

The Prison System: Is This Justice?

The intended function of the prison system is to take criminals away from society and rehabilitate them into functional citizens. However, the shame and humiliation of having a criminal record effectively puts you at ground zero in terms of your place in society, which usually leads to former criminals returning to a life of crime, or worse, returning to prison. This is a never-ending cycle that has existed for centuries, which has led men and women who may have made a few wrong mistakes being labelled as criminals for the rest of their lives, rarely getting a second chance from society

Ex-convicts face many restrictions once they return to society. In the UK, they are stripped of their right to vote, a right that could allow them to vote for a government that would be more lenient to the struggles they face. They are also barred from receiving public benefits and public housing, which becomes a problem when many of the jobs available to formerly incarcerated people are low-paying, such as jobs in construction and truck-driving. These jobs are also very simplistic and require little decision-making, furthering emphasising the [chronic loss of free choice](#) many prisoners develop. It also leads to prisoners becoming [emotionally detached, self-isolating and more socially withdrawn](#), which aren't exactly qualities you would want of a functioning member of society. It becomes clear that the system is not rehabilitating prisoners as much as it is changing their personalities entirely and then restricting their lives in such a way where they can't function adequately even if they wanted to. But is it reducing crime? No. [It's more likely to make someone commit more crime](#), which leads to a prison population that has risen by 80% in the last 30 years in England and Wales, which happen to have the highest imprisonment rates in Europe

Still, it could be worse. Across the pond in the USA, many prisons still allow slavery, as the 13th amendment states that "slavery is banned except as a punishment for a crime". Also, many American prisons are owned by the same company, CoreCivic, a company that requires a [90% occupancy rate in most states](#) in order to stay open, as the more people they have locked up, the more profit they make. Yes, you are reading that correctly, US prisons require large amounts of prisoners to stay in prison so that they can make more money. The sad part is, this isn't really a difficulty, as many formerly incarcerated people end up returning to prison anyways, with 44% of criminals returning within their first year, and 60% returning within two years. This is clear proof that the prison system is built upon keeping you in prison, and even once you've left, you're bound to come back eventually.

However, there may be some beacon of hope for the prison system, and it comes from Finland. As well as being the happiest country in the world, and the most secure, Finland has the lowest incarceration rate in Europe with a population of less than 3,000. This is due to Finland's open prison system, which gives inmates access to the same services as the rest of the country, such as online courses for once they are let go, and VR headsets of the outside world so that they can grow accustomed to life outside of prison. This is a lot better than the system in much of the world, where prisoners are offered no ways of adjusting to society but being asked to do so anyways. The Finnish system directly aids prisoners in re-adjusting and is the best example of a prison that reforms people instead of worsening them and their chances of living a normal life outside of prison.