

Resocialization Of Convicts in The Czech Republic: The Role of The Prison System in Promoting Reintegration into Society*

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Abstract

The article focuses on the execution of imprisonment in the Czech Republic and its objectives and responsibilities in promoting the reintegration of convicted persons into society. The prison system's primary mission is to ensure the safety of society and protection from offenders, as well as to provide systematic social support and penitentiary care. Specially trained staff help convicts understand their behaviour and the reasons for breaking the law and acquire new moral standards, skills, and knowledge. This approach emphasises the transformation of convicts to reduce the risk of reoffending and facilitate their return to society as active, independent and contributing members. The practical and social-adaptive skills developed during their sentence are crucial for successful re-socialisation and minimising re-offending risks. The study offers insight into the principles and practices of the Czech penitentiary system, emphasising its rehabilitative and preventive functions. The current Russo-Ukrainian war has caused an influx of Ukrainian refugees, including those who may have committed crimes in the Czech Republic. This situation places increased demands on the prison system, which must respond not only to the general needs of convicts, but also to the specific challenges arising from their cultural, legal and social context.

Keywords: Prison Service; Czech Republic; Imprisonment; Educational and Preparation of Employees

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A. INTRODUCTION

Every society has a prison service system reflecting current social, economic, and cultural conditions. This system adapts to a given society's socio-cultural and financial situation. Imprisonment is assumed to be a necessary social service with adequate security elements. The crucial sense for effective functioning is educated and qualified personnel who provide quality social services to sentenced individuals about the law. Further, well-educated personnel influence behavioural work with prisoners and their secure return to society. It is essential to realise that all prisoners have human and inherent rights that must be respected and fulfilled. Their reasons for crime and imprisonment are irrelevant; hence, they are still human beings with the right to protect their dignity. Prison employees must reflect this.

Daněk and Klugerová ([2023](#)) discuss social exclusion. Social exclusion is a significant issue that modern society is attempting to address. It has adverse impacts not only on a local scale but also on a national, European, and even global scale. In today's interconnected society, it is essential to recognise that social exclusion issues in other countries or on different continents will impact us. Therefore, striving to eliminate, prevent, and combat social exclusion through all possible means is crucial. Every imprisonment system originated gradually due to social factors meeting other social factors. Thus, imprisonment systems have historical roots and experiences that still influence them. Understanding this historical context significantly influences the further development and understanding of these services.

Concerning the conditions prevailing in Czech prisons, it is now appropriate to place primary emphasis on external connections with sociology and gradually build a position for a possible future return of sociologists to everyday life practice behind Czech prisons. In the eyes of the representatives, sociology must gain the (partially) lost trust of the Czech prison system. The implementation above contributes to this research in which sociologists participated externally and contributed to creating a positive image of sociology. Investing limited resources in external cooperation and gradually strengthening mutual ties is better. ([Dirga, 2021](#))

Crises are very creeping, slowly or quickly. We must rapidly identify control and border (critical) points to respond adequately to crises. These points will help us detect impending dangers and take appropriate action. The article's contribution is a description of the existence and an illustrative graphical representation of these points, which are crucial for early recognition. When searching for and evaluating threats, it is necessary to analyse their time course

and impacts depending on time. The contribution, in contrast to static observation or examination of crises (reaching a critical, further irreversible point), provides an insight into the dynamic side of the crisis. In practice, the symptoms of an impending crisis are either overestimated or not observed at all. The paper introduces various parameters and characteristics of crises, which can be used to classify crises further. ([Rak, Sulc, Kopencova, Vlach, Hudecova, 2022](#))

Prison research is key to understanding and improving the functioning of this system as a social service. Prisons play a vital role not only in punishment but also in the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners into society.

B. METHODS

This article uses a qualitative research method with a literature and legal approach. This approach was chosen to explore in depth various social, historical, and normative aspects of the correctional system in the Czech Republic, especially in the context of the resocialisation of prisoners. Qualitative research provides space for researchers to understand the complex dynamics in social reintegration, from the influence of socio-economic conditions to the challenges in overcoming social exclusion. Through a literature approach, researchers review relevant academic works and previous research results, including contributions from sociologists and legal experts who highlight the importance of humane treatment of prisoners. Meanwhile, a legal approach is used to analyse policies and regulations that regulate prisoners' rights and the responsibilities of correctional institutions. This article also highlights the importance of the involvement of educated personnel and the need for cooperation between social and legal institutions to create a just and effective correctional system. With this approach, the research is able to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the prison system functions as a social service oriented towards rehabilitation and restoration of human rights.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Current Content of Education in Imprisonment

The expectation and content of imprisonment education historically originate and develop based on state attitudes towards the imprisonment system and philosophical opinions in the justice area, mainly in imprisonment services. In a democratic legal state, imprisonment becomes a crucial social service for the public with required security contexts.

Work in imprisonment services aims to prepare prisoners for their return to society in an adequate form. The main goal is to prepare and provide sufficient conditions for imprisoned people to return to society and become active members (reintegrate). Prison personnel should help prisoners familiarise and internalise habits, attitudes, and skills they will need during their life outside prison (re-socialising process).

All these aims should be met in prison where the conditions are humane, imprisoned people are respected, and their rights and freedom are respected. Further, the law and rules are respected as well. Thus, to change an individual, the whole system of imprisonment must be transformed. That means, for example, accepting international norms and law. Afterwards, effective and efficient work with prisoners can begin. Further, that will lead to a successful process of re-socialisation, which will lead to lower recidivism.

2. Structure and Organisation of Imprisonment in the Czech Republic

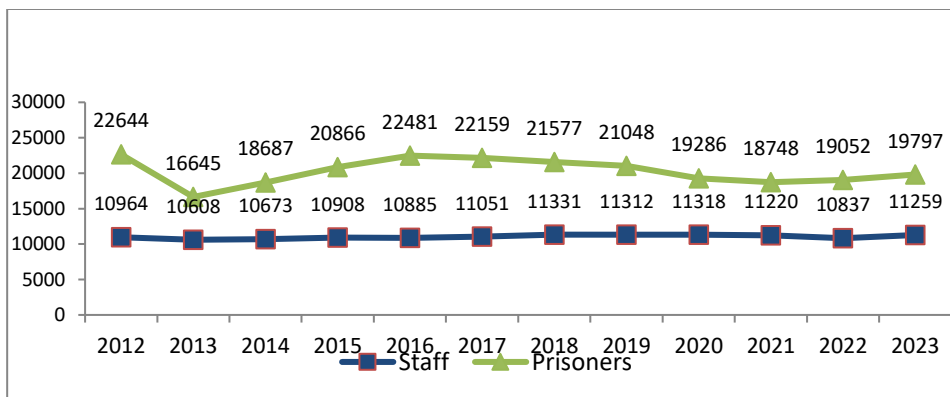
Every society has a system of law and sentence fulfilment that reflects its current needs and values. Prison plays a significant part in this system, which has two main aims: protecting society from delinquents and preparing sentenced people for their return to society as regular members who can respect the laws and rules given by society.

The Prison Services of the Czech Republic is a security corps supervised by the Ministry of Justice, and it secures imprisonment and its fulfilment, detention, security in court, and correctness during court. In the Czech Republic, there are 35 prisons, of which 10 are remand prisons and 25 are prisons. Further, the prison service oversees three institutions for securing remands. These institutes are prisons for people with mental disability, due to which they are not legally responsible. These institutes secure detention, and they are a type of security detention. Currently, there are three institutes in Brno, Opava, and Prague.

The Czech Republic's prison services have an educational institution in Stará pod Ralskem: the Academy of Prison Services of the Czech Republic. The Academy aims to provide education and training for new prison service members and offer employees specialised courses and lifelong learning courses. For imprisoned people, there is a High School specialised in handicrafts in Prague, which runs diverse educational institutions in selected prisons in the Czech Republic.

According to the law, the Czech prison personnel is divided into two categories: members who serve in uniform and civic employees. Members mainly fulfil security tasks such as the security of buildings, prisoner escorts, and direct supervision of prisoners. Further, justice guards supervise the behaviour and security of the courts' and the ministry buildings' buildings. At the same time, the civic employees are specialised workers in direct contact with prisoners, such as social workers, psychologists, notable pedagogues, medical staff, administrative staff, and supportive staff. The complete number of employees was in December 2023 11,259 employees, including 7060 members and 4199 civic employees (see Table 1).

Table 1. Development of the number of staff and the number of prisoners
between 2012 and 2023



3. Resocialising Process During Imprisonment

The law is stringent and states the aims of the imprisonment process: to protect society from delinquents, limit recidivism, and change the behaviour of those sentenced. The prison services in the Czech Republic focus on security and the re-socialisation process.

Resocialisation is a process that begins immediately when the sentenced person enters prison. It aims to prepare the sentenced for their return to society and provide them with skills to avoid recidivism. This goal is challenging due to the high number of recidivists and addicts who occur among sentenced people. Thus, diverse programs are provided for convicted people to prepare them for life after imprisonment. These programs offer diverse activities where sentenced

individuals can practice and gain the skills and attitudes needed for a triumphant return to society.

Handling programs are divided into: work activities, educational activities, special educational activities, activities of interest, and areas for creating outside relationships.

First: Work activities

Work activities are a crucial part of the handling program. If prisoners are placed in work activities, they have work responsibilities based on their health, age, work abilities, and skills. These activities aim to provide a chance to build a work attitude, mainly for those who have never worked, and to keep this attitude. Work in prison offers the opportunity to earn money to pay for their stay in prison and cover compensation for their crime.

Second: Educational activities

Education is crucial during the resocialisation of sentenced people. These activities are focused on gaining knowledge and skills for a triumphant return to society. The Prison Service of the Czech Republic ensures that sentenced people can get an education during imprisonment. To meet this, educational centres in prisons offer diverse majors. Further, it is possible to take courses provided by external companies, which help to gain specific education which can be used after returning to society.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a corner of society where the spotlight has not fallen – the black hole of prisons, confining predominantly poor, minoritised and often younger adults. Globally, during the pandemic, people detained in prison have been locked away in solitary, or near-solitary, confinement for up to 23 hours a day. In the UK, this meant choosing between fresh air, exercise or a phone call to loved ones daily. There has been little mention of education. Those in custody endured over a year locked in a cell without access to basic education, let alone Higher Education (HE). In examining the state's responsibility to provide "education for all", we demonstrate the value and importance of prison education beyond the current focus on risk, responsibility and recidivism through our collective participation in the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Programme. We evidence the transformative and humanising potential of HE in prison through three key elements – the space and learning environment; the role of voice, recognition and agency; and the power of disruptive and transgressive teaching practice. We shine a light on education in prison during the COVID-19 pandemic. The impacts of COVID-19 expose new and deeper forms of structural disadvantage that shape the educational

experiences and journeys of people in custody. We consider how we can expedite “education as the practice of freedom” for those incarcerated during and beyond the pandemic. We conclude by reimagining HE in UK prisons, reflecting upon alternative, more positive approaches to prison education. ([Martin, Bowl, Banks, 2023](#))

Third: Special educational activities

These activities focus on understanding the causes and consequences of offences and the risks and needs of each sentenced individual. These include psychological and therapeutic activities which lead to the right resocialisation and support an individual’s development. The Prison Service of the Czech Republic tries to perform these activities in specialised centres where sentenced people have some mental disability, behavioural disorders, personal disorders, or addictions.

Fourth: Activities of interest

These are focused on sensible leisure time usage during imprisonment. They aim to improve and develop skills and social abilities, which supports limiting recidivism. Favourite activities are sports, conditioning, handicraft, and participation in diverse leisure time clubs. We can also include support for spiritual needs here. Among the most problematic issues are issues of pragmatic faith, obstacles preventing prison chaplains from performing their jobs, and the unsystematic and inconsistent nature of prison and post-penitentiary spiritual care. ([Dirga, Váně, 2020](#))

Fifth: Areas of outside relationships creation

This area is focused on active relationship creation, strengthening, and support of sentenced people's social relationships with their families and friends outside of prison. The aim is for the convicted people to develop their skills and abilities in social communication, which will help them transition from prison to life after release.

Employees of the Prison Service of the Czech Republic, civic employees, and members work in direct contact with prisoners who have experienced repeated conflicts with the law. Plus, the prisoners are often complicated personas; several prisoners have some personal disorders, or they have some type of addictions, either drugs, alcohol, or gambling. Therefore, if the employees of the prison services should work with prisoners and their diverse personal characteristics, they must be aware of these pathological influences, which often are causes of their delinquent behaviour.

The imprisonment of sentenced people has its purpose and sense. Its main purpose is to protect members of society against criminal behaviour and prepare prisoners for their lives after their release. Therefore, the employees prepare programs that reflect the seriousness of the crime and the length of the imprisonment. They mainly aim to prepare the prisoners for their lives after their release so they can become fulfilled members of society. Thus, the programs should reflect the diverse needs of prisoners.

The program's success depends on several factors, such as the prisoner's inner motivation and the professional qualities of the employees. Therefore, significant stress is put on professionals and their characteristics. Thus, the employees must be able to handle the stress and unusual aspects of their work environment. Further, they must stay immune to pressure to reveal information and advantages and break the inner and outside rules given by the prison environment.

4. Education and Training of Employees of the Prison Services of the Czech Republic

The Academy in Straz pod Ralskem is the only centre of the Prison Services of the Czech Republic where all employees, civic members, and members complete primary-specific courses and further specialised courses in life-long learning. The Academy cooperates with specialists in the area, mainly from secure escort services for prisoners and universities. The cooperation is done through diverse seminars, conferences, and work-based meetings. The Academy also participates in developing academic work and research in pathology and penitentiary.

A quality education that responds flexibly to changes in the educational needs of pupils and students at all levels of education and to the demands of future employers on the labour market must become the Czech Republic's priority. It plays a vital role in tackling unemployment, as well as in the economic development and the increase in competitiveness of our country. ([Tomšíková, Němejce, Smékalová, 2019](#))

The Academy created its system of education and preparation for the needs of prisoner services, which is dedicated to every employee and professional group. Every new civic employee must undergo expertise preparation and then complete a specialised course and education for their role.

Primary preparation is aimed at all employees, whether civic or prison service members. For members of the prison services, primary preparation is one type of course. Still, for civic employees, preparation depends on whether they will be in direct contact with prisoners and whether they will be part of the handling program. Individual aspects (problems, trends, topics) of prison systems are in the long-term interests of penitentiary sociologists and penologists, which also applies to the situation in the countries of Central Europe. In connection with the growing number of prison population, the issue of so-called prison violence, including implementation, also comes to the fore, with possible preventive interventions and measures (including psychiatric examination of prisoners, individual emotion management programs, etc.). ([Juříček, Smolík, 2023](#))

Structure and placement of primary expertise training of diverse types:

- A-type focused on Prison Services of the Czech Republic members without differences in placement. The education and training for a member takes up to 15 weeks, including the final exam when the member must prove their theoretical knowledge in education, prison politics, ethical norms, psychology, and practice such as checks, handling handcuffs, and manipulation with a weapon.
- B1— This type is aimed at employees who interact with prisoners but do not run any handling programs. Typically, these are people who take care of logistics. This course takes one week and ends with a written exam.
- B2 – This course focuses on employees in contact with prisoners and run the handling programs. These are often people who secure the detention sentences, such as psychologists, specialised pedagogues, social workers, and sometimes sociologists. The education of these professions is focused not only on theoretical education but also on practical skills required for their ability to perform this job. Mainly, this includes preparing and leading the program, evaluating the sentenced people's knowledge of diagnostic tools and methods used to prepare diagnostic files, and working with specific groups of prisoners. This course takes up to eight weeks and is finished with a verbal exam on chosen subjects in front of groups of experts.
- B3— This type of course is aimed at medical staff, including doctors and nurses. It takes up to one week and is completed by a written exam.
- B4— This course is focused on civic employees working part-time who are in direct contact with prisoners.

- I—The new employees' course focused on employees who will not work in direct contact with prisoners. These include assistants or employees working in economic or maintenance resorts. This course is not conducted in person, but the preparation happens individually. Every employee is given distance texts that help them prepare for the exam.

Each organisation's base is specifically trained employees; thus, every step should focus on its employees. It is necessary to mention the aspect of professional practice and professional training, as stated by Stárek, Klugerová, and Víšek (2022). The development and nature of quality work placement is not only the work of the university but also each student, specifically from the perspective of representation of the given university when a student creates the first impression not only in itself but also in the university itself and may thus open or close the gates to undertaking further work placement. The ever-expanding portfolio of institutions with which they collaborate or participate in project activities, conferences, and professional seminars generates awareness of the profession's diversity and the interconnectedness and transfer of information that evaluates the student, the university and their expertise or performance.

Therefore, if the Prison Services of the Czech Republic is to be an effective and efficient social service, it should be able to rely on its employees. These employees should be experts in their field and able to prepare programs for sentenced people that prepare them for life after their imprisonment finishes. The head of the Academy acknowledges this need, and they aim to continue preparing their employees to help prisoners re-socialise. Further, they keep educating their current employees.

Radicalisation and extremist expressions represent a significant security threat to the prison environment, especially in its specific context. The dynamic nature of the radicalisation process, in connection with the mutual influence of processes in outside society on the prison environment and vice versa, causes the radicalisation process to take on new forms (not only) in the prison environment. In this context, monitoring these manifestations, whether about the activities carried out, the penetration of illegal substances and objects, or symbolism, is essential. (Lochmannová & Kolář, 2021)

It is necessary to realise that radicalisation is a multifactorial problem. Therefore, experts from the ranks of psychologists, pedagogues, sociologists, etc., should also participate in education. However, the Prison Service of the Czech Republic does not have many experts to educate employees in these areas. For that reason, it is necessary to include educational activities and experts from the academic sphere, who will be able to speak about the topic in depth and be

willing to participate and share information with representatives of the given security corps. However, sharing information and experience between security forces can sometimes appear problematic, mainly due to various security checks. ([Vejvodová, Kolář, 2019](#))

Requirements for the training of security specialists, which also includes the field of emergency management and protection of the public, are changing in response to the changing needs of society. The Czech Republic, acting through its competent ministries, has developed a Concept of Education in Emergency Management, which was approved by the National Security Council in 2001. Over time, however, these provisions have lost some relevance given the needs and rapidly changing demands of society and the security situation. The analysis that has been carried out has confirmed a lack of interconnection and uniformity within educational activities.

Therefore, the plan of non-legislative governmental tasks adopted by the Czech Republic for the first half of 2017 aimed to optimise training specialists' rules to align with current trends and needs. The aim of the updated provision was, in addition to the training of emergency management specialists, to enhance the coordination of educational processes, to provide regular information support to trainers, and to provide the opportunity to acquire lecturing skills and teaching experience. Subsequently, some concerns were voiced that target groups might not be interested in this training, and that the budget for this sector would be reduced. However, adequate systematic branch management in scale and continuity is currently lacking in this area. The present chapter outlines the gradual development of the emergency management education system and compares educational concepts, emphasising their positive and negative aspects. ([Tušer et al., 2022](#))

D. CONCLUSION

The Prison Service of the Czech Republic (PSCR) is tasked with a dual mission: ensuring societal safety by detaining offenders and preparing individuals for reintegration into society. This duality becomes increasingly complex in light of global crises such as the Russo-Ukrainian war, which has introduced new challenges to the prison system. Ukrainian nationals who find themselves imprisoned in the Czech Republic represent a unique demographic, requiring tailored approaches to address their resocialisation needs while acknowledging the significant impact of war on their psychosocial and legal circumstances.

The integration of Ukrainian inmates into existing resocialisation programs demands a sensitive and adaptive approach that takes into account their cultural backgrounds, linguistic barriers, and potential experiences of trauma resulting from conflict. The PSCR must ensure that these individuals receive access to mental health support, particularly for conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), while simultaneously equipping them with practical and social skills for reintegration. Such an approach reflects the broader principles of human rights and dignity enshrined in international standards for treating prisoners.

Moreover, the war's repercussions extend beyond incarceration, impacting Ukrainian nationals who are released from Czech prisons. These individuals face unique reintegration challenges, including uncertainty regarding their legal status, disrupted family and social ties, and limited access to post-penitentiary support networks. The PSCR must therefore collaborate with governmental and non-governmental organisations to provide comprehensive post-release support, encompassing housing assistance, employment opportunities, and access to social services. By addressing these challenges, the prison system can contribute to minimising recidivism and fostering social stability.

Preventing the stigmatisation of Ukrainian inmates and facilitating their acceptance by society is a critical aspect of successful reintegration. Public awareness campaigns and targeted initiatives can help combat prejudice and build societal understanding of the unique circumstances faced by individuals affected by war. Similarly, the PSCR should enhance its training programs for staff, emphasising intercultural competence, trauma-informed care, and effective communication strategies to better serve this vulnerable population.

The ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war underscores the interconnectedness of global crises and their influence on local systems. This presents an opportunity for the Czech prison system to refine its resocialisation strategies and strengthen its role as a rehabilitative institution. By prioritising the needs of Ukrainian inmates and those released under the shadow of war, the PSCR not only fulfils its mandate but also demonstrates its commitment to resilience and inclusivity in the face of evolving societal challenges.

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