



# EMPLOYMENT OF INDIVIDUALS AFTER RELEASE FROM ILLINOIS PRISONS: EMPLOYEE CHARACTERISTICS, OCCUPATIONS, AND WAGES



# **Employment of Individuals After Release from Illinois Prisons: Employee Characteristics, Occupations, and Wages**

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Introduction**

In 2022, over 16,000 persons exited prison in Illinois (Illinois Department of Corrections, n.d.-b). Employment is a major factor in successful community reintegration after prison release. Not only is it important to formerly incarcerated individuals, families, and their communities it is also associated with lower rates of recidivism (Berger-Gross, 2022; Flatt & Jacobs, 2018; Nally, et al., 2014; Yang, 2017). However, formerly incarcerated persons face many barriers to employment, such as stigma by employers; restrictions or prohibition to some jobs because of criminal records; lack of or gaps in work experience; and deficits in human capital, such as inadequate education, training, or vocational skills (Pogrebin et al., 2014). These barriers keep the formerly incarcerated from being competitive in the labor market. Even years after release, these individuals consistently have low rates of employment (Looney & Turner, 2018). The jobs that are available are often low skill, seasonal, temporary, and part-time. They provide low wages and limited, or no, benefits. While most individuals struggle to obtain employment post-release, certain groups are at a greater disadvantage because of race and gender (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010; Western and Sirois, 2019). Both race and gender affect earnings and employment (Carson, et al., 2021; Couloute & Kopf, 2018). Prison and community reentry programs can help increase individuals' probability of post-release employment. However, such programs are not sufficiently available to serve all who need them.

In order to examine employment following release from Illinois prisons, ICJIA collaborated with the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) and the Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES). We sought to answer the following main research questions:

- What types of employment did formerly incarcerated individuals obtain after release?
- What were the employment and wage trends of individuals released from prison in recent years?
- What were the characteristics of those who obtained and did not obtain employment?
- What individual characteristics and employment sector impacted length of employment and earnings?

### **Methodology**

We matched individual IDOC state prison data to IDES state employment data. This research was approved by the ICJIA Institutional Review Board. Our sample was made up of 4,430 persons who exited prison in 2018, and we tracked their employment through 2021. Most of the individuals in the sample were Black males with an average age of 37.

We ran descriptive statistics, t-tests, and linear regressions to examine employment patterns and outcomes. The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 23.0. We performed independent sample t-tests for those who were employed to examine differences in mean length of employment and mean wages based on industry. We performed linear regression to examine differences in sample characteristics and length of employment and wages following prison release.

Study limitations include the absence of some variables of interest, such as vocational program participation and education levels of releasees. We also were unable to know whether individuals had non-taxed or out-of-state employment or if they were unable to work due to jail stays, disability, or death. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on employment during two of the years that we examined (2020 and 2021). This impact means our trends will vary from previous or subsequent years of data.

## **Discussion of Key Findings**

### ***Formerly Incarcerated Had High Unemployment***

Following release from prison people in the sample had a relatively high unemployment rate of 45.5%. This rate was higher than both the state rate and rates found in prior studies (Couloute & Kopf, 2018; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.-a). A possible explanation is that COVID-19 affected rates of employment/unemployment in the United States beginning in early 2020 (U.S. Department of Labor Statistics, 2021). At present, however, the United States is experiencing a lower unemployment rate than when COVID-19 took hold in 2020 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). This increased demand for workers could potentially benefit the formerly incarcerated. As prior research has indicated, ex-prisoners and their employment have been sensitive to labor market conditions and job availability upon release (Schnepel, 2018; Yang, 2017).

### ***Individuals Had Relatively Low Earnings Post-Release***

The average income for those employed in our sample was \$8,998 annually, which is lower than the 2021 individual federal poverty level (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.-b). Low earnings for formerly incarcerated persons have been found in prior studies (Looney & Turner, 2018; Western, 2018). In our sample, the hourly rate, as calculated by our team, was \$10.42 per hour, which was lower than the state of Illinois rate of \$11 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.-c). Other researchers have also found low hourly rates (Visher et al., 2008). In addition, findings from prior studies have led researchers to conclude that employment is vital to meet basic needs and to lower recidivism for the formerly incarcerated (Flatt & Jacobs, 2018; Nally, et al., 2014; Yang, 2017). Coupled with such findings our evidence indicates a need for increased in-prison educational and vocational programming along with a reduction in socially held stigma and unnecessary background checks (Finlay, 2009).

### ***Persons who Were Black Experienced Lower Employment and Wages Than Those of Other Races***

In our study a higher proportion of Black persons than persons of other races were unemployed. They also had lower wages after release. Such disparities have been found in prior literature (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010; Western and Sirois, 2019). Prior literature also has indicated that challenges to employment following prison were greater for Black persons (Pager et al., 2009; Wheelock & Uggen, 2005; Western & Sirois, 2019) due in part to a lack of employment opportunities (Clear et al., 2003; Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Roberts, 2004; Sampson &

Loeffler, 2010). Therefore, there is a need for investment in prisoner reentry and support services (Reichert, 2019; Travis et al., 2001; Visher & Farrell, 2005).

### ***Women Worked More but Earned Lower Wages***

Following prison, women in our sample were slightly more likely to be employed than men, but they earned less. This finding is consistent with prior research into women's employment after incarceration (Carson, et al., 2021; Couloute & Kopf, 2018). Researchers have found, for example, that formerly incarcerated women and men encountered similar barriers to post-release employment, such as a lack of education and job skills and overall limited career opportunities. However, in this study, women had very different experiences and responsibilities both prior to incarceration and after release. Women had much higher rates of prior physical or emotional abuse, which can create obstacles to employment and contribute to their having to live in poverty. In addition, since formerly incarcerated women were more likely than men to be primary caretakers for minor children, they faced this additional obstacle to post-release employment (Seville, 2008). As one government report advised, women should be supported to find employment, learn skills, and gain other supports, such as childcare (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2020). For women in the IDOC system only one work release center is available. This center has demonstrated success in improving employment outcomes for women post-release, thereby suggesting the need for and feasibility of its potential expansion (Jung & LaLonde, 2019).

### ***More Employment and Higher Pay in Certain Sectors***

The Bureau of Labor Statistics categorizes work into two supersectors: service providing and goods-producing. Of the people in our sample who were employed, over 91% were employed in the service providing supersector as opposed to 32% in the goods-producing supersector. (Some persons worked more than one job across supersectors during the time period studied.) Of those working in the service providing supersector, the largest proportion - over one-third - worked in the "administrative support and waste management and remediation services" sector. During the COVID-19 pandemic, however, this sector had a sharp decline, which may have affected, or continue to affect, formerly incarcerated workers (U.S. Department of Labor Statistics, 2021). Although typically offering low wages, jobs in this sector can be attained by those with limited skills; and employees in this sector are projected to remain in demand (Illinois Department of Employment Security, n.d.). Overall, the overarching service providing supersector employed a large majority of our sample but those who worked in the goods-producing supersector worked longer and had higher wages. Goods-producing industries include agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting; mining; construction; and manufacturing. The highest earnings for our sample were in educational services followed by manufacturing, construction, management, and wholesale trade. Again, considering current low unemployment and high demand for workers within the goods-producing fields, employers may be extra willing to hire formerly incarcerated persons (James, 2023). Job training prior to or after release can help the formerly incarcerated obtain promotions and higher wages (James, 2023) and could orient them towards sectors which demonstrate a willingness to both hire and pay well.

### ***IDOC Supportive Programs were Associated with Better Employment Outcomes***

We found that participants in IDOC Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center and Illinois work release centers were more likely to have longer employment and higher wages post-release. Prior research on similar work release programs has revealed positive outcomes for participants, such as increased employment and hours worked. This finding suggests that these programs are viable substitutes for traditional correctional programming and ought to be expanded if resources allow (Duwe, 2013; Jung, 2014; Visser et al., 2004). Further research should be conducted to best determine their potential for aiding in successful reentry.

### **Conclusion**

Our sample of 4,430 persons released from IDOC in 2018 had high unemployment and low earnings when tracked through 2021. We found additional employment and wage disparities for Black persons and women. The largest proportion of workers, nearly one-third, worked in administrative support and waste management and remediation services. Those working in the education sector made the highest wages. Those who worked in goods-producing industries rather than service industries had higher wages and longer lengths of employment. Based on our findings, the state as well as local communities should invest in reentry support. Fortunately, the state is experiencing low unemployment and a demand for workers, so this may be a timely opportunity to assist formerly incarcerated individuals with job attainment. Jobs will help them pay for basic expenses for themselves and their families as well as reduce recidivism and taxpayer costs.

## **Section 1: Introduction**

At the end of 2021, the U.S. prison population was over 1.2 million (Carson, 2022), and 862,000 persons were on parole at the end of 2020 (Kaeble, 2021). In Illinois in 2020 over 16,600 individuals exited prison and served on parole (or mandatory supervised release) (Illinois Department of Corrections, n.d.-b). For those leaving prison, the reentry process into the community is important to explore because nearly 95% of individuals in prison will eventually be released (Carson, 2022). Many face significant barriers upon release, including difficulties in gaining stable employment with strong earning potential. Barriers to employment for the formerly incarcerated can include social stigma, restrictions or prohibitions on jobs because of a criminal record, lack of prior work experience, and insufficient education qualifications (Pogrebin et al., 2014). For context, a nationwide study on the incomes of individuals released from prison revealed that in the first year after release only 55% of individuals had any job earnings (Looney & Turner, 2018). Another study noted that one-third of individuals in prison reported unemployment prior to incarceration (Rampey et al., 2016); and other research suggests that as many as 36% of prisoners lack a high school education (Davis et al., 2013). Overall, a lack of employment contributes to recidivism.

Participation in vocational training and services during sentenced terms can assist individuals in finding and maintaining employment upon release and thereby reduce their likelihood of recidivism. In one study, as many as 70% of individuals in prison reported a desire to enroll in an education or skills training program, yet only 23% reported participation in a program while incarcerated (Rampey et al., 2016). Another study established that those who participated in prison education programming had 43% lower odds of recidivating than those who did not participate (Davis et al., 2013). The same study noted that individuals who participated in either an academic or vocational program while incarcerated were 13% more likely to find employment after release than individuals who did not participate in any programming.

### **Current Study**

As limited studies exist on employment after release from Illinois prisons, ICJIA in collaboration with the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) and the Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES), completed an updated examination of employment trends after release from prison. The study aimed to better understand employment outcomes of individuals released from Illinois prisons.

The research study attempted to answer the following main research questions:

- What types of employment did formerly incarcerated individuals obtain after release?
- What were the employment and wage trends of individuals released from prison in recent years?
- What were the characteristics of those who obtain and do not obtain employment?
- What individual characteristics and employment sector impacted length of employment and earnings?



## **Section 2: Brief Summary of the Literature**

Previously incarcerated individuals concur that obtaining a job (finding employment) is important, but many may struggle when returning to the community to do so (Visher, et al., 2008). Challenges are particularly pertinent for persons of color. They tend to have worse employment and earning outcomes after prison than White individuals do. While most research focuses on men, research on women has found they too fare poorly in the labor market after release. They also earn less than their male counterparts. Educational and work release programs have been shown to increase employment prospects for returning individuals, but not everyone participates in or has access to these programs (Duwe, 2018). Employment can be a key component in reducing recidivism. Evidence shows that those who secure employment post-prison recidivate at lower rates than those who do not (Berger-Gross, 2022; Flatt & Jacobs, 2018; Nally, et al., 2014; Yang, 2017).

### **Prior Research on Post-Prison Employment in Illinois**

In the early 2000s, the Urban Institute conducted interviews to examine employment after release from Illinois prisons (Kachnowski, 2005). Of those studied, 44% had been employed for at least one week in the 4-8 months following release. They worked mostly in construction/labor, maintenance, and warehouse work/shipping. In addition, Alper and colleagues (n.d.) examined employment two years following release from IDOC (2013 to 2015) and found 39% had some form of employment. These researchers, however, did not examine job type. In another study, researchers at the Urban Institute examined employment rates of men released from Illinois, Ohio, and Texas prisons (Visher, et al. 2008). They found that eight months after release, 65% had been employed at some point, but less than 50% were employed at the time of the interview. Individuals most commonly worked in construction/general labor, maintenance, and food service. Their median monthly income was \$700. Lastly, Jung (2014) evaluated Illinois' prison work release centers and found participants earned on average \$1,200 per quarter after release (in 2003 dollars). This amount was below the federal poverty line for a single individual that year (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.-a).

### **Employment Rates After Prison**

In a study of employment outcomes of individuals released from federal prison in 2010 researchers found that employment did not exceed 40% in any quarter of the four years studied. By the 16<sup>th</sup> quarter only 35% of the population were employed (Carson, et al. 2021). The majority were employed in administrative support, waste management, remediation services, accommodation and food services, construction, manufacturing, and retail trade. In the first quarter after release individuals earned \$3,500 on average per quarter. Median earnings increased to \$6,000 per quarter by the 16<sup>th</sup> quarter. A different study examined individuals returning to Chicago, Cleveland, and Houston. In this study 46% of the individuals were employed seven months after release (Visher, et al., 2010). Finally, Looney & Turner (2018) studied over 2.9 million releasees and found only 55% of individuals reported earnings in the first calendar year after release. Average annual earnings were \$13,890, with only 20% of those studied earning more than \$15,000 per year.

Prior to entering prison, employment rates are typically low. However, immediately following release employment rates are commonly higher than pre-prison levels. In a study of women returning from prison in Illinois, researchers found that employment rates exceeded 30% after release from prison, higher than the women's pre-prison levels. Over time, however, their post-release employment rates declined (Lalonde & Cho, 2008). In other states like Washington, the probability of employment increased post-release but returned to pre-prison levels after 6 to 8 months (Pettit & Lyons, 2009). This trend appears to be present for federal prisoners, as well (Carson, et al., 2021). This positive effect on employment could, in part, be due to state and federal parole both sharing employment conditions and requirements (Harding et al., 2018). Individuals may be required to obtain employment per the conditions of their parole, causing a rise in employment rates immediately after prison.

### **Employment by Demographics**

Some individuals fare better than others with employment after release. Western and Sirois (2019) examined inequity in the labor market and found the odds of employment and earnings after release were higher for White individuals than for Black and Hispanic individuals. Researchers at Pew Charitable Trusts (2010) found incarceration decreased total earnings by 2% for White men, 6% for Hispanic men, and 9% for Black men. A national study revealed formerly incarcerated Black women were overrepresented in part-time and occasional jobs (Couloute & Kopf, 2018). Of individuals released from federal prisons, women were consistently employed at higher rates but earned less than men (Carson, et al., 2021). Women's earnings increased 59% during the four-year follow-up period while males' earnings increased 72%. Couloute & Kopf (2018) found that formerly incarcerated Black women had the highest unemployment rate followed by Black men, White women, and White men.

### **Prison Educational and Vocational Programming**

Educational and work release programs have been shown to decrease recidivism and increase employment opportunities for participants. A Rand Corporation study reported that the odds of obtaining employment was 13% higher for those who participated in correctional education than for those who did not (Davis, et al. 2014). Duwe & Clark (2014) found that obtaining a post-secondary degree during incarceration had no effect on hourly wages but did positively affect total hours worked and total wages, mostly because of increased hours worked. In their study, those who earned a degree worked 176 more hours and earned \$2,649 more in wages during the year studied (2007-2008) than those who did not.

A work release and a reentry program called EMPLOY in Minnesota has been found to both increase employment obtainment and wages for enrollees (Duwe, 2013). Work release participants were eight times more likely to find employment after release, while EMPLOY participants were 72% more likely than non-participants to have employment after release. EMPLOY participants earned \$5,400 more on average during the three years studied, and work release participants earned \$4,800 more on average during the four-year period examined. Programs that offered a continuum of service delivery from prison to the community showed the most promise in reducing recidivism and increasing employment after release (Duwe, 2018).

## **Employment and Recidivism**

Individuals approaching release believed that obtaining employment would help prevent them from returning to prison (Visser, et al., 2010). In a study of individuals released from Indiana prisons, education and employment were the two most important predictors of recidivism (Nally, et al. 2014). Those who were unemployed or less educated were more likely to return to prison. Berger-Gross (2022) reported that in North Carolina individuals who found employment in the two years after release were over 26% less likely to return to prison than those in the same cohort who were unemployed. The highest paid individuals in the group were half as likely to return to prison than those who were unemployed. Western & Sirois (2019) reported re-incarceration was strongly associated with unemployment and low earnings. A study examining individuals released in Ohio revealed that any engagement with legal employment, consistent or not, reduced the likelihood of recidivism (Kolbeck, et al., 2022). The same study indicated that employment provided the same protective effect against recidivism for both black and white individuals returning from prison.

Some research has examined how variance in employment quality or earnings affected recidivism. For example, Agan & Makowsky (2018) found increasing minimum wages by an average of \$0.50 (2007-2009) led to a decrease in the probability that individuals would return to prison within one year of release. In another study, people released from Michigan prisons with higher quality employment were the least likely to return to prison (LaBriola, 2020). Employment quality was measured by earnings, and higher earnings were associated with higher quality jobs. Higher earning employment could potentially reduce engagement in crime because there would no longer be a financial incentive. That is, individuals would no longer struggle to meet needs once they became engaged in formal employment that paid well. Apart from earnings, employment may also serve as an informal social control. According to one study, it offered newly formed prosocial relationships, a stable routine, and - especially important - higher quality job settings (Wright & Cullen, 2004).

### Section 3: Methodology

In this study, we matched individual state prison data to state employment data. The study was approved by the ICJIA Institutional Review Board.

#### Sample

Our sample was made up of 4,430 persons who exited prison in 2018. Most of the sample were Black males with an average age of 37 (*Mdn* = 35 years old).

**Table 1**  
*Demographics of Sample*

	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Male	4,077	92.0
Female	353	8.0
Race/ethnicity		
Black	2,477	55.9
White	1,497	33.8
Latinx	422	9.5
Asian	17	0.4
Other or multiple race/ethnicity	9	0.2
Unknown	4	0.1
Age		
0-22	220	5.0
23-45	3,134	70.9
46-68	1,044	23.6
69+	23	0.5
Mean ( <i>SD</i> )	37.2 (11.3)	
Prison security level		
Minimum	1,104	24.9
Medium	2,023	45.7
Maximum	1,000	22.6
Multi-level	299	6.7
Unknown	4	0.1

*Note.* The sample was 4,430 persons who exited prison in 2018. Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding. *SD* = standard deviation

#### Data Sources

##### *State Corrections Data*

We used IDOC exit files provided to ICJIA for data analysis and research purposes. Each incarcerated individual is assigned a unique IDOC number upon initial admission to an IDOC facility that is kept for subsequent IDOC incarcerations. Exit files also contain information on demographics, offense convictions, and dates of entry and exit.

## ***Employment Data***

ICJIA entered into an agreement with IDES to obtain employment and earnings data for the sample. IDES's Wage Information System's Employment Tracking Database stores data for state-taxed employees, including names of employers, wages, employment periods (in four quarters per year), and employment sector category. Employment sectors are based on 20 sectors categorized in the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023).

## **Procedure**

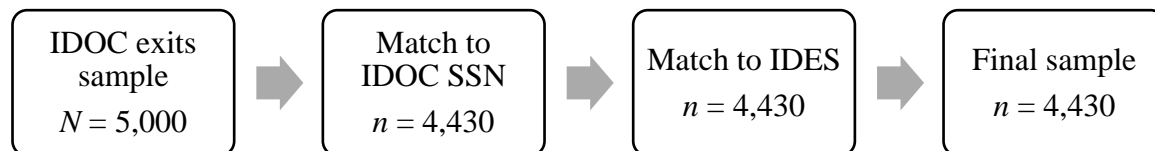
In November 2021, we randomly pulled 5,000 Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) exits from 2018 from the full number of 24,397 prison exits in 2018 (Illinois Department of Corrections, n.d.-b). ICJIA researchers have access to annual exit files provided by IDOC for research purposes. Personnel in IDOC's Information Technology department matched each file to social security numbers (SSN). We removed 570 individuals from the sample because 563 had unknown SSN and seven had a discharge reason of "deceased."

We entered into a data sharing agreement with IDES to match our sample to IDES data based on name and social security number. SSNs were used to link the sample to their employment data. In February 2023, we provided IDES with a password-protected Microsoft Excel file with first names, last names, social security numbers, and a unique ID number for 4,430 individuals in the sample group for cross-matching. IDES returned the response file to ICJIA researchers (Figure 1).

The data included employment periods (in four quarters per year), wages, and employment sector. Of the 2,411 releasees with at least one quarter with reported wages, 20 did not have sector level NAICS data available.

**Figure 1**

*Flow of Sample and Data Matching Process*



## **Analytic Strategy**

We ran descriptive statistics, t-tests, and linear regressions to examine employment patterns and outcomes. The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 23.0.

To estimate hourly wages, we used average quarters worked per group of interest (e.g., employed males, employed females, total sample). The standard 40-hour work week amounts to 160 hours per month. One quarter is roughly 3 months of a year and constitutes 480 hours total. We then multiplied the total number of working hours in a quarter by the average number of quarters

employed (per group) and divided the total average wages by the number of working hours. This outcome produced a more accurate estimate of hourly wage than simply dividing the total wages earned by the total number of working hours for the entire follow-up period. It is more accurate because it allows for persons who were not employed for the entire duration of 12 quarters (3 years).

### ***T-tests***

We performed independent sample t-tests to examine differences based on industry supersector in the mean length of employment and the mean wages of those employed. We used NAICS supersector and sector categories (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.-b). In the goods-producing supersector, component sectors include natural resources and mining, construction, and manufacturing). In the service providing supersector, sectors include trade, transportation, and utilities; information, financial activities, professional and business services; education and health services, leisure and hospitality, and other services except public administration. Government jobs are in neither supersector. We dichotomized those who worked in the service industry only (no work in the goods producing industry) and those who did not (1 = yes, 0 = no).

### ***Regression Analyses***

For linear regression, dependent variables were length of employment and wages following prison release. The independent variables included gender, race/ethnicity, age at prison exit, prison facility, work release center participation, and industry type. Regarding work release centers, IDOC operates four such centers called Adult Transition Centers (ATCs). They allow individuals to obtain employment while serving out the end of their prison sentence (20 Illinois Admin. Code § 455, 2022). We also examined individuals who were or were not inmates at IDOC's Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center. Kewanee is a facility for males with one to four years left on their sentence which offers educational and job readiness services, as well as cognitive behavioral therapy. We sought to examine whether its unique enhanced services might have affected more successful community reentry (Illinois Department of Corrections, n.d.-a).

We dichotomized variables of participant characteristics including gender (1 = male, 0 = female); race (1 = White, 0 = Other race/ethnicity); age at IDOC exit (1 = 18-35 years old, 0 = 36 or older); Kewanee (1 = yes, 0 = no); ATC participant (1 = yes, 0 = no).

### ***Study Limitations***

There were limitations to this study. First, although requested from IDOC, we were unable to obtain information about correctional vocational and educational programming, programming that may have influenced employment post-release. Second, we were unable to know about any non-taxed employment or employment in other states besides Illinois. Third, we could not guard against individuals possible sharing SSNs illegally, which could influence results. Fourth, we will not know if a person was unable to work due to a disability or unknown jail or prison stays. To overcome this limitation in future research, we have requested data from the U.S. Social Security Administration to attempt to obtain post-release Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits for those with a medical condition deemed a disability. Fifth, we did not know if

an individual in our sample died after release and if that was the reason for lack of employment. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic likely had an impact on employment during 2020 and 2021, which may be different from previous or subsequent years.

## Section 4: Findings

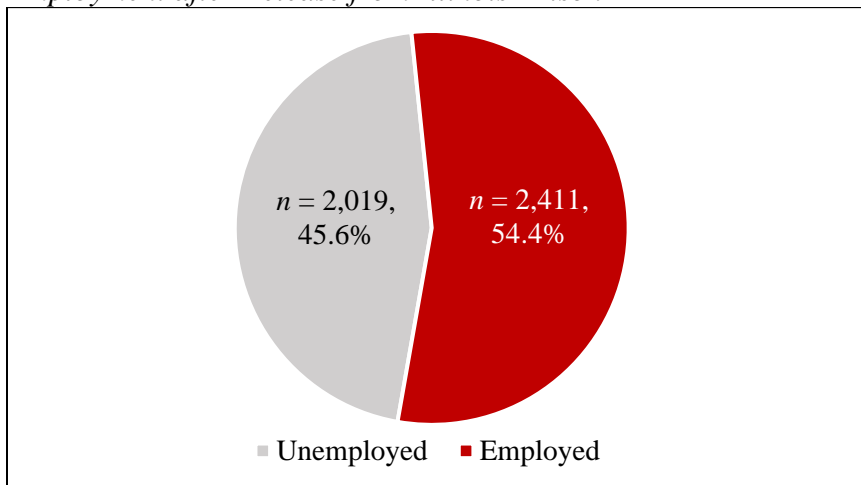
The following are findings describing our sample's employment and wages. Findings associate individuals' employment to job sector and demographics and present statistical differences in employment by demographics.

### Section 4.1: Employment and Wages

Of the almost 4,500 persons in our sample, 54%, a small majority, were employed (reported wages for at least one quarter) following release from an Illinois prison from 2019 to 2021 (Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

*Employment after Release from Illinois Prison*

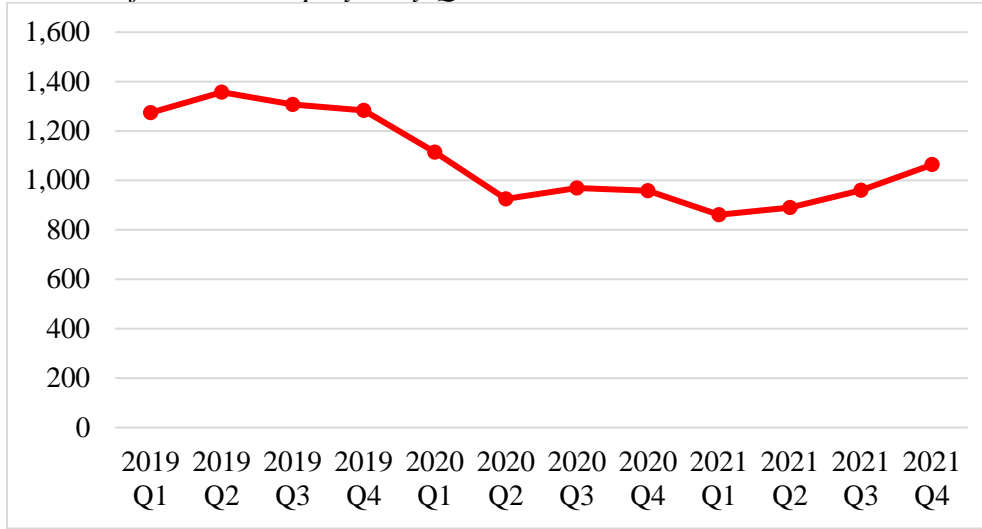


*Note.* Sample was 4,430 persons who exited an Illinois prison in 2018. Data source was Illinois Department of Corrections and Illinois Department of Employment Security.

### *Length of Employment*

We examined persons employed during any quarter during the time period. By quarter, the highest number of persons were employed in quarter 2 of 2019, two quarters after prison release in 2018 (Figure 3). However, the COVID-19 pandemic likely affected employment as the Illinois stay at home order due to the pandemic was effective starting quarter 1 on March 21, 2020 (State of Illinois, 2020).



**Figure 3***Number of Persons Employed by Quarter over Time*

*Note.* Sample was made up of 2,411 persons who exited an Illinois prison in 2018 with at least one quarter of reported wages starting in Q1 2019. Data sources were Illinois Department of Corrections and Illinois Department of Employment Security.

Based on the full sample, the largest percentage of employed persons worked just one quarter (Table 2). For the full sample, the average employment length was 2.9 quarters out of the 12 quarters examined ( $SD = 3.8$ ). But based on only those who were employed, the average length of employment was 5.4 quarters ( $SD = 3.7$ ), or 44.8 % of the time period examined. Also based on only those who were employed, 10% worked all 12 quarters.

**Table 2***Total Quarters Worked After Prison Release*

Quarters	<i>n</i>	%
0	2,019	45.6
1	386	8.7
2	331	7.5
3	255	5.8
4	235	5.3
5	172	3.9
6	180	4.1
7	153	3.5
8	133	3.0
9	117	2.6
10	99	2.2
11	109	2.5
12	241	5.4

*Note.* Full sample was 4,430 persons who exited an Illinois prison in 2018. Data sources were Illinois Department of Corrections and Illinois Department of Employment Security.

### ***Earned Wages***

Over the 3-year period examined, the average yearly wage for the total sample of releasees ( $n = 4,430$ ) was \$14,692 with a standard deviation of \$30,700. Additionally, half of all the releasees' total reported earnings were \$459 per year or less, and 75% were \$13,735 per year or less.

Of those who were employed at least one quarter during the three-year period ( $n = 2,411$ ), half reported annual earnings less than \$10,985, and 75% reported less than \$36,096 per year. The average income for those working at least one quarter was \$8,998 annually or \$10.42 per hour.

Table 3 displays the wages of employed releasees by measures of central tendency—mean, median, and mode.

**Table 3**

***Wages of those Employed after Prison Release***

Measure of central tendency	Wages
Min, max	\$15.00, \$275,721
Mean ( <i>SD</i> )	\$26,995 (\$37,415)
Median	\$10,985
Mode	\$113

*Note.* Sample was 2,411 persons who exited an Illinois prison in 2018 with at least one quarter of reported wages. Data sources were Illinois Department of Corrections and Illinois Department of Employment Security. Wages rounded to nearest dollar amount. *SD* = standard deviation

Table 4 displays the mean wages of those employed at least one quarter during the time period examined. The highest wages per quarter was in quarter 4, 2021.

**Table 4**

***Employment and Mean Wages by Quarter***

Year	Quarter	<i>n</i>	%	Mean wages
2019	1	1,274	28.8	\$3,023.76
2019	2	1,357	30.6	\$3,292.90
2019	3	1,307	29.5	\$3,575.40
2019	4	1,283	29.0	\$3,743.85
2020	1	1,114	25.1	\$3,660.80
2020	2	925	20.9	\$4,007.73
2020	3	969	21.9	\$4,121.43
2020	4	958	21.6	\$4,474.40
2021	1	861	19.4	\$4,222.76
2021	2	890	20.1	\$4,665.50
2021	3	960	21.7	\$4,912.31
2021	4	1,064	24.0	\$5,030.85

*Note.* Sample was 2,411 persons who exited an Illinois prison in 2018 with at least one quarter of reported wages. Data sources were Illinois Department of Corrections and Illinois Department of Employment Security.

## Section 4.2 Employment by Job Sector

Of the people employed during the time period examined, 2,390 had sector levels specified in their records. Some people worked in more than one sector, and the average number of sectors for those who worked was 1.9 ( $SD = 1.1$ ). Proportionately, 47.6% worked in only one sector ( $n = 1,137$ ), 30% worked in two sectors ( $n = 717$ ), 13.7% in 3 sectors ( $n = 327$ ), and 8.7% in 4 or more sectors ( $n = 209$ ). The maximum number of sectors worked was eight ( $n = 3$ ). All told, persons were employed in anywhere from one to four different sectors within the same quarter, indicating incidences of holding multiple jobs.

The most common job sector was “administrative support and waste management and remediation services” (Table 5). In this sector, services were provided for such various industries and households as office administration, the hiring and placement of personnel, document preparation and clerical services, cleaning, and waste disposal. (U.S. Bureau of Labor, n.d.-c).

**Table 5**

*Number of Persons Employed by Sector Total Quarters Worked, and Mean Quarterly Wages*

Employment sector(s)	<i>n</i>	%	Total quarters worked	Mean quarterly wages
Administrative support and waste management and remediation services	1,555	35.1	6,293	\$2,409.95
Accommodation and food services	661	14.9	2,518	\$2,665.97
Manufacturing	567	12.8	2,414	\$6,933.45
Retail trade	312	7.0	941	\$3,609.73
Wholesale trade	232	5.2	737	\$6,075.46
Construction	220	5.0	923	\$6,860.84
Transportation and warehouse	219	4.9	695	\$6,275.67
Other services (except public administration)	143	3.2	478	\$4,433.98
Professional, scientific, and technical services	123	2.8	335	\$5,261.98
Health care and social assistance	61	1.4	252	\$3,638.67
Real estate and rental leasing	57	1.3	144	\$5,207.76
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	35	0.8	76	\$2,540.11
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting	33	0.7	87	\$4,020.78
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	18	0.4	71	\$5,596.24
Information	17	0.4	36	\$3,107.03

Finance and Insurance	11	0.2	36	\$2,830.33
Public administration and government	11	0.2	19	\$1,343.47
Management of companies, enterprises	8	0.2	31	\$6,832.10
Educational services	6	0.1	30	\$7,310.23
Utilities	1	0.0	2	\$2,273.50

*Note.* Sample was 2,391 persons who exited an Illinois prison in 2018 with at least one quarter reported wages and sector level data available. Data sources were Illinois Department of Corrections and Illinois Department of Employment Security.

### ***Differences in Employment by Supersector***

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, there are two industry supersectors—goods-producing and service providing. Table 6 compares length of employment and mean wages by supersector. In our sample, more persons worked in service providing industries (91.3% of workers) than in goods-producing industries (32.3% of workers). On average, those working in the goods-producing supersector during any quarter had longer employment (more quarters worked) than those working in the service providing supersector. Their mean wages were also higher. Those who worked solely in goods-producing sectors, although a smaller number, earned the highest mean wages.

**Table 6**

*Differences in Mean Quarters Worked, Mean Wages by Supersector*

	<i>n</i>	Mean quarters worked	Mean wages
Service industry			
Any quarter	2,181	5.4	\$45,130
Service only	1,639	4.6	\$18,374
Good industry			
Any quarter	779	7.0	\$24,561
Goods only	207	5.75	\$53,882
Both industries	572	7.49	\$41,963

*Note.* Sample was 2,391 persons who exited an Illinois prison in 2018 with at least one quarter reported wages and sector level data available. Data sources were Illinois Department of Corrections and Illinois Department of Employment Security.

For those who worked solely in service industries, we performed independent sample t-tests to compare their length of employment and wages with those who did not work in these industries. Between the two supersector groups the difference in the length of time worked (number of quarters) was statistically significant,  $t(1418.439) = -15.557, p < .01$ . So were wages between service industry workers and non-workers.  $t(1073.206) = -14.808, p < .01$ .

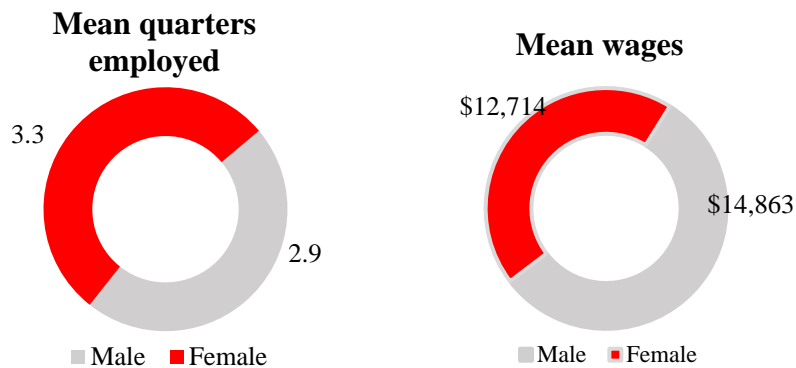
### Section 4.3: Employment by Demographics

#### *Gender*

In our sample, males earned 13.5 times more than females, respectively, \$60.6 million compared to \$4.5 million. Figure 4 displays details on employment length and wages by gender for the full sample during the time period examined. Included in Figure 4 are those who had no employment or wages. Males had higher average wages, although females worked more quarters.

**Figure 4**

*Employment and Wages of Full Sample by Gender*

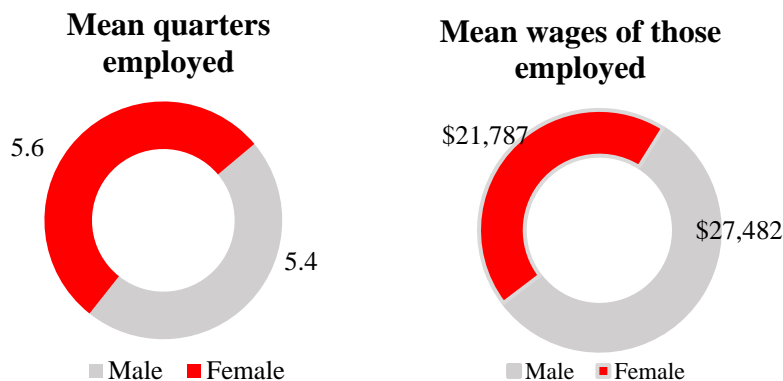


*Note.* Sample was 4,430 persons who exited an Illinois prison in 2018. Data sources were Illinois Department of Corrections and Illinois Department of Employment Security. Wages were rounded to the nearest dollar.

According to reported wages for those who worked at least one quarter, females also had slightly higher rates of employment than males, respectively 58.4% compared to 54.1%. Figure 5 depicts employment length and wages for only those employed.

**Figure 5**

*Employment and Wages of the Employed by Gender*



*Note.* Sample was 2,411 persons who exited an Illinois prison in 2018 with at least one quarter of reported wages. Data sources were Illinois Department of Corrections and Illinois Department of Employment Security.

Table 7 presents details on wages by gender based on all males and females in the sample. It also specifies some details for only those who were employed during the time period.

**Table 7**

*Wages Post-Prison by Gender*

Measure of central tendency	Wages
Full sample of males	
Min, max	\$0, \$275,721
Mean ( <i>SD</i> )	\$14,863 (\$31,207)
Median	\$448
Sample of employed males	
Min, max	\$15, \$275,721
Mean ( <i>SD</i> )	\$27,482 (\$38,133)
Median	\$11,132
Full sample of females	
Min, max	\$0.00, \$146,068
Mean ( <i>SD</i> )	\$12,714 (\$24,036)
Median	\$589
Sample of employed females	
Min, max	\$45, \$146,068
Mean ( <i>SD</i> )	\$21,787 (\$28,167)
Median	\$9,719

*Note.* As specified in the table rows, sample size was either 4,077 males and 353 females who exited an Illinois prison in 2018 or 2,205 males and 206 females with at least one quarter reported wages. Data sources were Illinois Department of Corrections and Illinois Department of Employment Security. Wages were rounded to the nearest dollar amount.

As described in Section 4.4 of this report, gender was not found to be a statistically significant factor affecting employment length or wages.

***Race and Ethnicity***

Table 8 displays details on employment and wages by race for the full sample during the time period examined. That is, it includes those who had no employment or wages. Black individuals had the highest unemployment rate, but other race(s) or unknown race had the lowest mean wages.

**Table 8***Employment and Wages of Full Sample by Race and Ethnicity*

Race/ ethnicity	<i>n</i>	Total wages	Mean total wages ( <i>SD</i> )	Employed	Mean quarters employed ( <i>SD</i> )	Mean sectors employed	Mean age in years at exit ( <i>SD</i> )
White	1,497	\$26,288,102	\$17,561 (\$35,931)	55.2%	3.0 (3.9)	1.0 (1.2)	37.8 (11)
Black	2,477	\$29,394,432	\$11,867 (\$25,065)	53.3%	2.8 (3.7)	0.93 (1.2)	37 (11.5)
Latinx	422	\$8,792,211	\$20,835 (\$37,439)	58.3%	3.5 (4.2)	1.1 (1.2)	36.6 (11.2)
Asian	17	\$458,081	\$26,946 (\$51,940)	47.1%	3.4 (5)	0.7 (0.8)	38.6 (11.1)
Other race(s)/ unknown	17	\$152,332	\$8,961 (\$13,840)	58.8%	2.6 (2.9)	1.1 (1.1)	38.4 (11.9)
Total	4,430	\$65,085,158	\$14,692 (\$30,700)	54.4%	2.9 (3.8)	1.0 (1.2)	37.2 (11.3)

Note. Sample was 4,430 persons who exited an Illinois prison in 2018. Data sources were Illinois Department of Corrections and Illinois Department of Employment Security. Wages were rounded to the nearest dollar amount. *SD* = standard deviation

Of those employed, Black persons had lower mean annual and hourly wages than other races. Table 9 displays details on employment and wages by race for only those employed during the time period examined.

**Table 9***Employment and Wages of Employed Persons by Race and Ethnicity*

Race/ ethnicity	<i>n</i>	Mean total wages ( <i>SD</i> )	Mean annual wage	Mean hourly wage	Mean quarters employed ( <i>SD</i> )	Mean sectors employed	Mean age at exit ( <i>SD</i> )
White	827	\$31,787 (\$43,422)	\$10,596	\$12.04	5.5 (3.7)	1.8 (1)	35.7 (9.6)
Black	1,320	\$22,259 (\$30,782)	\$7,420	\$9.10	5.1 (3.6)	1.7 (1)	35.9 (10.5)
Latinx	246	\$35,741 (\$43,286)	\$11,914	\$12.21	6.1 (3.9)	1.8 (1.1)	33.9 (9)
Other race(s)/ unknown	18	\$33,912 (\$48,042)	\$11,304	\$12.40	5.7 (3.9)	1.6 (0.8)	35.2 (7.5)
Total	2,411	\$26,995 (\$37,415)	\$8,998	\$10.42	5.4 (3.7)	1.8 (1)	35.6 (10)

Note. Sample was 2,411 persons who exited an Illinois prison in 2018 with at least one quarter of reported wages. Data sources were Illinois Department of Corrections and Illinois Department of Employment Security. Wages were rounded to the nearest dollar amount with the exception of hourly wage. *SD* = standard deviation

As explained further in Section 4.4 of this report, race was a statistically significant factor in terms of employment wages. Specifically, after prison release White persons were more likely to have higher wages than persons of other races.



## Section 4.4: Differences in Employment by Demographics

We ran linear regression to examine how differences in individuals' characteristics may have affected length of employment (total quarters worked) after prison release (Table 10). We found that the persons more likely to have longer employment were younger than age 36, were IDOC Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center participants and were IDOC ATC participants.

**Table 10**

*Linear Regression of Characteristics of Sample and Length of Employment*

Characteristic	Employment length					<i>p</i>
	$\beta$	B	<i>SE</i>	95% CI		
				<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
Gender (1=male)	.018	.142	.122	-.097	.380	.245
Race/ethnicity (1=White)	-.025	-.349	.212	-.766	.067	.100
Age (1=18-35 years old)	.066	.499	.114	.276	.723	.000**
Kewanee (1=yes)	.041	2.145	.774	.627	3.663	.006**
ATC participant (1=yes)	.057	1.348	.352	.658	2.038	.000**

*Note.* Full sample was 4,430 persons who exited an Illinois prison in 2018. Data sources were Illinois Department of Corrections and Illinois Department of Employment Security. Kewanee is IDOC's Life Skills Re-Entry Center; ATC is IDOC's Adult Transition Centers. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

We also ran linear regression to examine likely effects of individuals' characteristics on wages earned following release from prison (Table 11). We found that White individuals were more likely to have higher wages than those of other races. Additionally, participants in IDOC Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center and IDOC ATCs were more likely to have higher wages than non-participants.

**Table 11**

*Linear Regression of Characteristics of Sample and Wages*

Wages						
Characteristic	$\beta$	B	SE	95% CI		p
				LL	UL	
Gender (1=male)	.029	3313.553	1716.001	-50.668	6677.773	.054
Race/ethnicity (1=White)	.069	4489.458	983.237	2561.821	6417.094	.000**
Age (1=18-35 years old)	-.006	-363.785	920.598	-2168.617	1441.047	.693
Kewanee (1=yes)	.057	23930.613	6254.777	11668.121	36193.104	.000**
ATC participant (1=yes)	.054	10162.438	2841.698	4591.289	15733.588	.000**

*Note.* Full sample was 4,430 persons who exited an Illinois prison in 2018. Data sources were Illinois Department of Corrections and Illinois Department of Employment Security. Kewanee is IDOC's Life Skills Re-Entry Center; ATC is IDOC's Adult Transition Centers. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

## **Section 5: Discussion**

In this section, we report several key findings, discuss them further, and offer suggestions to improve the employment prospects of formerly incarcerated persons in Illinois. The authors recognize that some of the suggestions may require additional state resources. There are state agencies, organizations, and groups that can assist persons in reentry, including employment resources. The authors did not seek to share all potential resources in this report, but the Illinois Education Justice Project (2022) has attempted to compile a comprehensive resource directory for reentry support with a chapter devoted to employment.

### **The Formerly Incarcerated Had High Unemployment**

Our sample had an unemployment rate of 45.6%, while the overall unemployment rate for Illinois in 2021 was 6.1% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.-a). A national study found the unemployment rate for formerly incarcerated persons was 27% in 2008, the most recent year in which a study of a national sample exists. Illinois' rate was 1.7 times that rate (Couloute & Kopf, 2018). However, beginning in 2020, a year that we examined, there was record unemployment on account of the COVID-19 pandemic. We know the pandemic had an impact on employment for many workers throughout the state and likely affected our unemployment rate findings (U.S. Department of Labor Statistics, 2021). Since early March 2022, by contrast, Illinois has had a low unemployment rate (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023), and job training programs have been successful in aiding the formerly incarcerated in obtaining employment after prison release (James, 2023).

### **Individuals Had Relatively Low Earnings Post-Release**

In our study, the average income for those working for at least one quarter post-prison release was \$8,998 annually, a figure which is lower than the 2021 individual federal poverty level of \$12,880 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.-b). Our findings are supported by other research. For example, in the first year after prison in Boston, previously incarcerated individuals earned around \$6,000. These earnings were not enough to cover such basic necessities as food or clothing nor enough to afford rent for a median priced one-bedroom apartment (Western, 2018). In addition, a nationwide study of over 2.9 million formerly incarcerated individuals found average annual earnings amounted to about \$13,890 (Looney & Turner, 2018). In our study, we calculated income, which can be part-time or temporary, at an hourly wage of approximately \$10.42. For comparison's sake, the Illinois minimum wage was \$11 per hour in 2021 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.-c). An older study suggested the estimated average hourly rate of those leaving prison to be \$8 per hour throughout the U.S. (Visher et al., 2008). Obtaining employment and livable wages is not only necessary to meet an individual's or family's basic needs it also is important for self-sufficiency. Moreover, it contributes to lessened recidivism (Flatt & Jacobs, 2018; Nally, et al., 2014; Yang, 2017).

For various reasons, the characteristics of post-release employment are often temporary, low-wage, and without benefits like health insurance (Pogrebin et al., 2014). These findings illustrate the demand for educational and vocational programming for incarcerated populations, programming that can be offered and administered either during sentences or after release.

Additional support that is warranted includes targeted and coordinated efforts to reduce the stigmatizing of those who been formerly incarcerated, particularly stigmatizing carried out by employers. Support also includes eliminating the use of unnecessary or inappropriate background checks and making progress toward employers supporting, training, and hiring formerly incarcerated (Finlay, 2009).

### **Black Persons Experienced Lower Employment and Wages Than Those of Other Races**

A higher proportion of persons who were Black were unemployed post-release than persons of other races. Of those employed, Black individuals had lower mean annual and hourly wages. This employment and economic disparity post-prison has been found in prior literature (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010; Western and Sirois, 2019). In the United States, structural factors have led to mass incarceration of persons of color (Petit & Western, 2004; Wheelock & Uggen, 2005). Black persons are four times more likely to be incarcerated than White individuals and 2.5 times more likely than Latinx individuals (Pew Center on the States, 2009). For all individuals released from prison, challenges to employment are wide ranging and include social stigma, which has been found to be greater towards Black persons (Pager et al., 2009). They also include employment restrictions, employment history gaps, and a lack of social networks to assist with employment (Wheelock & Uggen, 2005; Western & Sirois, 2019). Persons of color returning to urban communities may face additional challenges due to lack of employment opportunities as well as a dearth of healthcare, housing, and behavioral health services (Clear et al., 2003; Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Roberts., 2004; Sampson & Loeffler, 2010). Therefore, to support those leaving prison and to improve reentry outcomes, including employment, investments in reentry services both in prison and during parole are needed along with investments through community organizations and groups, (Reichert, 2019; Travis et al., 2001; Visher & Farrell, 2005).

### **Women Worked More but Earned Lower Wages**

Following prison, women in our sample were slightly more likely to be employed than males yet earned less. In our sample, men earned 13.5 times more than women. This finding is consistent with prior research of women's employment after incarceration (Carson, et al., 2021; Couloute & Kopf, 2018). This disparity is seen for all women in the United States, not just formerly incarcerated women. The U.S. Department of Labor stated that women who work full-time earn 83.7% less annually than their men counterparts (Chun-Hoon, 2023). Furthermore, women leaving prison face additional challenges. A study of formerly incarcerated women found barriers to employment included prior abuse, lack of education and job skills, limited career options, responsibilities for supporting minor children, and poverty (Seville, 2008). The study also found Black women faced greater barriers due to stigma and bias based on race, gender, and the existence of a criminal record.

Women housed in and released from prisons should be supported through parole and community organizations. Support should help them find employment; learn interview skills; obtain interview-appropriate clothing; secure transportation for interviews; and, when hired, arrange daycare and obtain movement and time from parole obligations to work. Women also should be offered other social services and assistance that they need (Substance Abuse and Mental Health

Services Administration, 2020). IDOC has one work release center for women, but it houses fewer than 200 individuals. Participation in this center is associated with higher employment and earnings, suggesting a need for potential expansion of the program for incarcerated women (Jung & LaLonde, 2019).

### **More Employment and Higher Pay in Certain Sectors**

In our study, over one-third of those employed worked in the “administrative support and waste management and remediation services” sector. NAICS defines the sector as support for day-to-day operations of other organizations or households. Work may include office administration, personnel, document preparation, clerical services, security and surveillance services, cleaning, and waste disposal services (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.-c). Occupations include janitors and cleaners, laborers and freight, stock and material movers, landscaping and groundskeeping workers, office clerks, and security guards. In 2022, annual wages for those occupations ranged from \$31,690 to \$34,820. In 2022, not all in those occupations received benefits—27% had retirement benefits, 54% had health care, 67% had paid vacation, and 65% had paid sick leave. It should be noted that this sector had the sharpest decline early in the COVID-19 pandemic, which may have had repercussions particularly for formerly incarcerated workers (U.S. Department of Labor Statistics, 2021). Although relatively low paying and often lacking benefits, these jobs can be attained by those with low skills. Likewise, the number of and demand for these jobs are projected to grow. By 2026, it is projected that the Illinois labor market will have the largest expansion in the professional-business services and leisure hospitality sector, resulting in some 177,000 jobs (Illinois Department of Employment Security, n.d.).

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (n.d.-b) categorizes its sectors into two supersectors—service providing industries (of which administrative support and waste management and remediation services is a sector) and goods-producing industries. Of the persons who were employed in our sample, more worked in service providing industries than in goods-producing fields, 91.3% and 32.3%, respectively. Yet on average, goods-producing workers were employed longer and had higher wages. We found a significant difference in length of employment and wages between service industry workers and non-workers. Goods-producing includes agriculture; forestry; fishing and hunting; mining; construction; and manufacturing. Construction and landscaping jobs may pay well and be open to the formerly incarcerated, but depending on the job, these jobs could require training, apprenticeship, and licensing. Therefore, preparations to enter into those jobs should begin in prison and continue upon reentry into the community (Illinois Education Justice Project, 2022)

In our study, the highest earnings were in educational services followed by manufacturing, construction, management, and wholesale trade. Education includes jobs in schools, colleges, universities, and training centers (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.-d). By 2026, the largest employing industries in Illinois are projected to be professional-business services, health care and social assistance, leisure-hospitality, retail trade, and manufacturing. With unemployment currently low and a demand for workers rising, employers are more open to hiring formerly incarcerated persons (James, 2023). Job training and preparation are needed for employees to

secure these jobs and to obtain promotions to management, higher wages, and benefits (James, 2023).

### **IDOC Supportive Programs were Associated with Better Employment Outcomes**

We found IDOC Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center participants and ATC participants were more likely to have longer employment and higher wages. Both Kewanee and ATCs aim to provide more services and assistance to inmates to improve recidivism. Kewanee seeks to build life skills for successful reentry into the community by offering, for example, academic, vocational, clinical, and mental health services (Business and Professional People for Public Interest, n.d.; Illinois Department of Corrections, n.d.-a; John Howard Association of Illinois, 2018). ATCs offer a work release program for individuals nearing the end of their prison sentences (20 Illinois Admin. Code § 455 (2022)). Prior research on work release programs has found positive outcomes, suggesting they should be expanded (Duwe, 2013; Jung, 2014; Visser et al., 2004). Further evaluation of the two IDOC programs is needed to understand their operations, benefits, best practices, and areas for improvement. Prior evaluations of Illinois ATCs found positive outcomes, but the data represented individuals released 1995 to 2003 (Jung & LaLonde, 2019). ICJIA is currently conducting an outcome evaluation of Illinois ATCs. In terms of the IDOC vocational programming offered by Kewanee, evidence shows plans for an evaluation, but no evaluations have been made public to date (Harvard Kennedy School, n.d.).

## **Section 6: Conclusion**

In our study, we matched Illinois prison exit records with state employment records. We examined a random sample of 4,430 persons who exited prison in 2018 and tracked their employment through 2021. We found formerly incarcerated persons had high unemployment and low wages. There were additional disparities for Black persons and women. Evidence revealed some differences in employment and wages by industry sector. The largest proportion of workers worked in administrative support and waste management and remediation services. The education sector provided the highest wages, and those working in goods-producing industries were employed longer and had higher wages than service providing workers. The state should invest in vocational and educational programming and reentry support for those incarcerated and those released into the community. Community organizations and groups also play a role in supporting individuals who have been formerly incarcerated. Furthermore, we should be mindful of barriers and attuned to potential growth and demand in certain types of jobs and industries. Fortunately, because the state is experiencing low unemployment and a demand for workers, employers today may be willing to hire formerly incarcerated persons. As stated by Korzenik, (2022), “Advocates for hiring people with criminal records have traditionally focused on the considerable societal benefits: safer communities, stronger families, reduced racial disparity in economic outcomes, better use of taxpayer funds.”

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