Community Corrections – Israel

# Abstract

Israel’scriminal justice system differs from that of many other western countries. The two community corrections modalities are separated from one another and work independently. Yet, both are driven by a strong ideology of rehabilitation and reintegration, as described and explained throughout this chapter. The chapter begins with a short historical and correctional context followed by two distinct sections: One for probation and the other for parole. We first review the Israeli version of probation—*Sherut Mivhan*, and continue to discuss the Israeli version of parole—*Prisoners Rehabilitation Authority (PRA)*. The Israeli probation service provides a host of services aligned with the social welfare ideology of the country; the services are provided under the responsibility of the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs, and is anchored in the penal code of the country, and are considered as an integral part of the country’s criminal justice system. The agency is responsible for the intake, supervision, treatment, and rehabilitation of those suspected of illegal activity, convicted offenders, and victims. The Israeli version of parole is tasked with the re-entry and reintegration of criminal prisoners (i.e., different from national security prisoners who are not discussed in this chapter) after their release from incarceration. Accordingly, this chapter on the Israeli parole section discusses the release from prison/ Re-entry, PRA programs, PRA organizational structure, and PRA activities in the community, including PRA and COVID-19. We conclude with a summary that emerges from our discussion according to which the Israeli ideology and approach to community corrections is that of rehabilitation and reintegration of those who broke the law; and that the Israeli society, regardless of their crimes, considers them part of the community, and society is vested in their full integration and participation, although such ideology may not always reflect reality.

# Introduction

Israel’scriminal justice system differsfrom that of many other western countries. While its legal system is deeply rooted in the British mandate and British laws and legislation, since its inception in 1948, the government has evolved and developed its community-based corrections services for those convicted of crimes. Israel offers community correctional options in the form of probation and parole services. These two community modalities are separated from one another and work independently. While both are operating under the Israeli Ministry of Labor and Welfare and/ or the Ministry of Welfare and Social Services, and most recently, The Ministry of Labor, Welfare and Social Services (i.e., depending on the governing administration at the various periods, the name may change but its overall function remains), each was established as a result of different legislation that emerged from different needs, and is aimed at targeting diverse populations. Yet, both are held driven by the rehabilitation and reintegration ideology, as will be described and explained throughout this chapter.

A unique approach that is geared toward the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders in the community was adopted by the state of Israel from its earliest days (Diamant, 2016). Such an approach was deemed to be the most effective in reducing recidivism. The humanistic approach of rehabilitation and reintegration was further emphasized in a recent public committee tasked with the examination of sentencing policies and intervention with the convicted offender—the Dorner Committee 2015 (Lernau, 2019). In her report, Supreme Court Judge, Miriam Dorner concluded that the rehabilitation of offenders in the community should produce many superior outcomes than simply incarcerating offenders. It was further noted that there is no evidence to support the anticipated utility of incarceration and becoming more punitive by toughening sentences (Dorner Report, 2015).

In this chapter, we provide a review of both probation and parole in Israel and explain the difference between the two. We begin with the Israeli version of probation known as the *Sherut Mivhan* (we will refer to it in the chapter simply as probation), and continue to discuss the Israeli version of parole, known as *Rasha*, the Prisoners’ Rehabilitation Authority (PRA), that is tasked at providing rehabilitative interventions after re-entry and during the reintegration process.

# Israeli Corrections – Data in a Nutshell

Israel is a relatively young country (incepted in 1948), and also a small country in terms of both land (about 290 miles north-to-south and 85 miles east-to-west at its widest point), and population. According to the Israeli Central Bureau Statistics (CBS.Gov, 30 December 2021) at the end of 2021, Israel had 9.449 million people, about 74% of the population Jewish, 21% Arab Israelis, and 5% defined as other (i.e., not Jewish and not Israeli Arabs). This is important to place the correctional population of the country in context. In the same year, 2021, there were 9,430 people under institutional incarceration—both prison and jail, with another 4,260 that were under prison supervision responsibility that served their time in the community (not probation or parole). Another 4,390 individuals were held in separate facilities for homeland security related offenses (Israeli Prison System, 2021). Individuals supervised in the community under probation supervision—both juvenile and adults—counted for over 34,200 with another 3,812 supervised by the Prisoners’ Rehabilitation Authority (PRA). It is important to note that community corrections supervision in Israel, both probation and parole, are managed separately from the incarceration population. Specifically, while both probation and parole in Israel are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Welfare, jails and prisons are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Internal Security Affairs.

# Probation

The Israeli probation service, provides a host of services as will be described in more detail later in this chapter. Since Israel is a socialist country, probation services are provided under the responsibility of the ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs, and is anchored in the penal code of the country and considered as an integral part of the country’s criminal justice system. As such, the agency is responsible for the intake, supervision, treatment, and rehabilitation of those suspected of criminal activity, convicted offenders and victims. In that regard, the Israeli system of probation can be considered as a combination of social work with elements of law enforcement, with a strong emphasis on the service aspect. This is particularly so for services rendered to minors and young adults convicted of crimes. The probation service in Israel distinct between adult—individuals aged 18 and older—and youth, younger than 18.

The overall goals of probation are to reduce the risk of criminal activity by evaluating the risk of the offender, circumstances of the crime and other related community and familial factors, and recommend alternatives to punishment and incarceration. The service further aims to supervise and provide treatment and rehabilitation in the community for those convicted of crime while reducing their odds of recidivism.

Specifically, the above goals are addressed by providing various levels of supervision coupled with therapeutic interventions. The service further examines and applies alternative solutions to non-normative behaviours while promoting the strength of individuals, convicted of crimes, to positively assimilate in the community. Such a process is achieved by applying an individual legal process by which personal aspects of the individuals are brought to the fore, and their sociopsycho state is evaluated and taken into consideration, along with the circumstances of the crime committed. In that regard, the service is tailoring an individual service suite and recommendations for a more appropriate alternatives to punishment, with the overall aim of minimizing the potential devastating damages of incarceration.

# Brief history of probation in the country

Similar to other welfare services in the country, the roots of the Israeli probation services can be traced to the pre-establishment era of the state of Israel, and affected by the British mandate and its laws.

The Minor Criminal Order enacted in 1922 authorized the courts to release youth offenders to be supervised in the community. Only in 1932 was the first probation officer appointed and this signaled the establishment of supervisory social services to youth offenders in the Jewish settlement. Later, in 1937, The Young Offenders Order replaced the order from 1922, and made the distinction between two types of youth: delinquents and those who did not violate any laws but are in need of supervision. The age of criminal responsibility was set to 9–16, for boys, and 9–18, for girls. During this period, two separate services were in place, for Jews and Arabs.

The Supervision Ordinance, enacted in 1944, established the responsibilities of probation officers, their duties, and the organizational structure of the supervision services. Specifically, the ordinance set the national structure of an organization that is headed by the Chief Supervisor who oversees regional supervisors who holds the responsibility for individual supervisor officers that provide the day-to-day contact and treatment. It is important to note that at this period in time there was no distinction between juveniles and adults. See below illustration:

# Figure 1. Early Organizational Structure of Israel Young Offenders Probation Services

With Israel’s establishment in 1948, a decision was made to adopt the British mandate laws and penal code, and thus the Young Offenders Order and the Supervision Ordinance were formally adopted into the Israeli legislation and were used as benchmarks for the operations of both juvenile and adults’ probation services. It is then that these supervision services were placed under the responsibility of the Ministry of Welfare (later the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs).

In 1949, the first adult supervision officer was appointed, and his role was defined in a distinct and unique manner to differentiate it from those who dealt with juveniles. Such development was the result of growth in population, and the need to profess in adult interventions, while allocating much needed resources to the education of many juvenile immigrants that arrived at the country shortly after its establishment. In addition, many members of the legal system supported the separation of juvenile and adult supervision service to follow a more western model, while also calling for these services to be moved to the responsibility of the Ministry of Justice. Furthermore, two separate courts operated—juvenile and adult.

## The Development of Juvenile Probation Services

Since its inception in 1948, and till this day, the Israeli probation services has experienced numerous changes in its organization and operation. These changes are byproduct of changes in legislation, reorganization of the Israeli criminal justice system, and changes and reorganization within the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs. For example, in 1960, Juvenile Act (Treatment and Supervision) was enacted. This legislation separated the intervention with needed juveniles to those juveniles who broke the law. Initially, supervision officers served as welfare officers, however, in accordance with the changes at the Ministry of Welfare, these interventions were transferred to local districts and were assigned to special youth and juvenile case workers, and the authoritarian aspect of youth and juvenile intervention, and legal proceedings were removed from the responsibilities of juvenile probation. In 1971, an amendment to the 1960 legislation was introduced, in the form of a new enactment, The Juvenile Act (Judgment, Punishment & Therapeutic needs) of 1971. This enactment increased the age of criminal responsibility of minors from 16 to 18, which resulted in the transfer of 16–18 years old from the adult to the juvenile jurisdiction. As such law enforcement agencies were mandated to report juveniles suspected of breaking the law to the juvenile probation agencies. In addition, the new legislation mandated pre-sentencing reports in all cases to be discussed in juvenile and family courts. Yet in 1984, the age of criminal responsibility was reduced to age 12.

In 1987, the special district for the Arab sector in existence since the British mandate, was eliminated and merged into the other agencies according to geographic regions and districts. Two years later, in 1989, the Israeli police began to refer juvenile delinquents to the treatment of the juvenile probation officers for them to determine action in regard to prosecution or revert to intervention from a welfare state. In 1996, it was decided that juvenile first time drug offenders would be diverted to the juvenile probation office where their cases would be evaluated for legal and/or welfare action. This decision was an outcome of a consultation with the attorney general and in collaboration with the Israeli police. In that same year The Criminal Procedure Act (Enforcement Powers and Arrests) of 1996, was enacted. This legislation resulted in the assignment of new duties on probation services. Specifically, the new legislation mandated the completion of pre-sentencing report, examination of alternatives to incarceration and diversion, as well as pre-sentencing investigation for any individual arrested for more than five days. The actual law came into effect at the end of 1998, beginning of 1999.

## The Development of Adult Probation Services

In 1951, the adult probation services were parted from the juvenile service and were established as an independent service under the Ministry of Welfare. During the following years adult probation services underwent some major changes mainly due to change in legislation that resulted in the referral of new populations as well as the removal of juveniles ages 16-18, as previously discussed (i.e., The Juvenile Act – Judgment, Punishment & Therapeutic Needs of 1971). The foundation for the adult probation services rested in the British mandate legislation from 1944, which was updated to the new Probation Act of 1969, is in place till this date. Prior to its enactment in 1969, the act was modified and adjusted several times. For example, in 1953, few amendments were introduced and it was determined that all court decisions could be diverted to probation except in cases where imprisonment is mandated by the penal code. In addition, courts were mandated to accept pre-sentence reports, whereas the defendant must agree to the presentation of such report before the court. It was further determined that the pre-sentencing report should include special conditions and considerations that may be nullified according to changing circumstances. A year later, in 1954, the Amendment to the Penal Code (Punitive Forms) from 1954 (§ 19(g)) determined that no person under the age of 19 would be sentenced to prison without a comprehensive pre-sentencing report, this requirement was recently extended to age 21.

In 1977 an additional amendment to the Penal Code of 1977 mandates that individuals convicted of crimes may be mandated to volunteer their free time for the benefit of their community. This was enacted in the Public Service Act (Amendment #6 to the Penal Code of 1977). This type of punishment is available only after the completion of a pre-sentencing report and will be performed under the supervision of an assigned probation officer. This legislation was activated in stages till 1994.

Regarding substance abusers, the legislation enables the individual abuser to remain in the community for purposes of treatment pending an elaborated therapeutic treatment plan prepared and presented by the probation officer. Such option is also viable in cases where the court determined the activation of a conditional prison sentence. This legislation is known as the ‘Substance Test Order’ (§§ 82 and 83 of the 1977 Penal code). Section 86 of the penal code also determines the potential dispensation for those accused of domestic violence, based on a pre-sentencing investigation and report.

An interesting development in the role of adult probation officers in Israel was introduced in 1982. Section 187(b), and 191(a), to the Criminal Procedure Act of (Combined Version) of 1982, determines that a judge, prior to sentencing a sex or domestic violent offender, can request, beyond a basic victim statement, that the victim will undergo a thorough diagnosis for the mental, psychological, sociological, economic and employment damages suffered from their victimization. Such an amendment created a conceptual shift in role of probation officers that were now required to include the experience and testimony of the victim in sex crimes. The victim impact statement was further elaborated to include other serious felony offenses that resulted in death.

# Mission, Vision, and Objectives

The mission, vision and objectives of the Israeli probation services is a direct derivative of the historical context in which the service was established and developed. Changes in legislation, organizational changes in local law-enforcement, as well as the involvement of social work, and the ideology of the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs, determined its vision, mission and goals which culminated to two separate probation services—for juveniles and adults. In this section, juvenile and adult probation will be discussed separately.

## Juvenile Probation Services

The juvenile probation services operate in three major disciplines: (1) Psychosocial investigation of juveniles involved in criminal activity, and were referred by the police and/ or the courts, the conduct and submission of pre-sentencing investigation as well as providing treatment in compliance with court orders; (2) Arrestees investigations – examination of alternatives to arrest and supervision of those minors released on bail; (3) Investigation of minors as mandated by the Amendment to the Law of Evidence (Child Protection) of 1955.

These disciplines aim to serve three main goals that are at the heart of the juvenile probation services: (1) assistance to the criminal justice system in tailoring judicial decisions to individual juvenile defendant; (2) providing an informed opinion and pre-sentencing report to the referring agencies after the completion of the psycho-social investigation and a thorough intake; and (3) providing therapeutic intervention with juveniles who broke the law in an attempt to change their behaviour and reduce their odds of recidivism.

To achieve the above goals the assigned probation officer chooses the proper course of action and treatment in accordance with the offense. Specifically, there are four types of treatment. This first, *Conditional Treatment (CT)*, is aimed at youth and juveniles who have committed a minor offense or misdemeanor, and this is their first offense and no criminal record has been documented. The police usually warn the individuals and refer him to the probation services. The probation officer provides an intake to determine the psycho-social state of the juvenile, and provides treatment as needed. The second is *Conditional Drug Treatment (CDT)* – following the attorney general’s decision, minors who the police established suspicion of them using illegal substances and are first time users (no dealing or trafficking), are referred to diagnosis and short-term intervention (no more than four months). The intervention includes repeated urine samples, individual and/ or group therapy. The aim is to prevent relapse and recidivism. If the juvenile/ minor actively participates in the treatment and demonstrate willingness to abstain from further use of illegal substance a recommendation by the probation offices will be made to seal the case without bringing any charges. Third, *Crime Conditional Treatment (CTC)*, applies to minors who have committed a crime (e.g., usually felony). In these cases, both the minor and his family are invited for a psycho-social screening and intake to identify the circumstances of the crime, previous and further involvement of the minor in illegal behaviour, family climate, functioning in school or employment. At the end of the process and in accordance to the findings, a recommendation by the probation officer will be submitted to the prosecution with a recommendation to either seal the case without any further charges, or to pursue further legal action. The last course of treatment is (4) *After Criminal Charges (ACC) –* after criminal charges are brought against the minor and with the referral from the police prosecutor, the minor and his or her parents are brought to the probation officer for a psychosocial screening and intake, similar to the process described at the *CTC*, earlier. According to the findings and determination of the probation officer, a recommendation will be made for the needed course of action, either within the probation services or by an external agency, along with a recommendation to seal the record or continue with the criminal process.

In case a determination was made by the police prosecution to bring the minor to court, made an arrest or any other further criminal proceedings post indictment, the probation officer may be tasked with one of the following: (1) preparation of pre-arrest report and recommendation for alternatives to the arrest and plans for supervision; (2) preparation of pre-sentencing report to be presented to the court after the conviction; or (3) Implementation of the probation order, or the court orders in accordance with Section 26 of the Juvenile Act (1971) by direct involvement of the assigned probation officer and in collaboration with other therapeutic services. Specifically, this means removal of the minor form his direct family while remanding him to the supervision of a responsible adult, that is not the parent of that minor, to a period set by the court while limiting the rights of the parents as guardians for that set period of time.

According to the most recent report published by the Ministry of Welfare at midyear 2021, There were 12,278 juveniles under the supervision of probation at the end of 2020. This is a decrease of 8.09% from the following year that can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused several mandatory quarantines, limited outdoors activities, and imposed remote learning. The below table, describes the juvenile population under correctional supervision:

# Table 1. Characteristics of Juveniles under Probation 2019–2022

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **2019** | **2020** |
| ***Total*** | 13,359 | 12,278 |
| ***Gender:***  ***Girls***  ***Boys*** | 1,617  11,742 | 1,444  10,834 |
| ***Age:***  ***12***–***13***  ***14***–***15***  ***16***–***17***  ***18***  ***19+*** | 1,086  4,038  7,599  603  33 | 911  3,469  7,328  533  37 |
| ***Region:***  ***South***  ***Haifa & North***  ***Jerusalem***  ***Tel Aviv***  ***Centre*** | 2,521  4,343  2,356  1,835  2,304 | 2,203  3,992  2,124  1,592  2,367 |
| ***Religion:***  ***Jewish***  ***Muslim***  ***Christian***  ***Druze***  ***Other*** | 8,464  3,920  168  166  641 | 7,893  3,539  133  130  583 |

Source: Ministry of Welfare & Social Security (2022).

The above table, an excerpt from the formal Ministry of Welfare and Social Security report, does not provide any information on type of offenses. Information of the type of offenses for juveniles is also unavailable in any other source. Another important point to make is that Israel has a mandatory military service. For boys it is usually 32 months, and for girls usually 24 months. This is relevant to the issue of type of offenses, as many times the record will be sealed and even expunged if the juvenile demonstrate genuine desire to serve in the military.

## Adult Probation Services

Adult probation is tasked at providing diagnosis and intake, treatment, rehabilitation and supervision for those accused of committing crimes and victims of crimes age 18 and older. The aims of the adult probation services are twofold: reduction of risk to society by providing a through intake and risk assessment (i.e., pre-sentencing investigation and report), and writing recommendation to the court on the potential alternatives to incarceration and punishments, including the recommendation for rehabilitative sentencing options in the community. The second aim is focusing on the rehabilitation of adult criminals and their supervision for the sake of reducing recidivism. This aim is achieved by providing supervision orders, detention and intake while applying therapeutic approaches and result driven practices.

The above aims are related to the four stages of probation officers’ intervention in the judicial process. These stages begin with the initial arrest when the probation officer is responsible for the arrest report, release on bail, and supervision as an alternative to the arrest. In the sentencing stage, the probation officer is tasked at providing a report on the sentenced individual, as well as a report on the victim (i.e., victim statement and full victim diagnosis as explained earlier). At the post sentencing stage probation officers will execute the supervision requirements. Those may include individual and group therapy, reintegration in community activities, follow-up and supervision to assure treatment compliance. At the final stage, if an appeal on the sentence is filled, the probation officer will complete a final comprehensive evaluation that will address all the strength and weakness of the individual, any progress made from the initial arrest, and the individual level of risk.

In addition to the above the adult probation office is also tasked at providing reports to the attorney general in matters of postponing procedures, issues of prosecution, and providing treatment to offenders for whom a decision was made to either not prosecute or to delay their legal proceedings (i.e., pre-trial diversion).

To that extent, the adult probation services in Israel supervise, provide professional guidance, and is involved in the budgetary planning of the following: hostels for men convicted of domestic violence, day centres for adult sex offenders. In addition to the above, probation representatives participate in steering committees and make recommendation on the appointments of individuals to be tasked at evaluating risk (e.g., the particular risk of sexual offenders).

At last count slightly more than half (11,115) of all individuals under the supervision of the adult probation office were sentenced to probation. More than one third (36.6%) of individuals under the adult probation office supervision were jailed individuals referred to the probation services, with 1,281 (6.1%) individuals placed on limited-time work release alternative, known as ‘Service to the Public / Community Service‘ as way of paying their debt to the community that was affected by their crimes while eliminating the potential harm caused by removing the offender from his/ her immediate family and support network. For 403 individuals the probation services made a recommendation to delay their legal procedures and recommended no prosecution with option of forgiveness. For 458 individuals, the adult probation services made the recommendation not to press charges and seal the case (Ministry of Welfare and Social Security, 2022).

According to the most recent report published by the Ministry of Welfare at midyear 2021, there were 20,942 adult individuals under the supervision of probation at yearend 2020. This is an increase of 1.11% from the following year that can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. Unlike juveniles that saw a decrease, the adults were diverted from the prison system in order to reduce the number of incarcerated individuals and thus allow those deemed at low risk to stay within the community. With mandatory quarantines and limited outdoors activities, such option for supervision became more vital. The below table describes the adult population under correctional supervision:

# Table 2. Characteristics of Adults under Probation 2019–2022

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **2019** | **2020** |
| ***Total*** | 20,711 | 20,942 |
| ***Gender:***  ***Women***  ***Men*** | 1,450  19,261 | 1,466  19,476 |
| ***Age:***  ***20***– ***29***  ***30 and older*** | 9,527  11,184 | 8,669  12,273 |
| ***Region:***  ***South***  ***Haifa & North***  ***Jerusalem***  ***Tel Aviv and Centre*** | 3,935  5,799  3,521  7,456 | 3,979  5,864  3,560  7,539 |
| ***Religion:***  ***Jewish***  ***Muslim***  ***Christian***  ***Druze***  ***Other*** | Data Not Available | Data Not Available |
| ***Offense Type:***  ***Domestic Violence***  ***General Violence***  ***Accidental Death***  ***Substances***  ***Sex Crimes***  ***Property & Fraud***  ***Traffic***  ***Other*** | 3,314  4,971  207  4,142  828  2,890  3,107  1,243 | 4,188  5,026  0  4,188  838  3,141  3,141  419 |

Source: Ministry of Welfare & Social Security (2022).

It is interesting to note that the number of people placed on probation due to domestic violence increased by 26.4% from 2019 to 2020. Again, this can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic that forced people to be quarantined in their homes, which many times resulted in domestic disputes that escalated to violence. Disputes that would usually be prevented before the pandemic as people would spend long hours at work and outside the home.

# Organizational Structure of Israeli Probation

## General Structure

According to the Probation Act of 1969 (New Version) the Minister of Welfare will appoint a Chief Probation Officer for juveniles and another one for adults, and they will be tasked at the organization and management for which they are tasked with in accordance to the regulations. Further, the Minister will appoint sufficient number of probation officers who will be tasked with the fulfillment and compliance of the regulations set forth by section 27 of the above Act. As of the writing of this chapter, both juvenile and adult Chief Probation officers and their subordinates are appointed by the Minister of Welfare and report to his office.

The roles of the Chief Probation officer, who is head of the national probation service, and the roles of the regional and local probation officers are all defined in the regulations of the National Probation Act – Placing Offenders under Probation Supervision (1959). These regulations specify the individual mandates and tasks for each level of probation function as follow:

In accordance with Section 5 of the above Act, the Chief Probation Officer is tasked with the organization of the national probation services, its management, provide guidance and oversight on the work of the subordinate probation officers and is responsible for their professional advancement and promotion. The Chief Probation Officer is further tasked with maintaining continuous communications, and coordinate, with the courts, police, correctional institutions, social services, and any other agency tasked with providing intervention with individuals who broke the law. In addition, the Chief Probation Officer will also direct the internal policies and activities pertaining to the records and reports submitted by the regional probation officers.

Under Section 6 of the above Act, the Regional Probation officers are tasked with the organization and management of the services in their designated district/ region, and providing an oversight over the work of the individual probation officers in their district/ region, as well as their professional development and promotion. The regional probation officer is also responsible for the admission of those individuals referred to the service in their district and the assignment and determination of the caseload to the individual probation officers. Within this capacity, the regional probation officer is also tasked at determining the priorities and level of intervention and supervision, in accordance with their risk, and status (e.g., diversion from incarceration, pre-arrest, etc.). According to the agency case-load and local organizational requirements, the regional probation officer may also reassign the treatment of specific individuals from one officer to another.

## Organizational Structure – Juvenile Probation Services

The juvenile probation service is roughly divided into three service sections: Management; regional / district services; and volunteer units. The management includes the Chief Juvenile Probation Officer, which in addition to the tasked described above, manages day-to-day activities of the head office, which provides oversight of the Deputy Chief Inspector, who is responsible for special investigations, and the investigation of minors and juveniles, general inspector for minor and juvenile delinquents, the head of the computing centre, and the national inspector for pre-sentencing and representative to the Supreme Ccourt; the Chief Juvenile Probation officer is also responsible for the arrests of minors and juvenile, and is tasked with the administrative side of the services, which includes budgets, hiring, training of workers, and data collection and analysis. The Chief Juvenile Probation Officer, assisted by his aids, represents the juvenile probation service in matters of legislation, initiation, and development of intervention programs, and is further tasked at representing the service and providing training and professional development to other probation officers.

The regional probation service is divided into five regions / districts. Each district is headed by a Head Regional Probation Officer who reports directly to the Chief Juvenile Probation Officer. The regional probation officer is responsible for the operations and supervision of the deputy regional probation officer, few to several inspectors tasked at arrests, instructors tasked at directing the operations of smaller service centres at subdistricts and localities, senior social workers who deal with arrests, and the supervision of probation officers and senior juvenile investigators.

The volunteer unit is relying on a non-profit organization *ELEM*, which provides volunteers to mentor minors and juveniles that are at risk. The volunteers mentor these minors in employment, vocational training, and educational programs to enable them better integration into the main-stream normative society.

## Organizational Structure – Adult Probation Services

Similar to the juvenile probation service organizational structure, the adult probation service is also divided into management and regional/ district services. Headed by the Chief Probation Officer, the management is also staffed by the Deputy Chief, national inspector for the supreme court, and national inspector for arrests and administration. The management under the guidance of the Chief Probation Officer is tasked at developing policies, participate in legislation, initiate and develop intervention programs, plan and train probation service members, plan the budget for the regional probation offices, and frame operating procedures.

The regional / district service is divided into four districts. Each district is headed by the Head Regional Probation officer who provides an oversight to the work of the Deputy Regional Probation Officer, regional inspectors for arrests, few to several instructors—of whom some are tasked at the coordination of sub-districts—senior probation officers, social workers, line probation officers, regional inspectors tasked at pre-sentencing investigations and public coordinators whose task is aimed at tailor community services, by those who are on probation, to the benefit of their community. At last count, yearend 2020, there were 471 adult probation officers, with a mean case load of about 44 individuals.

In Israel, all probation officers, in both the adult and juvenile services, are professionally operating under the Social Workers Act of 1996, and are considered to be a distinct cell within the social work union. In addition, they are all members of Governmental Employee Union (i.e., ‘Histadrut of the Governmental Employees’).

# Supervision Practice

As mentioned earlier, Israeli Probation services are a discipline within social work. In its broadest sense, correctional social work focuses on those individuals who broke the law and those who are involved in criminal activity, their victims, and populations defined as high-risk for criminal involvement. Its main aim is to focus on the ways in which behaviour can change to reduce criminality and recidivism. As such, social work in corrections is defined by the target population (Friberg & Chovav, 1994). It is within this context that the social work approach will extend its focus into the general population and will aim to include those family members of the offender and their victims; by doing so, it assumes responsibility to provide relief for social distresses, and provide solutions to human problems in which the existing social order fails to resolve. As such, the overarching approach is multidisciplinary in nature and combines elements not just of social work, but those from sociology, criminology, psychology, psychiatry and law. Such multidisciplinary approach directs the various supervision and intervention practices of the Israeli probation services.

Specifically, the Israeli probation services offers groups, individual and family intervention, and for almost 30 years implements restorative justice conferences.

## Group Therapy

Acknowledging that the group has specific advantages that contribute to the overall therapeutic experience such intervention modality plays a major role in the arsenal of interventions offered by the Israeli probation services. Group therapy provides sense of belonging, a place where participating members can express their thoughts and feelings while providing the opportunity to assist peers in the group. Participating in a group therapy session further enables peer feedback, while also exposes the participating members to various and alternative coping strategies that can be viewed and controlled. From the group moderator and probation officer perspective, the group is used to deliver information and enable a substantial intervention, as they can observe the reaction of participants in their natural environment. Such observation provides a valuable diagnostic strategy that can later be used to better tailor the services to the individuals.

## Individual Therapy

The individual therapy intervention draws from the medical model in which individuals first needs to be diagnosed, prognosed, and treated. It later added elements from the psychodynamic approach. During the 80’s another behavioural approach was introduced to the probation intervention arsenal; this approach enabled intervention by ways of learning and changing attitudes, approaches and behaviour. This approach was later perfected into what is now known as the Cognitive Behavioural Treatment (CBT). Regardless of the above-mentioned approaches, the individual treatment is focusing on the rehabilitation of the individual and as such place emphasis on the interpersonal patient-therapist connection.

## Family Therapy

Leaning on the systems approach, this type of intervention assumes that delinquent and non-conformist behaviour is a by-product of family issues. As such, the approach aims to provide intervention in a more holistic manner that addresses the causes and consequences of the criminal act in relation to the family of the individual offender. Specifically, this approach assumes that, more often than not, the criminal action of the individual negatively affected his/ her family, and by providing a holistic therapeutic approach that involves the family helps the individual and her/ his family to advance and grow. Family intervention may focus on couples therapy, parent-children relations, and even the entire family. Recently, probation services began to refer families who need such therapy to professional services in the community and the probation officer is following the progress and provide the aspects of the required supervision.

## Diagnosis and Short-term Intervention

Acknowledging the level of stress and confusion in which many first-time offenders are found at, the assigned probation officer is encouraged to apply a humanistic approach that will promote confidence in the individual offender referred to the service. The probation officer will provide a realistic view of the situation and the process, and explains the individual the next steps. Through the years, few assessment tools were developed to enable more accurate intake that will allow the probation officer to provide a more accurate recommendation and opinion for the police and the legal advisor by writing a detailed report for the court—a report that is based on a thorough collection of personal information, impressions and assessments. Further, the assessment also enables to determine the level of willingness and readiness to participate in treatment that will prompt behavioural change, and accordingly will also provide a short-term intervention that will prepare the individual for his/ her court appearance and sentencing.

## Restorative Justice Conferences

In an attempt to heal the harm caused by the criminal action of the offender, the Israeli probation service offers restorative justice initiatives for both minor and adult offenders.

Restorative justice for juveniles provides an opportunity for both family of the offender and the victims to take an active part by learning on the actual offense and its effect on both offender and victim. The conferences further enable members of the community to take active role in findings solutions to the harm done while taking into consideration the place of the juvenile offender in the community as a functioning member that must be invested in. At present, the Israel juvenile probation services offers two main restorative justice programs: *Gefen* (similar to that discussed for the adults and meaning vine, the initials of the Hebrew words Mediation-Gishur, Offenders-Pogea and Victim-Nifga), and *Kedem* (Hebrew abbreviation for family discussion group). Kedem places more emphasis on the decision-making process that will enable restoring the harm caused by the offense, compensation for the victim, and tailoring appropriate intervention program for the juvenile offender, as well as a continuum of care. The juvenile, his family, meaningful members of the juvenile’s community, the victim and their support, as well as professional therapists and the probation officer, all take active part in the conference (Yanai et al, 2001; Yanai & Grabeli, 2008).

The main restorative justice initiative for adult offenders that is currently in place, is mediation between offender and victim known, Gefen. The Gefen program is a voluntary conference between the offender and the victims where the causes of the crime and its consequences are discussed. Conferences are hosted by a neutral mediator in a safe and respectful environment (Bar-Shuaa et al, 2008).

At the time of writing this chapter, data on violation and revocations was not available. That does not mean that such cases are not cooccurring, but the actual numbers are not readily available.

Aside from the probation services Israel also has a variation of parole. The following section will describe in detail this aspect of community corrections in Israel that begins with release from prison.

# Release from Prison

Between 2018 and 2020, the Israeli Prison System released 31,463 prisoners from its facilities. Most of them were released without any restrictions regarding supervision or therapy (State Comptroller’s Report, 2021). Specifically, according to the Israeli Prison Service, between 2018-2020, about 62% of released prisoners who were released back to their home communities without any restriction or mandatory supervision, were released as a result of an administrative release. Administrative release is a result of a decision by the county’s Supreme Court 2018 to alleviate prison overcrowding as it violates basic civil rights (see Supreme Court 1892/14). Another 27% were released after serving their full sentence, and only 11% were released under parole supervision (see table below).

# Table 3. Release from Prison, 2018-2020

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | % |
| Parole by the parole committee | 1,648 | 1018 | 872 | 11 |
| Release from prison after full sentencing with no supervision requirement | 2924 | 2557 | 3017 | 27 |
| Administrative release from prison | 8006 | 7014 | 4407 | 62 |
| Total | 12,578 | 10,589 | 8,296 | 100 |

Source: Prison Service in answer to the researchers’ freedom of information request

The following sections will focus on the Israeli Parole system that deals with roughly 11% of all released prisoners. Unlike many other countries, and as will be discussed below, parole in Israel is managed and operated by the Prisoners Rehabilitation Authority (PRA). As the name suggests, the ideology behind its operations is that of rehabilitation and reintegration. This is important, because different from many other countries, PRA also assists those individuals who completed their full sentence and were released back to the community without any requirement of supervision.

# The Israeli Parole

The Israeli version of parole, known as the PRA (‘*Rasha*’ as branded in the Hebrew language), is tasked with the re-entry and reintegration of criminal prisoners (i.e., different from national security prisoners) after their release from incarceration.

PRA is the state authority entrusted by law (The Parole Act, 2001) with preparing programs for the supervision and guidance of prisoners assigned to it. Some of the key functions PRA is responsible for are: supervision, rehabilitation, care within the community, employment reintegration job placement and support during the parole supervision period.

## Brief History of Parole in Israel

Up to 1983, prior to the passing of the Prisoner Rehabilitation Act, a small percentage of freed prisoners were assigned mandatory care according to the Adult Parole Service Act and by the Ministry of Labor and Welfare. Handling of the welfare of all freed prisoners was entrusted to voluntary associations, which were not able to cope with the large number of prisoners involved.

On declaration of the Prisoner Rehabilitation Authority Act, 5743 (1983), the subject of prisoner rehabilitation and reintegration gained momentum and received more well-organized and comprehensive attention. The act stated that a prisoner could apply voluntarily to PRA for a period of up to one year from the time of his release from prison in order to receive psycho-sociological treatment (Prisoner Rehabilitation Authority Act, 5743).

In 2001 an additional change in perception took place in the handling of the freed prisoner, following enactment of the Parole Act, 5761 (2001). This act determined that treatment accorded to the freed prisoner would no longer be on a voluntary basis but rather formal, under supervision and in accordance with the act. This conceptual change with respect to the role of the PRA led to the restructure and revision of PRA and its operation. Specifically, it mandated systemic and more professional changes.

## The Parole Act

The Parole Act of2001, constitutes the benchmark for determining the possibility of a prisoner’s early release. According to the act, a prisoner (with the exception of those serving life sentences) who has been sentenced to a term of more than six months, and who has already served at least two-thirds of his sentence, is entitled to request that his case be brought before a parole committee in order to enable him to serve the remainder of his sentence in the community. The parole board evaluates the risk, rehabilitation potential and odds of successful reintegration, and accordingly will not grant early release on parole to those deemed not worthy of release, and those who pose danger to public safety.

In 2018, Amendment No. 17 to the act was approved (Parole Act, 2018), extending considerably the scope of the mechanism for early release from short sentences (with the exception of prisoners who are a threat to the country’s national security) through establishment of a unit in the framework of the Prison Service. The unit discusses requests for parole by prisoners serving sentences of three months to one year. It operates according to the same considerations guiding the parole board, alongside which it is to make its decisions in the shortest possible time.

## The Parole Board

The parole board is a statutory body, i.e. a semi-autonomous legal entity that acts by virtue of the Parole Act (2001), holding legislative, executive and judicial powers. Till recently, parole boards in Israel were under the responsibility of the Prison Service. For years criticism had been voiced over delays in procedures and deferment of deliberations; as a result, and with a view to improving the efficiency of the process, responsibility for the parole boards was transferred in 2016 to the court administration (Rosenfeld & Noah, 2021). Two years later, in 2018, deliberations on the case of short imprisonments were transferred back to the Prison Service.

Under the responsibility of the court administration, parole boards are headed in most cases by a retired judge and two public figures specializing in the fields of criminology, psychology, social work and education. The committees convene within the boundaries of the prisons, with the judge serving as board Chairman. Appearing before the committee, on the one hand, is an attorney on behalf of the Attorney General, and on the other, the prisoner himself, generally accompanied by a private or public defense lawyer. On appearing before the board, the prisoner must prove that he has complied with two cumulative conditions, namely, that he is deserving of parole, and that his release will not endanger public safety. The function of the parole committee is to decide whether the prisoner is worthy of parole.

Clause 9 of the Parole Act details the committee’s considerations in determining parole, with the emphasis on the public interest involved. The principal considerations relate to: the danger posed by the prisoner, expressed, for example, in his involvement in overt or covert criminal action in prison; the seriousness of his offence and the circumstances in which it was committed; previous convictions; the possibility that he had been paroled in the past and had engaged once again in criminal activity; and the remaining term of imprisonment.

The parole committee attaches great importance to the question of therapy both in and out of prison in arriving at its decision. In order for the committee to have a basis for considering parole, it obtains the expert opinion of various agencies, such as the PRA, caregiving personnel in prison (e.g., a social worker), Prison Service intelligence (for reports on disciplinary offences in prison), and the prison mental health centre (for example, for an assessment of all aspects relating to the danger posed by sex offenders).

In addition to information received on the conduct of the prisoner while incarcerated, the board examines the suitability of the prisoner for participation in community rehabilitation and reintegration programs; when found to be suitable, it checks to see if a suitable program is in place that would meet his criminogenic needs and provide him with the needed supervised care. In most cases, PRA is responsible for the operations of these programs, however, some available programs are contracted to private rehabilitation agencies.

Despite the above, and in accordance with the Rights of Victims of Crime Act (2001), the attitude of the victim to the possible parole of the prisoner is also taken into consideration.

The committee may entertain additional general considerations relating to the effect on public trust in the legal system, law enforcement and deterrence, as well as the proportionality between the seriousness of the offence and the severity of the sentence served (Parole Act, 2001).

As of 2020, a pilot-program for the release of minors from prison has been conducted in accordance with Government Draft Proposal No. 3711 – Adoption of the Inter-ministerial Report for the Parole of Minors. This pilot-program was intended to establish a continuity with respect to therapy for minors from the time of their arrest to their release through development of a special model (Reentry Court -RC) aimed at preparing them for their return to community life. This model transforms the complex task of rehabilitating minors into one shared effort by all the relevant agencies (PRA, probation service, the Prison Service) with the participating minors receiving much needed attention and experiencing empowerment throughout the process.

The benefits of early release on parole received much attention in recent years. Various studies and reports acknowledge the potential harm caused by imprisonment, and thus the valuable benefits inherent in parole as an instrument that could aid in prisoners’ rehabilitation, reintegration and control recidivism while also alleviating the crowded conditions in prisons (The Dorner Report, 2015; Rosenfeld & Noah, 2021). Despite this, and as demonstrated in Table 3, the past three decades have seen a drop in the parole rate in Israel, reaching as low as 10.5% in 2020 (details made available to the researchers by Prison Service in answer to their freedom of information request).

## Requirements for Licensed parole

The Israeli Parole Act (2001) gives considerable weight to the supervisory aspect with paroled prisoners and specifies the requirements for licensed parole, including conditions that apply automatically.

A number of restrictions are imposed on the paroled criminal, such as a prohibition against committing offences and leaving the country, conducting periodic urine tests, reporting to local law-enforcement station, notifying the authorities of any change in residence and a mandatory employment requirement (Parole Act, 2001). Additional conditions have begun to appear recently in parole board decisions, such as the duty to remain under nightly house curfew, and a new rule was recently instated according to which if a parolee commits a criminal offense while on parole, their parole must be revoked, and the prisoner returned to prison (Dagan & Sha’ar-Efodi, 2021).

In addition, all parolees are expected to fully comply with all prescribed conditions of their individual rehabilitation program. The program generally includes individual and group psychotherapy in combination with employment. In addition, by virtue of the legislative amendments to the Act for Electronic Monitoring of the Detainee and Paroled Prisoner, 2014, the parole board is allowed to condition the prisoner’s release on the imposition of electronic monitoring to limit his freedom of movement. In cases where electronic monitoring is deemed necessary, the parolee will be fitted with electronic bracelets by a Prison Service unit which is responsible for active operation of the bracelets. By the end of 2020, a total of 198 parolees were supervised using electronic monitoring, with an average daily monitoring of 92 parolees placed under such supervision. In 2020, the parole of eight electronically monitored prisoners was rescinded (Walk & Malikson, 2021).

The PRA officer assigned to the case is the one tasked at preparing the supervision compliance protocol, and can sometimes be the one who accompanies and supervises the parolee during his assigned parole period. In cases where the parolee violates the terms of his parole, the officer is mandated to report the incident to the parole board, which can then decide to rescind the prisoner’s parole and remand him back to prison - or alternatively, to extend the period of supervision.

## Effectiveness of Early Release

Previous research conducted in Israel on the effectiveness of parole on reduced recidivism provide support to the connection between the two, supporting the argument by which parole reduces the risk of a return to prison (Ben Tzvi & Volk, 2011; Peled-Laskov et al, 2019). Peled-Laskov et al. (2019), for example, found that released prisoners who had one-third of their sentences commuted and who received guidance and supervision of the PRA exhibited significantly more positive indicators than those who had served their full sentences and were not paroled, and/ or received supervision and guidance. The positive results were manifested in four important indices: level of recidivism, integration of the released prisoner into employment; duration of the reported employment and wage level. The indicators refer to a monitoring period of up to three years (with the exception of recidivism, in which case the monitoring period was up to eight years).

As stated, a key program accompanying and supervising paroled prisoners in Israel is that conducted by the PRA; in that regard these are seamless programs that not only provide basic supervision after release, but further provide guidance and treatment. The program and activities of the PRA are therefore described below in detail.

# The PRA Program

## The PRA Program and Examination of Suitability for Joining It

Upon completion of two-third of their sentence, the prisoner is entitled to meet with a representative of the PRA in the prison in order to evaluate his/her suitability for PRA’s supervision and treatment program.

Shoham and Peled-Laskov (2020), who interviewed PRA therapists, found that suitability for joining the program is checked against a number of considerations, chief of which is the level of risk the prisoner poses to society. In contrast to the established assessment of risk and dangerousness, as per the law in the event of sex offences (Shoham, 2008), its assessment as described herein is based on the professional assessment of PRA’s assigned representative.

Another consideration in the assessment process and the determination of treatment suitability, is the individual treatment potential. Clearly, not everyone is suited to a psychotherapeutic framework and the probability of treatment succeeding depends on a large number of factors, such as motivation to undergo change, the age of the prisoner, etc. (Shoham & Timor, 2016). Finally, admission to the program is conditional, and based on the prisoner’s physical and mental ability to work, on cooperation with therapeutic agencies in prison, and on being drug-free for a period of at least six months.

In 2020, a total of 3,624 assessments regarding prisoner suitability were carried out ahead of the parole board deliberations Altogether, 52.9% were found suitable for supervised rehabilitation (Walk & Malikson, 2021).

According to a recent PRA report, the number of Jewish and Arab interviewees were almost identical, the percentage of suitable individuals was higher among the Arabs. It was also found that the percentage suitability decreased with age, while it was higher among married individuals and lower among divorcees, separated men and widowers. The highest suitability was found to be among those in possession of weapons, in criminal organizations, and for those involved in fraud and financial crime. The lowest was found among prisoners engaged in sex crimes and violence.

The professionals accompanying PRA programs include psychotherapists and employment counsellors. Psychotherapists are usually trained social workers, clinical criminologists, psychiatrists, and other trained personnel. Once the prisoner is found suitable, a program is tailored to his needs, and that program can be presented to the parole board. The employment counsellors, whose backgrounds include criminology and education, are responsible for checking the suitability of the workplace proposed by the prisoner, supervising him and attending to his needs in all matters relating to employment. They are also responsible for finding additional places of work, mobilizing employers, and providing occupational training for the prisoner.

## Released Prisoners under the Care of PRA

According to the PRA Report (Walk & Malikson, 2021), in 2020 a total of 3,793 paroled prisoners were treated by PRA, 53% Jewish and 47% Arab. Altogether, 43% of the prisoners were married, 40% single and 17% divorced, separated or widowed. The high percentage of married prisoners is in line with the fact that they account for a higher rate of suitability for rehabilitation vis-à-vis other marital categories.

A total of 59% were released after their first imprisonment, 26% after their second or third imprisonment, and 15% after their fourth or higher imprisonment. The table below presents the distribution of paroled prisoners under PRA supervision and treatment, by main offence (2020).

# Table 4. Distribution of Adult Paroled Prisoners in PRA by Main Offence (2020)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Main offence** | **Percentage of prisoners treated in PRA (%)** |
| Drug use | 25.8 |
| Violence | 16.8 |
| Property crime | 11.2 |
| Sex crime | 10.9 |
| Fraud and financial crime | 10.0 |
| Crime involving death | 8.6 |
| Possession of arms and criminal organizations | 7.6 |
| Robbery | 4.8 |
| Licensing and traffic violations | 4.3 |

Source: Walk and Malikson (2021)

It is important to mention that PRA also offers rehabilitation services in response to voluntary requests from prisoners who have served their full sentences. Data published by PRA attests to the fact that most of the individuals under their care are paroled prisoners and that only a small number receive voluntary treatment after completing their full term of imprisonment.

A comparison of data relating to the period 2018–2020 shows that in 2018, a total of 3,518 prisoners received treatment in the PRA, of whom 2,554 were under full supervision, and 964 treated voluntarily following completion of their full term. In 2019 a total of 3,272 prisoners were treated: 2,149 under full supervision, 355 after release following short sentences, and 768 after completing their full sentences. In 2020, a total of 3,391 prisoners were treated: 2,117 under regular supervision, 406 following short sentences, and 868 after completing their full sentences. In 2020, the number of prisoners treated voluntarily in comparison with 2019, was similar; this is remarkable in view of the COVID-19 crisis, which could have had an adverse effect on the readiness of released prisoners to seek voluntary treatment following completion of their full sentences.

## Vocational Component of the PRA Rehabilitation Program

Despite the difficulties many returning prisoners experience in finding and securing employment (Seiter & Kadela, 2003; Uggen, 2002), most Israeli prisoners are willing to accept the employment condition in order to earn a deduction of their sentence by a third under parole supervision. Many of these difficulties in gaining and securing employment has to do with a personality issue—difficulty in accepting authority—as well as their fragmented and insufficient work experience. Add to the above the fact that many are lacking specific basic vocational skills required by many employers. To address these issues, PRA has developed a vocational support and supervision program, which takes these difficulties into account and address them as part of their supervision and intervention (Peled-Laskov & Bialer, 2013).

While some prisoners are able to secure employment on their own, and sometimes even while still in prison, PRA representative will assist in making the necessary initial contact for those who were unable to. It is important to note that whenever parolees secure employment on their own, their employment can be vetted by PRA officers or even the police, from which the parolee must secure prior approval. Upon employment, PRA representative, usually the assigned parole officer, will monitor regular work attendance by visits to the workplace. The frequency of visits varies from one to three times a month and is determined by the prisoner’s risk level. It is important to note that according to the Director of the Employment Department of the PRA, many Israeli parolees regard these visits positively and only occasionally ask that it be conducted out of view of the employer and other employees (discussion with Gidon Bialer, September, 2018; Shoham & Peled-Laskov, 2020). The vocational aspect of the supervision is not limited to simple supervision, but is viewed in a more holistic manner that involve employment related counselling.

In 2020, vocational counsellors were responsible for a total of 1,617 parolees, a slight decrease form 2019, when there were 1,792 parolees under vocational supervision. Of importance to note is the fact that during 2020, PRA opened a vocational guidance centre where personal vocational workshops were held in developing basic skills in the use of computers and technologies and giving guidance for receiving professional training, academic scholarships and vocational placement. An additional proof of PRA’s dedication to invest in parolees vocational training came in the form of allocating an additional budget of 450,000 NIS (equivalent to roughly about $140,000) aimed to encourage parolees to participate in a vocational training program (Walk & Malikson, 2021).

## Friendly Employers

The literature contains references to the deep concern of employers regarding the employment of released prisoners (Albright & Denq, 1996; Fletcher, 2001; Hoffman, 2002; Holzer, 1996; Western, Kling & Weiman, 2001). Acting on this fear, PRA developed a unique employment program known as the ‘friendly employer program*’*. This program aims at maximizing compatibility between prisoner and employer.

A friendly employer is defined as a person who is willing to employ released prisoners and help them integrate into the job market, while approving the presence and guidance of PRA personnel at the workplace, as counsellors and professional aids to the parolee. The employer is endowed with understanding and sensitivity to the needs of the parolee and helps him both occupationally-economically and emotionally-socially. The friendly employer program focuses on locating a suitable employer, training the parolee for work, and assisting both. It is important to stress that personnel from PRA place considerable emphasis on open communication that enables the parolee to discuss with his employer any emerging challenges and problems so that these will not mushroom to bigger problem, and also to ensure that the employer properly address them. Things like low self-esteem, a sense of failure, poor education, and family issues, are often at the heart of most emerging problems. Positive rehabilitative and employment reintegration outcomes, of the friendly employer program, were documented by Peled-Laskov & Bialer (2013) who found that parolees who were engaged by friendly employers maintained their position longer than those who worked for regular employers.

It should be noted that in Israel, there is a greater willingness by Israeli employers to hire released prisoners, despite their apprehensions (Timor & Shoham, 2014). This willingness seems to stem from, among other things, an important value in Judaism that encourages the integration of people who have deviated from ‘the straight and narrow‘ and seek to reform their ways. In addition, Israel is a small country under constant security threat. This creates a sense of mutual responsibility and sense of family. Beyond that, people tend to know each other more and are willing to help and arrange work for each other. Simply put, the social networks in Israel are more closely tied compared to those in other western countries, add to it the informal moral obligation that ‘All of Israel are responsible for each other’, a well-known Hebrew phrase that symbolizes the ideal of brotherhood and mutual responsibility.

In addition, and unlike many other western countries, employers in Israel have limited access to criminal record (The Crime Register and Rehabilitation of Offenders Law, 1981), a fact that prevents discrimination against released prisoners in the hiring process and contributes to the relatively low unemployment rate among released prisoners and former convicted criminals.

## Supervision vis-à-vis Psychological Treatment

Every parolee who is under PRA’s supervision and treatment program is mandated to participate in therapy twice a week: there is one individual session and one group session per week. Each session lasts about 50 minutes. The individual session is where the difficulties faced by the parolee re-entering the community are raised. Prevalent issues discussed in sessions include problems in the workplace, difficulty in accepting authority, coping with the temptation to return to criminality, temptations of easy profits, past traumas and incarceration-related traumas, difficulties and pressures in the family, difficulties in intimate relationships, etc. As for group therapy, the parolees are placed in a specific group mainly based on the type of crime they have committed: fraud, violence, sex, drugs, traffic offences etc. Problems that arise in the individual sessions may also arise in the group session, thus providing a unique opportunity for many to understand that they are not alone. The group therapy sessions provide guided peer support for the parolees and helps them cope with their difficulties. One of the goals of the group therapy is to identify misconceptions and beliefs (such as those related to work) and try to change them (Efodi, 2014; Peled-Laskov et al,. 2021; Shoham & Peled-Laskov, 2020).

PRA offers diverse therapy groups aimed at addressing the various criminogenic needs of participating parolees. Thus, groups exist that focus on the subjects of law-breaking, bible studies, habit change, short prison terms, psychodrama, employment, life skills, mindfulness and youth advancement. During the COVID-19 epidemic, when many were isolated, PRA further placed emphasis on support group therapy. In 2020, a total of 66 groups operated in the community, most of them dealing with the causes of legal disobedience and law-breaking; these did not include groups that existed in hostels/ halfway-houses, in youth and young adult units, and in units for released female prisoners.

## Work Relations among PRA Personnel

An important ingredient that adds to PRA’s success is the harmonious work relations that characterize the work of many psychotherapists and employment counsellors (Shoham & Peled-Laskov, 2020). It is expected that both will work in close collaboration providing routine updates on parolees’ progress in therapy and any development or difficulties that arises in their place of employment. PRA’s regional inspector is tasked with keeping tabs on the full progress report of the parolees under their jurisdiction; this includes work progress, what happens at home, any progress in the individual and group therapy. In addition, the inspector is expected to be aware of changes or crises experienced by the parolees and, to the extent possible, offer assistance.

## Perceptions of PRA Paroled Prisoners Regarding Re-entry Barriers and Difficulties

The literature describes an array of problems and difficulties former prisoners face (Augustyn & Sample, 2017; Ostermann, 2011; Ostermann, 2012) and specifies what prisoners require as they re-enter the community (Nally et al, 2014; Reynolds et al, 2020; Taylor, 2016).

Although PRA is a comprehensive supervised therapy program that appears to fulfil most of prisoners’ needs as they re-enter the community (Peled-Laskov et al., 2021), a recent study (Shoham et al., in press) that focused on the subjective perceptions of PRA paroled prisoners regarding the difficulties and obstacles they face that could significantly impair their ability to integrate back into normative society, found some ambivalent findings. On the one hand, unlike findings of other studies in Israel and around the world that point to interpersonal difficulties, unmet subsistence needs, and insufficient support as major re-entry difficulties (Shinkfield & Graffam, 2009), most of the subjects (Jews and Arabs) reported that they were not very worried about finding a place to live, or their chances of keeping a job or a lack of social support. On the other hand, they were mainly concerned about instrumental issues, first and foremost the restrictive parole conditions, paying debts and fines, and finding a job with proper working conditions. The findings also revealed significant gaps between the paroled prisoners and PRA personnel regarding the importance they attributed to the re-entry difficulties. The authors were mainly concerned about the significant weight the parolees attributed to the restrictive parole conditions which they believe may reflect the recent toughening of parole conditions in Israel. As they see it, strict parole conditions may cause recidivism rates to rise, as rigid conditions are more likely to be violated (Padfield & Maruna, 2006; Reitz & Rhine, 2020).

The employment difficulties experienced by paroled prisoners were also puzzling in light of the fact that, as being said, the attitude toward paroled prisoners in Israel tends to be more humanitarian and inclusive, and their reintegration into normative society generally receives support (Shoham & Timor, 2014). However, paroled released prisoners are often limited in terms of employment due to the parole conditions set by the parole boards. For example, paroled prisoners cannot be hired by relatives or employers with a criminal background. In addition, other than in rare cases, paroled prisoners must work as salaried employees even if they were self-employed before prison. In light of these restrictions, it seems safe to assume that the employment difficulties reported by Shoham’s et al., (in press) participants stem, at least partially, from the restrictive parole conditions, which unfortunately add to the employment difficulties generally encountered by released prisoners (Peled-Laskov et al., 2018).

# The Organizational Structure of PRA

The organizational structure of PRA headquarters, district and regional branches is characterized by a small number of managing supervisors overseeing the various activities. PRA activities are carried out in various districts and regions (southern, central, northern and Jerusalem), with each district containing a number of regions (Walk & Malikson, 2021). See the figure below.

# Figure 2: Organization Structure of Israeli PRA

# PRA Activities in the Community

Apart from its responsibility for preparing and running rehabilitation programs for paroled prisoners, PRA has a number of additional functions, namely: formulating rehabilitation policy for prisoners; initiating establishment and development of auxiliary services in the framework of prisoner rehabilitation; liaising between government ministries, local authorities and other agencies on aspects relating to prisoner rehabilitation; proposing and initiating legislation with respect to prisoner rehabilitation; acting to raise public awareness of prisoner rehabilitation, provide for their rehabilitation and assimilating released prisoners into their home communities and the general society.

PRA carries out activities in various venues, including employment workshops in prisons. It maintains contact with therapeutic agencies in the community (addiction centres, centres for the homeless, probation services, welfare services, legal assistance, mental health services, therapeutic communities, and interaction with various non-profit organizations). It helps prisoners to receive their benefits (in terms of social-security benefits, food-stamps, debt management, management of bank accounts, assistance in payment of rental dues, etc.). It provides mentors for parolees and their families, student guidance, and assistance to families (in the way of workshops in financial management, parenting and organization of children’s activities); and recruitment of students and volunteers. At present there are about 44 volunteers in PRA.

In addition to the above, PRA manages four hostels/ halfway-houses (among others, for prisoners convicted of domestic violence and for women with addictions). In 2020, a total of 179 parolees received treatment in these locations. Additional residential settings aimed at parolees with substance addiction were operated by the Ministry of Labor and Welfare, in collaboration with PRA. These settings offered treatment for 173 parolees. However, there are other residential places that target youth, sex offenders, mentally ill parolees, elderly women and the physically challenged (Walk & Malikson, 2021).

The hostels are intended to provide intensive holistic solutions for extreme cases among the parolee population, namely those who cannot be rehabilitated in their native communities. These settings are characterized by a high level of supervision alongside a nurturing home environment for comprehensive treatment and rehabilitation.

In 2021, PRA intervention was extended to include additional residential settings, such as: Shoshan House (providing an out-of-home setting for youths and young adults), a halfway house for women, a holistic centre for treating domestic violence, a Torah hostel, and a general hostel for parolees with serious criminal records, those who served long sentences, and chronic recidivists.

## PRA’s Special Programs

A report published by PRA in 2021, provide further detail on additional programs available to released prisoners. Below is a list of some additional specific programs operated by PRA:

**Financial workshop *(Pamonim*):** proper financial management, with mentors supporting paroled prisoners ahead of their integration into the community.

**‘*Our City*’ project:** a joint undertaking with a high school. The program arranges get-togethers between paroled prisoners staying in hostels and regular youths, and involving volunteer work for populations in distress.

**Meditation (Mindfulness) group:** meets once a week, presided over by a volunteer, in accordance with research that shows that meditation programs for prisoners have an impact on strengthening mental wellbeing and reducing repeated drug abuse, violence and recidivism, thus improving the parolee’s chances of successful integration into the normative society.

**Masculinity and sexuality group:** as a result of growing awareness of the connection between addiction and a criminal lifestyle on the one hand, and sexual traumas on the other, special treatment is offered with the help of the centre for Sexual Trauma Victims in the form of a 10-session workshop. The workshop enables individuals to examine their attitude towards sexuality and masculinity, with the emphasis on emotional and containing dialogue about traumatized components, including sexual trauma.

**Case management:** support to women in matters related to health schemes, law, courts and other issues.

**Employment program (*Nitzosot*):** the program is aimed at creating an employment horizon for lawbreakers who are engaged in menial work and are interested in vocational advancement. Through personal guidance, empowerment and assistance in choice of courses and training frameworks, the program participants acquire practical tools to improve their employment status. The aim is to bring about a positive change in their self-esteem and lifestyle, thus creating a social impact in widening circles of influence. The selection process places great emphasis on identifying candidates who are motivated to make a real change in their lives.

## PRA and COVID-19

As is universally known, 2020 and 2021 have been particularly challenging years due to the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. During this time, PRA has had to deal with a host of problems, deriving from the need to protect oneself from the virus. As a result, PRA froze its prison-based activities, with the exception of suitability interviews for its community-based rehabilitation programs, which were conducted initially over the phone and subsequently in the form of video conferences. As a result of the imposed lockdowns, PRA was forced to reduce its reception hours and direct some of the groups to online forums, while splitting some of them into smaller groups. According to PRA, this organizational flexibility allowed activities to be continued with minimum interference to the effectiveness of treatment (Walk & Malikson, 2021).

In addition, the pandemic intensified social problems in general, and those of special-needs families in particular. During this period, PRA made every effort to continue being available and accessible for parolees and their families. PRA personnel performed creatively, initiating a number of activities aimed at maintaining contact with the centres and keeping their community spirit alive (Walk & Malikson, 2021). Throughout the lockdown period the staff continued to be on call for those who needed it. PRA centres remained open during the entire period, with the staff working with its usual intensity: the needs of each prisoner were examined, and individual and group intervention programs were constructed in accordance with guidelines. This included, among other things, jogging in the open air with a minor who was experiencing depression, and visits outside the prisoners’ homes with a view to maintaining eye contact. During this period online communications were expanded to include those in prisons who were in the midst of procedures with PRA; WhatsApp groups were formed in order to instill a sense of belonging; dozens of food baskets were distributed to prisoners and their families; information was forwarded and assistance provided in the utilization of rights and in finding alternative places of employment; and efforts were made to mediate between the prisoners and external entities. All the above actions helped to alleviate feelings of isolation and helplessness.

The COVID-19 pandemic had implications on the job market, compelling PRA’s vocational component to adjust and reinvent its operations in a number of areas:

– Waves of dismissals and leaves of absence: The two lockdowns led to unemployment: to the extent of about 25% in the first lockdown, and to about 15% in the second. This situation called for alterations to be made in the matter of employment, with PRA being required to identify essential markets and make adjustments speedily.

– Periodic updates to the parole committee: as a result of the two lockdowns the PRA was required to forward speedy updates with respect to changes in places of employment, including dismissals and leaves of absence.

– Supervision: in areas defined as red (indicative of the spread of the coronavirus) the possibility of physical supervision was limited. The PRA therefore intensified telephone-based supervision while also intensifying telephonic communication with employers. Personal relations with employers became a source of information on the conduct of the supervised prisoner.

– Appropriate systems were set up following the realization that many of the prisoners under supervision did not know how to use the online services. Thus, telephonic answering services were expanded and a WhatsApp group was opened for the purpose of speedy transmission of information to seekers.

# Summary

As noted earlier, community corrections in Israel operates under, what is nowadays called the Ministry of Labor, Welfare and Social Services (Israeli Social Strength), and not under the ministry of justice, or national security. This is more than just a coincidence and name, or simply an organizational structure; the decision to place community corrections under the Ministry of Labor, Welfare, and Social Services has a deep meaning to it. It signals the approach the country decided to take in dealing with those convicted of crimes; it is declaration of ideology that even those who broke the law, are still considered part of society, and that society is interested in their full integration and participation. Accordingly, and as the name suggests, much emphasis is placed on the welfare aspect of the offenders and their immediate social environment, and in the attempt to integrate them back into the labor market through vocational training and employment programs, as was described in detail in the parole section of this chapter, that is delivered by PRA. The recent addition to the name, found in the parenthesis, ‘Israeli Social Strength’ adds to the narrative of ‘united we stand‘, which is handing a hand to those in need, and not leaving anyone behind, even if they harmed us. It is the forgiving nature that is embedded in the country’s Jewish heritage that order us to treat one another as if they were family. Such moto and further operation received further justification with the Dorner Committee and report mentioned earlier in this chapter. This committee lead by the Honorable Supreme Court Judge, Miriam Dorner, concluded that rehabilitation of offenders in the community has the ability to produce much superior outcomes in terms of recidivism and public safety, than simply incarcerating offenders, a practice that did not provide sufficient evidence to support its effectiveness (The Dorner Report, 2015).

Yet, ideology and practice are not always aligned; While the Ministry of Labor, Welfare and Social Services aims to fully rehabilitate and reintegrate convicted offenders through its tasked agencies—probation and parole—not always such effort is welcomed by the general public, and much more effort should be devoted into educating the public to accept and welcome convicted offenders who paid their dues to society. Indeed, such efforts by the Israeli probation and parole are made through their restorative justice initiatives, and many well-developed programs and services, and yet it is not as easy to eliminate the stigma of being criminally convicted. Specifically, it is not uncommon for many to hold negative attitudes toward convicted offenders and released prisoners, and many times the limitations of supervision impede successful integration into the labor market. For example, while employment plays a major part in the successful rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders, the mandatory supervision at times may be viewed as a double-edge sword. On the one hand, supervision is helpful in keeping the offender on a straight path, one the other hand it signals employers that they are not to be trusted, or simply visiting by the parole agent is perceived as distracting the employee from doing his/ her job. These are issues that still pose great challenge to many, and in particular in a relatively small country where everyone can find out about anyone with relative ease.

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