

## Do post-prison job opportunities reduce recidivism?

### Increasing the availability of high-quality job opportunities can reduce recidivism among released prisoners

Keywords: crime, recidivism, prisoner re-entry, employment

#### ELEVATOR PITCH

The majority of individuals released from prison face limited employment opportunities and do not successfully reintegrate into society. The inability to find stable work is often cited as a key determinant of failed re-entry (or “recidivism”). However, empirical evidence that demonstrates a causal impact of job opportunities on recidivism is sparse. In fact, several randomized evaluations of employment-focused programs find increases in employment but little impact on recidivism. Recent evidence points to wages and job quality as important determinants of recidivism among former prisoners.

#### KEY FINDINGS

##### Pros

- + Improvements in aggregate labor market conditions are associated with decreases in aggregate crime rates.
- + Recent evidence suggests that increases in wages for low-skilled workers and opportunities in sectors that pay higher wages to low-skilled workers can reduce recidivism among individuals recently released from prison.
- + Providing employers with information on offender rehabilitation and relief from potential liability can expand employment opportunities for ex-offenders.

##### Cons

- Released prisoners face substantial obstacles such as substance abuse, mental health disorders, and social and family problems that dwarf any potential impact of employment on recidivism.
- Several randomized evaluations of employment-focused re-entry programs report increases in post-prison employment rates that are not associated with large changes in recidivism.
- Employment opportunities for released prisoners are scarce due to low levels of education and limited work experience as well as an aversion among employers to hire them.

#### AUTHOR'S MAIN MESSAGE

Individuals who face limited job opportunities are more likely to commit a crime. A criminal record diminishes the quantity and quality of labor market opportunities, which perpetuates a cycle of unemployment, crime, and incarceration. Recent studies find that improvements in wages for the low-skilled and growth in industries characterized by higher wages for low-skilled workers can help reduce recidivism. Future re-entry evaluations should therefore focus on policies and programs that increase post-prison wages and stable work opportunities, including initiatives that encourage more employers to consider rehabilitated ex-prisoners as applicants.

