

Summary

Effect of participation in ESF programmes on work/education and criminal recidivism

In the Netherlands, custodial institutions use funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) to finance activities in the field of job market preparation. At the request of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (*Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid*, SZW) and the Ministry of Security and Justice (*Veiligheid en Justitie*, V&J), this study examines the results of these 'ESF programmes'. The study sketches a picture of the recidivism and socio-economic position of the participating detainees (the 'ESF participants'). Several data sources were used for this purpose: exit data of the Custodial Institutions Agency (*Dienst Justitiële Inrichtingen*, DJI) and information derived from the Research and Policy Database for Judicial Documentation (*Onderzoeks- en Beleidsdatabase Justitiële Documentatie*, OBJD) to describe the criminal recidivism. For the latter we used the method of the WODC Recidivism Monitor. Data were also obtained from Statistics Netherlands (CBS) to describe the participants' socio-economic status (work, state benefits or education) shortly before and up to one year after their detention.

Main results

Ex-detainees

- One month after detention, more than one quarter of the adult ex-detainees that participated in an ESF programme were found to have a job or to be attending an education programme. This is slightly less than in the month preceding detention, when around 30% had a job or were attending education. A comparable percentage of ex-detainees had a job or was attending education one year after detention.
- A considerably larger percentage of ex-detainees lives on welfare after detention than before (approximately 37% versus around 20%).
- The ESF participants among ex-detainees have a higher chance of finding work or attending education than those that did not participate in an ESF programme during detention.
- Ex-detainees having a job one month after detention have a smaller chance of recidivism than ex-detainees who receive social benefits or are inactive one month after detention.

Ex-JJI pupils

The results for ex-pupils of Correctional Institutions for Juvenile Offenders (JJI) placed into custody under criminal law are very similar to the results for ex-JJI pupils placed into custody under civil law. The main results for these two groups are therefore discussed together.

- The percentage of juveniles with a job after detention increases slightly as more time has passed since the detention.
- The proportion of ex-JJI pupils that participated in an ESF programme and were found to attend education is considerably lower after detention than before. For the group placed under criminal law, 63% attended education before detention, compared to 38% six months after detention. For the group placed under civil

law, these percentages are 80% and 37%, respectively. This may be due to the fact that a large proportion of these juveniles are no longer of school age upon their release.

- A large proportion of the juveniles did not have a job, did not attend education, and did not receive social benefits after detention. Six months after detention, this applied to 31% of the group placed under criminal law and to 36% of the civil law group. This can have different reasons. First, it may be that the juveniles are unemployed and living at the parental home, and therefore not entitled to social benefits. If they are 18 years or older, then they are no longer obliged to attend school. It is furthermore possible that they work informally, or that they are once again in detention.
- For ex-JJI pupils, ESF participation means that they are less at risk of recidivism, but not that they have a higher chance of having a job or attending education one month after their detention.
- The observed recidivism is significantly lower for ex-JJI pupils than the expected recidivism. This means that the ESF participants in the juvenile sectors perform better than could be expected on the basis of their background characteristics and socio-economic status one month after detention.

Conclusion

The findings of this study should be interpreted with caution. To formulate any kind of definitive conclusions about the effectiveness of an intervention, it is necessary to compare the results achieved in the group subjected to the intervention to a control group that is as similar as possible to the first group, but is not subjected to the intervention. This was not feasible within this study, and this means that we present our conclusions with due reservation.

Although just a limited part of the ESF participants had a job or was attending education after their detention, and despite the limitations of this study, the results nevertheless give reason for some optimism. Participation in an ESF programme appears to be correlated with a smaller risk of recidivism: ESF participants show lower recidivism figures than (juvenile and adult) ex-detainees who did not attend any such programme. For adult ex-detainees, this effect is apparent through having a job or attending education; participating in an ESF programme is correlated to a higher chance of having a job or attending an education programme after detention. Having a job or attending education is in turn correlated to a smaller chance of recidivism than receiving social benefits or being inactive. However, given our research design, it cannot be ruled out that the lower recidivism after participation in an ESF programme is attributable to other factors.