

Labouring behind bars

Assessing international law on working prisoners

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ABSTRACT This briefing paper explores work in prison through the lens of international human rights law. This is the first of a series of publications in the project ‘Unlocking potential: towards effective, sustainable, and ethical provision of work opportunities for prisoners and prison leavers’. The briefing—along with a detailed Appendix—assesses and critiques the applicable law and highlights the outdated nature of key binding norms governing prison work. It also identifies gaps between claimed benefits and actual prisoner work conditions. It assesses the existing international legal framework, revealing conceptual gaps and inconsistencies across standards. These gaps, we suggest, may result in prisoners being exploited in ways unforeseen by the framers of international laws.

Keywords: forced labour conventions, human rights, international human rights standards, international prison research, labour rights, prison labour, work in prison

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