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# Resettlement Needs for Foreign National Prisoners Returning to Their Home Country

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**Summary:** While a wide range of literature exists on the topic of prisoner resettlement, little is known about the struggles faced by foreign national prisoners who return to their home country after serving a prison sentence abroad. This paper aims to address this gap in the literature by providing a comparative analysis of two reports which have examined this phenomenon in Ireland and in the UK. While concerns over accommodation, healthcare, addiction, employment, education and family contact are common to all prisoners, foreign national prisoners also face concerns related to language, culture and immigration. These additional concerns can have a dramatic impact on the resettlement of those foreign national prisoners who return to their home country post-release.

**Keywords:** Resettlement, foreign national prisoners (FNPs), returning prisoners, prisoners abroad, education, training, accommodation, healthcare.

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## [A-HEAD] Introduction

In recent years, a wide range of research has been undertaken, which focused on the differential treatment of foreign national prisoners (FNPs) in various criminal justice systems (Martynowicz, 2018; Gavin, 2022; Croux *et al.*, 2019; Ugelvik and Damsa, 2018; Doyle *et al.*, 2022). While some research has been conducted on the resettlement needs of FNPs (Slade,

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2015; Mbaye, 2018), there is a paucity of research on the resettlement needs of prisoners who return to their home country after serving a prison sentence abroad. For example, the only studies undertaken in Ireland and the UK are those of Gavin (2015) and Cracknell and Ward (2022) for the Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas (ICPO) and Prisoners Abroad respectively.

The ICPO was established in 1985 and engages with Irish prisoners around the world. Its role is to respond to the needs of Irish prisoners abroad and their families, as well as visiting prisoners and assisting families with travel and accommodation, researching, and providing relevant information to prisoners and their families, including on issues such as deportation, repatriation and prison transfers. It also works closely with those Irish prisoners who have served a prison sentence abroad and who return to Ireland, through either voluntary or involuntary means. At any one time, it has over 1,000 prisoners on its books, and the vast majority of these are in the United Kingdom (Gavin, 2014; 2015).

Prisoners Abroad was established in 1978 as a charity that supports and assists British citizens who are imprisoned overseas. Its main strands of work are its prisoners overseas service, family support service and resettlement service. The core values of Prisoners Abroad are to reduce the isolation and deprivation experienced by prisoners overseas and their families; to prevent destitution and street homelessness on return to the UK; and to assist people in rebuilding their lives on return (Cracknell and Ward, 2022).

Gavin's (2015) report included semi-structured interviews with seventeen participants. The participants comprised eight former ICPO clients, seven resettlement service-providers and two ICPO staff members. Cracknell and Ward's (2022) report included interviews with ten individuals who had been imprisoned abroad and who had used the resettlement service of Prisoners Abroad. They also interviewed four members of staff from Prisoners Abroad and two individuals who worked for partnership organisations. Both papers found specific resettlement difficulties for those returning to their home country, relating to accommodation, education, training and employment, mental health, addiction, finance and family.

This paper provides a synthesis of the general resettlement literature as well as the limited but specific literature (Gavin, 2015; Cracknell and Ward, 2022) on the resettlement needs of FNP who return to their home country. As recommended by Cracknell and Ward (2022), we use the term 'returnees' to describe this group. This paper begins, however, with a brief review of the literature on what has been described as the pains of being a foreign national prisoner.

### **[A-HEAD] The pains of being a foreign national prisoner**

While all prisoners suffer from deprivations, or pains of imprisonment, in terms of liberty, goods and services, heterosexual relationships, autonomy and security (Sykes, 1958), FNPs suffer multiple pains of imprisonment beyond this traditional perspective (Gavin, 2022).

These additional pains include concerns over language, family contact, and immigration (Bhui, 2009; Ugelvik and Damsa, 2018; Croux *et al.*, 2021; Gavin, 2022), as well as different cultural, ethnic, religious and healthcare needs (Doyle *et al.*, 2023; Martynowicz, 2018; Ugelvik and Damsa, 2018; Sen *et al.*, 2021). The language barrier experienced by FNPs can exacerbate all other difficulties they face, including isolation, a lack of information, immigration status and healthcare (HMIP, 2006; Croux *et al.*, 2019, 2021).

FNPs are likely to receive fewer visits than domestic prisoners (HMIP, 2006; Martynowicz, 2018). Difficulties associated with family visits can include the distance that must be travelled, the cost of travelling and the language barrier. FNPs are often less likely to engage in prison educational, vocational, and work-based programmes, often due to language barriers and a lack of information (Westrheim and Manger, 2014). Although the Council of Europe (2012) has recommended that its member states should ensure that educational and vocational training is as effective as possible for FNPs, the outcomes are often mixed. All the above can contribute towards a new set of pains – those of certitude, legitimacy and hope – with regards the carceral and post-carceral lives of FNPs (Warr, 2016). Ugelvik and Damsa (2018) found that FNPs felt they suffered pains of imprisonment related to discrimination, long-distance relationships, and deportation, all of which added considerably to their other pains of imprisonment. Croux *et al.*'s (2021) study considered the pain of non-

participation related to areas such as education, work, sport activities and worship. Again, the language barrier was found to exacerbate the pain of non-participation in these areas.

There are various means by which a prisoner can return to their home country. They may return voluntarily after completing their sentence or they may also be able to have their prison sentence or probation licence transferred to their home country (Ugelvik and Damsa, 2018; Croux *et al.*, 2019). The Council of Europe Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons<sup>2</sup> facilitates the rehabilitation of prisoners by providing FNPs the opportunity to serve their sentence in their home country, as does the European Council Framework Decision 2008/909/JHA.<sup>3</sup>

Prisoners may also be involuntarily removed through deportation. Deportation can be a traumatic experience as people may have to leave family behind in a country where they have lived for a significant part of their life (Golsha-Boza and Ceciliano-Navarro, 2019). Furthermore, they may be returning to a country to which they feel no attachment, have no home, and have no family support. Cracknell and Ward (2022) note that these pains associated with deportation can result in people serving a 'double punishment' of both their prison sentence and deportation, and how a prisoner or ex-prisoner returns to their home country will dramatically impact on their resettlement needs (Gavin, 2015). These needs are now considered.

### **[A-HEAD] Resettlement for returnees**

Most prisoners have experienced a lifetime of social exclusion, and the prison population is generally dominated by those who suffer from personal and social disadvantage, who come from communities that suffer from unemployment, low income, deficient education, bad housing, family breakdown, and drug and alcohol drug addiction (O'Mahoney, 2002; Kirwan, 2013). Resettlement is closely linked with concepts of rehabilitation and reintegration, and it refers to practical steps which can help a released prisoner be a part of a community

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<sup>2</sup>Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons <https://www.coe.int/en/web/transnational-criminal-justice-pcoc/transfer-of-sentenced-persons>

<sup>3</sup> Council Framework Decision 2008/909/JHA of 27 November 2008 on the application of the principle of mutual recognition to judgments in criminal matters imposing custodial sentences or measures involving deprivation of liberty for the purpose of their enforcement in the European Union <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A32008F0909>

(Gavin, 2015). The process is seldom straightforward, and successful resettlement will involve overcoming a set of practical, social, environmental and emotional barriers when reintegrating back into a community (Cracknell and Ward, 2022).

There are six key principles of effective resettlement practice. These are early identification of the needs of an individual; ensuring that resettlement plans are collaboratively produced and not focused solely on risk management; identifying continuity of engagement as a crucial factor in developing the relational aspect between the individual and their probation officer; supporting people to access appropriate welfare, treatment and community resources; the practitioner being cognizant of intersectionality and its impacts upon resettlement; and utilising a strengths-based approach (Cracknell, 2023).

While there is no universally agreed-on definition of resettlement, HMIP (2001, p. 12) stated that it is:

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A systematic and evidence-based process by which actions are taken to work with the offender in custody and on release, so that communities are better protected from harm and re-offending is significantly reduced. It encompasses the totality of work with prisoners, their families and significant others in partnership with statutory and voluntary agencies.

[END INDENT]

This definition emphasises that resettlement is a twofold process, which takes place both prior to, and after, release from prison. It highlights the two key aims of resettlement, which are protecting communities and reducing reoffending, and refers to some of the key actors involved in the resettlement process, such as prisoners, their families, and statutory and voluntary organisations. The literature suggests that there are between seven and nine resettlement pathways to help to ensure that prisoners have as much support as possible to help them make a successful transition to the community. These include supports in the areas of accommodation; education, training, and employment; health (including mental health); drugs and alcohol rehabilitation; finance, benefit and debt; children and families; attitudes, thinking and behaviour; domestic abuse; and sex working (Crow, 2006; Jacobson

*et al.*, 2010; Moore, 2011). Based upon the pathways discussed, this paper will consider accommodation; education, training, and employment; mental health; addiction; finance; and family support. These are the pathways most closely linked with other projects focusing on the resettlement needs of FNPs and returnees (Europris, n.d.; Gavin, 2015; Cracknell and Ward, 2022).

### **[B-HEAD] Accommodation**

Many prisoners lose their accommodation when they enter prison, and upon release from prison, many are left homeless (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). For example, they may be staying in a hostel, squatting or even staying with friends. The relationship between homelessness and imprisonment is complex. Homelessness is linked to a high risk of reoffending and can adversely impact on prisoner reintegration (Hickey, 2002; Seymour and Costello, 2005).

Prisoners generally associate having accommodation upon release with helping them to stop reoffending (Williams *et al.*, 2012). This is not surprising as having safe and secure accommodation upon release can help provide prisoners with a secure base from which other problems can be addressed (Greater London Authority, 2000). Typically, women are more likely to experience homelessness than men, and upon becoming homeless, many women embark on an unpredictable cycle of movement through emergency accommodation that can last for many years (Mayock and Sheridan, 2013; Kelly and Bogue, 2014). The impact of institutionalisation can often be felt most profoundly when women exit custody to return to the uncertainty of life in the community. For some, this uncertainty can be compounded by a lack of accommodation (O'Neill, 2017).

Gavin (2015) identified accommodation as being essential for the effective resettlement of returnees. One service-provider noted the importance of accommodation in helping to avoid relapsing into addiction and in reducing reoffending, while one service-user stated:

[INDENT]

‘That’s the most important thing, to have a roof over your head, the most important thing. I don’t know how people manage when they have nowhere to go.’

[END INDENT]

Cracknell and Ward (2022) presented similar findings. All returnees in their study emphasised how important housing was to their situation, whether this was being accommodated in a hostel or having access to more stable housing services. One returnee stated, ‘Once I got my house, I started moving forward slowly’, while a resettlement worker stated:

[INDENT]

‘I don’t think you could even say someone is resettled if they are not in accommodation ... having somewhere stable is where you can kind of start building life again and without that I don’t think it’s possible to do anything else really.’

[END INDENT]

### **[B-HEAD] *Education, training, and employment***

Education in prison is a basic right of all prisoners (United Nations, 2015; Council of Europe, 1989). Prisoners engage with educational programmes for various reasons, including to catch up with education that they may have missed out on in childhood; to keep themselves occupied during their time in prison; to survive prison and manage the given time; and to improve employment prospects upon release (Behan, 2014). Those who leave school early are at greater risk of experiencing long-term unemployment and social exclusion (Robinson and Meredith, 2013). As a socially excluded group, prisoners often truanted from school, left school at an early age, and have poor levels of literacy and numeracy (O’Mahony, 2002; Social Exclusion Unit, 2002; Robinson and Meredith, 2013).

Prisoners who engage with education and training programmes are less likely to reoffend upon release than those who do not (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). Education and training while in prison can help to prevent criminal activity by increasing employability post-release. Access to employment decreases the likelihood of reoffending following an immediate prison sentence (Blomberg *et al.*, 2011; Kazemian *et al.*, 2009; Uggen and Staff, 2001; Van den Berg *et al.*, 2014). Research has found that educational engagement can lead to a reduction in reoffending of up to 7.5 per cent (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022).

The skills developed by prisoners who participate in education may result in a greater degree of socialisation through learning pro-social norms, which can make it easier for prisoners to obtain and retain a job upon their release (Bazos and Hausman, 2004). This is closely linked with the idea that education can ‘help bring prisoners back into society’ (Costello, 2014, p. 31) and thus assist with reintegration and resettlement. Securing employment is, therefore, a critical dimension of resettlement.

Stable employment and higher wages are associated with lower rates of criminality, as well as helping to empower individuals and improving their sense of self-worth and self-esteem (Martynowicz and Quigley, 2010; Cafferty *et al.*, 2016; Morris, 2012). However, in some cases, a criminal record will prove to be a barrier to employment. For example, when employers check a person’s criminal record, that candidate is often perceived as less suitable for employment, despite an initial decision to hire them (Porter *et al.*, 2022).

There are inconsistencies between prisons in different jurisdictions in the courses and training they offer. Gavin (2015) found that while some prisoners may have obtained training or qualification in prison abroad, these were often not recognised by Irish employers, and significant re-skilling was required on return to Ireland. While some returnees were of the view that education and training in prison were important, ‘the real issue was their ability to access such courses or even information about them, on their release’ (Gavin, 2015, p. 39). Service-users and service-providers identified education, training and employment as being very important in terms of overcoming a criminal record, getting work, and moving on with their lives.



It should be noted that not everyone in the criminal justice system is ready for employment on leaving prison and everyone's starting point is different. This was highlighted in Gavin's (2015) study where one service-provider stated:

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'They might say "I'm ready for a job" and the question is "what stops you?" They say "oh I can take a job tomorrow" and when you go through it they have children, they have no child minding, they assume people will help them when they haven't even asked them, nothing's organised. It's all held together by the loosest of threads ... if you organise something too quickly it will fail, it will fall apart and it will compound their already existing sense of failure, and you don't want to do that.'

[END INDENT]

Cracknell and Ward (2022) found that securing employment on return was important, especially for younger participants in their study. Secure employment was found to impact on participants' sense of 'self', their sense of self-worth and their feelings of progressing towards successful resettlement.

Gavin (2015, p. 44) also noted that for returnees, 'dealing with new technology and new ways of living can be very stressful'. Cracknell and Ward (2022, p. 23) highlighted competence with digital technology and exclusion as being a key theme in their research, noting that many will have:

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missed out on acquiring skill that come alongside development of new technologies.... Many Prisoners Abroad clients experience 'digital exclusion' whereby they are unable to accomplish certain administrative tasks or engage in personal communications now typically conducted through digital devices.

[END INDENT]

One participant in their research stated:

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‘I got so much problems I was taking pictures of documents, I had to take pictures of my birth certificate, send it over, because I came in June of 2020, when the Covid was just, it was there. So I couldn’t even come in physically to this office, I had to do everything remotely and ... me being away that long, technology had advanced so much, I didn’t know anything.’

[END INDENT]

### [B-HEAD] **Mental health**

The relationship between mental ill health and offending behaviour is complex and is of international concern (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2015; Brinded *et al.*, 2001; Simpson *et al.*, 2001; Human Rights Watch, 2015; Lehmann, 2012). A sample of 23,000 prisoners from 12 countries found that 4 per cent of male and female prisoners had psychotic illnesses, 10 per cent of male and 12 per cent of female prisoners had major depression, and 65 per cent of male and 42 per cent of female prisoners had a personality disorder (Fazel and Danesh, 2002). It is estimated that approximately 25 per cent of prisoners in Europe suffer from a significant mental disorder (Fraser *et al.*, 2009) and there are widespread shortages in prison mental healthcare throughout European countries (Salize *et al.*, 2007). Many mental health issues often go undetected and untreated in prison (Offender Health Research Network, 2009) and the prevalence of psychiatric morbidity in the prison population is much higher than in the general population (Singleton *et al.*, 1998; Grubin, 2010).

The prevalence of mental illness amongst offenders on probation is high (Gulati *et al.*, 2019; Cotter, 2015) and time in custody can have an adverse impact on mental health (O’Neill, 2017). Research has found a high prevalence of mental illness among women who are newly committed to prison (Bartlett and Hollins, 2018), and women in hostels have been found to suffer from poor mental health and need additional outreach support (Morris, 2012).

Approximately 50 per cent of all people supervised by the Irish Probation Service who present with mental health problems also present with one or more of the following issues: alcohol and drug misuse, difficult family relationships, accommodation instability. These issues may severely impact on a person's ability to engage with resettlement services (Power, 2020).

Martynowicz and Quigley (2010) highlighted the inadequacy of mental health provision across the prison system, as well as the difficulties of linking former prisoners with mental health services on their release. More recently, the Irish Inspector of Prisons (2019, p. 38)) stated that 'Ireland is currently not meeting its obligations to ensure adequate healthcare provision for mentally ill prisoners who are not receiving the treatment they require'. There are significant unmet psychological and psychiatric needs amongst those subject to probation supervision in Ireland. Gavin (2020) found that Irish prisoners in England and Wales, where the vast majority of ICPO clients are in prison, experience depression, paranoia, fear, isolation and loneliness. These can be viewed as a crisis for the individual and in some cases resulted in acts of self-harm and attempted suicide.

Despite the increased risk of mental health issues for FNPs, very few participants in Gavin's (2015) study reported suffering from mental ill-health either prior to or during their incarceration, or post-release/return. Those who did report suffering from mental health issues were very critical of the availability of services in Ireland. One service-provider noted that it can be difficult to get returnees to engage with mental health services. Some service-providers were concerned that some returnees needed counselling, but they did not necessarily recognise it themselves. It was suggested that perhaps some returnees were putting on a brave face and simply wanted to forget about the past and move on. More than one ex-prisoner and service-provider mentioned the need for counselling services for returnees, with one service-provider stating:

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'Something like therapeutic counselling to deal with the mental health issues ... they haven't yet dealt with. It would be wonderful if we had something to offer them here, just so that they could go somewhere

confidential and talk through it all. Perhaps there's some counselling available, but it might not be specific to the experiences that people found in foreign prisons.'

[END INDENT]

Gavin (2015) described how most returnees will experience a sense of alienation, or 'reverse culture shock'. One service-provider described people returning to Ireland, particularly after a long period away, as being 'completely shell-shocked on arrival'. Cracknell and Ward (2022) also found that returnees went through a process of cultural adaptation upon their return to the UK. One area of concern identified by returnees and service-providers was the period immediately prior to and after release from prison as being a period of high anxiety. For those who have been in prison for a long time, seeing how life has changed on the outside and dealing with new technology and new ways of living can be very stressful. Upon entry to prison, prisoners often report what is known as entry shock. This anxiety on release might best be described as re-entry shock.

### [B-HEAD] **Addiction**

The relationship between offending, imprisonment and substance misuse, be that the misuse of drugs or of alcohol, has been well documented in both the criminal justice and medical literature for decades (Fazel *et al.*, 2006; Jones and Hoffmann, 2006; Seddon, 2010; O'Mahony, 2019). Prisoners are more likely to suffer from alcohol abuse than from drug abuse and, due to its widespread, low-cost availability, alcohol abuse is more likely to be overlooked (Tigue, 2010). Upon entry to prison, alcohol problems are not generally identified, nor is the severity of alcohol-related withdrawal (HMIP, 2010).

Use of illicit drugs is very common in prisons (Boys *et al.*, 2002; Strang *et al.*, 2006) and it is estimated that drug dependency amongst prisoners is approximately 800 times higher than that of the general population (Singleton *et al.*, 1998). Although the current data for illicit drug use in prisons across Europe is considered scarce (Carpentier *et al.*, 2012; van de Baan *et al.*, 2022), what is known is that many people enter prison with an existing drug dependency, while others initiate drug use in prison (Bullock, 2003; Strang *et al.*, 2006).

Motivation factors often include a need to self-medicate and relief from the monotony of prison life (Penfold *et al.*, 2005).

Access to treatment for substance misuse is important during imprisonment and post-release (Chandler *et al.*, 2009; de Andrade *et al.*, 2018). Although drugs in prison are a serious problem, a period in prison may also be the first opportunity that some people get to avail of treatment and support for their addictions. This support is essential for effective resettlement. Morris (2012, p. 165) highlighted the importance of support and treatment for helping people move beyond ‘the chaos and challenges that offending brings’. O’Neill (2017) reported widespread misuse of alcohol and drugs (including prescribed medication), and Rooney (2021) found there to be low levels of offender engagement with alcohol and drug intervention services.

Gavin (2015) highlighted treatment for drug and alcohol addiction as being a major factor when it comes to successful resettlement. Alcohol amongst the Irish population in Australia and the UK was highlighted as a cause for concern, especially in terms of binge drinking, which was seen to be more and more socially acceptable. Gavin (2015) found that stable accommodation was important to support people in dealing with addiction, as referrals to support services will often come through a GP, and an address is often required to register with a GP.

### **[B-HEAD] Finance**

Financial stability and ensuring that former prisoners have sufficient money to support themselves in the period immediately following release is essential for effective resettlement (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002; Gavin, 2015). The Prisoner Finance Gap refers to the gap in financial support experienced by many prisoners on release. It has been identified as ‘an issue that is likely to present a significant barrier to the effective resettlement of offenders back into the community’ (Meadows *et al.*, 2010, p. 7). For ex-prisoners who experience this gap, there is an increased chance of reoffending in the first few weeks post-release (Citizens Advice Bureau, 2010). This makes recently released prisoners both economically vulnerable and economically insecure, and despite the large number of

prisoners who return to their communities each year, little is known about how former prisoners make ends meet post-release (Harding *et al.*, 2014).

Most ex-prisoners will rely on the benefits system upon their release, but they will often experience a delay in receiving their benefits post-release. Many face significant challenges when it comes to attaining any form of financial stability, including difficulties in accessing bank accounts, outstanding debts, and poor financial management skills. Furthermore, many prisoners enter custody with a history of debt and financial problems which, left unaddressed, often get worse during their time in prison, and the system leaves many almost penniless in the weeks immediately after release (Gavin, 2015).

In the UK, benefits will usually end when someone is sent to prison. In some instances, Universal Credit housing costs can be paid for up to six months. Prisoners serving 13 weeks or less can continue to claim Housing Benefit through the local authority, while those held in custody on remand are entitled to Housing Benefit for up to 52 weeks. Prisoners in the UK also receive a discharge grant on their release. This is a one-off subsistence payment of £82.39.

### **[B-HEAD] Family support**

Families can play a vital role in supporting prisoners through their sentence as well as supporting ex-prisoners upon their release (Farrall, 2004; HM Inspectorate of Prisons, HM Inspectorate of Probation and Ofsted, 2014; Farmer, 2017). Strong family ties can result in a former prisoner having too much to lose by reverting to offending behaviour (Jardine, 2014; Cid and Marti, 2012). Family visits while in prison are an essential component of the rehabilitative process, and they perform several functions. They may be a reminder of the world outside and its associated responsibilities, allowing prisoners to continue their role as family members. They can smooth the adjustment of both family and prisoner to release and may reflect a promise of continued support on release (Shafer, 1994).

Those who do not have active family support during their imprisonment are more likely to reoffend in the first year after release, when compared to those who have family support (Mills and Codd, 2008; Cluley, 2009). Family support may help to reduce offending

behaviour by providing guidance, advice and encouragement. It may involve building up confidence and giving ex-prisoners a reason not to go back to prison.

Female prisoners often face high levels of stigma, and Morris (2012) found that many women become isolated from friends and family when they receive a custodial sentence. Female offenders are twice as likely to experience difficulties in the family/marital domain as their male counterparts (Kelly and Bogue, 2014). Imprisonment can also have a lasting and damaging impact on the family of prisoners. This is especially true for female offenders who are mothers, and specific supports should be introduced to encourage family contact for women in prison (O'Neill, 2017). To combat these issues, it is important for support services to be put in place to help women to rebuild relationships with their family and friends. Such contact could help promote effective resettlement.

Gavin's (2015) research demonstrated the important role that family plays for returnees. This was considered in terms of how family can relate to the other resettlement pathways, especially accommodation. Several returnees noted that without the support of their family, resettlement would have been very difficult. This went beyond simply having a place to stay upon their return. Emotional and moral support were also highlighted as being of vital importance, and family was also seen as being a motivating factor for returnees to reintegrate successfully into society. Participants also highlighted the role that family played while they were in prison. Family support helped participants get through their sentence and provided them with a sense of perspective on their position. One returnee stated:

[INDENT]

‘They brought me back to thinking straight, they helped me realise that I hadn’t lost everything. I’d just lost time, and it was time to start rebuilding.’

[END INDENT]

Gavin (2015) also noted that there are times where family may be seen as a hindrance to successful resettlement. For example, there may be situations where returning to the family home means returning to an environment of unemployment, addiction and violence. In such situations, where the family dynamic is problematic, it may prove beneficial to the returnee to separate from their family. Cracknell and Ward (2022) considered family from a

different point of view. In their study, they found that most returnees had no pre-existing family or friendship ties in the UK. Many respondents had left the UK as children, so their family support network was in the country from which they had returned. This proved to be very difficult for returnees.

## **[A-HEAD] Discussion**

Safe and stable accommodation is vital for securing employment and benefits, registering with a GP and availing of drug treatment. Ex-prisoners might be able to stay with family in some cases, but where this is not an option, they may be able to access sheltered accommodation specifically designed for ex-offenders, rent in the private sector, or access social housing or homeless services. Sheltered housing facilities designed for ex-prisoners provide key worker support, as well as access to training and addiction services (Gavin, 2015).

In Ireland, there is currently a housing shortage and a homelessness crisis. This has seen rent costs soar, making it close to impossible for recently released prisoners or returnees to access the private rental market. Limited accommodation and high rents mean that ex-offenders can often access only substandard or unliveable accommodation (Seymour, 2004). Furthermore, there are just under 60,000 households on social housing waiting lists around the country. Gavin (2015) has noted that for those returnees who cannot stay with family, 'it is a bleak picture in terms of accommodation' (p. 36).

Education, training and employment are important for prisoners while in prison, but also post-release. Prisoners have often disengaged with educational services at an early age, and many have poor literacy and numeracy skills. Education and training pre- and post-release can help prisoners in terms of obtaining employment, as well as having an impact in terms of socialisation. Employment post-release is important. It can help former prisoners by providing them with some daily structure and routine and giving them a sense of dignity. Having secure employment is closely related to the finance pathway as it can be a means of obtaining financial independence. Furthermore, for those who can obtain employment upon release and demonstrate some financial independence, it might make it easier for them to



find secure accommodation. For those unable to secure employment on release, it is important that there is access to the social welfare system or, at the very least, access to educational and training courses.

Access to mental health and addiction treatment is important during a prison sentence as well as post-release and can be of vital importance for effective resettlement. A period in prison can exacerbate existing mental health and addiction issues as well as creating them. Access to necessary services can often depend on having an address or suitable accommodation, especially if such access comes through a GP referral. Poor mental health or addiction may also impact on a person's ability to obtain or hold on to employment or engage with education or training programmes.

Poor mental health and addiction are sometimes linked with homelessness. A person may become homeless because of their mental health problem or addiction, or they may develop mental health problems or addiction issues as a result of being homeless. The homeless population is over-represented in both of these areas (World Health Organization, 2011; Homeless Link, 2014). Another issue of concern is that of dual diagnosis, whereby people present with mental health and addiction issues. It is often the case that mental health treatment cannot be obtained until a person is taking steps to deal with their addiction. Addiction treatment, however, cannot be obtained until they are taking measures to deal with their mental health issues. Thus, a vicious circle emerges.

When considering the impact of these pathways on returnees, it becomes clear that family is the most important resettlement pathway. Families can help with accommodation, with finances and with employment, as well as providing moral and emotional support. Codd (2008) found that prisoners who received at least one visit during their incarceration were three times more likely to have accommodation arranged on release. Having an address can allow a returnee to register with a GP, which might help with accessing mental health and addiction treatment, if required. It may also help when it comes to securing financial assistance or benefits. Family members can also play a key role in securing employment as they may have wider networks and social circles to which the ex-prisoner may not be able to gain access (Farrall, 2004). One study found that 51 per cent of prisoners who had employment, training or education lined up on their release had made these arrangements

through family members. Family can also be a key source of support and encouragement for former prisoners who are failing to obtain work (Gavin, 2015).

## **[A-HEAD] Conclusion**

This paper has highlighted the resettlement needs of foreign national prisoners who return to their home country after a period of imprisonment abroad. In many ways, their resettlement needs are similar to those of all other prisoners. There are concerns over accommodation, healthcare, addiction issues, employment and education, and family contact, to name but a few.

These issues are, however, compounded when a prisoner is serving their sentence in another country. For example, there may be a language barrier, additional travel costs making visitation impossible, and concerns over immigration, which have the potential to tear families apart.

Based upon our findings, family contact with prisoners should be supported by all agencies, where possible. Families may also need emotional, social, and financial support when they have a loved one in prison, as well as support to prepare them for their release and upon their return.

Family support can prove to be the most effective resettlement pathway for returnees, as it can provide accommodation, financial support, employment opportunities and help in dealing with poor mental health or addiction. Quite simply, an offender's family 'are the most effective resettlement agency' (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, HM Inspectorate of Probation and Ofsted, 2020, p. 5) as they can often be 'the strand that links together all the other resettlement pathways' (Gavin, 2015, p. 50).

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