

CHAPTER 7 MEASURES TO REDUCE REOFFENDING IN JAPAN

I. THE ACT FOR THE PREVENTION OF RECIDIVISM AND THE RECIDIVISM PREVENTION PLAN

A. The Act for the Prevention of Recidivism

Preventing recidivism requires steadily implementing crime prevention initiatives and ensuring fair sentencing through appropriate investigations and trials. It is also important for offenders to recognize their responsibility for their crimes, understand the feelings of crime victims, and make efforts to reintegrate into society. However, some offenders face numerous challenges in their recovery, including poverty, illness, addictions, disabilities, harsh upbringings, and inadequate education. Criminal justice agencies are limited in their ability to address these diverse challenges alone. Therefore, to provide long-term support to offenders and others facing difficult circumstances and to prevent them from becoming isolated in their communities, it is essential to seriously reassess the current efforts of criminal justice agencies and to implement comprehensive measures through close collaboration between the national and local governments, private organizations engaged in recidivism prevention activities, and other relevant parties.

In response to this situation, a cross-party group of Diet members began deliberations toward the enactment of a basic law promoting recidivism prevention, with the aim of addressing recidivism prevention nationwide. In examining various issues related to recidivism prevention, the Ministry of Justice, National Police Agency, Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, and many other relevant ministries and agencies participated. In December 2016, the Act on Promotion of Recidivism Prevention (hereinafter referred to as the “Promotion Act”) was enacted and came into effect the same month. These efforts to prevent recidivism are intended to contribute to the international community’s goal of creating a society in which “no one is left behind”, as stated in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015.

The basic principles of the Promotion Act are as follows (Article 3):

1. Recognizing that many offenders are unable to secure permanent employment or housing and therefore find it difficult to smoothly reintegrate into society, support will be provided to enable offenders to reintegrate into society, with the understanding and cooperation of the public, without becoming isolated.
2. Offenders will be able to receive necessary guidance and support, in accordance with their characteristics, not only while they are in a correctional facility but also without interruption after they have reintegrated into society.
3. To prevent recidivism, it is important for offenders to be aware of their responsibility for their crimes, understand the feelings of victims and make efforts to reintegrate into society.
4. Effective measures will be implemented based on the results of research and studies on the actual state of crime and delinquency and the effectiveness of various measures to prevent recidivism.

The Promotion Act also clarifies that the national government is responsible for comprehensively formulating and implementing measures to prevent recidivism, and clarifies that responsibility for the implementation of recidivism prevention measures, which until now has been the responsibility of the national government, particularly criminal justice-related institutions, will now extend to local governments as well (Article 4 of the Promotion Act). Furthermore, it stipulates that cooperation between the national government, local governments, and private collaborators will be further promoted (Article 5 of the Promotion Act). Furthermore, in order to deepen interest and understanding of recidivism prevention among the general public, July has been designated as Recidivism Prevention Awareness Month (Article 6 of the Promotion Act).

B. The Recidivism Prevention Plan

As mentioned above, following the passage and enforcement of the Promotion Act in December 2016, the government adopted the first “Recidivism Prevention Promotion Plan” (hereinafter referred to as the “First Plan”) at a Cabinet meeting in December 2017, covering the five-year period from fiscal year 2018 to the end of fiscal year 2022. Through the Promotion Act and the First Plan, recidivism prevention efforts, which had previously been driven primarily by criminal justice agencies, have evolved into measures that should be

undertaken jointly by the national and local governments, private sector partners, and others.

Based on the First Plan, the government has been implementing various initiatives, such as strengthening and improving measures for people released after serving their sentences, strengthening cooperation with local governments and promoting the activities of private sector collaborators. As a result of these initiatives, the government's target (*1) of reducing the rate of people who re-enter prisons, etc. within two years of their release (hereinafter referred to as the “two-year re-incarceration rate”) to 16% or less by 2021 was achieved for people released in 2019, and efforts to prevent recidivism have been steadily accumulating results.

However, even with the efforts under the First Plan, the proportion of repeat offenders among those arrested for criminal offences remains high at nearly 50%, and in light of this, the efforts under the First Plan were reviewed and future challenges were identified: (1) motivating individuals to pursue rehabilitation and enhancing guidance and support tailored to the challenges each individual faces, (2) making support services more accessible, (3) clarifying the roles that the national and local governments should play and (4) further strengthening cooperation between the national government, local governments, and private sector collaborators.

In light of the above, the government adopted the “Second Recidivism Prevention Promotion Plan” (hereinafter referred to as the “Second Plan”) at a Cabinet meeting in March 2023 to further deepen and promote recidivism prevention efforts, which have become more effective through increased collaboration between the national and local governments and private sector partners. Building on the priorities of the First Plan, the Second Plan prioritizes the following seven areas:

1. Securing employment and housing
2. Promoting the use of health care and welfare services
3. Providing academic support in collaboration with schools
4. Providing effective guidance tailored to the characteristics of offenders
5. Promoting the activities of private sector partners
6. Promoting inclusion in the community
7. Building a foundation for recidivism prevention

The above priority issues follow those of the First Plan, but the priority issue of “strengthening cooperation with local governments”, which was a priority issue of the First Plan, was changed to “promoting inclusion by the community” in the Second Plan, based on the fact that it is important for people who have committed crimes to be included in the local safety net, rather than being isolated in the local community due to discrimination and stigma and not connected to any support. Furthermore, the priority issue of the First Plan, “improving the human and material systems of related organizations”, was changed to “improving the infrastructure to prevent recidivism” in the Second Plan, as it is integrated with measures such as verifying the effectiveness of measures and promoting public relations and awareness-raising activities.

The Second Plan includes 96 measures for the seven priority issues mentioned above, covering a five-year period from fiscal year 2023 to the end of fiscal year 2027. The government will implement the measures included in the Second Plan as quickly as possible and will promote them while regularly checking their progress.

II. CASE STUDIES OF INITIATIVES FOR REDUCING REOFFENDING

A. Introduction

In order to reduce reoffending, efforts by criminal justice institutions alone are not sufficient; collaborative efforts by relevant government ministries and agencies, local governments, and local health, medical, and welfare institutions are essential, as well as activities by private collaborators such as probation officers and cooperating employers. This section introduces examples of efforts of institutions outside of the criminal justice system to prevent repeat offences.

Please refer to Chapters 4 to 7 for information on efforts by criminal justice institutions related to each case.

B. Housing Support in Collaboration with the MOJ and Other Relevant Ministries [The Chugoku Regional Parole Board]

People released from prison are designated by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and

Tourism ordinance as people requiring special consideration in securing housing (*2). The Ministry of Justice (Chugoku Regional Parole Board and Chugoku Regional Correction Headquarters), the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (Chugoku Regional Development Bureau), and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (Chugoku-Shikoku Regional Bureau of Health and Welfare) are working together to create a housing support system that coordinates housing, welfare and justice in the region. They are working with local governments and housing support corporations (*3) to ensure the smooth establishment and operation of housing support councils at the municipal level. They are also considering a housing support system for people released from prison, who face various issues. The current status of these efforts is explained below.

1. Toward the Establishment of a Housing Support Council

To provide various support services to people released from prison and others facing housing difficulties, such as securing housing and promoting stability and independence in their lives, it is believed that it would be effective to establish a Housing Support Council, a support network, and for the council to work with government agencies to establish a system where the support recipients need can be provided through a single point of contact. The three ministries therefore exchanged opinions on the form of support needed to establish a Housing Support Council, and jointly conducted a needs survey targeting local governments and housing support organizations.

2. Considering a System for Providing Housing Support to People Released from Prison and Others facing Various Challenges

The MOJ has identified issues that may arise when people released from prison and others wish to move into public housing, which is the core of the housing safety net, and have held joint discussions among the three ministries with prefectural and city officials, the entities that provide public housing, regarding these issues.

C. The Regional Reducing Reoffending Project [Recidivism Prevention Promotion Office, Secretarial Division, Minister's Secretariat, Ministry of Justice]

To increase the effectiveness of measures to reduce reoffending, the national government needs to take the lead in these efforts. However, it is also important to ensure that offenders continue to receive the support they need even after the criminal justice process has concluded, that is, after the criminal justice intervention concludes, the national government is no longer permitted to intervene in their lives without their consent. Local governments, which provide a variety of administrative services to residents, are expected to be the main providers of this support.

In response to concerns from local governments that the specific roles of the national and local governments were unclear, the “Second Recidivism Prevention Promotion Plan”, approved by the Cabinet in March 2023, clarified the roles of the national government, prefectures and municipalities. Specifically, the roles of each party are clearly stated as follows:

- The national government will provide guidance and support at the criminal justice proceedings stage, as well as provide necessary support, including financial support, to local governments and private sector partners.
- Prefectures, as regional governments, will provide necessary support to municipalities and strive to build local networks to ensure that recidivism prevention efforts are carried out smoothly in each municipality. They will also provide specialized support that municipalities would find difficult to implement alone.
- As the basic local governments closest to local residents, municipalities will provide appropriate services to enable offenders who require various administrative services, such as health care and welfare services, to live stable lives in their communities.

Based on this division of roles, and in order to further promote reducing reoffending efforts by local governments, the national and prefectural governments have launched the “Regional Recidivism Prevention Promotion Project” in fiscal year 2023. Under this project, the national government (Ministry of Justice) will subsidize half of the costs, up to a maximum of 1.5 million yen, when prefectures implement the following initiatives:

- Policy planning support for municipalities

This is intended to support the smooth implementation of recidivism prevention initiatives in municipalities within the region. For example, it is envisioned that prefectures will hold meetings to coordinate and share information among municipalities on recidivism prevention initiatives, and provide advice to municipalities when formulating or reviewing their recidivism prevention plan.

- Promotion of understanding and human resource development for municipalities

This is intended to support municipal officials within the region in deepening their understanding of recidivism prevention. For example, prefectures are encouraged to organize and conduct training sessions to learn knowledge and skills on recidivism prevention initiatives.

- Direct support for offenders

This is intended to provide specialized support tailored to the type and characteristics of crimes that municipalities would find difficult to implement on their own. For example, prefectures will implement rehabilitation programmes for people who have committed sex offences or people with drug dependency, and will support efforts to secure employment and housing for people who have been released from correctional facilities. Prefectures will be responsible for these efforts because expertise and a wide-range collaboration with municipalities is required within the region.

Through the implementation of this project, it is expected that the systems and infrastructure for reducing reoffending will be established in municipalities within the region, promoting efforts to prevent recidivism in municipalities, and improving employment and housing support, which are difficult to address at the municipal level, as well as specialized support for sex offenders and drug offenders.

D. Activities of Community Volunteers and Other Cooperating Private-Sector Entities

1. The *Hogoshi* System

The system of community volunteers supporting offender reintegration in Japan is known as the *hogoshi* system (see page 9). In March 2021, at the First World Congress for Community Volunteers Supporting Offender Reintegration, held as ancillary meeting of the 14th United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (the Kyoto Congress), the Kyoto Declaration on Community Volunteers Supporting Offender Rehabilitation was adopted. Building on this success, the Second World Congress for Community Volunteers Supporting Offender Reintegration was held during the sixth World Congress on Probation and Parole held in the Hague in April 2024, and the Declaration on the International Day for Community Volunteers Supporting Offender Reintegration was adopted. The declaration set 17th April as the international day for community volunteers supporting offender reintegration. In addition, the importance of these community volunteers is highlighted in the Kyoto Model Strategies, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2025.

However, in recent years, the number of *hogoshi* has been declining, and the Japanese workforce is aging. This decline is due to social factors such as population decline and the weakening of interpersonal relationships within local communities, as well as the significant anxiety and burden associated with *hogoshi* activities. This situation raises concerns about the viability of the *hogoshi* system. Nevertheless, there are many *hogoshi* who find their work fulfilling and continue working for a long period of time.

In the sections that follow, the personal stories of *hogoshi*, other community volunteers and cooperating members of private-sector entities are introduced to share personal experiences and to deepen understanding of their activities.

A president of an association of *hogoshi*
Iizuka probation district (Fukuoka prefecture)
Shuichi Ootsuka (Mr.)

➤ History of my work as a *hogoshi*

Before being appointed as a *hogoshi*, I was a company employee. After my parents passed away, I returned to my hometown and started a real estate agency. I have been working as a *hogoshi* for over 30 years and am currently doing while also juggling my own job.

A local classmate had already become a *hogoshi*, and he invited me to join him, which led me to work as a *hogoshi*. When I first became a *hogoshi*, I remember being very nervous when I attended training sessions with people from my parents' generation.

I didn't often feel anxious about my work as a *hogoshi*, but I did feel anxious when probationers didn't show up for their interviews at the scheduled time. When they didn't show up for their interviews at the scheduled time, I sometimes went to their homes to wait.

➤ Activities of *hogoshi*

I believe that the role of a *hogoshi* is to protect the peace and happiness of citizens. While providing counselling and assistance to those under probation/parole and conducting public relations and awareness-raising activities are all important, in recent years I have also contributed to crime prevention by ensuring that local children able able to go to school safely. I began these activities about five years ago. Rock, paper, scissors, shoot! At the beginning of my activities, the children looked nervous, but now they are more likely to play rock-paper-scissors themselves. It makes me very happy to see the children smiling and cheerfully walking to school.

➤ A sense of fulfilment in *hogoshi* activities

I feel a sense of fulfilment in my work when probationers express their gratitude to me. While I have often been betrayed in my interactions with them, some have successfully rehabilitated by engaging with them sincerely. Until the end of their probation, I sometimes visit their homes every day to talk to and persuade them. Even with those whose reintegration into society seems difficult, I engage them wholeheartedly, and some continue to work diligently to the present day, becoming company presidents.

I still keep in touch with some former probationers even after their probation ended. I visit their homes on their birthdays, and give them birthday cakes. Because probationers often have weak ties to their families and society, I always want to ensure they do not feel lonely. While challenges can arise in my work as a *hogoshi*, when probationers express their gratitude, I feel glad to be a *hogoshi*.

➤ Family understanding of *hogoshi* activities

At first, my family was apprehensive about letting probationers into our home, so interviews began in an office. Since some probationers are unfamiliar with the home environment, we believe that using the office as the interview location allows them to feel less nervous. It's natural for family members to feel uneasy when interviews are conducted in their own home, but gradually the family came to understand the *hogoshi* activities, and my wife began offering tea to the probationers.

2. Cooperating Employers

Ensuring employment opportunities for people released from correctional facilities is important for reducing reoffending, and as mentioned earlier, securing employment is one of the priority issues of the "Second Plan." In this connection, Cooperating Employers are private business companies who employ or intend to employ juvenile delinquents and adult offenders with the aim of cooperating with them in supporting their independence and reintegration into society.

Currently, there are approximately 25,000 Cooperating Employers in Japan, and probation offices have been constantly recruiting potential Cooperating Employers to secure employment for people reintegrating into society. On the other hand, there is a large gap between the number of Cooperating Employers and the number of them that actually employ juvenile delinquents and offenders. The current situation is that many companies

are not actually engaged in employing these individuals and there is an imbalance in the types of industries, with around 50% of Cooperating Employers being in the construction industry.

Despite this current situation, Cooperating Employers are crucial private sector partners in reducing reoffending, and they understand individual strengths and needs of juvenile delinquents and offenders and support their independence through employment.

A president of a transportation company
Kaisei Transport Co., Ltd.
Eitaro Nakahara (Mr.)

➤ History of my work as a Cooperative Employer

Since 2018, I have employed over 50 people released from prison as a Cooperating Employer. I became a Cooperating Employer after hearing from my colleague who was already employing people as a Cooperating Employer. He explained that he interviewed and hired job applicants from within prison, and I already had experiences working with people released from prison, so the programme piqued my interest.

I am the second-generation owner of a transportation company, and since I was a child, I have seen a variety of unique employees. One of them had committed a crime in the past and was only able to work in limited industries after his release from prison, so he used his driver's license to work as a truck driver. Therefore, I had no hesitation in hiring people released from prison.

Before I learned about the activities of Cooperating Employers, I had accidentally hired someone who was in a nearby offender rehabilitation facility through a general job posting, so I had no concerns about hiring people released from prison. Becoming a Cooperating Employer meant helping people released from prison who wanted to work, however small my contributions might be.

➤ Activities of a Cooperating Employer

I visit prisons and juvenile training schools to conduct employment interviews, and I try to conduct interviews face-to-face whenever possible. I help those who have been released from prison or who have no housing after leaving offender rehabilitation facilities by arranging housing for them, and I hope to help them become independent after reintegrating into society.

➤ A sense of fulfilment as a Cooperative Employer

Many offenders and juvenile delinquents are selfish and immature. We interview and provide guidance repeatedly until they realize that this is the reason they committed crimes. As a result, we can see gradual changes. Some individuals who had never held a permanent job before began to recognize that work is essential to living life in society. They also became more mindful of their time outside of work, telling us, I've stopped staying up late and drinking heavily. When we heard them express regret for having acted selfishly up until that point, we felt a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction in our work as a Cooperating Employer.

➤ Tips for hiring offenders and juvenile delinquents

In my experience, I have found that many offenders and juvenile delinquents have difficulty speaking up. Therefore, I believe it is important to reach out to them as much as possible and create an environment where they feel comfortable talking. Naturally, this doesn't always work out, but if they demonstrate a willingness to compromise, they will often approach me.

We want them to feel a sense of responsibility for the work they are entrusted with and to recognize that rules are a tool for protecting themselves. We don't isolate them from the rest of the company, and we don't treat them any differently than other employees, so I believe they understand this. Furthermore, if they wish, we offer the same support as other employees, including daily pay, apartment housing and assistance with obtaining a driver's license.

3. Other Cooperating Members of the Private Sector

The reintegration into society of offenders is supported not only by the activities of *hogoshi* and Cooperating Employers, but also by the activities of numerous cooperating members of the private sector. The

activities of these private-sector partners to reduce reoffending are broad-based, covering all stages of the criminal justice process, from prosecution to corrections and rehabilitation, and they also work in collaboration with criminal justice agencies and local governments. Their activities embody the multi-stakeholder partnerships set out in the Kyoto Declaration and are indispensable for realizing a “sustainable” and “inclusive society,” and should be highly valued by society.

In light of their important role in the field of reducing reoffending, the Ministry of Justice of Japan has been promoting initiatives that utilize the identification of NPOs and private business, and their know-how, that carry out activities in the local community that contribute to offender rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

The NPO Life Support Network

- The NPO Life Support Network (hereinafter referred to as “Life Support Network”) is a disability welfare organization located in Nagoya City, Aichi Prefecture. Since its establishment, it has provided broad support to suspects, defendants and people released from correctional facilities who require welfare support, in cooperation with the public prosecutor’s office, bar associations, correctional facilities, probation offices and other organizations within the prefecture. Here, we will introduce the Accompanying Entry Support Project, a project commissioned by Nagoya City.
- From a criminal justice perspective, the above project targeted people in need of welfare support. From a welfare perspective, however, it represents socially isolated residents. This project, implemented through municipalities, explored what could be done in collaboration with the criminal justice system to address socially isolated residents identified in connection with crime. In this project, the Life Support Network served as the city’s coordinating organization, providing support to people in need of welfare support (socially isolated residents) from a community perspective, connecting them to community support and welfare services. Since the project began, the coordinating organization has received consultations from public prosecutors at a rate of five to six per month. In one case involving repeated drunken trespassing, a man in his 30s was interviewed in a police station interview room and a support plan was created. Through interviews and the creation of a support plan, it was revealed that he had grown up in an adverse environment, had suffered from depression and was living alone on welfare. However, he had no one to care for him, and had begun drinking out of desperation. Visits were made about once a week, and support was provided to keep the individual connected, including accompanying him while shopping and to medical appointments, obtaining mental health and welfare certificates, and applying for disability pensions. Although there was some reoffending during the period of support, there has been no reoffending for more than a year since his last arrest. The individual explained the reason for this: “I don’t want to waste this precious time.” In another case, we visited the home of a woman in her 30s who had stolen offerings from a shrine because she was hungry, and the coordinator found that her mother had intimidated her, forcing her to live in the kitchen without giving her any pocket money. Because the family was isolated from the community, the coordinator utilized disability welfare services to help her rebuild her life.

In the process of handling many cases like those mentioned above, the Life Support Network cooperated with relevant agencies and made improvements to our collaboration. For example, in cases involving detention, the time between the request and release was tight, and coordination with the police station was necessary to ensure that the detainee was greeted upon release. Therefore, the public prosecutor was greeted upon release. Therefore, the public prosecutor’s office and the police station collaborated to implement the following measures:

1. Set flexible release time
2. Prosecutors informed the police station that a coordinator would greet the detainee upon release
3. The coordinator could meet with the detainee in the police station interview room upon arrival.

This enabled a smooth transition from the public prosecutor to the coordinating organization. Meanwhile, in cases involving detainees who were not at home, the detainees sometimes forgot that they had agreed to receive support, even after the coordinator's visit. Therefore, we began having the public prosecutor's office distribute notices regarding support to the detainees as needed.

- As described above, collaboration between criminal justice and welfare could be expanded to support residents by involving municipalities. Based on the experience of this project, Nagoya City has formulated the Nagoya City Recidivism Prevention Promotion Plan. As a welfare organization on the ground, the Life Support Network will continue to work toward realizing an inclusive community.

- Since its founding, Recruit Co., Ltd. (hereinafter referred to as “Recruit”) has been creating new systems and services to eliminate various social issues (e.g., dissatisfaction, anxiety, inconvenience) under a basic philosophy: Through the creation of new value, we aim to meet the expectations of society and realize a prosperous world where each individual can shine. WORK FIT is a social contribution activity undertaken by Recruit to help everyone find their own work. It is an employment support and career education programme that leverages knowledge cultivated through Recruit’s human resources business to provide an opportunity for young people who want to find a job but are struggling to get started or achieve results to take a proactive approach to their job search.
- Up until now, as part of the education provided to prepare juveniles for release from juvenile training schools, we have offered workshops where participants organize their strengths and try to communicate them in a one-minute speech, and as part of the employment support efforts in prisons, workshops where participants think about their individuality through interactions with other participants. This programme was developed with the aim of creating an opportunity for participants to face themselves and gain confidence through small successes in preparation for life in society. It appears to be a unique programme among correctional facilities, and many participants have shared common sentiments, such as: I didn’t think I had any strengths, but with the help of the people around me, I was able to find my strengths, and I was happy that the people around me told me about my individuality. This programme appears to contribute to fostering a sense of self-affirmation.
- Since FY 2022, we have been collaborating with the Ministry of Justice to develop a career education tool called CANVAS (Career education for Appreciating New Values and Adventurously Sailing against the wind) for probationers. Since education and employment are key to reducing reoffending, we believe that in order to encourage probationers to continue their education and employment after reintegration into society, it is necessary to provide guidance on stabilizing their livelihoods based on their motivation for education and future aspirations during probation. CANVAS has developed as a programme to be used during interviews between probationers and probation officers, and this programme encourages participants to think about their past and their future. Recruit is developing the section of ‘think about their future’. Using workshops for self-understanding and career education with specific card tools (in this case, work- and career-related cards), participants are asked to express the type of work they would like to try or find difficult, read interviews with people who have worked after probation, and gain inspiration. Finally, participants are asked to express what they would like to do. Even if it’s something small, we hope that by having them express their desire to try something, we can provide more meaningful support during the remainder of their probation period. CANVAS will be trialled at probation offices starting in FY 2023, and the content and operation of the programme are still in the process of being improved. However, probation officers who have used the programme have said things like, Not only has the programme helped the subjects to better understand themselves, but it has also helped the probation officers to better understand probationers, and It has made the interests of probationers more concrete, which has led to increased motivation.
- As a result of these efforts, the Ministry of Justice and Recruit signed a cooperation agreement on July 12, 2024, to promote reducing reoffending and realizing a safe and secure society. We will continue to provide support in the future, hoping that the experiences through the WORK FIT programme will lead to confidence and self-esteem, and contribute to reducing reoffending.