



Employing persons during and after imprisonment and employees' approach to these persons

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Prague
2017

Introduction

This study provides knowledge produced by realizing the project: *“Research of employing persons during and after imprisonment and employers’ approach to these persons”*.¹ This project follows the *“Preliminary analysis to identify barriers and conditions for employing persons during or after imprisonment”*, a project successfully implemented by the authors in previous year (for more see Bareš, Mertl 2016); its aim was to extend the current findings received in the monitored area.

While the previous study focused mainly (but not exclusively) on the perspective and subjectivity of the employers who considered employing released persons, in the current (follow-up) project we have focused on the prospects of persons released from imprisonment (further only “released persons” and “imprisonment”) and their subjective perception of their position with respect to their situation and possibilities in the labour market. This feedback was actually received also from persons who are already taking part in the labour market. Due to this, it was possible to reflect their situation directly after the release and in the period when they searched an employment, but also to evaluate their current participation in the labour market and how they perceive their position at the current work place. Although the relation to the previous project is obvious, due to the mentioned connections, it is also clear that the analytical perspective has shifted significantly in the follow-up project.

¹ This project belonged to the research solutions evaluated within a wider project of the Association of Independent Trade Unions of the Czech Republic (AITU) with a title “Work Digitalization Impacts on Employment, Collective Bargaining and Social Security of Employees”, realized in the course of 2017. However, it is obvious that the project’s assignment differed significantly from the “main stream” of researches realized within a wider framework of AITU’s project. This was primarily due to the fact that the wider project’s ambition was to reflect the importance of the selected, highly current and widely discussed topic of digitalization for different groups of people in the labour market. In the case of persons released from imprisonment (further only “PRI”), however, this issue is definitely not as important as it is for other monitored groups in the labour market and, in the case of the released persons, there were therefore emphasized rather different issues.

It is especially so in the sense that one of the main aims of this project was a more detailed description and a deeper understanding of the released person's situation after imprisonment and how does this situation influence this person's work history. In this respect, the monitoring focused mainly on barriers, the released informants had to overcome, their work experience and further important events ("milestones") which affect the work life of an individual. However, the selected approach also enabled a better understanding to the meaning of employment in personal life of an informant as well as capturing the respondent's approach to work and more generally also to professional participation in the labour market.

In the framework of interviews, information were received on individual factors influencing reintegration into society, vocational life, work experience as well as their reflection by the informant and their eventual connections or impacts, in the period prior to imprisonment, during imprisonment, in between eventual repeated imprisonments and after imprisonment.

A more detailed description of the respondents' job history and the related circumstances is significant mainly because it can contribute to identifying and describing some important factors which improve or, on the contrary, worsen the released persons' chances to participate in the labour market. On this basis, it is also possible to describe the extent to which the various specific procedures or the more general strategies used by the released persons to find and retain work were successful, or what procedures or strategies do not lead to success in this area. A more detailed understanding of the respondent's work history can also support the effort to capture and evaluate the external conditions and barriers which can make it easier or harder for people released from imprisonment to take part in the labour market. Findings from previous researches show many such obstacles. Some of them are directly connected to the work and employment, but in many cases there

are many connections also with other key topics for released person's reintegration, for example, housing, education, family situation, debts and seizures of salary, etc.

More detailed knowledge of the released persons' work history (or in regards to its intermingling – or on contrary to its bypassing – with a criminal and imprisonment history of the person)² also enables placing some other researched information into the relevant context and therefore it enables avoiding excessive generalizations and general statements. For example, when assessing the findings related to employers' approach to the criminal past or to the fact that a certain person was imprisoned, it is also possible to monitor how much they are affected, for example, by number of imprisonments, the length of their "stay at liberty" after the release from a detention facility, the previous work experiences of the released person (those obtained in the period after their release as well as during or prior to their imprisonment), their professional competences, etc. As we have accentuated in the previous research, the employers' approach to the criminal past, or to the imprisonment, is one of the most important circumstances determining the possibilities of released persons' recruitment and as such it was also monitored in this study, especially from the released persons' viewpoint. It is affected not only by the legislative or social environment, the scope and nature of previous criminal activity of released persons, current stereotyped ideas about these persons among employers, but also by the stated internal dynamics related to the work (and, of course, also by the criminal or imprisonment) history of the released person. Therefore it is important to pay attention to the specific significant characteristics of individual released persons and how these "case-related" characteristics change and condition each other (i.e., in their dynamics). This can be greatly facilitated by

² It was the precise capturing of mutual relationships between these two levels of the released persons' personal history within the framework of these interviews, which enabled capturing the different causal influences between them, as well as their parallel or contradictory parallel influence, etc. In the following text, only the "work history" is used to make the text easier to read.

analyzing the post-release situation in relation to the released person's work history within the concept selected in this research.

A more detailed inside into the released persons' work history makes it possible to capture also the internal dynamics of other key circumstances which determine the released persons' employment opportunities. Such situations which are desirable to be further monitored may include, in particular, the released persons' individual chances to obtain an employment. The work history, in this respect, enables to monitor what were or are the released persons' chances (and the influences shaping them in the past or present time) for finding employment prior to imprisonment, during it or in the period between multiple imprisonments (when it is relevant) and in the period after the release. At the same time, the knowledge of the person's overall work history makes it easier to assess his/her individual chances at the time of the interview and estimate the extent to which the current chances in the labour market are influenced by the person's recorded key characteristics with respect to his/her professional, criminal or imprisonment history.

The researched sample, by far, does not provide a detailed description of this issue, however, it clearly illustrates the variability of situations and relationships which are reflected to a different extent in the possibilities of released persons to reintegrate back into society and find and retain a job corresponding to their capabilities and experience. At the same time, this approach also allowed capturing some important relationships between the monitored phenomena and observing their internal dynamics when the significance of a certain circumstance can change significantly due to the influence of some important factors (e.g., it is possible to illustrate the relationship between the actual fact of staying in a detention facility and the ending or disrupting the work career, the impact of work experience gained during imprisonment, etc.).

Besides the described approach to studying the released persons' work history, this study also focuses on evaluation of released persons' possible participation in the labour market in the case of currently employed persons. The job position and employment situation of some persons we have interviewed can be perceived as relatively stable and they can be considered as released persons "that have succeeded in the labour market". In this case, the viewpoint of "success" and its definition is not considered by a narrow prism of frequently used contexts such as "fast career advancement", "getting a top position", (continuous) "improvement of professional competences", "finding an attractive job" etc. Such a focus on the subject of "success" is naturally too narrow, simplifying and above all, in the vast majority of cases, also inadequate in the given situation of released persons. In this respect, the key considerations are the job's stability and sustainability in the terms of these issues. However, as the evaluation of success was one of the questions identified on the basis of the informants' answers; it was crucial to receive the informants' own assessment of their situation in the labour market and their own perception of the situation as a success or the opposite. They could, of course, describe the reasons why they tend to one or the other viewpoint in their own way.

The selected method of mapping their success of integration into society and work success did not apply the "criteria" that may be appropriate for the majority of society or for a certain specific but very different group of people (e.g., top management, business people, etc.) as they may not be suitable for this group of people. On the contrary, the informants could chose criteria for evaluating their success which were appropriate to this purpose according to their own viewpoint. The disadvantage of such findings is a high subjectivity degree. Therefore, the findings in this area should be perceived rather as indicative. On the other hand, it is also clear that when assessing the possibilities of reintegration and employment after imprisonment, it is important to follow the findings of the released persons' self-evaluation of success in life, because the life trajectories and professional history are

often completely incomparable due to a number of fundamental differences. Such differences can include, for example, different background of individual released persons, the time period during which the released person was without work, how quickly the person found his/her first job after the release and how long was the person employed from the whole time period after the release, etc. The question as to how the life trajectories and professional histories are viewed by the informants themselves at the time of the interview, then, despite a considerable degree of subjectivity, provides a certain “point of reference” which enables, at least in a certain way, to compare and evaluate the recorded life and professional (and criminal or imprisonment) paths or their mutual interactions.

The following text first approaches the data generation methods and the analyzed data evaluation and describes the basic characteristics of the studied sample. Next chapter conveys the relevant knowledge of the released persons' employment which is discussed in foreign professional literature and so it complements the knowledge received in the empirical research with trends observed abroad and at the same time it brings important theoretical starting points and assumptions. The following chapters then gradually provide the findings from the empirical study. This part of the text is divided into four basic-theme chapters. The final chapter summarizes the most important findings gained in the framework of the performed empirical research.

Methodology

The research was based on a semi-structured interview methodology which provided informants with the opportunity to accentuate their viewpoint and experience in a sufficiently detailed form and, at the same time, these interviews were sufficiently guided by the introduced topics and complementing questions. Semi-structured interviews are therefore a very good tool for acquiring very detailed information in a relatively short time period and for penetrating deeper into the issue. Unlike quantitative data (most commonly generated through a questionnaire survey), they provide specific information and knowledge to enable better understanding and interpreting of the issue and social processes. The semi-structured interviews bring a disadvantage of possibly representing only partial knowledge if the sample of the research participants is not sufficiently variable and includes, for example, informants from the same and very narrow social field. For this reason, it is always necessary to have a sample of participants as variable as it is possible to represent various social positions and situations into which one can get within a society.

In our case, the sample consisted of 13 informants (12 men and one woman – the sample is not surprising since the absolute majority³ of the persons in Czech prisons consists of men), all of whom came from different parts of the Czech Republic and usually moved multiple times in their lives.⁴ All but one participant, 63 year of age and just before the retirement, were in a productive age. Time spent in prison also differed significantly among participants, ranging from half a year to twenty years, with the same situation in regards to the time elapsed since their release from prison, while some of the participants left the prison several years ago and the only female participant in the research was released only one week prior to the interview. The probation officers and the Rubikon Centrum non-profit organization

³ According to the statistics of the Prison Service (PSCZ 2016) the overall population of imprisoned people consists in 93 % of men.

⁴ All the informants' names listed in other parts of the text have been changed in order to guarantee their anonymity and protection.

helped us to identify and address the participants which was also reflected in the informants' life situation, when some of them experienced a great deal of poverty and homelessness, while others had a certain background and gradually started to overcome a very complicated time period and some have already overcome this period (or at least they perceived the situation this way). This variability was also reflected in the findings as some topics were repeated across the interviews (such as employment or housing) while other topics were very specific (for example, a specific stigmatization associated with a severe sentence or health problems).

In the interview, the participants were questioned about four major themes related to our research and analysis goals:

- Their current life situation and its connection to imprisonment and release from prison.
- Reasons why the participant got to prison.
- Their imprisonment with respect to the later (re)integration after the release.
- Work history – performed jobs, experience, carrier, etc.

In the course of these analyses, we will not discuss all general themes in detail, but we will focus only on the barriers the released persons must overcome in their (re)integration and on problems related to finding a job which would provide them with a material security and allow them to live a dignified life.

A special computer software (MAXQDA) designed to support qualitative data analyses was implemented for the data analysis. Using this software, we first encoded all of the interviews, arranged the information contained in the interviews and identified the general themes. Subsequent additional encoding cycles were aimed at analysing previously identified general themes and at identifying more specific themes and findings. Throughout the encoding and data analyzing process, we used the classical method of qualitative content analysis which primarily consists

of separating relevant and irrelevant data and is subsequently followed by critical analysis of the relevant data.

The initial situation of released persons after imprisonment

The released persons are, as often stated in literature focused on this population (e.g. Breese et al. 2000; Brown 2011; LeBel 2008; Moran 2014), very often marginalized and have to deal with a number of barriers that make it difficult and sometimes impossible for them to return back into society. Marginalization has both symbolic and practical dimension to it. Symbolic marginalization consists of the released persons' stigmatization as social deviants (see Becker 1966; Lemert 1967) who are at the society's margin. The preconceived negative view of the released persons is on one hand an understandable consequence of a situation where the imprisonment is generally regarded by society as a significant social sanction and it is generally assumed that such sentence was imposed for a conduct significantly outside of social and legal standards or which exceeded or disturbed them seriously. On the other hand, however, the criminal conduct is further projected into the present and the future, where awareness of a person's criminal past often leads to fears or assumptions that this person can or will continue to violate or disturb existing legal norms. It is necessary to make an individual assessment of the extend to which such fears and assumptions are justified and to which they only artificially feed the released persons' stereotypical images (and are, at the same time, artificially fed by them).

These fears and assumptions often lead to holding a very general, commonly negative or resolutely disapproving attitudes to released persons. The criminal past often leads to preconceived assumptions towards the person and is conceived as his/her determining feature, which the person carries with him/her and becomes the

main distinguishing feature, according to which the person is perceived, classified, or assumed to have preconceived attributes by the people in his/her surrounding, who judge according to this feature. For this reason and also because it provides the people in the surrounding social environment with an easily recognizable mark, the criminal past becomes, in a number of respects, the absolutely decisive “feature” of the released persons. This easily identifiable mark further confirms the position of a social deviant and is a clear signal for others to avoid them and not to interact with them (Goffman 1986). Criminal past is also a prism - i.e., the view according to which a person is judged in various life situations and often even in situations, where the criminal past might be entirely irrelevant. But even in situations where the information of the criminal past is significant, this characteristic often receives more importance than the other important circumstances, or the situation and chances of the released person may be even assessed only according to the fact that he/she has been imprisoned.

According to Goffman (1986), the stigmatized individuals have to cope with their so-called *spoiled identity* and learn to work with this identity so that they can at least partially participate in the public space and be recognized by the society as its members. LeBel (2008) subsequently points out that stigmatized people often behave reactively when they try to hide their stigma and status and act as “normal” people or in a proactive way, which means that they openly reveal their stigma and try to communicate about it to gain a position in society. Jones (2003), who has a personal experience with a released person’s position, provides in this regard three general strategies the released people try to use to overcome or weaken the significance of the stigma: (1) released persons try to speak openly about their past and gain understanding, or also a certain “forgiveness”; (2) they try to be resistant to society and stigma through performing activities which seem to be forbidden to a person with a criminal past, for example, university studies; (3) they use their criminal

past to acquire a “new” social capital and expertise position, through which they can, for example, pass on their experience and gain a better social position.

Very often the released persons experience that their neighbourhood views them primarily (or exclusively) in connection to their criminal past in most life situations. Therefore they accept this approach towards themselves as usual. On the contrary, they rarely have an opportunity to encounter an approach that differs from this “social norm”, or does not keep confirming its validity by repeated confirmations.

Byrne (2005) points out that the practical accompanying phenomenon of a marginal status in society (social exclusion) consists mostly of a material deprivation which is a “springboard” to other problems (indebtedness, depressions, insecurity, etc.) that further deepen and confirm the marginalization. For people with criminal past, as shown by the literature (Breese et al. 2000; Farrall et al. 2010; Hattery, Smith 2010), the social exclusion is specific also due to another reason: during imprisonment, they have completely disrupted most of the common social and personal interactions with no chance to develop them any further. After the release, they find themselves in a situation when they often cannot rely even on the support from their family or other close people. Broken social background and family relationships or their actual nonexistence are, more so, in case of released persons very specific, as they are often the reason why the person has been imprisoned (most criminal offences originate in the absence of material, psychological and emotional support), and, at the same time, this disruption continues to deepen, and the absence of relationships tends to further aggravate the released persons’ psychological status. In addition to existential issues, further deep existential concerns are added which can bring an increased level of mistrust and alienation towards society. Loss of social capital also has a major impact on employment opportunities, as greater social capital often means far better and wider possibilities

of finding employment and retaining it (friends and acquaintances can help with seeking, securing and retaining a job position).

The risk of social exclusion, the possibility of social inclusion, or the difficulty or fluency of this process are also naturally determined by individual dispositions, qualities, abilities, etc. It is obvious that these largely differ among the released persons and it is therefore very difficult to characterize this group of people in this regard without possible excessive generalization or stereotypical image of these people. What is important, however, is that in comparison with other groups of people, their personal features can be strongly formed by their criminal past. Which, in the case of released persons, can be distinguished schematically to the time prior to imprisonment, during imprisonment and the situation after the release from imprisonment. This text naturally focuses mainly on the last of the three phases, which, as many researchers and academics have pointed out (Brown 2011; Jones 2003; Richards et al. 2010), is strongly influenced by a fact that the imprisoned person is subject to a certain authoritative and disciplinary regime. The prison is a total institution (Goffman 1968) or heterotopy (Foucault 1997). It means that it operates on the basis of rules and norms which highly differ from the ones valid in the rest of the society. The persons in subordinate roles there often receive a very detailed daily schedule and strictly set boundaries to their behaviour. Therefore the released persons are used to operate in this routine even after their release because it has become an inherent (which does not mean also automatically internally accepted) part of their life. It can be, of course, quite difficult to adapt to the fact that daily program is organized by the institution; on the other hand, it is quite obvious that during the imprisonment the persons are exempt from a number of duties and situations, managed for them by the prison facility staff. The persons' ability to understand and handle certain social relationships and situations during their stay in a prison facility therefore greatly weakens or even completely disappears. This fact also, in many cases, greatly worsens the released persons' chances to adapt to the

“outside” life. In addition to weakening the ability to cope with common social situations and relationships, the prison regime also negatively influences the ability to independently organize one’s own time in situations when time and actions of the released person are no longer subjected to the external authority. Werth (2012) emphasized a paradox situation when, after their release, the released persons are required to show personal responsibility consisting of autonomous and responsible decision-making, careful time management, risk assessment, etc., but during their imprisonment the prisoners have no or minimal chance to practice it. However, poor or insufficient work with convicted prisoners in the prison is not an unusual situation, as the same or similar problems are repeatedly shown in a number of analyses and researches (for example Abrams, Lea III 2016; Breese et al. 2000; Graffam et al. 2007; Schinkel 2014). As Graffam and Shinkfield (2007) point out, the main component of the prison release process should be an intensive social work with the released persons, including providing them with a housing, an adequate employment and other support.

The described, symbolically and de facto, difficult to unfavourable social situation after the release has usually significant impact on the released persons’ psychological situation. Increased burdens, the inability to solve their situation satisfactorily or repeated failures to attempt changes can lead to psychic deprivation, loss of goals and loss of motivation for any further effort. Psychic deprivation can lead to the resignation of an individual for striving to integrate into society and his/her reorientation towards “alternative” (however, for these people generally easier achievable) goals or motivations which are associated with a relapse into crime or other forms of socially undesirable behaviour leading to conflict with the society, etc. This resignation is again highly accentuated in the relevant literature (for example, Breese et al. 2000; Brown 2011; LeBel et al. 2008).

The recidivism and repeated imprisonments further deepen the marginalization and social exclusion of the released persons in a significant way and their chances to try to get integrated into society (including chances to participate in the labour market) “sink” dramatically. It creates a kind of “vicious circle” from which such a person has only minimal chances to “get out” without a strong external support (which is rarely available due to his/her criminal past and due to the previous stay or stays in a detention facility). Efforts to employ, and, more generally, to reintegrate released persons cannot be, of course, limited only to the first-time offenders. The reintegration of persons with a “richer” criminal past can be undoubtedly perceived as achieving even more ambitious goals. However, it is necessary to provide good conditions for employment and reintegration especially to the first-time-offenders as it can efficiently prevent the recidivism of persons from this group. It is also true (see above) that the reintegration and participating in the labour market are easier precisely in this group (for all, the person with criminal past and often for the employer or entities focused on the released persons reintegration), rather than if the released persons got already trapped in the above described “vicious circle”.

Therefore the possibility to participate in the labour market is certainly not the only condition that contributes to the prevention of social exclusion and relapse into crime, or to the released persons’ social reintegration. However, it is clear, that finding employment is an absolutely essential circumstance allowing to compensate for all the above noted issues. It is also true, that the above outlined factors can also have a significant effect on released persons’ chances to find and retain an employment.

Main themes identified during the interviews and their analysis

All four interviews often resonated with four main themes that largely influenced the whole character of the interview:

- A problem to find a permanent legal job, especially due to the criminal past and debts/seizures of salary.
- A problem to find a dignified housing.
- Stigmatization of released persons by other people, which was based on the existence of a criminal record, which therefore represents a certain mark providing evidence of the person's past and setting up his/her future behaviour.
- An overall confusion after the release from prison and loss of contact with the outside world.

All topics were of course interconnected and at the same time connected to other sub-themes. Coping with the situation after the release from prison depended, of course, on a number of other factors, and not only on momentary abilities, motivation and effort of the person. The reintegration of the persons concerned very often evolved from their previous integration rate, and, above all, from the networks that they have been able to create during their lifetime, the social capital they disposed within these networks and also from the willingness of close people to help with their gradual acclimatization to society and also changes that have occurred therein. It was clear that the informants, who have improved their situation, had help of their close actors, especially family and partners, at least at the beginning of their integration. When these actors lacked, the reintegration process was very problematic, slow and often unfinished, as these informants were in a social position threatened by poverty, homelessness and social exclusion.

In the next part of the text, we will gradually analyze the above topics and place them into the context of individual cases and stories we have encountered

during the interviews; we will also compare them with other personal and structural factors.

Employment as the most often spontaneously accentuated problem

Problems in trying to find and retain an adequate employment was spontaneously accentuated by 12 informants and only one informant – Radek – had a permanent job at the time of the interview, but he also reached it with some difficulties. Radek got into prison before 1989 and spent there 3 years. His story after the release differed from all other informants' stories. Above all, Radek was fortunate that his family did not renounce him; instead, they supported him after the release and provided him with housing, financial and material support (subsistence) as he had a two-thirds salary deduction which covered the costs of his sentence. This alone played an important role in his return to society. Second key factor was the probation officer institution which had more powers than it has today. In the interview, Radek described their meeting and said that the probation officer had given him paper with address of his future employer where all the requisites had been taken care of (the employer provided a work place for Radek and accepted that he had a criminal past). Such a directive management, of course, largely robbed him of his autonomy in deciding where to find a job, but, at the same time, Radek himself thought that in a situation after the release such a degree of directivity was rather to his benefit as it had given him a certain goal and a perspective. Radek stayed in this job until he had another, more interesting job opportunity (it was in the 1990s which was a rather disorganized period in terms of economy and employment). Due to this support in the beginning, however, he gained some self-confidence and social capital, which ultimately helped him to find, through changing a few employments and a sole-trader' position, and with a support of his friend, an employment where he had been already 27 years at the time of the interview.

Although Radek's story after the release from imprisonment is very concentrated and simplified, it opens a whole range of topics and reasons why the other 12 informants had problems with the employment. First of all, Radek had a support of his family which assisted him after the release and without which help his situation would have been far more complicated (and in some aspects perhaps also difficult to solve). The family provided him with both material (housing and subsistence) and psychological support. On contrary, similar help was not available to some other respondents in our sample (for example, Martin, Richard, Adam or David). In the case of Martin, both parents were already dead (Martin actually inherited debts from his father, which made his situation even more difficult). His wider family invites him only to celebrations of special occasions, but otherwise does not really maintain any contact with him. Richard also does not see his family so often, because, according to his words, his mother, who stayed in contact with him, has enough of her own worries and sisters had moved away to an unknown location. Adam is in a similar situation, as he stays in touch only with his father. However, his father is ill, receives a disability pension and has himself difficulty getting along with his income, so he cannot support him. He keeps no contact with his siblings. David found himself in a specific situation, as he had parents of foreign nationality and they placed him into a foster family. This alone was quite challenging for him, but they did not like each other, so their relationship and mutual interactions were very difficult. After the release, David found out that the flat where he used to live has new locks as his stepfather was managing it during his stay in prison. He did not let him come into the apartment anymore. From day to day he found himself homeless. It was also a shock for David because he did not count on such a possibility at all and so he had no clue what to do in the situation.

However, the informants supported by their family also did not have the coexistence with their family very easy. Support of the parents was often only occasional, for example in a form of providing money in cases of greatest need or to

enable mobility. This was the case of Ladislav, who had a very complicated relationship with his mother, but a strong bond to his father, so his father helped him with money and occasionally drove him to various companies so that he could ask for employment there. Some informants perceived the help as a burden to their surroundings and family. This was especially the case of Jacob, who had a very wide family from first marriage, which he met regularly, but did not want to “use them”, because he was satisfied with the psychological support given to him by his children. Lucy, Philip and Viktor felt annoyed in regards to help for another reason – they wanted to be independent and live their lives without any interference from other people – so Philip and Viktor preferred to go their own way even at the cost of possible loss of housing and Lucy planned to “find her feet” as soon as possible.

The support of close people plays a key role in searching for a job. Without this support it is very difficult to settle all the necessary issues in a person’s life so that the situation of the person is “stabilized” and it is possible to carry out routine activities, including retaining the employment. This was well illustrated by Philip, who, at the time of the interview, lived mostly in a shelter (previously he lived in a hut which was set on fire by people running a circus):

I have a kind of [a job], may be illicit, but it isn't bad money, but a hostel... because as they set it on fire, I was without shoes and had only shorts and a T-shirt, and now I continuously buy everything, yes, hygiene, of course. I have got a full backpack, yeah. But I don't have it ... there [in the shelter] you cannot leave anything, you have to carry everything with you. That's the problem. To carry everything with you... it's crazy. In the hut, I've put everything under a lock, right. Before they stole my dog, there was the dog there, right.

Radek expressed himself in a similar way, but he had the advantage that his family supported him after the release and he, on the other hand, had accepted the help, as it was a fundamental issue for him:

Radek: I had a place to live... actually the money I did not have, as it was missing from my salary, so they provided it instead of me. And this somehow... they tried to help me not to think where I had come from.

Researcher: So, was it a vital help for you?

Radek: One can put it this way, yes.

Martin was actually looking for a job related to an accommodation, because he slept on the street. (He answers the question if he is considering a more stable job):

If I'll have some background... But I cannot go there from a street now. Consider it that I am sleeping normally now... that is not even a tent. I have kind of a roof there and a cardboard under me and a blanket. Nothing extra. [...] And I accept everything with accommodation, I don't care what I'll do.

The interviews were typical in this way, as Martin had mentioned it, namely linking employment with an accommodation. Such a form of employment is provided by recruiting agencies which connect employment with a place in hostels. However, employment through a recruitment agency is characterized by a very high degree of precarity, i.e., uncertainty due to a possible replacement by another person, as employers and agencies often change employees, provide poor working conditions and also small remunerations. Living connected to such precarious employment is therefore a great risk that could result in a loss of housing. Such a situation was experienced by Viktor, who lost his job provided by a recruitment agency, as the company he worked for went bankrupt and with the bankruptcy he lost the place in a hostel where he had lived until then. Richar had even worse experience. He became sick and was sick for a longer time, so the employer fired him. This way he lost also his entitlement to a place in the hostel. So Richard lost housing from day to day. Along with describing his own situation, Richard also pointed out that the situation

actually does not have a way out and it is not within the capacity of an individual to avoid losing an accommodation in such a situation:

Now, the worst is the situation with an accommodation, it is a reality, you are still dependent on the agency... as you actually cannot go to social security and tell them that you would make money there somewhere and ask the social security to pay the accommodation for you, that you will earn something there. It is not possible. [...] There would suffice a simple thing – if they at least pay for the accommodation and let you earn something, say some CZK 5,000, it would be quite different. But they may even pay the accommodation but then they find out that you have an income, let's say, even the minimum, and you are lost again. You have an income, so you do not fulfil certain prescribed conditions they have to keep, to be completely without any income, and so on. [...] It is a bit illogical... but so it is.

It is also necessary to emphasize that the hostel should serve as a temporary accommodation for people who find themselves in a current housing distress. Living at a hostel should serve as a stepping stone for finding a proper housing. However, for people with a poor social situation, living in a hostel becomes a long-term or even permanent housing, which is also problematic in legislative viewpoint, as hostel operators do not have to meet the conditions for permanent housing.⁵ Philip was heading towards a hostel as a way of permanent housing:

Now I try to save up, right, and go to a normal hostel, because there [in shelter] you have to watch everything... ID, papers, money, telephone...

Philip also accentuated very frequent pitfalls associated to the goal of saving money for an adequate housing, namely that a large percentage of people does not have

⁵ Apart from worse housing conditions, it also includes a fact that the managers conclude accommodation agreements with the lodgers, not lease contracts, on which basis they can evict them from the hostel at any time without any serious reason or compensation.

such a common thing as is, for example, a bank account. They must hide all finances somewhere or take it with them and guard it so that nobody steals it. This makes the whole process very difficult. At the same time the hostels are for some (released) persons totally inappropriate. This illustrates, for example, the situation of Adam, who is currently being treated for alcohol addiction and for whom the hostel is a very inappropriate environment of which he was scared himself due to possible encouragement of his addiction.

The connection between housing and employment (the necessity to find a background first of all) is confirmed by cases of Lucy and Mark. Lucy had been only recently released from imprisonment at the time of the interview so she was still searching for a job. However, her story showed a big advantage she had, namely the guaranteed permanent housing provided by her mother. Even though Lucy did not feel comfortable at her mother's place, she had some certainty and background and could focus on finding a suitable job. Mark had a similar advantage. At the time of the interview, he also was not long after the release from imprisonment and he searched for a job. In his case, he was accepted to his girlfriend's apartment and thus he did not have to worry about arranging and searching for housing and he could also fully concentrate on finding a suitable job.

A very important factor that negatively affected the possibility of finding a job was the criminal record, or the records of past sentences listed in it. 11 informants pointed out that submitting a criminal record was a big problem for them, as this document represented a certain mark from the past and uncovered their criminal past which most informants would prefer to delete and not tell anyone (especially not to an employer at which he/she applied for a job). All of these informants met a situation when they were not accepted to a job due to their criminal past. The reason was apparently a fear of future crime, misbehaviour, unreliability or expected conflicts with other colleagues. However, the informants did not find out the exact reasons,

because the employers' representatives often would not say it openly. The interview or recruitment usually took place without any difficulty until the employer or his/her representative found out that the informant has a certain criminal record, which resulted in termination of the interview with him/her and an information that they would eventually contact them again. This situation was described in different ways by a number of informants:

They thought that I would have caused problems and such... but... but I tried to explain it to them this way: "Please, what was in the past is not today, I am a completely different person" [...] And they keep making excuses, such as it is already full or that they do not accept anyone or that they actually dismiss people. Well, one just cannot win, yeah (Viktor).

I just was in a glassworks last week... The [operation supervisor] told me he was going to show me the operations, so I said "excellent" and when he asked me why I finished in the [company], I told him I was sentenced and that they released me and so now I am searching for a job, he told me suddenly: "Well, so we will let you know on Wednesday." And I also have a friend there, who happens to work there and knows that they do not have locksmiths, yes. And he just told me, "Probably not." I have told him [the operation supervisor] openly: "Tell me straight, we are humans, I'm not a mass murderer, or something, I'm a normal person. Just tell me straight away. Either you accept me or not, so that I know it and can look for something else." "We will" – he said – "let you know on Wednesday." Well, as I said it: "It is clear" (Mark).

Lucy: They want a criminal record everywhere... Yesterday I was at a petrol station, she told me she would accept me and then that she would let me know later... so I have also given it up. So nothing.

Researcher: You often encounter troubles with the criminal record...

Lucy: Well, it is probably the biggest issue.

Some informants found the rejection due to the criminal record such a trauma, they did not even apply to positions where it was necessary to provide the criminal record. This was the case of Ladislav, who had problems even to write his CV, as he did not want to mention his criminal history as he was ashamed of it, and Adam, who,

according to his own words, has given up responding to persons who wanted to see his criminal record. After all, Adam described his experience which certainly destroyed his motivation:

I actually managed to be accepted into [a regional hospital] to a medical orderly position at the urology department, where I spoke with the head nurse directly and she told me: "Well, I have your criminal record here, I see it was no theft, no robbery, no stealing, etc., that it is really no big deal, only something like driving licence and this, so I see no reason why we could not accept you to this position." I worked there almost four months and the head nurse called me and said: "Look, unfortunately, it was disapproved at higher positions." They sacked me in one hour.

Informants were very often surprised that no one distinguished between individual conducts for which they had been sentenced to imprisonment, as they more often understood that employers are very hesitant to employ someone with a criminal record related to property, but, on the other hand, they did not understand why the employers require the criminal record on many work positions which are completely unattractive:

I understand that when I work in a security agency, in a shop or somewhere and I have once done something, well... But a dustman... even a road sweeper... even a road sweeper has to have a clean criminal record? Like if I could take somebody's cigarette butts? For manual work positions... But this is not fair. They give you no chance when they release you afterwards. I had a very big problem. Now somehow... I have... here and there some temporary job... (Martin).

Some informants have therefore created certain strategies to at last mitigate the consequences of the criminal record. One such a strategy was described by Jacob, who at first thought that the criminal record would not be such a problem because of the positions he had applied to (mostly manual workers positions) and the kind of an offence in his criminal record, however, he found that it is a problem. Therefore he

started practicing a strategy of staying at work at least some time (at least to the first deposit or salary). He would tell the employer that the criminal record document is too expensive for him and that he cannot afford it, so that he would provide it after the first deposit or salary. Some employers would occasionally accept this agreement and he would manage to retain the work position until the employer became insistent and demanded the record strictly. In such a case, either he arranged the criminal record and provided it (only in the case he felt that the boss was kind and could have an understanding), or he did not pay for the criminal record because he did not want to waste the earned money and just left. David outlined another strategy. He figured out that he could simply fill out the empty place in the CV by the employments he had performed during imprisonment and as an employer he filled in the Prison Service in the acronym, i.e., PSCZ. He said that only in one case the recruiter had asked him to explain the company hidden under this acronym. However, most of the informants considered submitting the criminal record rather a frustrating barrier they could not cope with. It is also important to mention that the informants perceived the criminal record also as a symbol revealing their past to their surroundings, the past they would most likely erase from their lives and, at the same time, it always reminded them of it. The criminal record therefore was, in fact, a constantly present materialization of the past and a mark at the same time.

Other serious problems, besides the criminal record, are debts and seizures of salary, which applied to 8 informants. Debts and seizures of salary actually made it impossible for them to perform any legal employment, as it was a very disadvantageous way of earning money for the people concerned:

I get the job, but I have the seizure, so I do not look for a main job. I look for temporary jobs or some agreements. That's normal, sincerely. In the spring I have worked two month in one factory, good money, 26 thousand, and the next

month I received CZK 6,800... Excuse me... CZK 4,500 for hostel and you are left with CZK 1,300 and what? This is not enough for you. I smoke, I want to go somewhere for a beer, I will tell you straight. With 13 hundred per month really not (Martin).

As Martin also suggests, seizures also prevent people from finding a proper commercial housing, as the people simply do not have the money, and preserve the people's position within the seizure, as they have to rely on a completely inconvenient housing in hostels and precarious employment mediated through recruitment agencies. This position and situation is not beneficial to any party – released people are forced to live on the edge of poverty and in a day-to-day uncertainty and the creditors only find it difficult to get their money back as the debtors avoid any legal main job contract or under the influence of precarity they simply get into a very complicated situation, in which they can hardly pay the debt off. Choosing insolvency is a certain solution, however, Martin has described an experience of one of his friends, who decided to go through insolvency and concluded an agreement with a non-certified entity. It turned out to be a company which only wanted to get other people through different means into a stage of so-called sustainable debt, in other words a debt trap, since the contract he had concluded with the company was as disadvantageous as the previous commercial loans he had made before. The aforementioned friend managed to pay the settled amount for a certain time, however, he lost a job and could not pay the amount, so he had breached the contract and all the money, he had paid within the insolvency, were lost, so his original debt remained and was increased by the amount he had undertaken to pay within the insolvency. Of course, this situation can be handled with caution when selecting a subject which assists the person concerned during insolvency, but not many people are informed of a certificate qualitatively distinguishing various insolvency subjects. Such negative cases then contribute to discrediting insolvency as a tool for solving debt and seizures salary.

In the case of some informants, the barrier that contributed to the complicated search for a job was their worsened health condition which limited the possibilities of employment they could perform. This included especially Patrick, Daniel and Jacob, who had a serious health disorders at the time of the interview.

Patrick had problems with varicose ulcers which he had on his legs, so he could not perform any job where he had to walk or stand for a longer time. This prevented him from performing virtually any position he had ever performed and had an experience with. However, Patrick was fortunate enough to have received at least a partial disability pension which partly covered his living expenses (he himself, however, said that he needed employment because he had troubles to get both ends meet from his monthly pension).

Daniel's health problems were the result of several heart attacks. He has a cardiac pacemaker which should prevent other heart attacks, but Daniel has already permanent consequences which prevent him from performing any physically more demanding work because he gets tired quickly and cannot continue to work. At the time of the interview, Daniel had submitted an application for an invalidity pension. He waited for the result and hoped he would be able to pay for hostel and get out of the shelter where he stayed at the time.

Jacob's health problem – endured lung cancer – was apparently linked directly to the imprisonment, since, for years, he had worked in the prison as a glass cutter and consequently he made glass castings in a big heat near the furnace. His doctor advised him to try to solve the matter through a court trial to compensate for the health consequences of work in imprisonment as he could not choose the work himself, so he could not also influence the consequences of performing the job. However, Jacob did not solve it this way because he did not want to enter a lawsuit which would, in his view, have an uncertain result.

All the described factors have forced almost all the informants to make a living from temporary jobs and unstable employments (in particular, an agreement to complete a job or an agreement to perform work), or “temporary jobs”, i.e., occasional illicit work:

Now only some kind of a temporary job, kind of... One only has to worry if they pay him or not... No contract, nothing (Patrick).

However, Patrick admitted that he is very glad for the illicit work, as it is the only way he can earn something, and in his case it is not such a risk, as he works for a friend, which gives him slightly better guarantees he eventually gets the money. In addition, some employers take advantage of the released persons' poor social situation and with a view of saving costs they offer job opportunities without formally requiring criminal record or repeating the other aforementioned barriers. The released persons are glad that someone offers them a job without considering their criminal past, but it carries along the aforementioned pitfalls associated with the failure to pay for the work done, which was experienced, for example, by Jacob and Adam:

As I have said, it was my last “illicit work”, as they say, without any document, nothing, some payments per week, all cash, I was definitely [an excavation work], I got my fingers burned there, a lot, they still owe me, the two so-called business partners, but each should had paid me something, till today, a lot of money, and that had burned me, it disappointed me, so only through an agency. I have some document in my hand (Jacob).

Adam: You can get jobs, but not with a contract. So there is enough work, but with no contract.

Researcher: So they kind of offer you an illicit work, if I put it this...

Adam: Exactly, in popular terms “illicit”, when one actually has no security that he really gets the money, which had happened to me million times in my life.

However, Jacob had the advantage of not having any seizures and he could afford a legal employment with a contract. On the contrary, Adam was searching for legal temporary jobs at least, so that he would receive a remuneration for the work done. However, it was very significant that most informants had either an unstable employment through a recruitment agency (because of the already mentioned connection to housing the informants were not otherwise be able to get), or they have focused on this type of employment. The only exception was already mentioned Radek, who, at the time of the interview, has already worked many years on a primary employment contract in one building company, and also Richard, who was planning to go back to the employment he had performed prior to the imprisonment and where he used to have a primary employment contract. Along with that he planned to rent a flat in which he had previously lived and where he liked it and felt also quite certain about it as the flat was owned by his friend.

The informants were forced into temporary jobs also because of their existing education, skills and work experience, which did not really help them much to find a job:

Most... Most of the companies want a CV, so you write it for them, well. And then they see there a three years break: "And what else have you been doing?" When you tell him: "I was at the Employment Office," and you lie, do you think he is interested? Or you tell him: "Well, I was in a prison, so." "Aha, so we will let you know". And nothing. No, it is a problem, this (Martin).

And, at the same time, Martin had a very rich employment experience – 11 years he worked as a cook, waiter and bartender, 4.5 years as a professional soldier and occasionally he worked also in manual and worker positions. It was similar like in the case of Patrick, who was a trained bricklayer and he had also performed this job for a long time, but he had to quit for health reasons, so he went to be a dog handler in a security agency. Ladislav was a trained gardener and had several years of

experience with this job. Mark had a very rich employment experience – 15 years as a locksmith, 15 years of entrepreneurship and he had experience with work in agriculture. Jacob was a trained car mechanic and had a very rich experience with driving different types of motor vehicles (he drove a truck, vans and a garbage truck). Richard is a trained confectioner and he actually also worked in this position for some time, but he had also an experience with different manual worker positions, one of them lasting for longer time period (5 years). Philip worked for a longer time on a sawmill and also in a security agency, but he said he enjoyed working in agriculture the most, where he had to quit because the company went bankrupt. David had several years of experience with various manual jobs and an entrepreneurship and he could offer the employers a plumbing certificate, a welding licence and a driving licence (even for deliveries up to 3,500 kg). However some informants also admitted that they perceive their experience as useless or unattractive for potential employers. For example, Adam is also a trained bricklayer but, according to his words, he would find it hard to return to the profession because he has not been doing it for a long time, and he does not know the current techniques and technologies, so it would take him a longer time to become experienced in it again. At the same time, he had a rich experience with driving, however even these experiences he could not use because he lost his driving license – first because of his alcohol problems and consequently because of health problems. Lucy herself said that before the imprisonment she had only a little experience with employment – she had worked mostly as a shop assistant, but she did not last very long on any position and she often changed them. Regardless of whether the informants had less or more experience, only Richard felt that his experience could help him find a more stable job, the others did not perceive it as a significant factor.

In this respect the informants did not receive any advantage based on the jobs they have performed during imprisonment, even though in some cases it was a very rich experience with many various positions. For example, Viktor worked in a quarry,

manufactured car airbags, fluorescent lamps and then he also assembled chandeliers; Jacob cut glass and made practical and artistic glass products and later he shaped the glass at high temperatures; Daniel was a miner at first and later a product quality inspector of the products of his fellow prisoners. The problem, however, was the practical impossibility to report these jobs in the CV, as it would automatically mean a reference to the criminal past, which, as we have emphasized in the previous paragraphs, was problematic for both released persons and potential employers. A certain option was David's strategy to add the jobs into the CV and provide an acronym of the Prison Service as an employer, but even this strategy was not very successful and David did not reap much success with it. However, another highly individualized question was, how potential employers perceive the work experience from prison – whether these are relevant factors for them, which they value as a benefit or if they are not significant for them at all.

Informants very often searched at least for temporary jobs or other unstable jobs through their social networks and by addressing people they had known, asking if they knew of any work or could provide them with some work directly. This was, for example, the case of Viktor, Adam, Jacob, Mark, Lucy and also Radek. The use of this option is quite logical as the informants assumed that their friends and acquaintances or relatives and family members would have a greater degree of empathy and, at the same time, would mediate the contact between them and the company or other entity, therefore they could possibly avoid complications and unpleasant situations in interviews or other forms of recruitment. That was also Mark's assumption:

So they kept bugging me all the time: "You will come, you will come on 100%." I say: "I will come, don't worry, why wouldn't I." Well. May be I've even seen him sometimes, he looked at me and...Yes, they really need locksmiths, all right... Well... All right, well, I've told him about... and it was all over. Well. "We will let you know on Wednesday." On Wednesday I got a text message that I did not

pass the first round. And on Wednesday my friend calls me that they are looking for a locksmith... because he [the operation supervisor] told me, that there were still some other people after me, but there weren't any. I knew there was no one. I knew it on one hundred percent. Well, and my [friend] calls me and says: "There is no one else there, they are bastards." And I say: "Well, so." And the person who would actually bring me there would even get 20 thousand. That's why I wished him this, he may have kept the twenty, I did not want it. May he have it and buy something he wants, but may he really get it. So he kept going there, yes, and asking: "Look, he's ok, he is not a bad guy, yeah, well, and he can work hard, yes." "Yes, we need such people". And bang, it was gone, well.

Mark's assumption did not work out or his friend's mediation not work out. Lucy had a similar experience. She had emphasized her troubles with the criminal record, when she was searching for a job on a petrol station. This option was arranged by her friend, who recommended her to be the most open and straight forward towards the boss, which Lucy did, but later she told her she did not feel too good about it and that too much sincerity might have had an opposite effect. However, a case of Victor also appeared in the interviews. He had met a friend who offered him a job connected to a hostel. He should, according to his words, have started the job at the time of the interview.

A part from trying to find a job through a friend or an acquaintance, seven informants were registered at the Employment Office hoping they might receive an adequate job there. However, none of them said that he/she would gain any job through the Employment Office, which was due to a combination of various influences. In the case of Patrick the main reason was mostly his health condition (his doctor forbade him jobs where he would walk or stand too much because of the varicose ulcers on his legs), which limited him to an office job, but he had no qualification for it (he could not really do much on a computer). Mark emphasized that the Employment Office had offered him a job, but it included only positions he did not, according to his own words, qualify for – it included, for example, a car tin-smith, he

would not dare to do as a locksmith. David also had a similar experience, he even complained about the approach of the Employment Office staff, who did not treat him decently or fairly, according to his own words, and offered him only “dirty works” (David gave an example of heavy and physically demanding unskilled work at a sawmill, where he managed to stay only several days and then he had to leave). In the case of Jacob, the main problem was the criminal record, where severe penalties were listed, which obviously discouraged most of the potential employers and he said, that the Employment Office staff reproached him for a little work experience (which was formally true because Jacob’s rich work experiences were gained mostly through employment without any contract, which he could not therefore list). Adam said he had some offers, but mostly a short-term jobs (cleaning public spaces, etc.), which did not solve his difficult situation.

Informants also tried to look for jobs through advertisement on their own, which had one practical pitfall – a momentary lack of finances for travelling to potential employers. This was the case, for example, of Ladislav and Adam. Ladislav was at least occasionally supported by his father who sometimes drove him to an interview or a recruitment, but Adam had no help, and the whole situation was very demotivating for him. Especially in the cases he would pay the travel expenses and come to the employers just to learn that they would not hire him because of his criminal past. The second pitfall was the fact that most of the advertisements are linked to the activity of the retirement agencies that have already been spoken of, so these are actually very precarious jobs which do not help to improve situation of released persons, which was well expressed by Richard:

There [through a recruitment agency] it is not a problem to find a hostel... Well, like today, you will find it through some temporary job and it's fine, but no one can guarantee that the temporary job will last, that it would be regular. It means that you cover all the costs – the hostel, food, I don't know, clothes, the basic stuff like this. It is nice that you can get this one, I don't know, a temporary job even with

the hostel, but they can tell you in one or two weeks that, unfortunately, there is no work. Well, then you are back, exactly where you were before.

Most informants did not have excessive demands on employment or remuneration for the work performed. An example might be Martin, who declared he would sweep the streets or work as a garbage man, positions that do not have too much social prestige. Some people had certain preferences, for example Adam wanted to perform work somewhere outside and on contrary to avoid corporate hall operations, Philip would prefer employment in agriculture and David said, he would like to go back to the entrepreneurship. However, most informants subsequently decided that their plans and requirements were hardly achievable in their current position and declared that they would, of course, work in any position which would provide them with sustainable subsistence. A good example of a sober look at the matter can be the approach of Mark, who made a good impression in the glassworks at a potential employer when he kept the wage expectation low and asked for a smaller monthly salary than his potential future employer expected. But even that did not help him when the superior learned about his criminal past.

Most of the informants then said that they never had problems at the employment after the imprisonment due to their criminal past, although Adam counted with this possibility himself, and was prepared that other co-workers would look at him with a scorn and caution when he would enter an employment after the release. In the case of some informants, this was due to small penalties for less serious reasons for which they were sentenced to imprisonment, which was the case of Richard. But even Jacob, who spent in the prison almost 20 years all together for two serious crimes, said that he had actually no problems with other co-workers in his jobs. The only exception was the situation when two co-workers wanted to beat him

up, because they had learned about his criminal past and wanted to increase their self-esteem. The only informant who emphasized negative experience with co-workers was Martin, who said that some people, with whom he was working directly, were occasionally looking at him with mistrust and the manager, who commissioned him, treated him worse and used his weaker position in the collective, which resulted mainly in him performing more work than others.

Problems with housing

As mentioned in the previous chapter, housing is a basic prerequisite for finding a permanent job, however, it is, of course, also a prerequisite for living a normal personal and social life. A typical illustration of the importance of housing in this regard is provided by the example of David, who, after the release, had to solve his housing situation. During the time he was in the prison, his step father, who administered his flat, had prevented him from entering the flat. According to his words he was not prepared for such a situation and counted on the fact that he has a place to stay after the release. The biggest problem was that he had no place to relax from all the problems and tasks which gradually began to pile up on him after the release. He then had to solve all the issues in a great deal of stress and not rested, which increased the possibility he would create even more problems. He was a bit fortunate in his situation because he managed to resolve his housing situation through a charity organization that provided him with a small studio after his release. However, this solution was only temporary, because he had to move out of it after a year and make a place for another person in a difficult situation. Since then he has only temporary housing, which makes it difficult for him to function normally and to a large extent, demotivates him and diminishes his will to solve other partial issues in his life, among others also the employment. This loss of motivation is further illustrated by Daniel:

A man, the way... he arranges his life, such a life he has. And everywhere – it is in the jail as well as outside. But in the jail it works, but outside it doesn't. It is opposite. It used to not work in the jail, it worked outside. Today it is opposite – it works in the jail, but outside it doesn't.

The problems in trying to ensure adequate housing then interfere with personal and family life, which was the case of Patrick, who had to live with his wife in different hostels and shelters, but their possibilities were limited because some of the facilities do not let couples to live together as they provide only accommodation in gender-separated sections.

Informants often lost their permanent housing due to the imprisonment. We have already spoken of David. Martin has experienced a similar story:

Researcher: And have you lost the apartment because of the stay in the prison?

Martin: Yes... yes... yes... I lost it because of that... Well, I signed up my cousin there and he started a family during my imprisonment...

Researcher: And you had nowhere to go to...

Martin: On the other hand, it is true that I would have to pay the rent... not, it was not a rent, it belonged to me, I inherited it from my granny. But it was CZK 3,500 and when I had no work during imprisonment I could not pay it, so I needed someone to pay it. So I came back: "You have a bad luck." I will not lie, he gave me some money, but a little... just enough for me to start. [...] Well, I'll tell you honestly, if he did not have a family, I would solve it otherwise – by force. But because he just had two children... and a wife. I wouldn't dare it.

After the release, David encountered a situation he did not count on, just as Martin, which he had to cope with and which even made his situation harder after the release. Moreover, in the long run, he lost a very affordable housing, which he could pay even with a relatively low income. Imprisonment resulted in a loss of housing also for Lucy, which, prior to the imprisonment, struggled with drug addiction and lived with her boyfriend who was also a drug addict, and they both started an

execution of their sentence almost at the same time, so they lost the housing, as none of them could pay the costs of it during imprisonment. Richard emphasized the loss of housing in the dormitory because of such a banal thing like a sickness:

I lost my living just now only because I actually got sick. I worked for an agency and I had a dormitory from them... Well, classically, well, you come or you start to be sick and the boss did not want to pay me... or he actually did not want to wait 14 days, I would be sick, that he would pay the dormitory instead of me. He just did not like that. And then it is quite easy, well. Because it is connected – work, dormitory.

Richard had lost a permanent housing previously – a studio flat – due to the imprisonment when he could not afford to pay the rent during the sentence, which was short, but it was rather difficult, because due to the short sentence (six months) he was not entitled to employment during imprisonment. The studio flat belonged to his friend who rented it to someone else, so he could not return there even after a relatively short sentence. At the time of the interview Richard said he might come back to this original flat, because, at the same time, he managed to arrange his original work place he had prior to the imprisonment. Both questions were again interconnected – studio flat he could not afford without a permanent job and an affordable housing he would not find if his friend did not rent it to him.

Adam's housing started to be a problem at the time of the interview as he was parting from his girlfriend, where he had lived and had a background. However the background was very problematic due to Adam's problems with alcohol and his striving to quit this addiction, which his girlfriend did not support because she had been also an alcoholic. Living together encouraged him in consumption and did not enable him to try to live otherwise or change certain things in his life. According to his own words, however, he was in a precarious situation as he did not have sufficient

financial capacity to rent a flat. Although he considered trying to save the initial financial investment for rent from the money earned at different temporary jobs, he eventually abandoned his interest in the lease. He was worried about the uncertain future situation and that he may not get the temporary job, not be able to pay the rent and find himself in the same situation as before.

On the other hand, the informants who had a housing at the time of the interview, had it in all cases due to a help of people around them. Radek, mentioned at the beginning, was fortunate to get helped from his family just after the release and that he could live with them and come to stand up on his own feet and later find his own housing without having to solve existential issues. Mark was also lucky that he could rely on his girlfriend after his release and move in with her. Jacob could live with his wife at the cottage he rented from his friend and where he had to pay only the services which was about CZK 1,000 per month. In addition, Jacob said that his friend is to some extent benevolent and if he, for example, does not have the money, his friend can wait one or two months and does not really solve the whole thing. Lucy, who, at the time of the interview, was shortly after the release from prison, did not have to solve existential issues as she could move in to her mother's place, which gave her a background, even though she expressed certain dissatisfaction because she did not feel so well there and it was unpleasant to her to be so dependent on her mother as she was already an adult person.

Stigmatization due to the criminal past

Only three informants were not reluctant to talk about their criminal past with their surrounding, others felt uncomfortable when they had to talk with other people about their imprisonment, with some exception of their friends, even though many informants felt a certain barrier even there. One of the informants, who declared that they generally speak with other people of their past, was Victor, who approached this

communication to a large degree in a mentor's way and would narrate to younger people what is it like to be in a prison and what does it involve:

Well it is so that they could realize, I mean the younger ones, that they are outside, to make them realize that they are really outside. They cannot realize it, these issues, because it is easy to get there, but not so easy to get out. A kind of, like, you understand me, yes. And, for example, God help me, if such a young man stays in a jail for fifteen or twenty years... To put it straight, he will hang himself, because of his psyche. He just cannot handle it.

Viktor therefore talked about his criminal past with the aim to educate young people around him in order to provide them with a support in such a way, they would avoid such an undesirable experience. During the conversation it was evident that Viktor does not have problems to talk about his experience, whether from prison environment or in relation with post-release events. However, he did not want to talk much about one topic, namely, his second sentence and the reason why he got it (he only mentioned, he had participated in a serious crime).

Richard also did not have a problem to talk about his past. However, he had a very short prison sentence and also both deeds which brought him there could be perceived more like a minor offence and a less serious crime (he received a suspended sentence for a brawl in a pub and he went to prison for half a year because he was sentenced for a debt of CZK 9,000 on alimony during the suspended period). Richard was aware that the reason for his imprisonment was an offence committed "during suspended period" and by the nature and severity of the crime he differed greatly from a general "profile" of imprisoned persons. He also said that he is confronted more with a curiosity towards him, which would, according to him, change into fear or caution if he was imprisoned for a worse conduct. Even Radek did not find it difficult to talk about these issues because he had gained a

certain degree of confidence since the time he was released, which helped him to overcome negative reactions:

It depends who is it in this case. For example, one sample [a friend] I know, I do not know for how long, well, so I have talked about it with them. On contrary, they had asked me, so I answered, so I talked about what, where and how, but some people, to whom, if it ... which you don't know, and if, so to say, they lead talk in this way, they look at you with suspicion, that is true. Well, it is actually so, that I just do not respond to it any more, somehow, I just pass it by. I say: "You wanted to know it, so I told you. If you didn't ask, I wouldn't tell you." Then it is his problem, not mine, he must deal with it.

Radek perceived possible negative reactions mainly from unknown people, but he felt so strong in his position that it was no longer unpleasant or threatening for him. A similar view was held by Adam, who originally had a very uncomfortable feeling when he had to speak with someone about his past (it was even so strong, he would deliberately conceal it), but later he came to believe that he had nothing to be ashamed of, as, according to him, many other people went through prison anyway, so there is no reason to think of it as something special or isolated and to be ashamed of. During the interview, however, he also said that he does not have many chances to talk about his past with someone, because he is rather a loner and does not have many friends, and he tries to avoid strangers.

Martin spoke of his past only among his friends, towards whom he felt confidence so that he did not have problems with it, since most of his friends also had some experience with imprisonment, so in this circle of people it was possible to talk of, in a certain sense, mutual harmony and reciprocity. Jacob had a similar approach to the criminal past. He said that his close friends know his story and so there is no need of verbalizing it any further, and he does not talk to other people about his past, unless it is absolutely necessary. David does not talk about his past very often. But he did not have any uncomfortable feelings, as, according to his own words, he

would meet rather curious people who wondered how he overcame the whole thing, what had happened after the release and if he had a chance to (re)integrate.

The last group of informants tried to make a “thick line” after their past and not to talk about it to anyone. Mark, for example, said that as soon as he stepped out of the prison gate, he forgot all what had happened, and focused only on the future, which helped him to cope with the period after the release. Lucy had a similar approach. After her release, she met a curiosity from her good friend, who wanted to know what she had experienced in the prison, but Lucy did not want to talk about it much. She said it was better to forget the criminal past and start a new life.

Ladislav also made a thick line behind his past. He wanted to distance himself mainly from his former friends who had brought him to the jail and who, as he assumed, could have a bad influence on him if he did not stop seeing them. In the case of Ladislav, it was visible that he was ashamed of his past and does not really want to remember it. Feeling of shame was also noticeable on Philip, according to whom, his past is not something he could or should be proud of. For some, this effort has been disrupted by reactions of their surroundings, which made them feel stigmatized to a great extent. For example, Ladislav and Patrick both experienced victimization by the policemen, who regularly stop them and check not only their identity, but also the baggage they have with them (they have to take their content out in front of the policemen). Perhaps the greatest degree of stigmatization was apparently felt by Patrick, who felt it immediately after leaving prison:

Well, but what at home then, everyone is watching there... if anything was lost in the building, they would already ring our door bell. You know it yourself, in the surroundings, where you live, if you were in the jail, everyone knows it. They may say [city] is not like a village, that everyone knows it in the village... hmm... this is may be even worse.

Even his mother was victimized because of him, as she had to face a symbolic violence from her surroundings, especially with regard to her son as a potential thief of everything that has been lost in the neighbourhood. Patrick was so traumatized by these events that he hid his criminal past even from his wife for some time:

Even my wife did not know about it. When I told her: "Yeah, I've been in a jail for 2.5 years and I've had a suspension as well," and I do not keep any secrets from her as I want her to know things. "You were in a jail?" I say: "Well, I was." "And for what?". And I say: "Well, you will laugh.". "Well, and for what?". And I say: "Participation in a robbery attack." "Have you robbed anyone?". And I say: "Please, it was like this." And now I explained her the stuff. "That is not possible, they couldn't sentence you for this." And I say: "It is perfectly normal, you will be in a car with me and they will sentence you as well because you did not go to the police and did not tell them that I have committed a robbery."

Patrick was accused and convicted of participating in a robbery because he went in a car with people who committed this attack, but, as he said, he did not know about it. When they arrested him, they accused him of assisting at least by not disclosing the identity of the perpetrators he supposedly knew. Ladislav also had a similar experience. He was convicted of a theft, and after the release he got, by a coincidence, to a burgled place, the police officers checked his identity and when they found out that he was convicted for the same crime, they detained him. Fortunately, the situation was explained, a real offender was caught and Ladislav was released. For Ladislav, however, this experience was a great disillusionment. Martin also felt a strong stigmatization:

Just the people... people, which they release, if they did not commit a serious crime like murders and so on, well... let these stay there for a lifetime. But... simple people, who made a mistake once, they should have a bigger chance than now, because... this isn't fair. Really not.

In Martin, feelings of stigmatization were mixed with the injustice and unfair behaviour of the other actors towards his person, which, as he said, was due to a poor social mechanisms set up and institutions, which supported these interactions. Martin had the impression that the stigma is so strong and his social position so weak that he was basically condemned “second time”, this time to live on the edge of society.

Some informants emphasized that the stay in prison and the subsequent stigma resulted in the loss of some close people. Radek described how he was literally divorced when he came out of the prison:

I was married when they locked me up, but when I came out, I got divorced. Or I'll put it otherwise – I was divorced. I was divorced because my mother in law couldn't bear it, because I got married into a very well... how to put it... situated family, so they just could not bear my scar.

In this case, the stigma was perceived by a wider family which was afraid to lose their social capital because of his sentence and that his stigma could possibly affect them as well. Patrick had a similar experience, this time with his friends and acquaintances:

Well... now, they were actually many, who did not stay, because no one knew why I was in the jail, but everyone knew about it, it was something completely different. I say: “Well, fine.” Now already... they all have families and... if we meet, we chat, well, yes... it is not like it used to be, when we went to a pub or discos. Well, not any more.

Due to her imprisonment, Lucy also lost most of her close people, but in her case it was also caused by her drug addiction, which caused collapse of her marriage and loss of everyday contact with her older daughter and subsequently also removal of the younger daughter, which was fortunately entrusted to the foster care of Lucy's

mother. Lucy has no friends, because they were all connected to her drug past and Lucy wanted to tear herself off them, so that she would not have the need to take drugs again, and she could try to start a different life.

Confusion and loss of contact with the outside world

Six informants directly emphasized that they had a problem to get used to and adapt to the outer world directly after the release. It was very confusing for them; and they had problems to perform even a very common and simple tasks:

Well, that's nice, well, that's a shock, it's like... There [in jail], well, sometimes you manage to get to see the TV, well, if you do not go to sleep, when it is allowed, especially, it is possible only till ten, well, till the bed time, so you will watch the news, but still it is a shock. When I got out of jail for the first time, they actually released me in [city], yeah, so I looked around, dude, as crazy, well, I was afraid even to cross a street. It was mad. You have a small space, yeah... and then all of a sudden you are free (Philip).

They let me out, for example, from jail... I lived in [town] on [district] and I remember [town] in the old way. After eight years I got out and I got actually lost in my town. I had to ask where is it... where is the [street]. [...] But... then I have learned it, but after half a year (Viktor).

Then they released me and I came to [town] and you, now: "You nutcase. And now, how do I get to the place of my residence." Now I did not know if the trams, the numbers, go there or not, the same with the buses [...]. But I have managed to get there (Patrick).

The testimonies show that the confusion was in the first place related to the space – the informants did not know how to reach their final destination, or they were totally confused by the space, which was around them, because during the time they were in the prison, it had changed a lot. In larger cities it can result in confusion and a problem to perform such a banal task like travelling by public transport means. Philip

made an interesting observation in this regard, when he pointed out that the whole time of the custody (he was also long time under arrest) he was locked in a small room to which he got used to, and when he was “released” to a large open space, he had an uncertain and unpleasant feeling. David felt similar, when he was released, because he had a psychic shock from the uncertainty waiting for him and an open space, which, as he said, was caused by a long-term stay in a prison where he had been in a small cell and he could see only a corridor, bars and fellow prisoners. It was also supported by a specific prison regime which gave him a certain order and routine, which completely broke up after the release. In addition, it was, as he said, complicated to begin any interactions with other people within the prison regime, which further contributed to the development of problems outside. Adam also explained how, for a long time, he could not get used to not being awakened by the prison sirens anymore:

So from the first sentence I really felt a strong relief, even tears broke out. Then my father came to pick me up, I actually walked one meter ahead of myself, everything drops off you. From the second sentence, emptiness... the thoughts just... of course, I was looking forward to my girlfriend, so quickly to a bar and from the bar I just called: “Hey, I’m on my way home...” So, this way. But only after some time, when one realizes, that in the morning the siren at half past four really isn’t there, you just get used to getting up and I have it till this day. I keep it because I’ve learned it this way, so I think it is not a bad habit. And... in time I realize, what has one lost during the several months, I just cannot imagine the ten years long penalties... (Adam).

Jacob described other problems with trivial things:

This integration was, so to say, somewhat good. I actually came back here in July 2000 from the first sentence, at the end of July. I came. My deceased father was then one and half years gone, he had passed sixteen month ago, almost seventeen. So I came and I was socially secured. I got the decision about inheritance into the prison, so I knew, there was a car, yes, BMW, waiting for me

at home, that I a flat, three plus one, and I had maybe a hundred and fifty thousand on my bank account. And plus half a million I have earned during the imprisonment. So it was... well... I just came back home and I was alone. I came, well, I visited my ex wife and I visited my children, they were little at that time. Well, all that went well. I have even bought something, but I was afraid of it, so I went to ask my friends and I say: "[Friend], excuse me, I've spent nine Christmas eves in jail, can you tell me how do you actually celebrate it outside? What presents are ok to buy for the kids?

After the first sentence, Jacob has returned back into a very secure environment, albeit he was "fortunate in misfortune", because it was due to his father's death and the inheritance he had inherited and therefore he had gained housing and material security. But interpersonal interactions were a large obstacle for him, as it was strongly influenced by a nine-year sentence, so even so common issue, like celebration of Christmas eve, had become a big obstacle he was afraid of.

The second dimension of confusion was arranging practical issues, the informants often had no capacity for and the mentioned prison regime did not support them in this way, rather on contrary. In this respect, a good example is David again, who had described how he had to arrange everything on his own after the release – social support, housing, employment and on top of everything else, he had problems with a doctor, who dropped him off the record and did not want to return him his folder, so he could not apply for an employment where they asked him for a medical examination report. Finally, he found another doctor, who had started a new folder for him and helped him with the examination for the employer. All these things he had arranged, as he said, within four or five days after the release. It was very stressful period for him, because he did not know what was going to happen and had no background, where he could rest and then solve the problems well rested, as during the imprisonment he had lost his housing and so he did not count on not having a place to stay. His situation was also worsened by the fact that he was almost without any money at the time of the release. Richard also described a similar experience:

You have quite different troubles, well, when you get out. Yeah, even if it's stupid and, maybe you are in a jail, they still take care of you, somehow. If I say it in a silly way, food three times a day, you have where to sleep... When you get out, you have to strive for things much harder, yes. Well you still get something, let's say, I don't know, how it works, but you get something to cover the journey and a thousand-crown note from a probation officer. That was more or less all you got. So you have to try it somehow, because you practically run out of money very fast, because that thousand-crown note, well, you buy a few things you really need, you get something arranged...

However, Richard had experience only from a six-months penalty, which he reflected himself:

The worst on it probably was... well, the worst... fortunately it was not that terrible, it was only half a year, but... and I came out probably, well, in summer, but... This way you have to try, yes, start to do a bit, at least a little bit, if you want to get going, if you don't want to stay on the street. And I had an advantage, at least at the beginning when I did not have any work arranged, just to make sure, that I had connected to the shelter. And there it's usually enough to write that you will arrange a social support, and all. And this way you ensure at least something basic. This usually works out well, this thing. And then it was quite simple, yes. Well, it would be something else to get out after two or three years, of course. This half a year is not so much to make one incapable to fit back, well, or, in theory, to catch up again, well.

The practice described by Richard, however, was not mentioned by any other informant and obviously not used. It is a question, if that was because of being uninformed (this was certainly an important factor, as most informants said that they did not receive much information at prison, as to where they can get support after the release and who could provide some help at least partially) or if it was because the informants did not solve their (potential) problems in advance. This was also the case

of David, who said that he got some information as to what to do after the release, but he did not pay much attention to it, because he did not count on the situation he could lose his housing. On the other hand, the information provided in different prisons differed greatly in the quality, so it is a question, if the information provided to David would also help him.

The third dimension is a certain superstructure of the first two, where the spatial uncertainty and the strain of worries and issues which the released person did not have to solve in prison at all, could lead to a cognitive dissonance, total confusion or even depressions and psychic emptiness:

I will tell you it this way, such people... they are just used to live there... they cannot live with their psyche outside. They are just used to their [prison] regime. Just like the guy that keeps coming back there all the time. He will tell himself: "What shall I do outside? I cannot live outside and I don't want to be on the street." And such a guy talks to himself like this. So rather than going to steal, it is better to kill someone, I will get thirteen, fourteen years and I will be taken care of. Well and in the prison they live... he has his people there... and it is automatic, he knows he is going back to his room (Viktor).

Viktor has, of course, outlined a very extreme experience that, nevertheless, illustrates how these psychic traumas can be combined with the prison regime and create a very difficult situation for all actors involved. The released person who is required to use an ethos of personal responsibility immediately after the release and be able to manage his/her own life, cannot handle it without support, as this responsibility was not required from him/her during the whole imprisonment, on the contrary, the autonomy in decision making is being systematically suppressed there. This contradiction largely affects the (re)integration of released persons both ideally and practically.

The social institutions, which are often in a key position and make the difference between life above the poverty line and below it, or between life out of prison and in it, could and should provide help with (re)integration, as Richard suggests:

I didn't have a problem, not even a psychic one, but more so... how to put it. I just don't know, after the two or three years, it's really a long time already, then you have to arrange everything, well, yes. I know of no job... you cannot connect to an Employment Office, no one will help you there, if you are not registered there, not even during imprisonment or when you are about to be released. It is not possible to get help from them. Then there are not many chances, well. If you do not have any friends who could arrange some work for you after such a long time, then trying to fit back is rather hard. Then you really have to rely on the social security, if they would provide you with something...

All the informants used the help of institutions, which is related to the fact that these institutions helped us to contact them and recruit, so we cannot say, if it is a common practice among released persons or not. However, it was very interesting to observe, what do the informants imagine from institutions, what do they actually perceive as help. In the case of most informants, the assistance of institutions was limited to a probation officer, which is actually the only publicly funded institution set up to help the released persons (with exception of non-profit entities). These two facts already imply a primal problem, because of the institutional weakness of the probation officer as a certain systemic measure. The probation officer (after the recent social reforms from 2006 to 2013) can only play a role of some very detached mediator between the released persons and various other institutions. An example of the weakening position of probation officers can be an extraordinary immediate help, which, prior to the above mentioned reforms, the probation officer himself could have guaranteed without any further approval process. After the reforms, this decision passed on to

the Employment Office and the probation officer can only advise the released person to go to this office and ask for assistance there (of course the probation officer can also help him/her with the contact). In addition, the mediation activities are dependent on the capacities of individual probation officers and their number in the region, which means that in some regions even this mediation can be weakened, as the staff simply does not have the capacity for it.

The [probation officer] advised me at least sometimes with some issues [...] I didn't know what had changed and what hadn't... But he [the probation officer] didn't help me so much. Well, they probably can help you, if you need, I don't know what, maybe they can actually help you with a social security, they may provide you with some list of dormitories, maybe they arrange some temporary job, if there is something going on in the city, let's say, if there is something extraordinary. In this it is beneficial, well (Richard).

Well, here actually [the probation officer], she helps me a lot, now she will actually arrange something for me, because they did not give it to me... actually when I was released from the prison, they did not give me the employment record [...] and I need to bring it to the Employment Office, well, yes. [...] On Monday I went to get my ID photo and she [the probation officer] paid my pass [for public transport], so that I would make no more debts (Lucy).

I also went to [a probation officer], it is a good guy, all people are good here [...]. They are really nice. There should be more of them. But really. In all the cities [...] [They helped me] for example, with papers and so... Some temporary job, maybe. Well, [probation officer] can arrange a temporary work for you and you make some money just to get you an ID. You have it in three weeks, that is good (Martin).

[The probation officer] knows me, I've been coming here quite a long time, and I've arranged it [ID], yeah, well, may be with a help [of the probation officer], but... it is a nice lady, well. This approach is really excellent, people take advantage of if a lot, well (Philip).

As seen from the testimonies, in most cases, the released people consider a consultancy and occasional mediation (in terms of social work, i.e., systematic

assistance to improve the situation of the persons concerned) to be an assistance which may help them temporary, but for the reasons listed above (very problematic material and psychological situation) a regular work targeted on a frequent contact, terrain assistance, first-line support and empowering competences and autonomous decision making in the second line would appear more appropriate. It is also clear from the testimonies that the released persons often take it as an obvious and self-evident fact that they should help themselves in this very complicated situation and that any assistance with (re)integration provided to them should also be minimal. This is why they consider any assistance, even just a mediation, as very positive, because it symbolically implies some support in the sense that at least someone is partially interested in them and is trying to help them.

Some informants also had experience with other entities which helped them with various issues. Most frequently it was a job mediation, which have succeeded with some (for example, Jacob) and did not with others (Martin, Adam or Mark). Jacob was also very happy about the legal and debt counselling, through which he had received insolvency and therefore got out of all the debts he had so far. In this regard, Martin has pointed out through the story of his friend, who had also undergone insolvency, the problem which has recently arisen, namely that insolvency entities have begun to appear, but they are not certified, so they offer their service under very unfavourable conditions (it is rather similar to the so-called consumer loans).

However, the probation officers or other actors or entities are hardly to be blamed for lack of assistance, as they simply do not have capacities or tools to help the released persons effectively, and they are generally limited by the social system in the Czech Republic. Whereby it is not possible, for example, to assign someone a social housing, as they do not operate with any stable social work financing from the public budget. The quality of services also varies greatly, since these services are set

up by municipalities which approach this issue with a different empathy levels. Therefore it is not surprising that some informants turned to their social networks and were searching an assistance within them, albeit at the cost of getting back into a situation when they would continue in criminal activities through these contacts. These were, for example, the cases of Viktor or Ladislav.

Summary of the findings received within the framework of the analysis and study

From the above mentioned context, it is clear that the very fact of the stay in the prison and even the very record in the Criminal Register, are so stigmatizing circumstances that they make it virtually impossible to find a stable job with standard conditions in the common labour market. And this applies even in the cases when employers do not require the criminal record. The stay in prison is naturally reflected also in the professional CV and it is impossible or very difficult to avoid mentioning it. Some informants (David's case) have tried to avoid this circumstance causing an attention (by mentioning the Prison Service of the Czech Republic in a form of an employer's acronym), but even those "manoeuvres" are not effective and, in addition, undermine the trust between the employer and employees. Even in the cases when the person directly responsible for hiring people is willing to employ the released person, because this person was in personal contact with the released person or present at the job interview, the employment or the job interview can be terminated, if the imprisonment or the very criminal record is assessed as an obstacle preventing the released person's employment by the recruiter's superior.

The released persons' existing job carrier or professional experience have very little influence in this respect. In some cases, the employers take into account the type of criminal offence for which the applicants were convicted. In a situation when the released person committed less serious crimes, his/her chances to find a

job are somewhat better. However, in this case, it is necessary to realize that it is a comparison of the chances with other offenders, while in comparison with other applicants even the offenders of minor crimes have a minimal chance to get a job, already due to the very effect caused by the information about the criminal past and the criminal record.

Similar consideration can be given to information on the number and the length of sentences, but the significance of these two characteristics of the released person's criminal past appears to be essentially marginal and the employers do not really take them into account. Paradoxically, after the release, a person with no or minimum qualifications (for example, Lucy) does not have much worse starting chances than the released persons with "richer" work history (for example, Viktor).

The only "parameter" of work and criminal history of these persons which can significantly improve their chances to find and retain employment (if we do not consider their participation on an illicit work market, unstable and temporary jobs, etc.) is a sufficiently long employment period passing since leaving the imprisonment, when the criminal record had been already deleted and the information in the professional CV regarding the imprisonment is overshadowed by "job successes" (this is evident from Radek's story). However, it is obvious that it is very difficult to "work out" oneself into such a situation, it requires considerable amount of time, willingness to accept not very attractive job positions and to prove oneself even in these positions, but also a considerable determination (which is needed more than of people who are not disadvantaged in the labour market) and undoubtedly a considerable dose of "luck".

However, it should be emphasized that the very imprisonment and criminal record are by far not the only significant factors complicating the process of finding a job and managing general reintegration. An important role is often played by an

insufficient background (for example, it can be hardly imagined that the released person finds a stable job without a stable housing), which the released persons have after their release and which cannot be improved without a high degree of close people's support and professional support from different institutions and entities specialized in these fields. All informants who managed to at least partly stabilize their life, had at least some support at the outset (among them were, for example, Radek, Jacob or Mark). This support was provided mostly by the family and to a lesser extent, by institutions, which is largely caused by the Czech social system, which provides only a very limited assistance to the persons in a complicated life situation by means of social field work.

Among the other factors complicating reintegration and finding employment were debts and seizures of salary. These very often lead to the fact that the effort to get a legal employment completely loses its merit – the income left to the person after paying them does not cover the basic life needs. In addition to this practical impact, the debts and seizures often have a significant impact on the released persons' psyche and motivation to solve the situation, which is already very difficult to solve as well as highly stressful and demotivating. As Martin points out, the debt trap can be further deepened by using the insolvency mechanism through an uncertified entity which makes the insolvency procedure into another form of a so-called consumer loan. However, even the insolvency which is intended to help the debtor, can be of help, as was demonstrated by Jacob's case, who managed the whole process successfully. However, the insolvency itself does not suffice and it is rather necessary to prevent the debts and the so-called sustainable debt traps, which are created mainly due to the poverty and consumption way of life.

At the same time, the interviews have shown that as to the reflexion of their own position in the professional life, the released persons are rather or very critical (and also sceptical). Only one informant (Radek) has been satisfied with the current

job and a conclusion was made in this regard that the criminal past has no longer influence on the professional life of the person concerned (it can be also assumed that these two circumstances are interconnected). In the case of other informants, it was possible to distinguish the situation of persons relatively satisfied with their situation (they are employed, although it is associated with various difficulties, disadvantages or different shortcomings) and persons in an extremely precarious or emergency situation (without work, without a chance to get a job, performing only occasional jobs, experiencing many unpleasant or undesirable situations during their work performance or in relation to it, or finding themselves often in various difficult situations in relation to the work performance). Another important circumstance in this respect is that even if the released person works and his/her work may be perceived as an adequate job for him/her (and he/she himself/herself also perceives it this way), in the unfavourable social situation after the release (and often in relation to the existing thereby related negative impacts or risks), even such jobs need not be sufficient to guarantee a successful reintegration.

The issue of the released persons' employment is therefore a multi-layered and complex problem which does not depend only on the willingness of the released person to seek employment and to work and the willingness of the employer to employ such a person, but it is based on many other factors, many of which need to be addressed before the very issue of the released persons' employment.

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