

Submission to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on Social Reintegration of Persons Released from Detention and Persons Subjected to Non-Custodial Measures

March 2025

Fair Trials

Fair Trials is an international NGO that campaigns globally for fairness, due process, and equal treatment in our criminal justice systems. Our team of independent experts exposes threats to justice through original research and identifies practical changes to fix them. We advocate for better laws, support strategic litigation, work to reform policy, and develop international standards and best practices. We do this by supporting local movements for reform and building partnerships with lawyers, experts, academics, and other NGOs. We are the only international NGO that focuses exclusively on the right to a fair trial, giving us a comparative perspective on how to enshrine the right to a fair trial as a human right.

About the Submission

This submission responds to the call for input issued by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to inform the preparation of the Human Rights Council-mandated comprehensive study on human rights and the social reintegration of persons released from detention and persons subjected to non-custodial measures, according to Human Rights Council resolution 57/9.

Fair Trials submitted this response to OHCHR on the 21st of March 2025.

For more information about the call for input, visit: www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/2025/call-input-ohchr-comprehensive-study-human-rights-and-social-reintegration.

Introduction

This submission is made by Fair Trials, an international NGO that campaigns globally for fairness, due process, and equal treatment in our criminal justice systems.

It responds to question 3 of the OHCHR Call for Input, which seeks “*examples of initiatives to prevent and eliminate discrimination, violence and harassment against persons released from detention and persons subjected to non custodial measures, to educate the public and to address the negative social norms, stereotypes, stigma, economic and social inequities and systemic racism and discrimination.*”

By highlighting four key initiatives in Europe, this submission demonstrates that successful reintegration requires a shift from passive support models to active participation. Reintegration policies are most effective when individuals with lived experience play a leading role in shaping solutions. These initiatives illustrate how empowering impacted persons through leadership, advocacy, and structural engagement not only dismantles discrimination but also fosters long-term social inclusion and systemic change.

General Comments

Social reintegration is often framed as a process in which individuals simply receive support to re-enter society. However, reintegration can only be truly effective when impacted persons are recognized as key stakeholders, not passive beneficiaries. Many current approaches remain top-down, reinforcing stigma and limiting opportunities for meaningful involvement. This weakens the impact of reintegration policies and fails to address the structural barriers that perpetuate exclusion.

For reintegration efforts to be sustainable, individuals with lived experience must be actively engaged in policy development, advocacy, and decision-making. Their insight, leadership, and direct participation are essential to challenging stereotypes, reducing discrimination, and ensuring justice policies reflect real lived experiences.

By integrating participation at every level, from peer-led programs to structural reforms, the following European models promote empowerment, dignity, and systemic transformation, in alignment with Human Rights Council resolution 57/9.

Examples of Good Practice

1. European Impacted Persons Advisory Council (EIPAC) – Fair Trials Europe

The European Impacted Persons Advisory Council (EIPAC) was established in September 2024 as part of Fair Trials¹, an international NGO that campaigns globally for fairness, due process, and equal treatment in our criminal justice systems.

Composed of six members with lived experience in the criminal legal system, EIPAC brings together individuals who have been policed, suspected, prosecuted, or sentenced.

They belong to communities disproportionately affected by systemic disparities or work in grassroots CSOs defending those most vulnerable to procedural rights abuses. Their role is to provide expert insight, ensuring that Fair Trials' campaigns, policies, and strategies are shaped by lived experiences and contribute to meaningful reform. EIPAC is dedicated to advocating for better laws, driving policy changes, and contributing to the development of international standards and best practices. The council develops and drafts guidelines that support Fair Trials' mission, advises on key issues to ensure the voices of impacted persons are represented and fosters a collaborative and inclusive environment.

In addition to its advisory role, EIPAC actively engages with policymakers, legal professionals, and advocacy groups to drive discussions on systemic inequalities and the necessity of procedural rights reforms. Through research, collaboration, and public engagement, it seeks to influence both national and European legal frameworks.

By amplifying the perspectives of those directly affected by the criminal justice system and providing expert recommendations, EIPAC contributes to building a fairer and more equitable justice system across Europe.

¹ Fair Trials: www.fairtrials.org

2. Global Group of Experts by Experience – Penal Reform International

Penal Reform International (PRI)² established the Global Group of Experts by Experience³ to centre the perspectives of individuals who have experienced the criminal justice system firsthand. This group is composed of people with lived experience of the criminal justice system (currently there are 7 members of all genders from Europe, Africa, Asia and North America).

PRI started building the global group of experts by experience in 2023, to support the quality of criminal justice reform in the form of advocacy, research and practical programs. By involving people with lived experience, PRI wants to promote practical knowledge and lived experience in addition to theoretical knowledge.

A key milestone for the Group was the publication of its [Charter](#), an evolving document reflecting the aim to improve and learn. This Charter has also informed and enriched PRI's [Ten-Point Plan for Involving People with Lived Experience in Criminal Justice Reform](#), published in June 2024.

The Ten-point plan is designed to support policy makers and practitioners in involving people with lived experience of the criminal justice system in reform efforts. With a focus on fragile and conflict-affected settings, it is based on the fact that people with lived experience bring unique insights and expertise to reform efforts. The plan includes strategies for addressing stigma, ensuring safety and wellbeing and promoting goal-oriented involvement.

3. ELEVATE CJS Programme - Criminal Justice Alliance

The Criminal Justice Alliance⁴ (CJA) launched a 2-year pilot program, ELEVATE CJS (Elevating Lived Experience Voices, Advocacy, Training, and Expertise in the Criminal Justice System)⁵ in 2022 to address the structural barriers faced by individuals with direct lived experience of the justice system.

ELEVATE CJS was developed through two years of peer research and co-design efforts with a lived experience Advisory Board, building on CJA's 2019 ["Change from Within"](#)

² Penal Reform International (PRI): www.penalreform.org

³ Global Group of Experts by Experience – Penal Reform International <https://www.penalreform.org/about-us/people/global-group-of-experts-by-experience/#:~:text=PRI's%20Global%20Group%20of%20Experts,ground%20rules%20of%20the%20Group>

⁴ Criminal Justice Alliance, www.criminaljusticealliance.org/

⁵ ELEVATE CJS Programme - Criminal Justice Alliance www.criminaljusticealliance.org/elevate-cjs/

report. The initiative's core goal is to empower individuals with direct lived experience by equipping them with the skills, networks, and opportunities necessary to assume leadership roles and ultimately drive justice reform. ELEVATE CJS also aims to bring about systems change by building inclusive workplaces.

ELEVATE CJS addresses the social issue of barriers faced by individuals with criminal justice system experience in accessing senior positions and influencing policy. Participants engage in online and in-person workshops, a weekend residential, action research projects, senior-level work placements, and shadow board positions. They are supported throughout the program with 1-2-1 coaching and therapeutic support. Upon completion of the program, five participants were awarded bursaries to kick-start projects in the social and justice sectors. For example, one participant formed a social enterprise offering an early intervention approach for young people at risk of being trapped in the justice system.

Since its inception, ELEVATE CJS has supported 30 emerging leaders, with the first cohort graduating in 2023 and the second in 2024. 83 of participants reported that they have developed a stronger sense of self-belief and confidence in their abilities as a leader, as well as stronger emotional intelligence, enabling them to tackle challenges with greater resilience and to empathise and motivate their team members. The program has seen immediate results: ELEVATE CJS participants have successfully secured senior roles and trustees' position within the social and justice sectors and have made new connections which have allowed them to consider, train and embark on new careers. Another key impact of the program was the formation of peer support networks amongst the cohorts. The program has also fostered collaborations with government and sector employers, advocating for improved hiring practices and progression pathways for impacted persons. The CJA has also actively campaigned for criminal record reform⁶, pushing for systemic changes in vetting processes for employment.

By removing barriers to leadership and policy influence and decision-making, ELEVATE CJS is shifting power dynamics and promoting equity and inclusion in criminal justice governance.

4. Rubikon Centrum

Rubikon Centrum⁷ is a Czech organization with more than 30 years of history that helps people overcome their criminal past. On an individual level it supports them in reintegration through direct services. At the system level, it tests innovative solutions, cooperates with Czech and international partners and initiates system changes. At the

⁶ [Criminal Justice Alliance and Media Trust Films | Criminal Justice Alliance](#)

⁷ Rubikon Centrum: <https://www.rubikoncentrum.cz/en/>

societal level, it strives for a mindset shift and co-creates an open and respectful society. One third of Rubikon's staff are people with lived experience of serving a sentence.

As of 2019, Rubikon is part of the European [movement RESCALED](#), which is committed to transforming detention practices by advocating for small-scale, community-integrated detention houses as an alternative to large-scale prisons.

A key component of Rubikon Centrum's work is ensuring that impacted persons actively contribute to shaping criminal justice policies and systemic reforms. To reinforce this approach, in 2022, Rubikon Centrum launched the project "[Our Voice Matters: Including People with Lived Experience in System Change in Criminal Justice](#)". This initiative aims to empower individuals with a criminal history and involve them in policy-making and systemic change in penal affairs and criminal justice. Through this project, Rubikon Centrum seeks to verify and strengthen the role of lived experience in justice reforms, challenging exclusionary policies and advocating for inclusive decision-making processes.

The organization follows structured engagement frameworks, ensuring safe and meaningful participation for individuals with lived experience. Participants engage in low-threshold activities, such as public education campaigns and peer mentorship, as well as high-level advocacy efforts, including policy lobbying and strategic consultations. A strong emphasis is placed on risk assessment and support mechanisms, ensuring that former detainees are not placed in unsafe or triggering environments.

By advancing community-based detention models and advocating for inclusive justice reforms, the organization demonstrates that empowering impacted persons is essential to achieving sustainable reintegration and long-term systemic change.

Recommendations

To ensure sustainable, rights-based reintegration and combat systemic discrimination, we recommend that policymakers, criminal justice institutions, and international organizations:

- Institutionalize the participation of impacted persons in justice reform by creating formal advisory roles, leadership programs, and participatory mechanisms.
- Strengthen policies that address stigma and systemic bias by integrating public awareness campaigns, legislative protections, and training for criminal justice professionals.
- Ensure equitable access to employment, housing, and legal support for individuals released from detention or subjected to non-custodial measures.

- Expand international cooperation to share best practices and develop guiding principles for reintegration based on lived experience, evidence-based approaches, and human rights standards.

By recognizing impacted persons as active agents of change, justice systems can move toward sustainable reintegration models that prevent recidivism, promote public safety, and uphold fundamental rights.