prevent social exclusion among all risk groups in the EU. Since the accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union in 2004, matters of social inclusion and employment have been addressed within the framework of the EU policy. During the years 2000-2010, the European Social Fund (ESF) was developed within the framework of the Lisbon Strategy, through which the main concern was the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The primary objective was to prevent the social exclusion of the most vulnerable populations, a strategy which was facilitated by helping provide access to

resources, justice, services, education and employment opportunities for at-risk individuals and communities. In 2010 the Lisbon Strategy was fully replaced by Europe 2020, a set of policies which puts forward three mutually reinforcing priorities: smart, sustainable and growth-promoting inclusion, in turn developing a knowledge-based and innovative economy with sustainable growth. Support measures are being put into place to promote a more competitive as well as a greener, less resource-intensive and growth-friendly economic model which fosters the integration of a high-employment economy characterized by social and territorial cohesion (Europe 2020 Strategy in European Commission, 2010). In line with Europe 2020 objectives, individual member states have developed their own national targets in the area of social inclusion which take into account the economic and social specificities of the particular country. The aim of the Czech Republic is to try to reduce the number of persons at risk of poverty and material deprivation as well as the number of individuals living in households without a person employed by the year 2020 (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, 2016).

As Pavlák (2005) has indicated, the European Union's key financial instrument for promoting the employment and social inclusion of disadvantaged groups is the ESF. The fund currently promotes equal opportunities in the labour market, the advancing the qualifications of the unemployed, lifelong learning, improving access to the labour market for women as well as introducing modern ways of organizing work and doing business. ESF resources are made available to combat labour market discrimination, to promote social inclusion and to provide help for disadvantaged groups of people entering the labour market (European Social Fund in the Czech Republic, 2016). EU strategies are being implemented within a seven-year programming period of 2014-2020, for which funds of almost € 24 billion have been earmarked for the Czech Republic. Most of these funds have been slated to contribute toward programs connected with the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, an approach which represents a long-term vision for the development of the European Union (Ministry for Regional Development of the Czech Republic, 2016).

In the 2007-2013 programming period, an increased focus was placed on integrating socially disadvantaged groups into the labour market, with a number of projects implemented to address social inclusion, whether in the area of education, counselling or housing. Since 2010, a higher number of projects have been implemented under the Human Resources and Employment Operational Program, which focuses on persons released

from custodial sentences. The projects are aimed at facilitating the return of prisoners to active life, with the main focus being on working with individuals to enhance their self-esteem, to provide information on current trends in the labour market, to make retraining available, to strengthen computer literacy and to facilitate supplementary education (European Social Fund in the Czech Republic, 2014; see illustrative purposes Table 1).

Table 1: Ongoing and completed projects supported by the European Social Fund

Operational programme (using official Czech abbreviations)	Title of the project	Years of implementation
OP LZZ	New beginning	2013 – 2015
OP LZZ	Integration of socially excluded individuals into the labour force	2010 – 2012
OPZ	Where to go in the Hradec Králové Region II	2016 – 2020
OP LZZ	Fragile chance	2012 – 2015
OPZ	Another chance in the Vysočina Region	2015 – 2018
OP LZZ	On the right path!	2012 – 2015
OPZ	Social prevention services in the Olomouc Region	2015 – 2019
OP LZZ	Maintaining a good work record	2013 – 2015
OP LZZ	Comprehensive reintegration program for individuals released from the Příbram prison system	2010 – 2012
EU Erasmus +	Preparation for the support of individuals following their release from prison in terms of their reintegration into society and the labour market	2015 – 2017

Source: European Social Fund for the Czech Republic, 2016

3.4. Public sector

Governmental organizations also help prisoners reintegrate after their release (Dohnal Zachová, 2007). These institutions often become partners in projects operating in this area that are co-financed by the ESF. The Prison Service (PS) of the Czech Republic was established on 1 January 1993 by Act No. 555/1992 Coll., on Prison Service and Judicial Guards of the Czech Republic. This organization is responsible for the prevention, detention, rehabilitation and re-education of those incarcerated. The Czech PS is one of the main actors involved in dealing with prisoners, e.g. the execution of responsibilities regarding the enforcement of imprisonment, custodial services, internal and external security issues, order in the exercise of justice, as well as escorting and transporting detained persons, conditions for the serving of sentences and other issues regarding detention. For our purposes it is important to mention this organization's ongoing activities for detainees through education, development and treatment programs to create conditions and prerequisites for a law-abiding life for this population after release from the correctional facility (Act No. 555/1992 Coll., on the Prison Service and the Judicial Guard of the Czech Republic).

The Probation and Mediation Service of the Czech Republic is the organizational component of the state which carries out probation and mediatory activities in matters involving criminal proceedings. This service is governed by Act No. 257/2000 Coll., on the Probation and Mediation Service, with its activities falling within the competence of the Ministry of Justice of the Czech Republic. The Probation and Mediation Service seeks to mediate effective and socially beneficial conflict resolution in connection with criminal activity while at the same time ensuring alternative sanctions with respect to the interests of injured parties, community protection and crime prevention (Probation and Mediation Service of the Czech Republic, 2016). These activities consist of supervising the behaviour of the accused as well as deciding if or when to replace custody by probation. At the same time, this service helps to remediate and mitigate the consequences of the offense for the injured and other affected persons, including the prevention of similar criminal activity in the future. (Act No. 257/2000 Coll., on the Probation and Mediation Service). Ščerba has indicated that: "The main reason for the creation of the Probation and Mediation Service was the effort to assist criminal justice institutions in the application of the new criminal policy measures to be employed at large in the community and thereby to reduce the number of imprisoned persons" (Ščerba, 2011: 352).

In dealing with criminal cases, the interests of the victim of the crime, the accused and the society are taken into account while help and guidance is also provided to the accused in order to strengthen his accountability for his actions (Matoušek, 2008). In terms of the relevant legislation, probation is understood to mean "organizing the activities of the detainee as well as the conditions regarding his release, i.e. supervising the accused, defendant or convicted party, controlling the execution of alternative punishments not connected with imprisonment including imposed responsibilities and limitations, monitoring the behaviour of the sentenced person during the probationary period of the conditional release from imprisonment in order for the individual to lead a proper life" (Štern et al., 2010: 71).

The main objectives are to integrate the offender into society, to create within him or her a sense of involvement in the regular life in society without violating its standards and laws, to facilitate the active participation of victim in the process of avoiding subsequent criminal activity and, finally, to protect society by averting further violations of the law through the prevention of further criminality. The objective is not just to punish the accused or compensate the injured party, but above all about finding a lasting solution that is acceptable for all involved. Mediation itself can be understood as an informal process that helps to resolve conflicts (Žatecká, 2007).

Mediation associated with a crime arbitrates alternative solutions to criminal matters with the help of a mediator, that is to say, a third party, to solve the problem, and seeks to achieve a solution that is acceptable regarding the public interest that is reflected in a particular decision in criminal proceedings. Svoboda (2005: 21) states that: "Generally speaking, the concept of restorative justice is the starting point for mediation in criminal matters as well as the alternative treatment of criminal matters." The concept of retributive or punitive justice in which the primary victim of a crime is seen as the state or the society he represents, and thus specific individual victims are attributed only a passive position has been replaced by the concept of restorative justice, which is somewhat contradictory to the traditional concept of punitive criminal justice. The concept of restorative criminal justice treats the offense quite differently and emphasizes the damage to one person, not the attack on the state and the damage to general public interests. The emphasis therefore is placed on the conflict between the victim of a crime and the perpetrator, whereby the prosecuted offense is judged to be a manifestation of a social contact between them and the

criminal process allows for an active role for both the accused and the injured (Svoboda, 2005).

3.5. Non-profit sector

The non-profit sector consists of a number of organizations of different sizes which engage in various legal activities, fields of activity and general utility measures (Bačuvčík, 2011). An important role is given to non-state actors with regard to ongoing assistance in the process of integration of individuals who face challenges of social adaptation and reintegration into society (Černíková, 2008).

There are a number of non-profit organizations in the Czech Republic that deal with socially deprived persons, including those who are serving a custodial sentence. Černíková (2008) describes a number of civic, religious and charity associations and organizations which can be divided in terms of providing various forms of social assistance to entities providing:

- • material assistance (ADRA, Czech Catholic Charities, Czech Red Cross, SOS Centre of the Diakonie of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren)
- • counselling (Association for Assistance to Released Prisoners and People in Need, Helping Hands)
- • social care (Asylum Houses, Salvation Army, Hope Association)

Among the organizations whose primary mission and purpose is to assist with the reintegration of people with a criminal background into society and into the labour market are civic associations such as the Rubicon Centre, the Prague Business Support Centre, the International Prison Society, Another Chance as well as In Freedom (Na svobodě), Romodrom and many others. Their goal is to help released prisoners integrate into society through the provision of social services, legal advice and job placement.

3.6. Motivation for released individuals to be integrated into the labour market

Developing and supporting motivation to work is an important factor in former prisoners, as employment or other occupational activities have been found to be extremely beneficial in this population. Employment provides certain advantages that are indispensable for these individuals (Dohnal Zachová, 2017). Motivation for work has a diverse character, and it depends on and varies with the individual needs and values of each prisoner. Vágnerová (2004) argues that incentives for work can be different and each may carry an individual specific meaning, e.g.:

• **Money** - financial satisfaction resulting from gainful employment during custody, which can repay fees, fines and other financial restitution resulting from a crime, including those demanded by the criminal justice system itself, or to earn cash to purchase food and other items from the prison canteen.

• **Work** can satisfy the need for meaningful activity. The significance of the passing time while serving a sentence takes on a different dimension for the working prisoner than the person who was not employed while in custody. The prisoner adopts working habits that he may not have had before incarceration, which has a positive effect after his release. The time in spent in custody seems to pass faster and it can be said that working activity prevents boredom, apathy and a lack of life purpose.

• **Self-realization** - the goal is to gain desirable attitudes, the need to push forward and show what one is able do and can accomplish.

• **Social contact** is important for the possibility of establishing a range of social contacts, allowing for easier entry into society after the sentence has ended.

• **Disciplinary rewards and benefits** are awarded to prisoners for the exemplary performance of their duties under Act 169/1999 Coll.

According to Vágnerová (2004), a positive evaluation is essential for the prisoner's request to be reassigned to a more moderate type of prison, a conditional release, the commutation of the original sentence, or inclusion in the first differential group of convicts as indicated above. Disciplinary practice is considered the systemic allocation of the rewards and punishments implemented by the custodial institution or wider prison system. The decision to impose discipline or punishment falls within the competence of a staff member with disciplinary authority. The discipline / reward system provides a motivational element and exerts a positive influence on the self-regulation and self-realization characteristics of the prisoner. Among the most significant rewards are official commendations that increase the possibility of being able to leave the prison grounds for a temporary period of several hours or days (Vágnerová, 2004).

On the other hand, the lack of motivation to work legally upon release can be caused by several factors. According to Šťastný and Matulík (2010), certain individuals generally have no motivation to become employed because they have either lost working habits while in prison, or have never worked and thus never had an opportunity to build them at all. In these cases, the classic societal problem of long-term unemployment ensues. This is a situation in which the individual becomes accustomed to life based only

on the support of social benefits, thus social parasitism occurs. Some people released from custody prefer to work illegally, such as through the production and sale of drugs. This population would rather risk being arrested and sentenced again than to work legally with much less earnings (Šťastný & Matulík, 2010). Motivational programs are in place that seeks to address this issue by fostering within this population empowering skills to secure and maintain employment, addressing the particular life situation of an individual, or changing negative patterns of behaviour. The main objective of all motivational programs is to change an individual's outlook on his life situation and help him seek out solutions to the obstacles that face him in his integration into society. This process can be facilitated by preparing target groups to aid individuals during the process of finding a job, i.e. helping the individual in dealing with potential financial debts, finding him adequate housing, contacting his family and other steps that help him integrate into society (Kalauzová, 2011).

3.7. Recidivism

Generally speaking, the concept of recidivism is the focus of several scientific disciplines. Decades ago, Suchý (1971) recommended a basic division of criminal recidivism within criminal law into two general concepts, one that merely entails any repetition of criminal activity regardless of the nature of the offense, and the second a narrower concept that solely describes the repeated commission of the same or a similar kind of offense. In Czech criminal law today, the term recidivism indicates a situation in which an offender who has previously been legally convicted of a crime commits another offense, with this definition of recidivism employed by the court when imposing a sentence on the accused for a later offence (Frišták, Galát, Přepechalová, & Žatecká, 2009).

Marešová et al. (2011) has documented that the first six months after a detainee has been released from custody is the riskiest period for recidivism, with the maximum number of those who become repeat offenders committing a new offense within three years after release. The risk of failure in this area is lower for first offenders or for those individuals who have served a relatively short sentence. The risk of reoffending is also lower for those who do not have been diagnosed with disturbed personalities, who come from a functioning social background, and who have developed strong working habits and marketable professional qualifications. Conversely, the social situation of some who have been released from a correctional facility is aggravated by the fact that they are often unable to maintain relationships due to their generally unacceptable social behaviour. These individuals tend

to come from a weak or dysfunctional family background and have few to no long-term familial or friendly relationships, and they limit their contacts to people of a similar status and disposition. In one analysis of a group of respondents with a criminal history, it was shown that this population generally consists of individuals with lower education, of which 40.0 % are completely unskilled and have no job qualifications of any kind. They rarely find employment, and when they do they are unable to work systematically or to hold down a job for any length of time because of their perceived inability to respect certain fundamental rules and protocols, i.e. regular attendance and observance of working hours and, generally, the failure to demonstrate a strong work ethic. The result of this population's failure in the workplace is their isolation from society, and thus they often fall back into old habits which lead to criminal recidivism (Vágnerová, 2012).

4. Discussion

Providing extensive reintegration assistance should be put forth as a challenge especially for the state sector and other employers, but also for the whole society, as the full participation of former prisoners in society can greatly help to reduce the recidivism of the newly released, thereby reducing economic and social demands.

The target social group under discussion represents a large number of individuals, as about four thousand people in the Czech Republic leave prison annually (Prison Service of the Czech Republic, 2016). The employment of persons who have been imprisoned or under another form of detention is relatively complex. Based on the data from the Czech Statistical Office, in recent years less than 60 % of released prisoners who are able-bodied and otherwise eligible to find work are able to do so. The crucial role in the process of reintegration of an individual back into the majority society following incarceration is his involvement in the labour market. Hála (2006) has described how work brings huge benefits for an individual and is considered a positive factor that ensures the employee's material existence and other additional benefits as well as provides a sense of self-realization and usefulness.

In a period of economic growth, a stable economy and a low percentage of unemployment, a larger number of employers are interested in the possibility of cooperating with the Czech Prison Service to find employees. In a strong economy, commercial entities experience a lack of not only skilled workers and professionals, but also unskilled workers to take jobs for which there is a limited amount of interest in the general public. In

these circumstances firms become interested in offering employment to those serving or who have served time in the correctional system as well as to other groups they would not consider hiring when the overall unemployment rate is higher. At present a relatively strong economy has brought better conditions for the recently released in regard to finding and maintaining employment than in previous years, e.g. when the Czech Republic was experiencing the negative effects of the 2008 global financial crisis in its own economy.

The employment opportunities of this population naturally depend on a number of other social contexts, i.e. the individual characteristics of job seekers as well as those conditions and demands of employers. Each situation depends on whether the expectations of both parties match in terms of what employers and potential employees can offer each other. Naturally, a potential candidate's professional or other work experience, educational profile, personal competencies as well as other qualities must meet the requirements for the relevant position (Dohnal Zachová, 2017). Employers' notions and assumptions regarding potential workers who have served prison sentences may be distorted in a number of respects by various social stereotypes, or they simply may have no idea at all about these people because they have no experience with them, thus an unknown variable is presented which the employer does not wish to risk. Background information and perceptions are therefore crucial factors regarding employer interest in finding new workers among the population of released prisoners. Through cooperation between the Union of Industry and Transport Workers of the Czech Republic and the General Directorate of the Czech Prison Service, workshops are carried out in which potential employers are informed about the advantages and disadvantages of employing persons currently in custody as well as about the possibilities of employing released prisoners. As these services are of interest both from the employers' perspective as well as from that of the representatives of labour offices, regions and towns, this can be considered another positive step in the work with former detainees, who serve the public interest. On the other hand, a number of legislative and practical problems hinder and often prevent former prisoners from being employed (Union of Industry and Transport Workers of the Czech Republic, 2017).

Lešková (2013) has referred to this problem, pointing out the possibilities of the prison institutions in the employment of convicted persons, the applicable internal regulations and the fulfilment of the requirements resulting from legislation, by which minimal conditions must be created, security is assured and risks are reduced. From a legislative point

of view, prisoners must consent to work for the non-state sector; in addition, barriers must be put in place to limit or eliminate the employers' liability for accidents. These safeguards are based on national health insurance in cases when employers cannot insure these employees, who themselves cannot afford commercial insurance based on their financial situation. Practical problems in this area are mainly related to the possibilities of the Czech Prison Service to allow detainees to be employed outside of the prison grounds, where the demand for employees is much higher. This is of course linked to the fact that prisoners are divided into groups according to the seriousness of the offense committed. Based on these classifications, most detainees have to be supervised at all times and are not allowed to work outside the prison (Sociální Dialog, 2017).

At present, despite the increased interest of employers in hiring individuals currently in custody or who have recently been released, the general public are more likely to hold opposing views in regard to this practice. For this and other reasons, in one survey more than half of the firms tested would not hire an individual with a criminal record, although the employers surveyed gave no legitimate reason for this. This survey conducted by the company LMC and which involved 241 employers showed that 55 % of the respondents have never employed an individual in this situation. Further, in a research study conducted by Dohnal Zachová (2017), another 37 business owners confirmed the results of the research by LMC, i.e. a sample of 37 (100 %) returned responses showed that in 16 (43 %) cases the firm would not hire an individual with a criminal record.

The reasons for such practices are often the negative experiences of companies, warranted or unwarranted concerns, or simply stereotypical thinking, which infers that people with a criminal history simply cannot become high-quality employees. One of the best-known organizations working with released individuals and helping them integrate into life outside of prison is the Rubicon Centre (Dohnal Zachová, 2017), a non-governmental organization begun in 1994, currently with one location in the Central Bohemian region. In one survey of former prisoners by the Rubicon Centre, it was confirmed that this is the only institution the respondents were able to give in their responses regarding firms that hire or facilitate the hiring of ex-convicts. While this is a positive result for this NGO, such a lack of familiarity or interest in these issues by other employers or organizations shows that there is much work to be done in this area (Rubikon Centrum, 2017d).

One part of the Rubicon Centre consists of an employment agency which has been in operation for over twenty years in the Czech Republic.

This area of the non-profit organization creates programs to assist people with a criminal background. The aim is to develop activities and projects to reintegrate people with a criminal past into society, including the development of their ability to work in the labour market and the achievement of their full social and work integration, which is an important part of the inclusion of this risk group into everyday life. It is quite clear that this approach to working with this population reduces recidivism, an effect which has a positive impact not only on society but also on the former prisoners themselves. Rubicon works with people with a diminished ability to deal with their own problem situations along with other individuals in isolation and conflict by providing services within programs to increase employment, address financial indebtedness, and increase the effectiveness of commuted and alternative sentencing. In terms of employment enhancement programs, the organization provides job counselling and job placement, while it also helps those with a criminal record to gain a greater insight into the job opportunities available to them. The centre consults with clients to help them create an effective CV and motivation letter, as well as helps them prepare for job interviews with potential employers. Further, it teaches these individuals how to communicate with interviewers about their criminal past and to successfully present skills to get a sense of self-confidence when applying for a position (Rubikon Centrum, 2017d).

The Rubicon employment agency organizes its professional recruitment of suitable employees for a given job with a detailed screening of candidates to be recommended for the position, while also offering helping and support for both the employer and employee as the new worker is adapting to his new workplace environment. Since the agency's establishment in 2012, it has successfully supplied workers for more than 100 employers in Prague, the Central Bohemian Region and the Karlovy Vary Region. Nearly 500 candidates have been placed in positions, with 75 % remaining at the company after a probationary period (Rubikon Centrum, 2017e).

In connection with support initiatives for those released from correctional custody, the completed project of the non-governmental non-profit organization Rubicon Centre called "The Central Bohemian Region - A Chance to Start Again II" should be mentioned. This venture took place in 2016 in the Central Bohemian Region and fulfilled several goals, among these, tertiary prevention of crime and recidivism in individuals with a criminal history in the Central Bohemia Region, as well as support for the social stabilization of this population, i.e. strengthening the motivation and competences needed for them to actively address unemployment concerns

and financial indebtedness, thus increasing their practical employability in the labour market, etc. The target group consisted of both the first-time offenders and recidivists. The main activities of the project included support for social stabilization, e.g. the mediation of information regarding available support services, the mapping of individual client needs and the reinforcement of the motivation to seek and secure work, orientation in resolving key situations, along with help in establishing contacts with relevant organizations, authorities and social curators. Clients received the necessary assistance and information regarding available housing as well as the securing of benefits from the social security system along with other social services, depending on their individual needs. "Start Again II" also included assisting each client in forming a map plotting their past work experience along with prerequisites for personal development and orientation goals towards the most appropriate line of work to be perused. Participants were given support in the preparation of a CV and motivation letter as well as practical orientation in the current labour market and for specific job vacancies. Attention was devoted to resolving clients' financial indebtedness by means of professional economic advice for clients faced with a lack of skills with money (Pavelková, 2018) and indebtedness. The project outputs provided to us by Rubicon indicate that the total number of clients involved in the project "Central Bohemia Region – A Chance to Start Again II" consisted of 165 individuals. The motivational course was attended by 14 individuals and 56 participants of the project resolved negative situations in the area of indebtedness. The counselling course in acquiring competencies helpful for finding a job was attended by 41 people, 8 of whom were later employed (Rubikon Centrum, 2017c).

Another project currently under way and co-financed by the ESF through the OPLZZ is entitled "Access to the Labour Market in Příbram." The project has been implemented in the Central Bohemian town of Příbram from the beginning of September 2016 and lasted until the end of August 2018. The aim of this project is to provide basic counselling to 170 persons and to equip at least 80 of them with competencies needed for employment in a company on the labour market. Using comprehensive support and focusing on the criminal histories and social exclusion of the target group of the project, i.e. socially excluded and socially vulnerable persons, the focus is on aiding the unemployed with criminal backgrounds to find work (Rubicon Centrum, 2017a).

Another project being carried out in the Central Bohemian Region from the beginning of July 2016 until the end of June 2019 should be mentioned is called "Work and Debts - A Comprehensive Model of Support

for Persons with a Criminal Past Entering the Labour Market and Society." This project addresses the situation of people with a criminal history with demonstrable problems regarding their standing in society and employability in the job market, as a result of which they are threatened by social exclusion. Through their activities, the project team responds to the needs of this population in terms of motivation, financial distress due to indebtedness and social stabilization. Reducing recidivism is an important factor in preventing the further deepening of social exclusion and resolving other conflicts socially excluded individuals experience along with helping them to avoid criminal actions against the law. The participants involved in this project work in cooperation with the Probation and Mediation Service, the Czech Labour Office, social curators, and non-governmental non-profit organizations in the Central Bohemian Region. The team supports individuals currently in prison custody, who are instructed in penitentiary information seminars as well as financial literacy and debt management courses, debt counselling, and a training course in useful skills and knowledge needed to secure employment. The associated motivational group program consists of two interrelated topics related to application to the labour market and financial indebtedness. Within post-penitentiary care, activities are further developed in cooperation with the Probation and Mediation Service of the Czech Republic and the Czech Labour Office, where these institutions use the program as an extension of its standard activities. Another point of the project is debt prevention and counselling individuals to help them address either minor or major financial indebtedness (Rubikon, 2017g).

Another project recently completed in the Central Bohemian Region is "Time to Work," which ran from the beginning of September 2016 until the end of August 2018. The aim of this project was to improve the status of people with a criminal record in the labour market by dealing with these individuals in terms of their accumulation of handicaps and social disadvantages which are exacerbated by demonstrable obstacles in the labour market with regard to recruiting employers. The essence of this team's mission is to make longer-term changes that will have a positive impact not only on this population's ability to secure and sustaining employment, but also on improving their overall quality of life and social integration. The project responded to the problem of low employment rates for low-skilled and formerly incarcerated individuals and their related long-term unemployment by means of a tailor-made service tailored to the needs of this population. Participants who are listed in the Criminal Records Register work with the Czech Probation and Mediation Service, the Czech Labour

Office, social curators, non-governmental non-profit organizations, whose staff offer the possibility of this kind of assistance to the clients throughout the region.

Through individual meetings or group workshops, the activity of "Time to Work" was carried out in the form of guidance with elements of career counselling and motivational interviews, taking into account the individual needs and situation of the client, including his involvement in specific project activities and directing him to appropriate employment. A portion of the individual counselling was focused on the development of job-seeking skills, as well as on work-based training and retraining through activities that enable participants to improve work habits through training sessions and to obtain the skills needed to further penetrate the labour market and re-qualification programs (Rubicon Centre, 2017b).

Finally, as has been stated, during the job application process the criminal record of potential employees is an important factor. This is an attitude that has been verified by a series of surveys. One such study published in 2013 was conducted by LMC, an international job placement and recruitment agency which is among the leading service providers in the job market. One finding shows that in the Czech Republic 79 % of the 2,404 surveyed visitors to the jobs.cz employment server stated that they must submit an official Criminal Records Certificate when they enter a new position. In another study, nearly half of the 151 surveyed employers indicated that they do not consider individuals with a criminal record at all for any positions; 9 % of companies require a clean criminal record only for certain positions and one fifth of employers assess the candidate with regard to the severity and nature of the offense. According to these studies, the majority of employers are simply not interested in workers who have been released from prison (Rubikon, 2017f).

The projects mentioned above are only some of the ventures and research studies carried out by companies that are dedicated to dealing with the integration of former prisoners back into the workplace and into a life of freedom. These successful projects can serve as valuable examples that need to be further modelled and promoted not only by non-profit and private sector organizations, but above all in public institutions, where it can be expected that the state would have a vested interest in dealing with this population and could offer more specialized programs. Another possibility toward improvement can be seen in the creation of completely new non-governmental non-profit organizations, particularly in regions of the Czech Republic where the social care of former detainees has been found to be inadequate.

As indicated above, improving employment opportunities for individuals who have been released from correctional institutions is a goal that is highly beneficial socially in a number of ways. Not only can employers recruit from a largely untapped workforce and, of course, bring practical material and psychological benefits directly to the population concerned, but society as a whole benefit when conditions for preventing criminal recidivism can be enhanced and strengthened. As a key prerequisite for the successful return of these individuals to society, helping this population secure and maintain employment is a vital step in their process of reintegration. Only targeted and legislatively backed activity aimed at finding the solution for the issue raised in the paper can prevent or gradually mitigate the reduction of risks of recidivism in society.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to bring to the fore the issue of individuals released from prison with emphasis on their most common problems in the current social and environmental situation in the Czech Republic. The focus has been on the process of the integration of this population back into the general job market, including resolving problems and challenges that former detainees are forced to deal with in order to adapt to a life of freedom, e.g. acclimating themselves to social norms and conventions that can help facilitate their reintegration into the society at large. The integration of these individuals into the labour market is the key in this process.

As we have seen, several programs and projects have emerged in terms of support for this goal through the ESF, as well as the state and non-governmental non-profit sector, but more of these types of ventures are surely needed. The penitentiary and post-penitentiary care provided by social workers to these individuals both in custody and upon release plays an indispensable role, including the use of available treatment programs through which prisoners can prepare for life outside the institution, e.g. by ingraining socially acceptable behaviours within themselves that will benefit themselves as well as the larger society when these individuals are released. Extending the possibilities of education and employment for these individuals while they are serving their sentence can be considered a highly positive factor by which the convict can prepare the optimum conditions for a positive new life beyond the prison gates (Dohnal Zachová, 2017). Clearly a number of obstacles stand in the way of the ex-convict finding employment, the most serious of which is having a criminal record itself. On

the practical level, employers in private firms or companies as well as public institutions require from any prospective employee the submission the Czech Criminal Records Certificate.

To support former detainees in the process of securing employment, the non-governmental non-profit organization Rubicon Centre has emerged in the Czech Republic as the most prominent source of assistance for this population. Since 1994 the Rubicon Centre has been working diligently with released prisoners to help resolve a number of issues connected to the population within this risk group.

Nevertheless, only a deep and sustained interest on the part of both the public and private sector can create opportunities, services and other support mechanisms to help successfully integrate former detainees back into the majority society. The strategies involved in achieving this goal include creating professional recommendations for practical action, with one key consideration being the fact that the basic prerequisite for maintaining a productive and fulfilling life in society after being released from imprisonment is obtaining employment and the legal income to satisfy basic material needs. It is advisable and worthwhile to support the emergence of new non-profit organizations within the specific regions of the Czech Republic. These institutions could provide comprehensive care for prisoners in the form of social worker services, legal services and representation, as well as a psychological or a therapeutic assistance. This support would include the organization of programs focused on close cooperation with potential employers in the creation of new jobs primarily intended for individuals with criminal backgrounds. To qualify and be hired for these positions, submitting a clean Czech Criminal Records Certificate would not be required. Only professional involvement of social workers and state and non-profit organizations with persons serving imprisonment is very important and implies not only fulfilment of the purpose of punishment, but also the proper integration of former prisoners into civilian life.

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