

Supporting young offenders in their reintegration and reducing reoffending

Estonian example of partnership between
the state and non-profit organizations

WORKPRIS final seminar

WORKPRIS-Supporting young offenders in their reintegration and
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Team leader

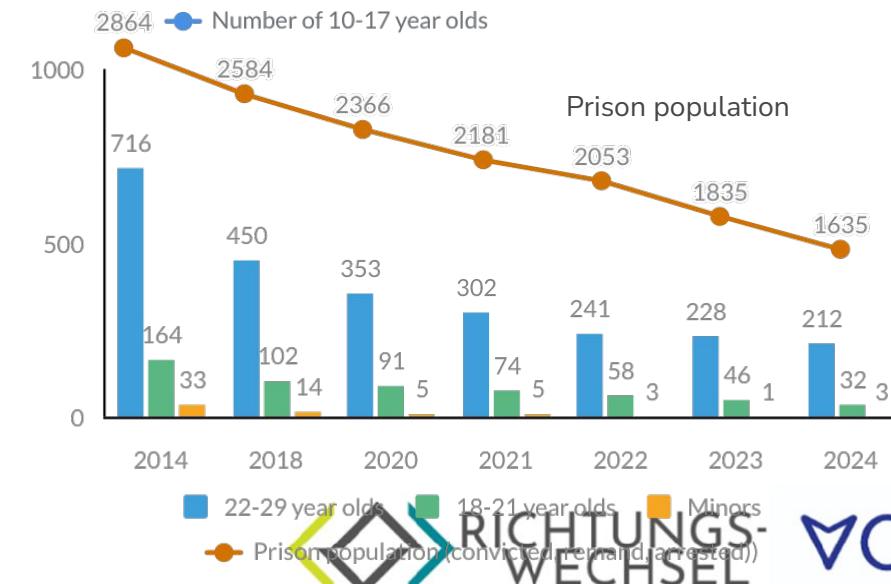
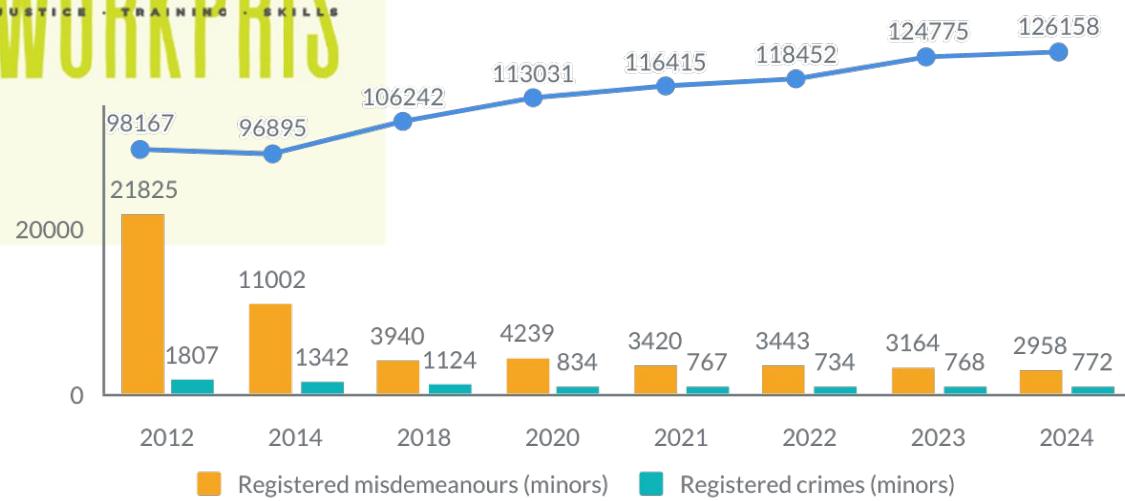
Criminal Policy Department
Ministry of Justice of Estonia

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Context



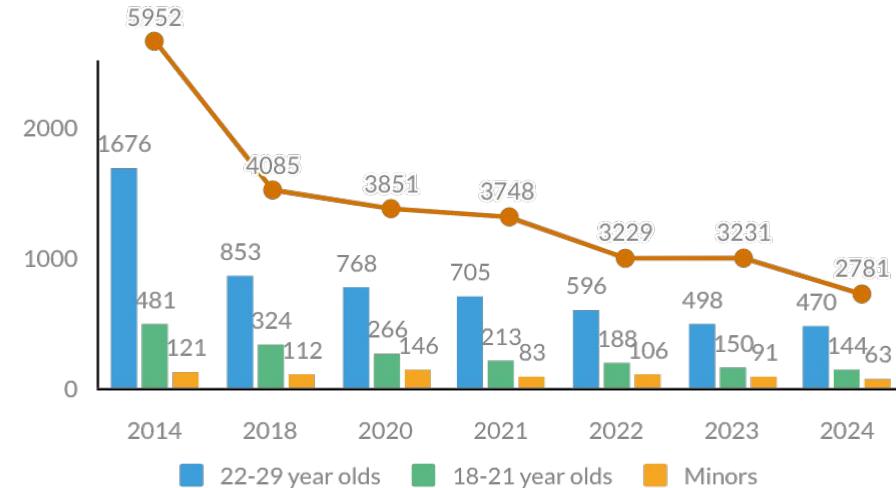
Population of Estonia
1,37 million



Minimum age of criminal responsibility is

Young adult – who committed a criminal offence when she was under 21 years of age.

Number of people on probation



People on probation (total)



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Why do we need to support?

you ask the average young person who has broken the law

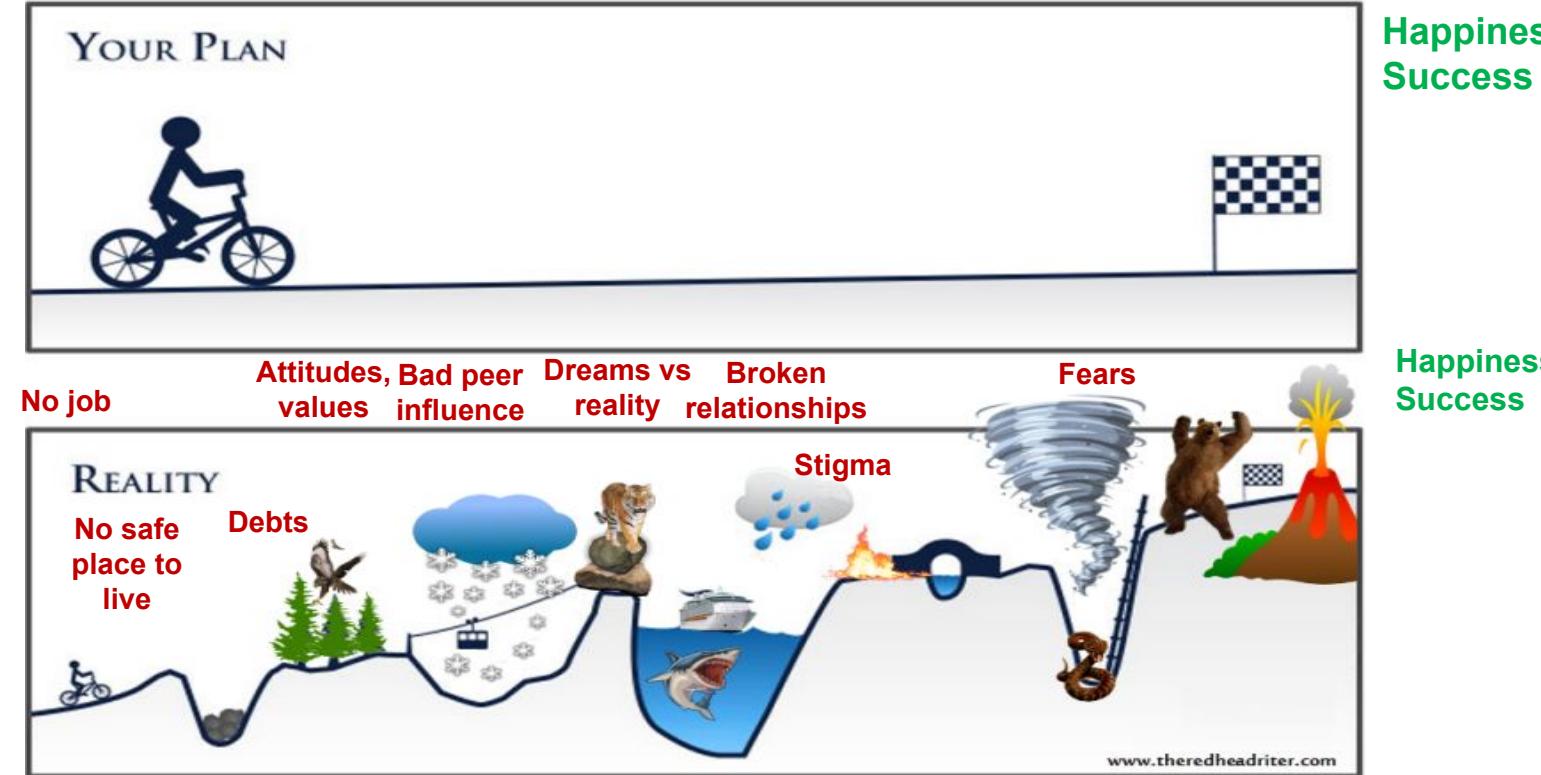
what are your thoughts...

... about your future? What are you going to do? How do you see yourself?
... about your upcoming release from prison?



What happens if we do not support

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Supporting offenders in (re)integration



- Co-funded by European Social Fund programmes 2014-2020 and 2022–2027
- Project 2015–2023 „Re-entry services for ex-offenders“;
- **Ongoing project 2023–2029 „Reducing recidivism among young offenders“.**

Interventions in the community to support independence and legal compliance:
mentor is provided or
accommodation with support services, to integrate people into the community.

Target group are men and women:

- for prison leavers, incl. conditional release, incl. electronic monitoring (*half way out*)
- as an alternative to prison (*half way in*)
- as an alternative to sanction;
- probationers;
- suspects in an ongoing criminal proceeding;
- repeatedly committed misdemeanors.

Ministry conducted a public procurement to find service providers.



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Short-term vs long-term goal

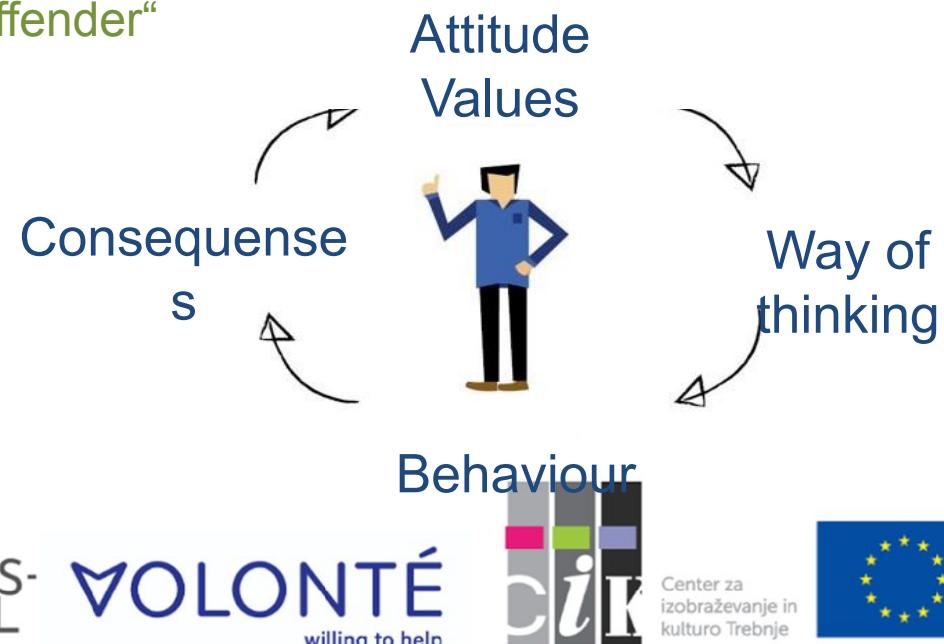


Desisters vs persisters*: it can be a long way out of crime,
it's a an individual journey, but we help and guide

If you've been walking in the wrong direction for years,
it is impossible to make a return in months.

Attitude of a person can be:

- Taking responsibility or blaming others
- „I can be better“ or „I am used to be an offender“
- Action or distraction



From
fantasy
world to
real one.



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Mentoring

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For youngsters of 14–29 years of age. Up to 18 months.

- Working alliance is main factor to succeed;
- agreement of goodwill between mentor and young person;
- building the bridge – 6 + 12 months model.

*Preparation
and inclusion
starts up to 6
months before
release*

Mentor is an adult whom a young person can trust. Mentor is a listener, advisor, motivator, and supporter.

What does mentor do?

- Help to draw a realistic (post-release) plan A, plan B etc.
- Help to organise appointments (job provider, Unemployment Fund, housing, debt counselor etc.)
- Working on building trustful relationships (family, peers, hobbies etc).

Non-profit organization as a service provider all over Estonia (divided by regions).

All mentors are trained to work with youth with criminal background.



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Housing (half-way house)



For youngsters of 18–29 years of age. Up to 18 months.

- Small scale unit, 8-20 youngsters;
- working alliance and „family principles“;
- intrinsic motivation of young person can make a huge impact;
- structural program: discipline and values;
- relationships and taking responsibility (e.g. letters of forgiveness; restoring „broken bridges“);
- day-to-day counselling (health issues; documents; debts; job; living place etc.).

Non-profit organization as a service provider (Village of Hope).

Staff members are trained to work with youth with criminal background, some of staff members have previous experience of addiction, imprisonment.

Involvement

Help to adapt, find motivation. Trust, belief.

Restoring or building up selfconfidence.

Feeling of doubt (should I stay or go).

Development

Learning and gaining new skills.

Shift in mindset and attitudes.

Feeling of success.

Growth

Experiencing change.

Feeling of improved quality of life.

Feeling of gratitude.

1-6 months

6-12 months

12+ months

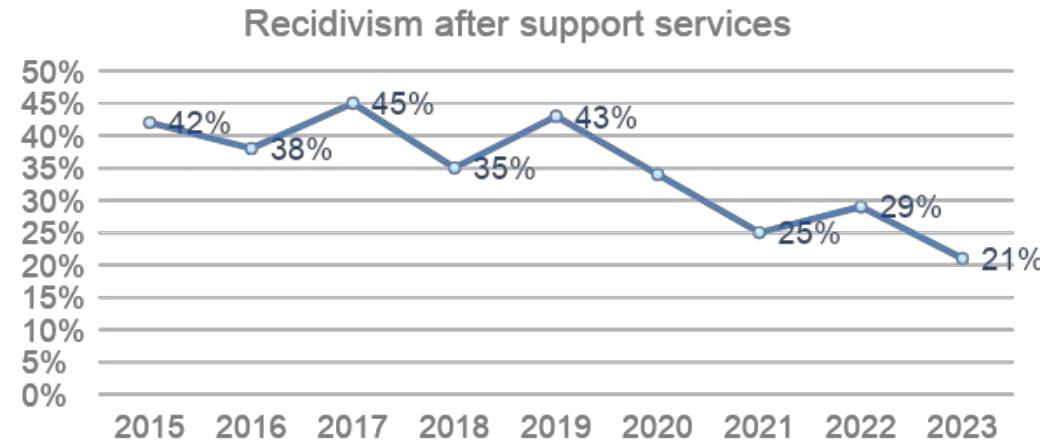
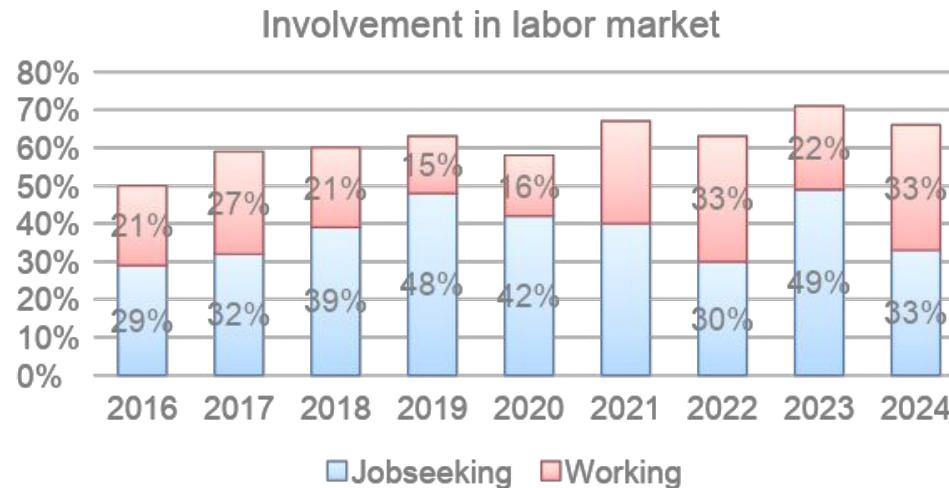
It is not just a place to stay, it is an opportunity to change a lifestyle.

Outcome results

- 2015–2023 project „Re-entry services for ex-offenders“
- 2024 project „Reducing recidivism among young offenders“

Study (2020)* compared to a reference group, positive impact on:

- involvement in labor market;
- recidivism after 9 months of getting support service.



Challenges and learning elements

*In Estonia
43% of
offenders
have mental
health
disorder**

- It's a step-by-step process – 2015 vs 2024 – trust the process
- and learn
- It is challenging to deal with all the needs, not an easy task.

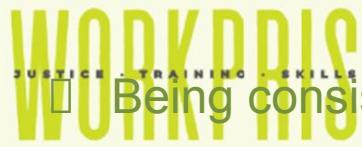
- Our partner NGO-s are highly motivated, do their work with a big heart, have less bureaucracy, are flexible and impressively good at working with people.
- Impact is difficult to measure: important to look behind the numbers.
- There is no “perfect service“, we provide opportunities.

- Good preparation work in prison, make (re)integration process easier.

- Continuous communication: to reshape attitudes; „question of why“; providing supporting is normal.

- Success stories vs experience stories

Challenges and learning elements (II)



- Being consistently visible for all the stakeholders and prisoners (e.g. information hours, field trips etc)
- Project as network management: one project manager in the ministry, one goal, joint effort, learning and acting together.



Field trip seminar with prosecutors and judges from different Estonian regions
(Village of Hope)



Seminar on restorative justice basic skills with prison and probation workers and mentors



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Playing at the tournament together with youngsters from Village of Hope

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Village of Hope

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Half way house in Western Estonia



Half way house in Eastern Estonia

Thank you for listening!

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