

Post Release Job Market Study

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study examines where post release jobs are likely to exist. This is a timely issue because over 600,000 prisoners are released annually, and the labor market has been difficult for job seekers in recent years.

Only a few studies have systematically examined the labor market experiences of ex-offenders. These studies found that **serving time in prison does not necessarily harm employment itself but depresses earnings** by 10 to 30 percent.

We selected five diverse states for study:

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| Large State: | Texas , South Central |
| Large Mid-size State: | Indiana , Central |
| Mid-size State: | South Carolina , Southeast |
| Small Mid-size State: | Utah , Western |
| Small State: | Rhode Island , Northeast |

Surprisingly, **48 million people were hired** during a jobless recovery last year, 4 million per month, despite no net job growth. **Trade-transportation-utilities** led with 10.1 million hires, followed by **leisure/hospitality** with 8.4 million. Both sectors hired many unskilled workers in restaurants, stores, moving companies and warehouses. Construction hired more (4.7 million) than manufacturing (3.9 million), despite the fact that construction has fewer than half the workers in manufacturing. The **South and West** hired faster than the Northeast and Midwest and hiring declined in the winter and rose in **summer and fall**.

Ex-inmates can qualify for some **37 million jobs**, or **29.3 percent of payroll employment** because they are entry-level, low-skill and occupational bans for a criminal record would be rare. At least one in four jobs, in other words, requires only short-term on-the-job training and can be performed satisfactorily within hours or days by able-bodied, literate, cooperative applicants.

Most of the 37 million jobs available to ex-inmates are in ten occupational groupings from food preparation and serving to transportation and material moving occupations. The largest **15 entry-level jobs** (cooks, janitors, stock clerks, laborers, etc.) collectively employ **25.6 million** people, or **20% of jobs**. In addition, 41% of all hours worked require only knowledge level 1 or 2 out of 9 levels.

Variation in the industrial and occupational distributions of the state and metropolitan economies is **quite small**. Indiana and South Carolina have notably high concentrations in production occupations but this yields relatively few jobs for ex-offenders as manufacturing continues to shed jobs. Total job growth and the unemployment rate are more important than the microeconomic distribution of employment.

Forecasts of anticipated high-growth occupations from 2002 to 2012 show **strong expansion of low-skill and low-wage occupations**. On the other hand, many of these low-skill, high growth occupations are female-dominated.

In view of the strong positive association between schooling and pay, ex-inmates who want higher pay can start in entry-level jobs but **must improve their skills** through training and education to obtain higher pay.

Interviews with correctional officials, especially parole and workforce development, yielded insights on ex-offenders and jobs:

- “It’s hard to find jobs,” says Steve Outlaw, a parole supervisor in Indianapolis. “Most of them have no GED, no high school degree. They work odd jobs.” Despite these challenges, “if a person wants to work, he’ll find work,” Outlaw says. **“Those who don’t want to work, complain, ‘I can’t find a job. It’s my criminal record,’ but it’s an excuse.”**
- “A majority are employed with construction at the high end, assembly in the middle and fast food at the low end,” supervisor Rolina McQuiston says at the Probation and Parole day reporting center in Salt Lake City. “We have a good relationship with the Workforce Commission. Those with Correctional Industries experience usually have already made the job connection.”
- “Ex-inmates usually have a bad work history and no single occupation,” Texas officials say. “At 35 years-old, they’ve put themselves at the beginning.”
- “Proper attitudes are more important than skills,” says John Ownby of Texas job placement Project RIO. “We organize a work search campaign and actual job interviews. ‘Keep ‘em on the road’ is key.”

Is there an industrial and occupational mismatch between jobs on the inside and outside? Over nine in ten prison industry jobs are traditional industries serving public agencies, while **nine in ten low-skill jobs outside are in for-profit, private enterprises**. Correctional industry jobs are concentrated in manufacturing while this sector only employs one in nine workers and has a low hire rate outside the walls. Yet attitude and **general employability skills** are more important than specific job skills, making the paucity of correctional industry jobs the principal problem.

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