

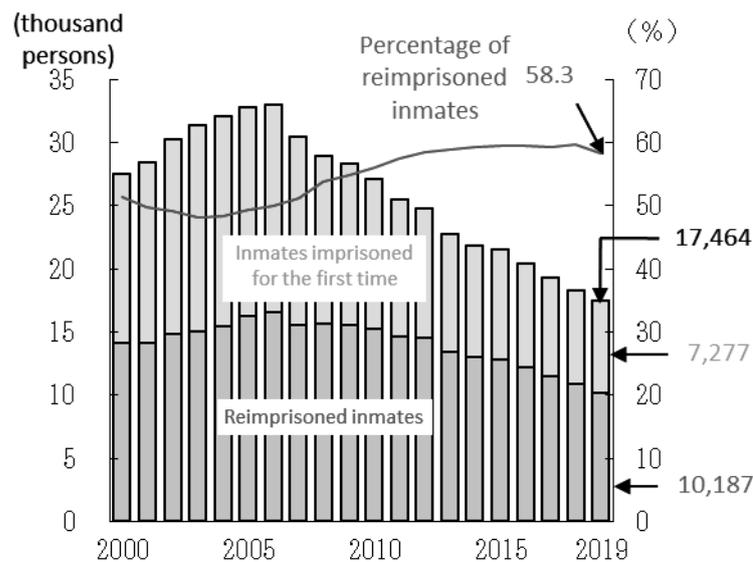
A MULTI-STAKEHOLDER APPROACH TO ENSURING CONTINUOUS SUPPORT AND SERVICES FOR REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION OF OFFENDERS: FOCUSING ON HOUSING SUPPORT

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I. OVERVIEW

In 2003, reported Penal Code offences reached the highest-ever number. Further, in 2006, the number of newly admitted reimprisoned inmates reached its peak. However, the ratio of reimprisoned to newly imprisoned inmates has remained high over the years, reaching 58.3 per cent in 2019, as revealed by the line graph in Figure 1. This figure reveals that the majority of offences were committed by recidivists.

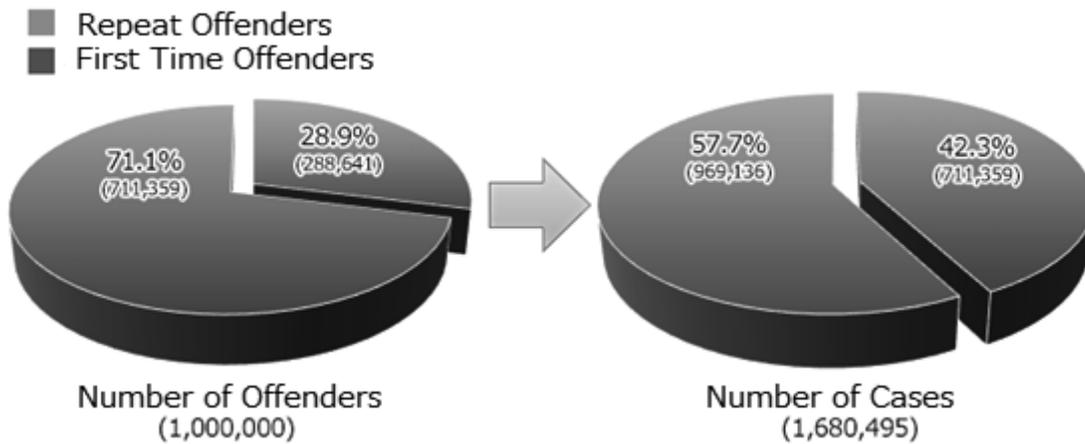
Figure 1 Reimprisoned inmates among new sentenced inmates, and percentage of reimprisoned inmates



Source: Annual Report of Statistics on Corrections 2019

Furthermore, among those who were sentenced between 1948 and 2006, 1 million were randomly selected and the tendency of these subjects was investigated and analysed. As shown in the pie chart below, when looking at the extracted cases by offenders, 71.1 per cent were first-time offenders, while 28.9 per cent were repeat offenders. On the other hand, looking at the number of cases caused by each, the number of cases caused by first-time offenders is 42.3 per cent, while the number of cases caused by repeats offenders is 57.7 per cent. In other words, about 60 per cent of crimes are committed by about 30 per cent of repeat offenders in Japan.

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Source: White paper on crime 2007

This recognition led to the development of national strategies for the prevention of crime, particularly reoffending. To effectively reduce reoffending, it is necessary to meet each offender’s individual diverse needs. Therefore, criminal justice authorities are required to involve various stakeholders in areas such as employment, housing and social welfare services to facilitate offenders’ smooth re-entry into society. In Japan, the continuous development of reoffending prevention strategies requires the involvement of all relevant ministries. They are implemented by governments from the national to the local level and involve both the public and private sectors.

II. MEASURES IMPLEMENTED BY THE GOVERNMENT

A. Comprehensive Measures to Prevent Recidivism

On 20 July 2012, the Council of Ministers for Crime Countermeasures decided on “Comprehensive Measures to Prevent Recidivism.” This is a comprehensive measure taken by the government to prevent the recidivism of released offenders, and the initiative’s numerical target to be achieved 10 years after its formulation is as follows: “the ratio of those who will re-enter prison within 2 years after being released from prison will be reduced by more than 20 per cent in the next 10 years.” Further, in 2016, a milestone that marked five years after decision was made on this comprehensive measure, a follow-up was conducted of the initiative’s achievements and challenges.

In addition, the Council of Ministers for Crime Countermeasures declared “No Returning to Crime, No Facilitation of a Return to Crime” in 2014, and the government provided various measures for recidivism prevention. As a result, a circle of cooperation by community volunteers such as *hogoshi* and cooperating employers was widely facilitated. On the other hand, many drug addicts who face various challenges in recovery and the elderly and disabled who have committed crimes have fallen between the criminal justice system and the local community and have been reoffending without the necessary support. Therefore, “Emergency Measures to Prevent Reoffending by Drug Addicts and Elderly Criminals” were decided to prevent recidivism of such criminals by the Council of Ministers for Crime Countermeasures in 2016.

B. Act for the Prevention of Recidivism

The Act for the Prevention of Recidivism (hereafter, “the Act” in this section) enacted

in 2016 aims to comprehensively and systematically advance initiatives to prevent recidivism, prevent people from becoming the victims of crime, and contribute to the realization of a society in which people can live safely and peacefully in accordance with the following principles:

- a. Laying down fundamental principles for recidivism prevention;
- b. Clarifying the responsibilities of the central and local governments regarding initiatives to prevent recidivism;
- c. Specifying the basic aspects of recidivism prevention measures, and comprehensively and systematically implementing these measures.

The Act emphasizes local governments' endeavours to implement initiatives that facilitate the appropriate sharing of roles with the State according to the circumstances in the areas under their jurisdiction. Based on the Act, criminal justice agencies, including probation offices, provide guidance and information on recidivism prevention measures to the local governments and support the formulation of the "Local Recidivism Prevention Plan" with the cooperation of the community volunteers who support offender reintegration. Further, the local governments play an important role in recidivism prevention in adherence with the Act and its "Recidivism Prevention Plan." As of 1 October 2020, 71 local governments, not only prefectural governments but also municipal governments, across Japan have established their own Local Recidivism Prevention Plans, and prefectural and municipal governments have strengthened cooperation in the field of reoffending prevention (see subsection (3) in this section).

C. Recidivism Prevention Plan

Currently, the Recidivism Prevention Plan, which was formulated in 2017, consists of 7 priority issues with 115 specific measures based on a nationwide multi-stakeholder approach. The plan highlights the importance of employment, welfare services, housing and so on.

D. Regional Recidivism Prevention Model Project

To promote recidivism prevention in accordance with the Act, the Ministry of Justice has been implementing the "regional recidivism prevention model project" since 2018 in cooperation with local governments. Accordingly, the local governments carry out several activities such as (1) researching the status of recidivism in the region and formulating a model project implementation plan, (2) implementing the model project and (3) examining the effects of the model project. As of 31 December 2019, 37 projects have been implemented by 36 local governments.

III. JAPAN'S APPROACH TO SECURE HOUSING

Housing forms the basis of our daily lives by providing us with a place to call our own. It gives us a sense of stability and security. The same is true for people who re-enter society after serving time in prison. For them, securing a place to live is closely linked to the ability to find employment, receive welfare benefits, become a member of the community and so on.

In Japan, there are more than 500 privately run or publicly run facilities that support the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders. The offender rehabilitation facilities, which function as so-called halfway houses, have played an important role as the last bastion for released inmates who could not secure a residence. Since those released inmates have increased, it is necessary to secure various measures and residences systematically. To ensure that offenders are able to secure housing by themselves in the community, the probation officer provides them with knowledge and information on securing housing, such as the procedures to rent a house, and guidance to help them live independently. In addition, for probationers and parolees who have nowhere to live, the probation officer actively secures employers who can provide a residence and helps them move into the National Center for Offender Rehabilitation as well as offender rehabilitation facilities.

Correctional institutions and probation offices in Japan collaborate in coordinating offenders' re-entry, such as by securing housing tailored to each inmate's needs. In correctional institutions, specialized staff conduct assessments of inmates at the beginning of incarceration to identify their needs. Such information is shared with probation officers in a timely manner. Moreover, at major prisons, a probation officer is stationed full time for coordination of offenders' reintegration into the community.

Coordination and information sharing between correctional institutions and probation offices are systematically and continuously conducted for almost all inmates regardless of their offence. These practices start from the early stage of incarceration and continue up to the point of release, making it possible to find housing tailored to each inmate's needs. The regional parole boards and probation offices promote securing housing for released inmates in cooperation with housing support corporations, which provide support for securing housing for people in need of housing support, such as those in need of housing, the elderly, and the disabled, as stipulated in the Act on Promotion of Offering of Rental Housing to Persons Requiring Special Assistance in Securing Housing.

To find the most suitable place to live after release, probation officers consult with a variety of stakeholders. For instance, for those who need welfare or medical support, the probation officers consult with the welfare or medical section of local governments which can offer housing or other accommodation with access to welfare or health-care service. For people with addictions such as drugs and alcohol, the probation officers contact self-help groups which can offer accommodation with rehabilitative programmes. For those who cannot return to their family and cannot find a proper place to live, the probation officers coordinate temporary housing.

When coordinating re-entry into the community, it is of vital importance that it is done according to the conditions relevant to the community to which the offenders return. Thus, *hogoshi* (volunteer probation officers), as community volunteers, help probation officers coordinate re-entry.

For instance, *hogoshi* visit the offender's future residence, interview the offender's family or guardian, and foster the relationship between the family or guardian and the offender during his/her incarceration. Furthermore, if the offenders are released on parole, the same *hogoshi* are generally assigned to conduct their community supervision and to support them as a good neighbour. Under the national strategies, criminal justice authorities have engaged these stakeholders and have developed cooperative partnerships with them with clearly identified roles.

However, it is hard for some members of the general public to understand the importance of accepting offenders back into society, and they often refuse to cooperate. For example, there are some cases in which released offenders cannot rent an apartment or they cannot be employed because of their criminal records. To tackle these challenges, probation officers make full use of their contacts and resources in the community, particularly *hogoshi*. *Hogoshi* are usually highly respected senior members of their communities. Using their personal networks and knowledge of their communities, *hogoshi* regularly make efforts to recruit and encourage community stakeholders who can potentially offer housing and other support to released offenders.

Furthermore, other volunteers such as members of Big Brothers and Sisters, the Women's Association for Rehabilitation Aid and cooperating employers, also play an important role in gaining public understanding of the importance of successful reintegration of offenders into society.

IV. CONCLUSION

Still, the process of reintegration into society is complicated, and some offenders need a long time to reintegrate into the community. In these cases, the local governments are required to provide continuous support for those offenders, because they have the authority and the responsibility to take care of their own residents' housing and welfare issues. Therefore, the Ministry of Justice provides the local governments with the necessary information for prevention of reoffending in order to take effective measures in cooperation with them. According to such a mechanism, each local government has individually been developing a local recidivism prevention plan.

To facilitate communication among relevant governmental agencies, the Ministry of Justice has taken the initiative to establish platforms for cooperation between the national and local governments, such as the Conference of Prefectural Officials and the Conference of Mayors.

According to the statistics, 26.9 per cent of prison inmates did not have proper and stable housing at the time of release in 2008. Since then, comprehensive efforts to intensify housing support as above mentioned have been implemented. In the result, the percentage had decreased to 18.7 per cent in 2019 (Annual Report of Statistics on Corrections 2019).

In conclusion, the multi-stakeholder approach to ensuring continuous support and services for the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders emphasizes the following three key points: enhancing the multi-stakeholder approach based on public-private partnership, activating stakeholders' strengths engaged in a variety of areas of services and support, and gaining public understanding for successful offender rehabilitation and reintegration into society. This approach will be further promoted through practices as a legacy of the 14th United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice.