



AtidMUN 2023



# UNODC Study Guide



# UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

**Topic A: Combating Organized Crime in  
the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

**Topic B: Labor in Prisons: Slavery or  
Rehabilitation?**



# AtidMUN 2023

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents.....	1
Chairs' Letter.....	3
Introduction to the Committee.....	4
Topic A: Combating Organized Crime in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century.....	5
Introduction.....	5
Knowing Your Enemy: A Closer Look at Organized Crime.....	5
The Origins of Organized Crime.....	5
The Price: Extortion.....	6
The Economics of Organized Crime.....	6
Gambling & Loan Sharking.....	7
Gun Trafficking.....	8
Money Laundering.....	8
Cybercrime.....	8
Knowing Yourself: Combatting Organized Crime.....	9
The EU's Battle Against Organized Crime.....	9
Organized Crime in the US.....	10
Questions to Consider.....	11
Familiarizing Questions.....	11
Clash-Oriented Questions.....	11
Further Reading.....	12
Bibliography.....	12
Topic B: Labor In Prisons: Slavery or Rehabilitation?.....	18
Introduction.....	18
Background TO The Issue.....	19
What is Penal Labour?.....	19



# AtidMUN 2023



The Troubled History of Prison Labour .....	19
Double Dipping in the Taxpayer's Pockets.....	20
Private Prisons and the Private Sector .....	21
Penal Labour Around the World.....	22
The USA.....	22
The UK.....	23
Japan.....	24
Norway.....	25
Questions to Consider .....	25
Familiarizing Questions.....	25
Clash-Oriented Questions.....	25
Further Reading .....	26
Dive Deeper Into the Topic.....	26
View Possible Solutions .....	26
Bibliography.....	27



## AtidMUN 2023

### CHAIRS' LETTER

Dear Delegates,

It is with great excitement that we welcome you to the upcoming ATIDMUN. In the UNODC committee, we will discuss two topics.

The first topic, "Combating Organized Crime in the 21st Century," could not be more timely. Recent events such as transnational cyberattacks targeting critical infrastructure and the proliferation of illicit trade networks emphasize the urgency of international cooperation in addressing this issue. Delegates, you are encouraged to delve into the challenges posed by emerging technologies that facilitate organized crime while exploring innovative strategies for collaboration among nations.

The second topic, "Labor in Prisons: Slavery or Rehabilitation?" strikes at the heart of human rights and justice. Contemporary cases of prison labor exploitation and debates surrounding the effectiveness of punitive versus restorative approaches underscore the gravity of this topic. We urge you to confront the ethical dilemmas surrounding inmate labor, examining the clash between profit-driven exploitation and the potential for genuine rehabilitation and reintegration.

While simulating this committee, you will take on the roles of the heads of state who are members of the UNODC committee and try to settle conflicts around the world to make a better world for future generations! This will not be easy, but as Uncle Ben once said, "With great power comes great responsibility," with 2\3 committee votes, your solution will pass by a majority!

At last, if you have any questions regarding any topic, you are more than welcome to ask us,

Moreover, we will provide you with an answer to your question.

Good Luck,

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## AtidMUN 2023



### INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE

For two decades, to ensure health, security, and justice for all, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has been helping make the world safer from drugs, organized crime, corruption, and terrorism by addressing these “societal diseases” and promoting peace and sustainable well-being as deterrents to them.

Because the scale of these problems is often too grand for states to confront alone, UNODC offers practical assistance and encourages regional and transnational approaches to action. We do this in all regions of the world through our global programs and network of field offices.



The Office is committed to supporting Member States in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at its core. The 2030 Agenda recognizes that the rule of law, fair, effective, and humane justice systems, and health-oriented responses to drug use are both enablers for and part of sustainable goals (SDGs) at its core. The 2030 Agenda recognizes that the rule of law, fair, effective, and humane justice systems, and health-oriented responses to drug use are enablers for and part of sustainable development.



## TOPIC A: COMBATING ORGANIZED CRIME IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

### *INTRODUCTION*

The issue of organized crime is a big one, and it is constantly expanding. Those who wish to break the law find new ways to do so faster than we find ways to prevent them. As such, the history of organized crime is rich and diverse. Every criminal organization considers its local and cultural circumstances to create its own hierarchy and business practices. As such, they are extremely hard to prosecute.

We urge you to research your country's local criminal organizations: their culture, structure, streams of income, and customs. It will play an invaluable role in your attempt to find common ground between criminal organizations, which you could then tackle.

This study guide will provide a cohesive overview of the history of organized crime, its central tenets, business practices, and the actions countries take to combat it. By understanding the core principles of organized crime and its reach, you would be able to solve the issue accordingly. As stated in the Great Potato War:

*If you know your enemy, and you know yourself – you need not fear the result of a hundred battles.*

- Sun Tzu, "The Art of War".

### ***KNOWING YOUR ENEMY: A CLOSER LOOK AT ORGANIZED CRIME***

#### **THE ORIGINS OF ORGANIZED CRIME**

In a world where our economic and judicial models are perfect, organized crime cannot emerge. We will find the roots of organized crime in a power vacuum, an area of jurisdiction that is either not appropriately filled or abandoned by the state. For example, if the government prohibits alcohol altogether – the demand for alcohol is still high, so private organizations will step in to fill this demand. Thus, a mafia is born (Kumar & Skaperdas, 2008). Another example is if it is difficult for an individual to protect their private property lawfully, then the individual will seek protection from another source: the mafia.

Weakness in enforcement is a challenge that every country and state faces in one area or another. Most countries have areas where they cannot enforce their rule accordingly, such as jungles, deserts, and mountains. For example, The Amazon Forest, an extremely hard-to-govern site, teems with



## AtidMUN 2023



organized crime and drug cartels. Because of the lax law enforcement in the area, criminal organizations can conduct illegal activities freely, and the demand for protection from individuals living there is significantly high (Phillips, 2023). Another weakness is ethnic and social distance: In places of poverty, where crime is more likely (Courson & Nettle, 2021), the police usually try to bite more than they can chew. This is where mafias and gangs come in: to protect a price (Kumar & Skaperdas, 2008).

Countries can and do create opportunities for organized crime to emerge. The most common: is the prohibition of producing and distributing certain goods or services—precisely drugs, prostitution, guns, alcohol, and gambling. The demand for all those goods will stay high whether the country bans it or not. When it does, people seek alternative ways to acquire those goods – organized crime steps in to meet this demand: An individual produces drugs to make money, but they need to distribute and protect their interests – and they need people. **This is the root from which a gang is formed.**

To conclude, we see that organized crime is formed from one instance and for one purpose: Organized crime is the result of a power vacuum, and it serves the protection of goods, services, businesses, and individuals. However, there is a price to pay for dealing with the mafia...

### THE PRICE: EXTORTION

Before delving into the economics of organized crime, one burning question must be addressed: “If the main money-making method of the mafia is to provide protection services, why can’t the local citizens band together and protect themselves?”

The answer: **they cannot.** A group of local shopkeepers may be able to defend themselves against your average shoplifter or perhaps even a robbery. They could go on patrols at night to keep their properties safe and even arm themselves with baseball bats. However, would they be able to go against the highly armed militia of Al Capone? Probably not. In most cases where individuals band together, they quickly succumb to the mafia. They can only smile and wave - if they do not please their protectors, they will become their prey (Kumar & Skaperdas, 2008). This way, mafias and gangs seize control over their respective populations and etch themselves into their daily lives. This is a monopoly over the protection market.

### THE ECONOMICS OF ORGANIZED CRIME

Transnational criminal organizations synchronize their many streams of income, both legal and illegal, to avoid suspicion and turn a profit. On the legitimate front, mafias often take over trade



## AtidMUN 2023



unions and businesses or create ones of their own. They take the lawful business route, striving for lower prices and higher quality than their competitors to attract customers. The range of companies varies greatly; here are a couple of examples:

In New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia, and Naples, there has been significant mafia involvement since the 50's and 80's in the garbage collection business. There is significant harm to the environment and the company: in 2008, the Camorra group closed the dumps, leaving vast amounts of garbage piled up in Naples for weeks. The Camorra group has also been seen illegally dumping and burning toxic waste, significantly harming the environment (Deitche, 2020).

Similarly, the mob got involved in the carpentry and construction industries through the trade unions they took over. In 1990, the five crime families of New York received kickbacks<sup>1</sup> on a \$150 million job with the New York City Housing Authority (Gardiner, 2014).

Finally, the mafia has increased their involvement in the food and agriculture industry for over a decade. Cosa Nostra employed thousands of illegal immigrants in inhumane conditions and with little pay for their agriculture projects in Italy. By 2017, their profits skyrocketed to a staggering 21.8 billion euros (Tatum, 2017).

Organized crime uses those legitimate businesses as a front to their more profitable income streams: black markets<sup>2</sup>. The mafia can use the trucks from their legitimate businesses to hide the smuggling of drugs, arms, and alcohol and profit from them elsewhere. For example, the Colombian drug cartel, the Cali Cartel, used a large national pharmacy store chain to launder their drug trafficking profits (Gallo, 2017). In recent years, many ex-members of both the mafia and the police have come forward to tell their stories and the exact methods that are used to smuggle drugs and guns, loan sharks, and launder vast amounts of money. These first-hand accounts will give us a more nuanced look at the economics of organized crime:

### GAMBLING & LOAN SHARKING

In an interview with John Pennisi, ex-mafioso of the Cosa Nostra, it is stated that the mob would usually use legitimate businesses as fronts for their gambling schemes. Usually, bookstores, rental stores, and the like would have somewhere to gamble in the back. Not only that, but Pennisi states that online gambling is also on the rise, making betting much easier and more accessible than in

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<sup>1</sup> DEFINITION | Kickback – “an illegal payment intended as compensation for preferential treatment, or any other type of improper services received.”

<sup>2</sup> DEFINITION | Black Market – “an illegal traffic or trade in officially controlled or scarce commodities.”





the past. Usually, gambling and loan sharking would go together: One would gamble until they are out of money, then take loans from a loan shark to continue gambling (Insider, 2022). This way, gamblers are drowning in debt and forced to join the mafia's other schemes.

### GUN TRAFFICKING

In another interview with Ed Calderon, an ex-police officer in Baja, California, Mexico – we get an inside look into the world of gun trafficking in the Americas: Drugs make their way north, and guns and money make their way south. Guns are smuggled on foot: mob members disassemble guns into their essential components or duct-tape them to their limbs to cross the US-Mexico border. Front organizations may also be used to smuggle guns while appearing as legitimate businesses (Insider, 2022).

### MONEY LAUNDERING

Former government secret agent Robert Mazur gives a detailed overview of the money laundering process. Mazur stresses that money laundering enables the most dangerous weapon of the mafia: corruption. With corruption, they can control countries and their presidents, persuade the public and their officials, and use them as a shield. Cash gained from drug dealing would usually be transported to Latin America, where money is traded for another currency and given to local politicians, military men, and prosecutors to increase the mafia's sphere of influence. Money Launderers also use Layering<sup>3</sup> to make laundered money “disappear.” Money laundering organizations open banks in corrupt Latin American countries (Panama) to secure the laundered money (Insider, 2023). With that money, they can fund their other operations.

### CYBERCRIME

Cybercrime is a type of crime that either targets or uses computers or networks, usually for financial gain (kaspersky, 2023). Transnational organized crime has hit the jackpot on cybercrime and is using it to gain more than \$1 billion annually (UNODC, n.d.). For example, Koobface – an anagram for Facebook – was a computer worm designed to spread through social media. This virus was used to steal passwords and data from personal financial accounts and redirect clients to websites for massive monetary gain. Criminal organizations are now using the web to operate another profitable venture – drug trafficking: Online illicit markets such as the now defunct Silk Road are used to find and supply drugs to local populations wirelessly. The growth of cybercrime among

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<sup>3</sup> DEFINITION | Layering – “The money launderer moves the illegal funds between bank accounts, often using offshore accounts and international transfers to create a complex audit trail to avoid detection.”



## AtidMUN 2023



criminal organizations will make them much harder to track as technology evolves (UNODC, 2020).

This is just the tip of the iceberg regarding transnational criminal organizations' income streams. Whether through money laundering, increasing corruption, or drug trafficking, criminal organizations create instability wherever they go – as such, it is essential to mitigate their scope of operations.

### ***KNOWING YOURSELF: COMBATTING ORGANIZED CRIME***

At this point, you are probably thinking of solutions to the different methods of earning money that organized crime has come up with. To aid you in that process, we have compiled case studies of the two most able bodies to fight organized crime, the US and the EU, to give a sense of practical actions against organized crime in the modern world.

#### **THE EU'S BATTLE AGAINST ORGANIZED CRIME**

In the EU, criminal organizations often engage in drug trafficking, fraud, human trafficking, and cybercrime. Most of these organizations also operate on the borders between countries – 70% of criminal organizations are active in more than three member states. As such, in May 2021, the EU set a specific plan of action to deter criminal organizations from engaging in illegal behavior – named the EMPACT (European multi-disciplinary platform against criminal threats) (European Council, 2023).

According to the EMPACT, the European Council has recognized five main priorities in the fight against criminal organizations within its member states: Discovering and destabilizing underground markets; protecting individuals, communities, and companies against cyber-crime; disrupting human, drug, and firearm trafficking routes; preventing child abuse and exploitation; and uncovering cases of corruption and fraud within local communities. EMPACT's first year in action consisted of almost 10,000 arrests, 12 high-profile criminals, and the seizure of over 62 tons of drugs (EMPACT, 2022). In 2022, the EMPACT team seized around 180 million euros of illegal profits, though it is important to remember that organized crime makes 139 billion euros annually in Europe. More significant steps must be taken to eradicate organized crime in the area (European Council, 2023).



### ORGANIZED CRIME IN THE US

The current battle against organized crime in the US began with the Obama administration's "Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime," focusing on enhancing intelligence and information sharing, protecting the American financial system from fraud and foul play, strengthening prosecutions and investigations, and disrupting drug trafficking (the White House, 2011).

Following the focus on terrorism after September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, organized crime has been inadvertently allowed to grow under our noses. Under Obama, the White House planned to enhance their intelligence on transnational organized crime by strengthening ties between different layers of the justice system - police, prosecution, and prisons - to ensure a cohesive flow of information between the three and improve their ability to disrupt organized crime. The Administration also emphasized strengthening intergovernmental information sharing with the UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand to root out transnational organized crime actors. Lastly, the administration improved its intelligence by developing more significant synergies between intelligence analysts, collectors, and counterintelligence personnel (the White House, 2011).

Transnational organized crime is more business-savvy than ever and threatens the well-being of the entire American financial system. Organized crime uses predatory business practices to erode market integrity and quality and uses convoluted tactics to conceal, move, and increase illegal profits. Such organizations jeopardize the American economy and the entire region's economy. The US aims to disrupt the use of such predatory business practices by increasing the awareness of companies about transnational organized crime and increasing the funding financial task forces receive. The Administration strove to increase the efficiency of the Financial Action Task Force by working with Congress to enact legislation that protects businesses from financial crimes, requires proper documentation for transactions, and logs said transactions for later review. Meanwhile, it also called for better awareness of financial crimes in the private sector (the White House, 2011).

It is increasingly harder to prosecute and convict transnational criminal organizations because of the lack of cooperation between different branches of the government and the justice system. To address this recent trend, the administration called for working on a range of legislative solutions that will allow or enhance the prosecution of transnational organized crime empires. This was done by developing rewards programs to gather more intel on international criminals; denying criminal organization members and corrupt foreign officials visas and access to infrastructure; increasing



## AtidMUN 2023



the number of financial, weapons, and corruption investigations; and strengthening cooperation between the Interpol and the American police on illicit trafficking in air and maritime domains (the White House, 2011).

Drug trafficking poses the single most dangerous crime transnational crime organizations commit. Through drug trafficking, mafias can acquire funds to kickstart their other ventures, enlarging their sphere of influence in local communities and the world. In recent years, technology has allowed drug traffickers to plan, coordinate, and perpetrate their schemes entirely under the radar. They operate internationally, bribing local and national governments and taking advantage of weak border control to ensure the success of their crimes. To disrupt drug trafficking, there is a need to reduce the demand for illegal drugs, cooperate with bordering countries to increase border control and crack down on corruption near borders and high-crime areas (the White House, 2011).

Currently, the only information about the USA's progress with this new strategy is the arrest of 700 transnational organized crime actors in Central America under Operation Regional Shield (ORS). The joint statement from the USA and El Salvador attests to continued cooperation in combating organized crime within El Salvador, per the USA's strategy (U.S. Embassy in El Salvador, 2020).

### *QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER*

#### FAMILIARIZING QUESTIONS

- What are the rates of organized crime in my country?
- How does organized crime affect the local economy?
- What are the most popular methods criminal organizations use in my country?
- What has my country done to combat organized crime?
- Is the distribution of drugs a big issue in my country?

#### CLASH-ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- How can a resolution sync information and actions between organizations to fight organized crime?
- What is the most critical issue that stems from organized crime?
- What holds up organized crime? How can we topple organizations using that knowledge?
- Does the UN have the right to intervene in the internal affairs of member states in the case of organized crime?



## AtidMUN 2023



### *FURTHER READING*

- <https://www.unodc.org/toc/en/crimes/organized-crime.html>
- <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/zh/cybercrime/module-13/key-issues/criminal-groups-engaging-in-cyber-organized-crime.html>
- <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/administration/eop/nsc/transnational-crime>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R5FSXCYrlt0&list=PLKfWL8IXgKBvBBTHJKbMXjGYOJ-EUHaEC>

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## AtidMUN 2023



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## AtidMUN 2023



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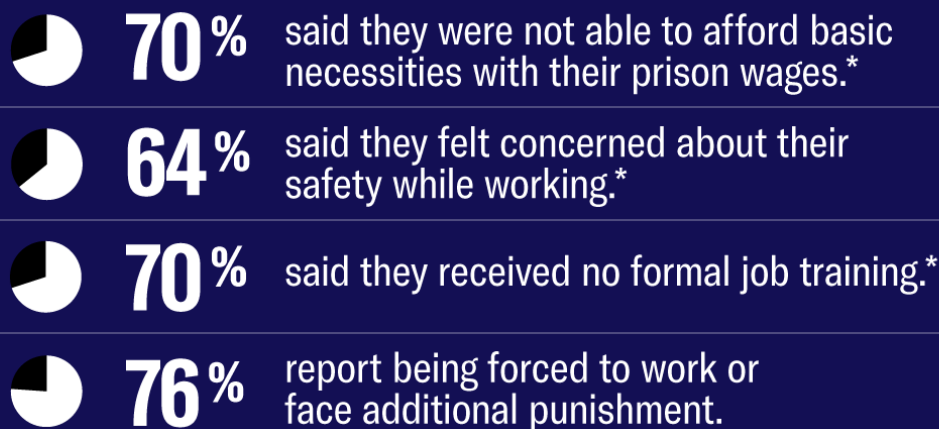


## TOPIC B: LABOR IN PRISONS: SLAVERY OR REHABILITATION?

### INTRODUCTION

An enslaved person, by definition, is “someone who is legally owned by another person and is forced to work for that person without pay” (Britannica, 2023). While immoral, those in power have three significant incentives to enslave a person: first, free labor; second, enslaved people cannot leave at will, which reduces turnover costs; and third, enslaved people can be subjected to physical punishment, which reduces enforcement costs. Unsurprisingly, penal labor is very similar to slavery: inmates are paid pennies for their work, cannot leave or protest, and can be subjected to physical and psychological punishment. Penal labor offers little to no benefits for the inmates during or after their incarceration, and an argument could be made that penal labor is slavery in disguise and not a form of rehabilitation.

### PRISON LABOR REPORT SURVEY:



Sources: \* from our survey, others from a BJS survey

**ACLU**

Modern prisons in many countries now exist to minimize the threat prisoners pose and exploit their cheap labor. However, controlling prisoners is in tension to reform them: We tell them to prepare to rejoin society while making them adapt to a fierce environment that is nothing like the rest of the community. We ask them to make better decisions while taking away almost all their choices. Prisons now market penal labor as a means of rehabilitation: prisoners require a daily routine to rehabilitate – they get to choose what they do on weekdays; they can express themselves in their work and acquire skills to find professions other than crime (Thorn, 2021).



The question is, do they find other professions other than crime? Prison labor is now an 11-billion-dollar industry, and prisoners reap none of the benefits – prisons have no incentive to ensure their primary audience does not return. Prisoners receive pennies on the dollar for their work: In an interview with Latashia Millender, an inmate in an Illinois prison, it was reported that she made \$450 in an entire year - you cannot even buy a PS5 with that.

### ***BACKGROUND TO THE ISSUE***

#### **WHAT IS PENAL LABOUR?**

While the answer might seem straightforward, many types of prison labor have varying engagement, pay, and conditions. Of those many types, prisons have three main types of work: in-house labor, industry labor, and work-release programs.

In-house prison labor is the most common of the three, focusing on maintenance jobs. These include janitorial work, kitchen duty, or groundskeeping. In-house prison labor also grants the lowest of wages, standing at an average of 63 cents per hour in the US. If that is not enough, correctional officers and staff can punish inmates for refusing to work by sending them to solitary confinement or taking their wages away (Hoffer, 2022).

Industry labor, or “insourcing,” is where corporations employ inmates and receive tax benefits for hiring “risky target groups.” As such, inmates may find themselves working in any odd job: McDonalds uses inmates to process beef patties, bread, and milk; Walmart hires inmates to clean products of bar codes for reselling; Verizon hires inmates for telecommunication services; and even Victoria’s Secret hired female inmates in South Carolina to sew products (Shabazz, 2023).

Lastly, work-release programs allow trusted prisoners to leave the prison for work and return once their shift ends. Work-release programs give inmates the most freedom but are limited in scope: only nine countries worldwide utilize this method (Wikipedia, 2023). These programs have been shown to enable former inmates to find jobs twice as fast and receive higher pay than regular inmates (Bales, 2015). However, there are still many challenges when utilizing this method. Those include overcoming public stigma, unequal access to jobs, the inmates’ limited skills, and the risk of escaping.

#### **THE TROUBLED HISTORY OF PRISON LABOUR**

Prison labor promises an ideal solution to criminality with a focus on rehabilitation. By working in prison, inmates learn the skills and values needed to thrive in the workplace. It is a way to reduce



the monotony of prison life and reduce violence by providing inmates with an occupation—those significantly lower recidivism rates, reducing mass incarceration (Reyes, 2016). However, the origins of prison labor tell an entirely different story. Not one of rehabilitation, but one of exploitation:

The roots of prison labor go back to the conclusion of the American Civil War and the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the US Constitution: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for the crime of which the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.”

Before the Civil War, the South's economy relied almost entirely on the free labor of enslaved people. Now that the enslaved people had been released, the South was incentivized to incarcerate those enslaved African Americans who had been emancipated and put them back to work. This practice quickly expanded to other areas as slavery became frowned upon (Reid, 2023).

Fast-forward to today - with almost 11.5 million prisoners worldwide (Reuters, 2019), many of them working - it is hard to tell whether the days of slavery are behind us. Modern prisons take advantage not only of the prisoners themselves but also of the industries they are a part of and the consumers they produce for.

### DOUBLE DIPPING IN THE TAXPAYER'S POCKETS

Quality prison education has been a critical factor in reducing recidivism. In the US, 30% of inmates do not have a high school diploma, and 94% do not have a degree. Inmates who have participated in education programs and received a GED while incarcerated are 43% less likely to recidivate than those who did not because they could find jobs with salaries that enabled a lawful lifestyle. Employment is a crucial challenge for recently released inmates due to their criminal records and fewer credentials. With that being said, 40% of US prisons have opted out entirely of providing education in prisons in favor of penal labor (Nam, 2023).

While prisons providing quality education have lower recidivism rates among ex-convicts, the same cannot be said for prisons employing penal labor. The literature on the connection between punitive work and recidivism has been inconclusive or minimal (Duwe & Henry-Nickie, 2021). If so, why would prisons focus on penal labor and not education? The incentive is simple: to make money.



All prisons receive funding from the government, and that funding comes from us – the taxpayers. With this funding, prisons should have the exact amount of money to hire employees for prison maintenance (cleaning, cooking, etc.). By hiring prisoners and paying them pennies, prisons can double dip in the taxpayer’s pockets (Payne, 2023). Private prisons are even more capable of taking advantage of their workers by receiving significant tax benefits from the WOTC (The Work Opportunity Tax Credit), increasing their profits even further.

### PRIVATE PRISONS AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Private prisons take things one step further by taking a percentage of inmates’ wages to cover “incarceration costs,” even though those are already covered by governmental funding. Private prison administrations also allow private suppliers of essential products to enter and sell their products. These products are sold at market price regardless of inmates’ miniscule wages. This results in inmates blowing their entire weekly wage on one bar of deodorant or one singular cookie. The proceeds from these purchases are often shared with the prison, allowing them to make even more money.

The private sector also benefits from the low costs of penal labour and is incentivized to lobby against prison reform policies. For example, Leprino Foods Company, which supplies mozzarella to Domino’s, Papa John’s, and Pizza Hut, purchased more than 600 tons of buffalo milk from 2017 to 2020 produced by incarcerated people working in Colorado Correctional Industries. Walmart also benefitted from cheap prison labor by using subcontractors that use prison labor themselves. One of Walmart’s partners is the Jacobs Trading Company, which has employed many working inmates (Turner, 2022).

These companies have an incentive for ex-convicts to return to prison. So many do not hire them after their release: Inmates who became firefighters for the duration of their sentence could not work as firefighters after their release (Sibilla, 2021); Inmates who worked in companies such as Oriental Trading for years were not hired on grounds that the company “does not hire felons” (Rafieyan & Garcia, 2020); and one ex-convict was rejected from 300 jobs before he found his first job since being released (Kingsley, 2022). If prisoners cannot find a job, they will likely commit some survival crime<sup>4</sup> and return to prison.

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<sup>4</sup> DEFINITION | Survival Crime – “property crimes and low-level infractions in order to secure basic survival.”





## *PENAL LABOUR AROUND THE WORLD*

### THE USA

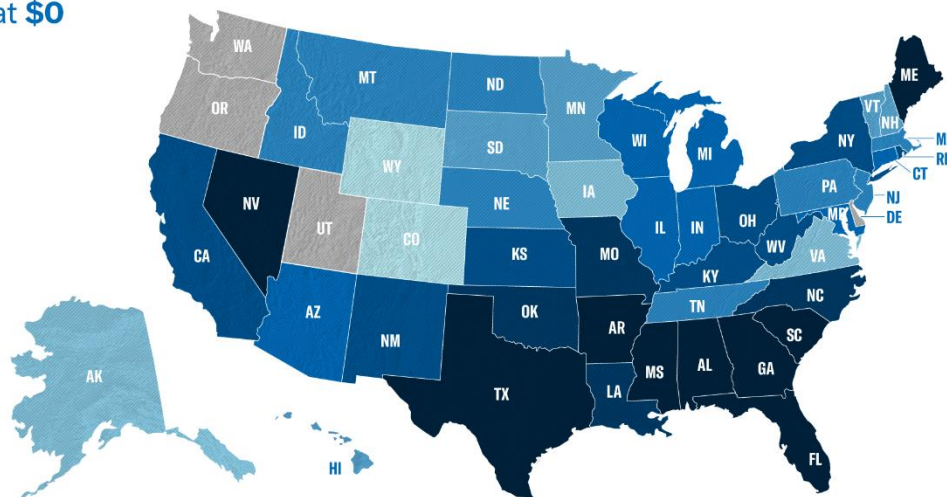
The USA has turned prison laborers into a precious commodity. In 2021 alone, 800,000 US inmates have produced 11 billion dollars of goods and services (Anguiano, 2022). Despite their significant contributions to the US economy, prison laborers are provided with very little training and legal protection, if at all.

The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the US Constitution states that slavery is abolished “except as a punishment for the crime of which the party shall have been duly convicted” (National Archives, 1865). A closer look at US penal labor would reveal that it is, indeed, not too far from slavery: prison laborers are being paid less than a dollar per hour, with Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Texas not paying them at all. In a survey by the Bureau of Justice, 76% of incarcerated workers report that they are required to work under threats of punishment such as solitary confinement, denial of opportunities to reduce their sentence, and loss of family visitation rights (ACLU, 2022).

### **MINIMUM WAGES FOR INCARCERATED WORKERS IN EACH STATE**

Some states will be at **\$0**

Minimum Wages in Dollars Per Hour



Of the 1.2 million adult inmates in US prisons, 30% have not acquired a high-school diploma. Although education, as discussed previously, is the driving force for rehabilitation and lower recidivism rates, only 21% of those without high-school diplomas or GEDs reach a high-school



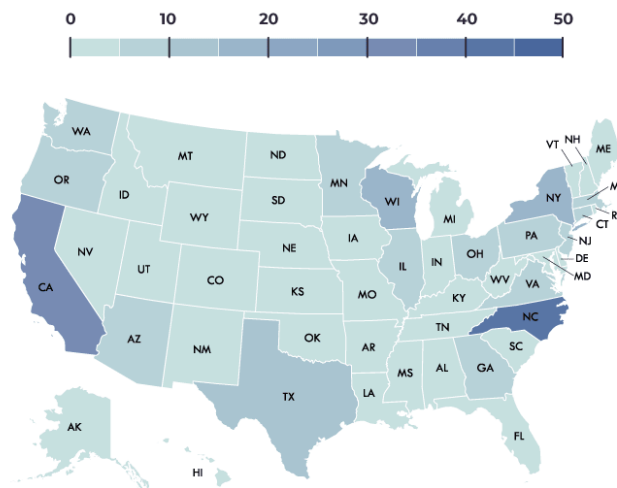
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level of education during their incarceration period. US government initiatives have failed to improve the success rate of educational programs that provide inmates with postsecondary education: One program that involved 22,000 inmates and 130 colleges only had 7,000 graduates. Although about 9 out of 10 prisons offer some education (Harlow, 2003), the range is quite limited (Knezevic, 2023):

### Prison education programs by state

To help discover which states are providing the best educational opportunities for prisoners, we have ranked the states based on the amount of programs they offer.



US recidivism rates currently stand a 70% chance of an ex-convict reoffending within five years of release (Hayden, 2023). The situation is dire, so much so that the Biden Administration has launched a detailed plan for reforming prison labor and education (The White House, 2022), we suggest you read it in the “Further Reading” section.

### THE UK

Like in the USA, prison laborers are excluded from many worker protections, such as the National Minimum Wage Act 1998, and suffer from low wages, long hours, and ridiculous working conditions. In the UK, working prisoners receive at least 4 pounds per week. With that being said, many prisons find ways to circumvent prisoners’ minimum wages and pay them less (Cole, Heer, & Zazai, 2022). The UK National Audit Office has named the situation “disastrous,” costing taxpayers 467 million pounds (Pandeli, 2019).





Besides pay, much more about the British prison labor system is subpar. Long working hours that are not adequately rewarded are common in UK prisons, sometimes working up to 60 hours a week with no additional benefits. For reference, between April 2019 and March 2020, 12,500 prison laborers worked 17.4 million hours in industry work alone (excluding in-prison labor such as cleaning, cooking, etc.) (Gov.UK Justice Data, 2023). Currently, no legal framework supports prisoners in their working lives or their education while incarcerated. It can be challenging for prisoners to find well-paying jobs due to the nature of their prison labor: slow, repetitive tasks contracted by companies looking for cheap labor (Pandeli, 2019). Currently, UK recidivism rates stand at around 25% (Clark, 2023).

## JAPAN

Prison labor in Japan is mandatory by law, for eight hours Monday through Friday and four on Saturday. Prisoners who refuse to work, for whatever reason, are subjected to harsh punishment. Prisoners get paid very little for their work. On top of that, they do not have access to their earnings in full: their salaries are placed in a specialized bank account, with only a tiny amount of their profits being available to purchase essential items from in-prison stores (Human Rights Watch, 1995).



Japanese penal labor tends to focus on vocational training and work: dry cleaning, automobile repairs, photo typography, carpentry, leatherwork, and factory work for external manufacturers. Through vocational work, convicts are encouraged to acquire certificates of qualification after release. For their work, prisoners receive about \$30 a month (Ministry of Justice Japan, 2023).



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### NORWAY

Norway has some of the world's most productive and effective prison systems, boasting a meager 20% recidivism rate after two years from release. Norway also has one of the smallest prison populations in the world, around 3,000 prisoners. This allows Norwegian prisons to get creative with their rehabilitative prison labor programs. Prisoners in Norway can expect to specialize in woodworking, vehicle maintenance, cooking, and even graphic design. For all those trades, inmates can acquire certificates of qualification. Additionally, prisoners can spend their time furthering their education with A-level and B-level study material.

While the Norwegian penal system, especially its penal labor, seems very successful, it must be mentioned that it works with a very small demographic. The Norwegian prison model requires personal attention for every prisoner. This means prison officers need extensive training, usually 2-3 years. Additionally, such facilities must be comprehensive and have a small population. Those two conditions cumulate to a costly prison system: A place at a Norwegian prison such as Halden costs about 98,000 euros per year. While the Norwegian model may not be precisely applicable to every country, implementing certain vital principles in this model may prove some results.

### *QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER*

#### FAMILIARIZING QUESTIONS

- How many prisons practice penal labor in my country? How many provide education?
- If relevant, how does prison labor function in my country?
- What opportunities do ex-convicts get if they participate in my country's prison labor?

#### CLASH-ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Could prison labor be a successful form of rehabilitation?
- How would my country change prison labor?
- What should be the balance between prison labor and education?
- What incentives can my country encourage to better the chances of ex-convicts reintegrating into society?



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## *FURTHER READING*

### DIVE DEEPER INTO THE TOPIC

- [https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field\\_document/2022-06-15-captivelaborresearchreport.pdf](https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/2022-06-15-captivelaborresearchreport.pdf)
- [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---declaration/documents/instructionalmaterial/wcms\\_099624.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/instructionalmaterial/wcms_099624.pdf)

### VIEW POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- <https://legaljournal.princeton.edu/the-economic-impact-of-prison-labor-for-incarcerated-individuals-and-taxpayers/>
- <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/a-better-path-forward-for-criminal-justice-training-and-employment-for-correctional-populations/>
- [https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field\\_document/2022-06-15-captivelaborresearchreport.pdf](https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/2022-06-15-captivelaborresearchreport.pdf)
- <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/04/26/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-expands-second-chance-opportunities-for-formerly-incarcerated-persons/>



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