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Work of former prisoners – opportunities and limitations

Abstract: Work is one of the basic forms of adult people's activity. It is a universal and ambiguous concept that is interpreted in a myriad of ways. Working in prison, before being discharged from it, is very significant as well. It enables one to gain material goods useful when being imprisoned; it also prepares inmates to life outside of prison. In the penitentiary practice, there is a number of programs that promote employment and prepare prisoners to the reality of living outside of prison. Oftentimes, having employment is the only chance for the prisoners to return to the society. The process is fostered if the prisoner is given help during their stay in prison and directly after being released. The people leaving prison encounter many difficulties, including the ones related to the searching for and getting a job. The difficulties in finding employment are often related to the fact that employers have aversion to the criminal past of the former prisoners and do not trust them. This aversion is frequently caused by the fact that former prisoners are not accustomed to working in a systematic and honest way, and that their qualifications are generally very low. Many authors indicate the need to build a collaborative network aimed at helping and supporting the people released from prisons.

Key words: work, work of prisoners, preparing for employment, work of former prisoners.

Introduction

Work is one of the basic forms of activity of an adult. It provides the means of subsistence, to satisfy one's needs; gives a sense of self-worth, which is particularly

emphasized in the field of social rehabilitation issues. There are various roles of work: it shapes personality, contributes to one's development, determines social and professional position, is a source of income for the employee and their family – therefore it conditions existence and determines its level (Woźk 2000, p. 11). Social rehabilitation of persons serving a prison sentence includes, in the view of Polish criminal and executive law, also work and education of the convicts. A person leaving prison should be able to function in the environment outside of prison in accordance with the existing social, moral and legal norms. For this to happen, it is necessary to prepare a person who is in isolation to participate in social life already at the stage of starting the social rehabilitation process. This will make it possible to prepare them for taking up employment after leaving prison.

The following text discusses the work of former prisoners, with emphasis on the possibilities of taking up such work, as well as the limitations that hinder it or even make it impossible. This issue is important and worthy of attention, especially in periods of various crises and social tensions. Taking up employment by former prisoners is connected, among other things, with the processes of social reintegration in conditions of social insecurity. It should also be stressed that the problem of work constitutes a subject of interest of many scientific disciplines and serves as a focus of numerous theories and concepts in sociology, psychology, economics (especially in the field of management sciences), as well as the borderline of disciplines. Due to the necessity of conciseness of the paper, the considerations presented are mainly part of the area of pedagogy, including social rehabilitation pedagogy and labor pedagogy, and partly also of social work.

What is particularly important to highlight is that in light of the data from the “Work for Prisoners” program (average for 2020):

- the prevalence of employment of convicted and sentenced prisoners was 53.71%;
- the prevalence of employment of convicted and sentenced prisoners in the work-eligible population was 78.55%;
- the share of paid employment in the total population of employed and convicted prisoners was 42.39% (*Work for Prisoners* program).

This means that a significant proportion of prisoners take up work while serving their sentences. However, after being released, they may face barriers in continuing this type of activity and obtaining legal, full-fledged employment. Such situation, if prolonged, entails the risk of frustration, depression, recidivism and social exclusion. Guy Standing calls such individuals as “lumpen-precariats”. They are part of the so-called “precariat,” a newly-emerged social class that is dangerous to the social and political order. Such people, also referred to as “denizens” (someone who, for one reason or another, has limited rights, e.g., civil, cultural, social, economic, and political rights; an underclass citizen, an incomplete citizen, a quasi-citizen, a semi-citizen) suffer from a lack of the seven forms of work-related security: labor market security – the obligation of “full employment” and

the possibility of gainful employment; employment security; workplace security; security at work; skill reproduction security; income security; and representation security, that is, having a collective voice in the labor market. People without this kind of security often live in constant anxiety and fear. Such a prolonged situation is not without its effects on their behavior in their personal and family life, as well as their physical and mental health. In the case of mental health and emotions, it results in a syndrome of four feelings: anger, anomie, anxiety and alienation (four As). Such people become “precariatized”, which means that they are subjected to pressures and experiences that lead to their precarious existence, living in the present, without an identity that provides a sense of security, as well as without the opportunity for growth achieved through work and lifestyle. In many cases, they do not take up employment at all, and if they do, it is usually in unprotected forms of work that offer no opportunity for a sense of professional identity, much less for a career-building one (Standing 2011).

Work in the life of adults

The work of a human being can be considered in various aspects. It is also a universal, ambiguous concept that is interpreted in many different ways. As it has already been emphasized, the problem of human work is the subject of interest of various, already mentioned, scientific disciplines. Each of them looks at it from their characteristic point of view. One of these disciplines is *pedagogy*, including *social rehabilitation pedagogy*. The analysis of publications in the field of pedagogy allows us to conclude that the issue of human work has recently not been very frequently addressed in theoretical considerations, and especially in empirical research. Therefore, before discussing the issue of work in the life of people leaving prison I would like to highlight the issue of work in general, with emphasis on its pedagogical aspect. This is because a significant part of the efforts made by these people and institutions supporting them falls within the scope of pedagogy.

Therefore, following Waldemar Furmanek, it can be assumed that work is treated as:

- a life necessity resulting from economic pressure;
- a duty of man;
- an opportunity to fulfill the need for identification and personal identity;
- a path and area of self-fulfillment of man;
- a symbol of social prestige;
- an opportunity to build social ties and to satisfy the need for social contact;
- as creation of one's own life (Furmanek 2006, p. 168 et seq.)

In many publications, work is seen primarily in economic terms, as a source of earnings and discussed mainly in the sense of professional work. A pedagogue

should also pay attention to other interpretations of human work. Thus, it is worth to reflect on the role of work in the life of a modern individual. Its economic aspect seems to be obvious, also from the point of view of the topic of this discussion, which is why I will return to this issue later in the article. At this point, I would like to discuss the issue of work in a broader context.

Treating work solely as a source of income does not promote the growth of the importance of work in society and individual life. Nor does such a limited and utilitarian approach to work always ensure maximum material benefits. Viewing work purely as a source of income is only a means to an end. This kind of human activity becomes basically meaningless in the course of its everyday performance, and only gains meaning at the moment of payment. Work treated as self-fulfillment, on the other hand, is a value in itself that is perceived in the process of its daily performance, every day of the week. Meanwhile, the performance of work should be accompanied by increasing personal satisfaction, which will increasingly become not only a source of earnings, but also an area of human self-fulfillment. This is of momentous importance not only for the effects of work, but also for the way of experiencing the whole human existence (Suchodolski 1983, p. 53; Gerlach 2016).

Work was the theme of one of the encyclicals written by John Paul II. In *Laborem exercens*, he states that “work is the fundamental dimension of human existence on earth” (Encyclicals 1996, p. 109). He continues: “the first essential value of work is man himself – its subject. This immediately implies a very important ethical conclusion: while it is true that man is destined and called to work, above all work is for man and not man for work” (Encyclicals 1996, p. 114). The document also reads: “Work is man’s duty, or obligation, in various senses of the word” (Encyclicals 1996, p. 133).

Many texts have described and emphasized the significant role of work in the life of every human being. It was underlined that it has a special value in the life of individuals, but also in the life of social groups and whole nations. It is generally agreed that work allows man to perfect himself as a human. Work is a fundamental part of human life. Preparation of man for life means at the same time preparation for work.

Is work, then, still “that particular value thanks to which all other values emerge and function socially? Is work, in the words of Stanisław Brzozowski, “our calling, what gives meaning to our lives, and a moral value as a basic, metaphysical imperative for human beings”? Is work, and if so, how long will it remain a measure of man’s worth? Or, as John Paul II wrote: “through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfillment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes ‘more a human being’”? (Encyclicals 1996, p. 133; Gerlach 2010, p. 149).

If we assume that the answers to the above questions are positive, another question that comes to mind is whether it is possible to function without work?

Views on this topic vary. There has been some recent discussion about the end of work. The most distinctive approach in this regard is taken by Jeremy Rifkin, who in his well-known study *The End of Work* foretells a significant reduction in the number of jobs. The justification for such a situation is the massive development of technology and digital technology resulting in the replacement of “manpower” by machines. The rise of the *fourth industrial revolution* and *society 5.0* suggest that reductions in traditional jobs are possible (Gerlach 2019; Gerlach 2020). Yet, many believe that new jobs will emerge, and that there will be just as many of them, and that they will usually be better jobs. It must be recognized, however, that the transformation of work will occur, and is already occurring. It will therefore be necessary to systematically adapt one’s qualifications and competencies to the new, constantly changing requirements. Many years ago Alvin Toffler already pointed out that “the economics of permanence are – and must be – replaced by economics of transience” (Toffler 2007, p. 53). The aforementioned J. Rifkin, when writing about the end of work, reminds us that work has been an integral part of everyday human existence since the beginning of civilization. “We are now witnessing for the first time the systematic elimination of human labor from the production process. Within less than a century, mass employment in the market sector can be expected to drastically decline in virtually every industrialized country in the world” (Rifkin 2003, p. 17).

Therefore, returning to the above question, it should be emphasized that the lack of work has a destructive effect on people and undermines the basis of individual and social existence. Hence, unemployment is the basic cause of poverty. It also causes marginalization and exclusion of those who do not have a job.

Leszek Kołakowski expresses an opinion with which it is hard not to agree. As he writes: “There is a view that work as such embodies a special virtue, that it is something noble – not because it is necessary in order to supply us with various goods, but because it befits us as human beings, that it affirms our humanity. Whether this is the case perhaps depends on the kind of work one has in mind” (Kołakowski 2004, p. 177). Work allows man to satisfy various types of needs. Clayton Paul Alderfer distinguishes three types of needs that can be satisfied through work:

- existence needs – related to physical survival, are satisfied at work through remuneration, additional benefits, a safe work environment, and job security;
- relatedness needs – provide emotional support, respect, recognition;
- growth needs – concern individual improvement and development (Wilsz 2008, p. 125).

When discussing the issue of human work, it is also worth referring to reflections on the objectives of introducing young people to the process of work. It can be concluded that these objectives should also be applied to people leaving prison. These are:

- shaping of the overall personality (personality-creative role of work), including preparation of the convicted persons for social activity, return to functioning in society;
- entering into the stream of producing goods and providing services (utilitarian objective) (Solak 2004, p. 43).

Similar opinions about work are found in the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church*. It lists the following aspects of work:

- formative – work perfects the worker, they develop their personality through participation in work;
- social – work makes it possible to satisfy both material and spiritual needs of others;
- solidarity – it enables working people to enter into relationships with other people, to overcome difficulties, and it also generates wealth (Solak 2004, p. 43).

Concluding these general reflections on work, it may be noted, following Augustyn Bańka, that: “in the psychological development of the concept of work one can distinguish two opposing traditions. The first is the tradition of the cult of work and action. The second is the tradition of the meaning of life without the ethos of work”. (Bańka 1996, p. 12). It must be recognized that both of them are manifested by modern man. This is as true for people who have never been in prison as it is for prisoners and former prisoners.

Preparation of prisoners for life outside prison

The second part of the presented considerations refers to the social rehabilitation thought, especially to the data published by the prison service, and is based on the guidelines for penitentiary work with prisoners.

The starting point for reflections on the preparation of the prisoners for life outside prison may be the statements of the already quoted A. Bańka, where the author emphasizes the role of critical events as a source of work-related crises. Among them he mentions imprisonment (Bańka 1996, p. 154). The time spent in the penitentiary unit should be, from the very beginning, a period of preparation for life outside prison. That is why work in penitentiary facilities, even before leaving the prison walls, is important, as it enables such preparation.

The implementation of this task is possible thanks to production facilities functioning on the premises of penitentiaries and detention centers. According to the objectives of the “Work for Prisoners” Program, which consists of three basic pillars determining the activities implemented within its framework:

1. construction of production halls in prisons,
2. expanding the possibilities of unpaid work of prisoners for the benefit of local governments,
3. reliefs for entrepreneurs employing prisoners,

Between 2016 and 2019, such facilities were established in 40 institutions and 9 more remain under implementation. The figures published on the Prison Service website show that:

- during the implementation of the program, the employment of convicts has increased by almost 12 thousand prisoners, and the employment prevalence rate of prisoners exceeded the value of 56%. In the group of prisoners able to work, the rate is more than 84%,
- nearly 37,000 imprisoned people were employed (data as at the end of December 2019),
- income of the Fund for Professional Activation of Prisoners in 2019 amounted to almost PLN 160 million,
- a larger number of working prisoners means larger financial means from deductions from their salaries allocated to the Fund for Professional Activation of Prisoners and Development of Prison Workplaces, which is used to finance the construction of production facilities where further prisoners are employed,
- a larger number of working prisoners means larger financial means from deductions from their salaries, allocated also to the lump sum paid to entrepreneurs for the increased costs of employing persons deprived of liberty, which, as a result of the legislative activities of the Ministry of Justice and the Prison Service initiated under the programme, increased from 20% to 35% of the value of salaries due to prisoners (Prison Service 2020; *Work for Prisoners Program...*).

Taking up employment by prisoners certainly has benefits both while in prison or detention and after being released. These are benefits for the penitentiary units, but also, and perhaps most importantly, for the inmates. The most frequently mentioned are:

- the possibility of taking up employment providing an opportunity for unpaid apprenticeship and training for later professional activation outside of prison,
- the employment providing an opportunity for the prisoners to obtain funds for their own needs in a socially acceptable way, which may allow for financial support of their families by giving them the money earned and may constitute a source for payment of penalties, e.g.: alimony or fines,
- learning to perform specific tasks, to be systematic and to fulfill assigned duties; forming a sense of responsibility for the work performed; training for independent life outside of prison and preparation for return to society,
- the possibility of making use of free time; counteracting the development of prison subculture and violence against other inmates or self-mutilation,
- shaping of a sense of being useful, usefulness, acquiring the ability to cooperate in a team, the emergence of a sense of meaning in life, the meaningfulness of the effort made, a sense of being appreciated by others,

- the establishment of new jobs creates a new situation, relieving the sense of purposelessness of staying in prison and allows to maintain professional efficiency, physical and mental strength (Ibid).

According to the provisions of the Penal Code: “six months before leaving the penitentiary institution, the convict is prepared to leave the facility “[...] these measures are not obligatory and are applied only when “necessary” or “as needed”, and the assistance is to be ad hoc” (Miłkowska, Sobański 2017, p. 132). Also important are the activities undertaken in the period preceding the release of the convicts. According to Aleksandra Iwanowska, in the period of preparation for release it is important to serve the sentence in a facility that is close to the future place of residence. This allows to ensure the conditions for future adaptation to life outside of prison. The exceptions are situations when, according to T. Szymanowski, this principle may not be applicable, e.g. when in the current prison facility the convict is completing their education or undergoing drug treatment which should not be disrupted (Iwanowska 2013, p. 29).

“Preparing a convict for release from prison can be considered a variation of work with an individual case. In the traditional model, working with an individual case involves three stages:

- identification of the case – diagnosis of personality,
- preparation of a plan – contact,
- implementation of the plan – the stage of working with the case.

The model course of the period of preparation for release should also include three basic stages: diagnosis of problems that may impede the convict’s social readaptation, development of a liberty program, and then implementation of the program” (Iwanowska 2013, p. 31).

Analyzing the results of research on the possibility of preparing convicts for life outside of prison, A. Iwanowska refers to the results of research conducted, among others, by A. Szymanowska, which reveal that nearly 26% of the convicts a month before their release did not have any clear life plans, while 70.7% considered finding a job after release as the most important for them. Respondents tended to also accept the need for support before returning to life in a society of free people (59.5%). Similar results were also obtained by B. Skařirak, who surveyed 126 female inmates. The study conducted by this author found that 78.6% of the women interviewed expressed concerns about returning to society stemming mainly from lack of employment, housing, rejection by society or loved ones. Also, 62.7% of the inmates did not feel prepared for life at liberty (Iwanowska 2013, pp. 36–37).

The penitentiary practice has repeatedly implemented programs promoting employment and preparation of convicts for the realities of life outside of prison. The three editions of an innovative penitentiary project entitled “Programme of professional activation of prisoners” implemented in 1996, 1997 and 1998 are a good example here. As part of the program, efforts were made to develop in the

convicts a belief in the value of work and to encourage their readiness to take up employment (Iwanowska 2013, p. 38).

Summing up the considerations so far, one should agree with the already quoted L. Kołakowski, who writes about the necessity of learning virtues through education in the environment where they are practiced: “The old adage that one cannot learn to swim without getting in the water proves correct” (Kołakowski 2004, p. 49). This analogy can be applied to work. Talking about work is not enough to learn the work. What is more, in my opinion, it will not contribute to the formation of many qualities that are necessary in both professional and non-professional life, such as diligence, responsibility, honesty, respect for one’s own and other people’s work, etc. Therefore, participation in work, both paid and for the benefit of the prison, e.g. cleaning work, voluntary work, etc., can be considered a form of preparation for life and work after leaving prison.

Opportunities and limitations in employing former prisoners

The analyses below constitute the most salient part of this paper. The return to society after a stay in prison is a challenge both for the person who leaves the facility and for the society they return to (Małkowska, Sobański 2017, p. 131).

In this context it is worth adding that there are people or groups who are vulnerable to exclusion and at high risk of exclusion. Among them are former convicts, the unemployed, especially with long-term unemployment, and people with low qualifications. The risk of marginalization and exclusion can, simplifying it, be reduced to issues related to the reproduction of poverty, both in the symbolic (intellectual and cultural) and material dimension. The activities aimed at preventing exclusion include four types of priority measures. These are:

- precautionary measures – early warning, prevention;
- equalizing measures – compensating for one’s worse socioeconomic background;
- measures aimed at solving nagging problems for which no good solutions have been worked out;

universal measures (for equal access, equal opportunities, reducing disparities, not excluding the poor and those at risk of social exclusion (Gerlach 2018, p. 41).

When thinking about return from prison, one can mention the term social justice. Wolfgang Merkel lists among the priorities of social justice in a post-industrial society the guarantee of employment to all those who are able and willing to work (Giddens 2009, p. 93). This guarantee applies in equal measure to former prisoners. These are people who need employment no less than others. Having a job is often the only chance for them to return to society. This is, however, not easy, because of stereotypes about former prisoners that often exist

in society. In the words of Anna Fidelus: “people with criminal past live for the most part on the margin of society (regardless of their current situation and behavior), they are depreciated in their environment, humiliated, disregarded, even overlooked in social life. [...] A person who is valued and respected in society will get a job faster than the one pushed to the margins of social life” (Fidelus 2019, p. 134). Marginalization and exclusion of these people is very often exacerbated by lack of employment and the resulting material problems. Those who have been in prison tend to have gaps in their education, and after a period of isolation, their vocational training, if they have any at all, is in jobs for which there is no demand in the labor market.

As Anthony Giddens states: “in the economy of knowledge/services, the primary focus of occupational mobility is on documents confirming qualifications, i.e., certificates, diplomas, certificates of degree conferral” (Giddens 2009, p. 91). Therefore, it is advisable for people leaving prisons to have their qualifications supported by relevant certificates. Their chances of obtaining employment will be then much higher compared to those who lack such credentials. Thus, taking advantage of opportunities to obtain education and qualifications that meet employers’ requirements while in prison is very advisable.

The Executive Penal Code emphasizes that influencing the convicts takes into account, first of all, work, especially the work that promotes the acquisition of appropriate professional qualifications, and education (Jaroszevska 2019, p. 183). “Social rehabilitation education involves: completing education gaps and vocational training. In the course of the education, apart from acquiring knowledge and skills resulting from the curriculum, the prisoner is subjected to a process of educational influence [...]. A prisoner, having theoretical and practical background in a certain field, has a better chance to find employment after being released and proper readaptation in the external environment (Machel 2003; Jaroszevska 2019, p. 189)

When talking about education in prisons and the impact of the qualifications obtained on employment in freedom, one should remember about the need for lifelong education. The qualifications obtained during a stay in prison are not for life. The changes that take place in qualification requirements necessitate continuous supplementation and updating of skills. Therefore, the role of this process in preparing for further education and developing motivation for lifelong learning should be emphasized. “The success of the readaptation process is determined by the extent of assistance that is provided to the former prisoner while still within the prison walls and immediately after their release” (Miłkowska, Sobański 2017, p. 134).

Among the entities supporting prisoners and those leaving prisons are a number of organizations and institutions, such as, for example: social welfare centers, social welfare homes, foundations, associations or addiction therapy centers (Miłkowska, Sobański 2017, p. 134). As stated by A. Fidelus: “we can notice an affirmative approach in contemporary systemic efforts targeting a group

of former prisoners. It boils down to post-penitentiary assistance, programs in the area of social welfare (Fidelus 2019, p.133). People who leave prisons face a range of difficulties including, among others, those connected with job search, career counseling or coping with running errands in offices, writing applications, and creating resumes (Miłkowska, Sobański 2017, p. 135). People who leave prisons and remand centers can only rely on social welfare centers for ad-hoc assistance. Thus, there is a lack of long-term and comprehensive assistance that would allow these individuals to readjust in society. Helping people with adaptation difficulties after release from prison is the mandatory task of municipalities. Among the beneficiaries of social assistance, former prisoners constitute a specific group through their difficulties in social readaptation, mainly due to the burden of their past and often prolonged isolation. Support targeted at them must therefore be multi-directional and sustainable. Otherwise, the risk of these individuals returning to a criminal path increases (*Życie po więzieniu...*).

Recidivism is most often caused by **problems with finding a job, poor housing and material conditions and ostracism that excludes these people from social life**. Hence the indispensability of post-penitentiary assistance and the need for **closer cooperation of social welfare centers with other institutions** operating in this field. Each of these entities acts independently and within the limits of its competence, and **the assistance they provide often overlaps**. The Act on social assistance does not provide for special benefits for people leaving prisons, all assistance is on a general basis. Persons released from prisons may apply for cash benefits (e.g., permanent, periodic, purpose-specific benefits) or non-cash benefits, including in-kind assistance, specialized counseling, crisis intervention, shelter, meals, necessary clothing, assistance in obtaining employment, health insurance premiums, residence and services in a social assistance home, supervised apartments, assistance in obtaining adequate housing conditions (*Życie po więzieniu...*).

Many authors point to the need to build a collaborative network focused on helping and supporting people released from prison. Assistance organized by network members in a variety of ways, including, but not limited to, employment and improvement of qualifications (Miłkowska, Sobański 2017, p. 137). Collaboration with labor offices as well as education and vocational training institutions is essential in seeking and obtaining employment. Among the factors that hinder the social readaptation of convicts after leaving prison, we can distinguish external (outside the prison walls), internal (inside the individual) and penitentiary (inside the prison) factors. In the group of external factors, homelessness and, what is particularly important for the topic, unemployment play an important role. H. Machel's research on the causes of recidivism shows that the difficulty in finding gainful employment or the inability to undertake it constitute a significant difficulty (Miłkowska, Sobański 2017, p. 132).

Difficulty in finding employment is often due to reluctance and distrust of employers caused by criminal history of former prisoners. This reluctance is also

due to the fact that convicts are often people who are not used to systematic and reliable work. Lack of work often causes a loss of security, respect, feelings of loneliness, inferiority, alienation, and often as a consequence causes separation from society and exclusion. “The above factors most often co-occur with a lack of ties and support from relatives, especially a properly functioning family. Strong family ties may be the primary motivating factor for a former prisoner to change and work on themselves; their absence leads to discouragement and abandonment of efforts” (Miłkowska, Sobański 2017, p. 133).

Among the factors that impede the readaptation of convicts, learned helplessness and “lack of knowledge and skills to navigate the modern labor market, as well as educational deficiencies, lack of a profession, and a habit of working” (Miłkowska, Sobański 2017, p. 133) are often mentioned. As A. Iwanowska writes, “the position of former prisoners on the labor market is extremely unfavorable because they are stigmatized by their past. Potential employers being able to choose among employees generally choose those with no criminal record. Moreover, the very process of navigating the job market nowadays requires a number of skills, e.g. writing a resume, a cover letter, communicating with employers, recognizing one’s own predispositions and abilities, as well as knowledge about effective job search. Many people leaving prison have problems with this, as was already mentioned. The dynamic and complicated situation on the labor market makes convicts without substantive support and adequate preparation not able to meet its demands” (Iwanowska 2013, p. 39).

An interesting initiative was the project entitled “A new path for former prisoners” (in Polish: “Nowa droga dla byłych więźniów”), which developed a reference model of cooperation between various institutions for providing comprehensive assistance to improve the situation of prisoners returning to society.

The model included social and professional activation and training programs responding to the needs of the local labor market. Surveys were conducted among project participants about their social and professional situation. They were attended by 101 beneficiaries and a control group of 35 convicts who did not participate in the training. Of those participating in the program, 76% took up employment after leaving prison and 24% were looking for a job.

In the control group, 35.3% were employed, 24% were looking for a job, while 14.7% were not looking for a job. For 72.3% of the beneficiaries, gainful employment was a source of income, 17.8% were dependent on family and 5% received social benefits. 42.9% of those in the control group were dependent on their families, 37.1% were gainfully employed and 2.9% received social benefits (Iwanowska 2013, p. 41).

According to the NIK (Supreme Audit Office) report, it is important for former prisoners to have a job that provides a livelihood. Research conducted among 85 entrepreneurs from Łódzkie Voivodship, within the framework of a systemic project *Support and improvement of professional qualifications of social assistance and integration personnel* (in Polish: *Wsparcie i podnoszenie kwalifikacji*

zawodowych kadr pomocy i integracji społecznej), shows that almost 1/5 of them employed persons with criminal records, and the main motive for employing them was having appropriate qualifications, and a little less often – the willingness to help. Only 12 people, i.e. 14.1%, said they would not hire a former prisoner. The main factors for not hiring such a person were concern for the company property, the employee's unreliability and the safety of other employees. However, the interviewed entrepreneurs did not exclude the possibility of hiring an employee released from prison/remand center, provided that certain conditions are met, the most important of which (apart from qualifications) is the recommendation of such a person by some institution, e.g. prison, labor office, social welfare center or probation officer" (Pomoc społeczna 2019, p. 13).

NIK data also show that the percentage of former prisoners receiving assistance from Social Welfare Centers (SWC) who have taken up the employment is steadily increasing. In the years 2015–2018 it was 12.5%, with 10% in 2015 and 14.7% in 2017. The report also states that SWC, when providing assistance, should place greater emphasis on their professional activation and improvement of their social functioning, as well as linking financial assistance to undertaking by these people of vocational training, therapy and searching for a job. (Pomoc społeczna 2019, pp. 13–14). Former prisoners usually used the SWC assistance only once (about 40%). The reason for this for almost 20% was finding a job, but for some of them it was just a casual job. This was confirmed by surveys conducted by NIK. Of the respondents no longer receiving assistance from SWC, 38.7% were employed, and for 16.7% of them it was a permanent employment and for 22% a casual job (Pomoc społeczna 2019, pp. 18–19). Providing assistance to people who have difficulty adjusting to life after release from prison is a mandatory responsibility of the municipality. On average, 17% of people released from the prison/remand center receive assistance from SWC. The research shows that 39.9% of the respondents serving a prison sentence believe that finding a job is the most important problem after being released from prison. Research commissioned by NIK shows that after release from prison it is a big challenge to get a job because a clean criminal record is often required and employers do not want to hire former prisoners (criminals). Those who can count on the support of their family and friends are in a better situation. They have more time to search for a job. In contrast, people staying in prison for long periods of time have more difficulty finding a job. The negative attitude of the society towards people leaving prison hinders the process of social and professional readaptation, especially finding a job (Pomoc społeczna 2019, p. 27).

Problems with finding a job are also noted by directors of district labor offices, but they emphasize that this is often the fault of the prisoners themselves, e.g. lack of proper qualifications, work experience, willingness to work, and frequent addictions. The changes in the labor market that have transformed the employer market into the employee market in recent years have caused the percentage

of former prisoners who, with the help of the SWC, have obtained employment to increase, but, as presented earlier, it is a small increase. According to the opinion of NIK based on the results of the research, “there is a need for more comprehensive and multidirectional assistance and support addressed to people who, depending on the length of time they have served in prison isolation, in rapidly changing social, economic, educational conditions, will not cope on their own with readaptation and social reintegration after leaving prison. The help and support provided to them (in material, housing as well as emotional and educational terms) will be the best insulator against both criminal and correctional recidivism. The results of the aforementioned NIK survey show that over 38% of former prisoners found employment (Pomoc społeczna 2019, pp. 66, 69). The survey performed by NIK also indicates that: “among the most difficult issues faced by a person leaving prison are not only the lack of material security, financial security, food, clothing, lack of housing and chances to find a job and family support, but also poor health and awareness of stigma (Pomoc społeczna 2019, p. 85).

It should also be added that the audit performed by NIK shows that planning of assistance was most often focused on immediate material assistance, so that only **a small percentage of former prisoners benefited from specialized guidance** (in the audited units 3% of them were covered by psychological assistance, 2.3% received family counseling, 1.1% legal counseling, and only 7% of former prisoners received social contracts, providing comprehensive and long-term support). About 17% of people released from penitentiary units benefit from the support of social welfare centers. **Psychological assistance is therefore very rare**, although it is particularly necessary, especially for those who cannot count on the support from their relatives. In the period from 2015 to the first half of 2018, a total of only 148, out of 4702 charges who had problems after leaving prison, used the psychological assistance in the audited SWC (**only over 3%.**) **Family counseling was used by 111 people (2.3%) and legal assistance by only 52 people (1.1%). The average annual cost of providing assistance to one released person during this period amounted to approximately PLN 2130** (*Życie po więzieniu...*).

The considerations presented in this section primarily show the limitations faced by former prisoners. What opportunities can be seen in this regard?

In a growing number of penitentiary institutions, efforts are being made to prepare people for life outside of prison. Many prisons also have manufacturing companies that employ prisoners while providing them with an opportunity to learn vocational skills and knowledge. The number of former prisoners who take up employment is increasing. It may not be a significant increase, but it inspires optimism. Enabling prisoners to obtain professional qualifications, both through education and through employment, is therefore an opportunity to prepare them for employment. There is one more issue that should be noted. Employers have

been pointing to a lack of properly educated job candidates for quite some time. In Poland, 33% of companies experience a shortage of workers with appropriate skills (globally it is 36%). The most difficult occupational group to fill is skilled manual workers. Among the reasons for talent shortage the following were mentioned: lack of technical skills (50%), lack of candidates (30%), lack of experience (15%), lack of communication skills (soft skills – 5%), too high financial expectations (18%) (Gerlach 2017, p. 129). Among the 10 occupations most affected by the shortage are unskilled manual workers. Considering that former prisoners are dominated by people with a low level of education (primary and basic vocational), it should not be difficult for them to get a job. Therefore, the problem with getting a job is often not the lack of a job, but the lack of willingness to take it and sometimes the excessive requirements, far beyond the preparation. This leads to the suggestion that too little time is devoted in prisons to educational activities, where motivation to work should be shaped. In addition to the instrumental sphere including knowledge and professional skills related to human functioning in the work process, also the directional sphere that allows situating a person in the social space is important.

What should once again be particularly emphasized, an element that can prevent recidivism is work. Here the problems lie also on the side of former prisoners (the already mentioned **lack of qualifications, experience, willingness to take up employment, addictions**). Entrepreneurs, on the other hand, explain themselves by fearing for the company's property, the employee's unreliability and the safety of other employees. However, **the percentage of former prisoners who have taken up employment with the help of the SWC is steadily increasing**. Only occasionally did **SWC attempt to put charges in touch with potential employers**. According to NIK, this should be a standard for all units providing assistance to former prisoners. NIK believes that it is also important to **focus on their professional activation and on linking financial assistance to commencement of vocational training**, therapy, search for a job by these people, e.g. through motivating **social contracts**. **The activities of the centers towards former prisoners should be supportive and activating**. Assistance should be organized in a way ensuring the widest possible participation of the person in need of support. **Through active participation, these individuals feel more needed, assert their identity and subjectivity, gain self-esteem, and feel that they have a say in their own lives** (*Życie po więzieniu...*).

In this context, we can finally add that the mentioned phenomenon of marginalization and social exclusion includes both the aspect of material well-being and the aspect of subjectivity. In terms of the former, it is expressed primarily by a low standard of living or even poverty, caused, inter alia, by lack of employment, bad situation on the labor market and difficulties in finding one's place in modernization processes, as well as lack of skills to adapt to changing living and working conditions. In the perspective of the latter, it is the lack of

authorization to participate in all aspects of social-cultural life, to make claims, to enforce one's rights. It is also worth noting that processes of marginalization and exclusion are not just the result of external influences. It can also result from personal decisions in which people exclude themselves from various aspects of social life by, for example, dropping out of education, leaving work and failure to take on social roles. It is important to note the fact of self-marginalization and self-exclusion inherent in the effort to build one's own identity, one's own sense of freedom, not only by individuals or communities, but being a manifestation of broader social games (Gerlach 2018).

Final reflection

In conclusion, lack of employment has a destructive effect on human beings and undermines the basis of their existence. For people leaving penitentiary institutions, having employment is particularly important, as it makes it easier to return to life outside of prison and prevent recidivism. Having a job is not only gaining material benefits, but also having the opportunity to develop qualities that enable one to function in the work environment as well as the social and family environment. It should be agreed that: "for social readaptation to be successful, a convict must make a fourfold effort: parting with his/her criminal past, working on the present, planning for the future, and starting a new life according to these plans" (Pindel 2009; Miłkowska, Sobański 2017, p. 131). These plans and their implementation must include work and education. Their implementation, to which the former prisoner should devote a significant portion of his/her time, will enable, and certainly facilitate, the return to life out of prison.

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