

Recidivism among persons released from prison in Norway 2015 – 2018

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Summary

The article presents some results on reoffending by persons released from prison in 2015 - 2018. The population consists of 22,068 released persons with a valid personal identification number, who have served their sentence in prison. In other words, serving part or the entire prison sentence in the community on electric monitoring is excluded from the measurements, but serving in a treatment institution ($N = 831$) or home detention without electronic monitoring ($N = 177$) is included.

Recidivism is here defined as the share that is re-incarcerated in prison with a new prison sentence. Other offences that the prison sentence in question is not based on are excluded. Recidivism is calculated from the date of the first offence that led to the new prison sentence. The data include new, registered sentences up to 8 September 2020 and are drawn from the correctional service's own registration system KOMPIS.

The results show a summed up recidivism for all who have been released up to 8 September 2020 of 13.4 % for female offenders and 22.9 % for male offenders, independent of when they were released or when the offence in question was committed. A distribution of recidivism by year of release shows that the total for a period of two years amounted to 31.1 % of all those released in 2015 and 26.7 % for those released in 2016. In 2017, recidivism decreased quite suddenly to 16.4 %. The preliminary results for those released in 2018 show an even lower percentage for those who meet the required two-year observation period.

The author discusses some probable causes for this decrease from 2017 on. The recent, comprehensive police reform and changes in the police's routines and priorities are assumed to have played quite an important role. Another probable reason lies in the decrease in the number of released persons with a previous prison sentence. Their share dropped from 39 % among those released in 2015 to 24 % in 2018. It is well documented that previous prison sentences among released persons just about double the odds of reoffending, compared to those without a previous prison sentence. Fewer young persons and fewer persons sentenced for theft among those released may be yet another cause for reduced recidivism. These are categories that traditionally show a high reoffending rate. However, it cannot be ruled out that reoffending actually has decreased among those released, independent of these explanations, but this is hardly the primary reason explaining the relatively considerable decrease reported after 2016.

3,853 of those released meet the requirement of a five-year observation period for possible relapse. Among these, almost a third (32 %) is registered as recidivist. However, recidivism varies strongly between those released from high security level versus lower security level, 44 % against 23 %, respectively.

The results on recidivism in this measurement only show new prisons sentences that have been commenced in prison. An estimate shows that the overall recidivism leading to a new sentence would be 18 % higher if sentences served in the community were included.