

WHITEPAPER · MEPD

# Second-track reintegration: much more than a legal obligation

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15 key questions answered by our  
experts Paul Bongers, Arjen Klasens,  
and Corine Pennings.



## INTRODUCTION

# Introduction

Second-track reintegration is often seen as something employers simply have to do. But it can be much more than a legal requirement.

For employees it can be an opportunity to explore a new direction in their career. For employers, it is a responsible and future-focused way to support employees when returning to their current organization is no longer possible.

The process also raises important questions. How do you support an employee in a way that not only meets legal requirements, but also adds real value? And how do you turn second-track reintegration into a constructive process that creates new opportunities for both the employee and the employer?

In this whitepaper, our experts explain what effective second-track reintegration looks like: clear, supportive and focused on sustainable employability. With personalized guidance, close collaboration and a proactive approach, second-track reintegration can become a pathway to new opportunities rather than simply the end of an employment relationship.

## "Mensenwerk in de Maak"

MEPD is a dedicated partner for organizations and employees in the manufacturing industry and technology sectors. We believe that people make the difference in an organization's success.



PAUL BONGERS · REINTEGRATION EXPERT

# Strategic questions

## Creating value through second-track reintegration

Second-track reintegration is more than an administrative requirement. It is an opportunity to help employees move toward suitable and sustainable new employment.

### A new perspective for the employee

Focused coaching, career development, and guidance across different sectors help employees remain employable and prepare for their next step. Practical support such as career coaching, retraining, networking, and job search guidance increases the chances of finding suitable work and helps employees regain confidence and resilience.

### Value for the employer

Employers do more than meet their legal obligations. A well-designed second-track program also demonstrates responsible employment practices and contributes to a supportive organizational culture. Professional guidance can reduce the workload for employers, provide expert advice, and help limit legal and financial risks. Clear communication and cooperation between all parties help maintain a constructive relationship with the employee and turn the process into a shared search for the best possible solution.



"Re-integratie is geen eindstation, maar een opstap naar nieuwe kansen."  
Paul Bongers | Re-integratie expert

"Reintegration is not the end of the road. It can be the beginning of a new direction."

## HUMAN RESOURCES

# The role of HR in second-track reintegration

HR plays a central role in connecting employees, managers, case managers and occupational health professionals. This means coordinating the process while maintaining the right balance between legal requirements and personal support.

From the start, clear communication can help reduce uncertainty and resistance. HR also helps define responsibilities, schedule evaluations, and translate the occupational health physician's recommendations into practical reintegration steps.



## HR

Coordinates the process and helps maintain balance.

## Case managers

Guide the reintegration process and monitor progress.

## Managers

Support the employee and remain actively involved.

## Occupational health professionals

Provide medical guidance and define the employee's functional capacity.

## LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

# Meeting the requirements of the Dutch Gatekeeper Improvement Act

Effective second-track reintegration combines a personal approach with careful documentation and compliance with Dutch reintegration legislation.

Following the required steps under the Dutch Gatekeeper Improvement Act (*Wet verbetering poortwachter*) and documenting actions and decisions carefully can help prevent delays and reduce the risk of wage sanctions.

## Careful documentation

Record relevant actions and decisions throughout the process.

## Gatekeeper requirements

Follow the required reintegration steps and timelines.

## Specialist support

Work with experienced professionals to guide both employer and employee.

## Clear structure

Create a structured process that supports progress and results.

## PREVENTION

# Preventing long-term absence

Prevention starts with a proactive approach to employability. HR and managers can help prevent long-term absence by regularly discussing well-being, employability, career development, and changing needs. Data, coaching, and career development can also help identify issues at an early stage.

When employees feel comfortable discussing their employability and support is easily accessible, they are more likely to speak up before problems become serious. This can help prevent long-term absence while also supporting job satisfaction, productivity, and employee retention.

## Ready to turn reintegration into a new opportunity?

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## Practical questions

“Successful reintegration starts with small steps forward.”

# When should second-track reintegration start?

Second-track reintegration generally comes into view during the first year of absence, or earlier if it becomes clear that returning to the employee's current position is no longer realistic. Once the employer gives approval, we begin actively exploring suitable opportunities with other employers. At the same time, the employer continues to explore possibilities within the current organization. This requires close cooperation between the employer, employee, and reintegration advisor, supported by clear communication and regular evaluations.

**First report of illness:** Absence management begins.

**First-track reintegration:** The focus is on returning to the employee's own position or another suitable role within the organization.

**During the first year:** Second-track reintegration may come into view.

**Parallel approach:** When appropriate, first-track and second-track reintegration can continue alongside each other.



## Finding suitable new employment

The process starts with a thorough assessment.

What is the employee still able to do?  
Where do their strengths, skills, experience, and ambitions lie?

Based on these insights, we create a reintegration plan focused on realistic employment opportunities.

We use our network to identify suitable roles and provide personal coaching and guidance throughout the search. This increases the likelihood of finding work that offers a sustainable match.

Key elements include:

- A thorough assessment of strengths, skills, and ambitions
- A reintegration plan focused on realistic opportunities
- Using our network to identify suitable roles
- Personal coaching and guidance toward sustainable employment

## Keeping the process on track

In Dutch, there is a saying: *"een goed begin is het halve werk."*

A clear, structured reintegration plan provides direction and makes it easier to monitor the process.

Our approach allows us to stay closely involved and make adjustments when necessary. Regular progress reports and open communication with the employer help keep everyone aligned and prevent unnecessary delays.

1. **Plan:** create a clear and structured reintegration plan
2. **Act:** follow a proven approach and take practical steps
3. **Evaluate:** review progress regularly
4. **Adjust:** make timely changes when needed

# Common challenges, and how to address them

## Unclear expectations

Employee and employer may have different expectations about what second-track reintegration involves. We clarify expectations from the start and communicate openly throughout the process.

## A passive approach from the employee

Some employees find it difficult to take an active role in the process. Clear guidance, realistic actions, and achievable steps help maintain momentum.

## Limited employer involvement

Simply handing the process over to an external provider can slow progress. Regular communication keeps the employer, employee, and advisor actively involved.

## Lack of structure

Without clear goals and planning, progress can stall. A structured approach keeps the process moving and makes progress visible.

## MONITORING

# Monitoring and documenting progress

A structured approach is essential throughout second-track reintegration. We maintain a complete file that meets UWV requirements. This reintegration plan is updated throughout the process with progress reports, contact moments and an overview of job application activities. This keeps the process transparent and makes it possible to adjust the approach quickly when needed.

"Successful reintegration starts with the right steps forward."

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## The human side of reintegration

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"Second-track  
reintegration: an  
obligation or a new  
opportunity?"

## Supporting employees who struggle with second-track reintegration

Starting second-track reintegration can have a major emotional impact. We take the time to explain why the process is necessary, while also focusing on the opportunities it can create.

We explain the legal requirements clearly, but we also recognize that this can be a significant step for the employee. Some people need time to process what is happening. We create space for that conversation.

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We listen carefully and give employees room to express their concerns, emotions, and questions.

# Dealing with resistance, frustration and uncertainty

Four approaches help us address resistance constructively.

## Listen

Acknowledge emotions before immediately trying to find a solution or persuade someone.

## Understand

Explore what is causing the resistance so that the underlying issue can be addressed.

## Support

Provide additional support when needed. This might include involving HR in a joint conversation.

## Inspire

Share examples from previous reintegration programs to show that second-track reintegration can also lead to positive opportunities.

We also support managers who need to have difficult conversations about reintegration. Training in communication and leadership skills can help them approach these situations with greater confidence.



## Helping employees feel heard and supported

### Active involvement

We involve employees in decisions and choices throughout the process.

### A transparent process

We explain each step clearly so employees know what to expect.

### Confidentiality

We report on the progress of the process, not on the personal content of coaching conversations.

### A safe environment

Without the employee's consent, we do not share substantive information from confidential conversations with the employer.

# Regaining confidence and motivation

After a long period of illness, employees may lose sight of their strengths and abilities.

We help them rediscover who they are, what they want, and what they are able to do. Together, we work on a strong resume and LinkedIn profile and encourage networking conversations, job applications, and opportunities to gain practical experience with potential employers.

Job application training and support with personal presentation help employees approach the next stage of their career with greater confidence.

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"We guide people with personal attention, perspective and confidence, so every step in second-track reintegration becomes a step forward."

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## CONCLUSION

### More than an obligation: a new perspective

Effective second-track reintegration goes beyond complying with laws and regulations.

It gives employees an opportunity to take the next step in their career with greater confidence. At the same time, it helps employers demonstrate responsible and supportive employment practices.

With personalized guidance, close cooperation between everyone involved, and attention to prevention, reintegration becomes not only more effective, but also more meaningful.

Ultimately, second-track reintegration is not just about meeting obligations. It is about creating perspective.

Reintegration is not the end of the road. It can be the beginning of something new.

# Questions? Let's talk.

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