

## THE PRESENT STATE OF AFFAIRS AND ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF THE PRISON SYSTEM IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

<sup>a</sup>FRANTIŠEK VLACH, <sup>b</sup>PETR ČERVENKA, <sup>c</sup>TEREZA KOLOUCHOVÁ

*AMBIS University, Faculty of Education, Lindnerova 575/1, 180 00 Praha 8 – Libeň, Czech Republic*  
 email: <sup>a</sup>frantisek.vlach@ambis.cz, <sup>b</sup>13310@mail.ambis.cz, <sup>c</sup>25244@mail.ambis.cz

This article was created at AMBIS University within the project "The research of selected areas of contemporary prison system" number SVV/2024/6105 supported by funding for Specific University Research provided by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in 2024 and 2025.

**Abstract:** This paper focuses on the current development of the Czech prison system, which feels the strain from prison overcrowding, the need to improve resocialization programmes, and to lower penological recidivism. The paper places particular emphasis on the growing share of women serving prison sentences. An additional area of discussion highlights the need for economic sustainability of the prison system. Said proposals could improve the financial circumstances of the prison system and raise the chances of successful prisoner reintegration into society, precisely because of the employment rate. This paper aims to illustrate the significance of the restorative approach in justice (in contrast to the retributive approach) in combination with economic effectiveness that it can assist in ensuring a stable prison system.

**Keywords:** Alleged offender, employment rate, imprisoned women, person serving a sentence, prisoner costs, the Prison Service of the Czech Republic.

### 1 Introduction

The Prison Service of the Czech Republic, in terms of expertise and management complexity, is among the most demanding state protective bodies because it also assumes the role of a specific public social service. Experts in the prison service work in direct contact with prisoners to provide education. These prisoners are a danger to society as they may be perpetrators of serious crimes, but they also need effective help, penitentiary education and therapy with regard to the depth of the personality disorders. It is here then the double meaning of punishment – not only the punishment of criminals and protection of society against dangerous perpetrators, i.e. individuals with behavioural disorders who threaten the lives, health and property of citizens on one hand, but also the provision of suitable rehabilitation programmes to increase the likelihood of successful reintegration of the sentenced into society after release to eliminate the risk of recidivism.

In recent years, the Prison System of the Czech Republic has undergone significant changes, especially in its attempt to react to the challenges connected with prison overcrowding and the necessity to improve the resocialization programmes for prisoners because of the high penological recidivism. This article provides an overview of the growth of the number of prisoners, the difference between an alleged offender and a person serving a sentence, and the economic costs for running a prison system in the Czech Republic over the last ten years. The context for these changes is the broader European trend that follows the development of the prison populations not only in numbers, but also in demographics, including gender composition.

Traditionally, men form the overwhelming majority of the prison population, but the portion of women in prisons in European countries has grown in recent times, not only in countries with high prison populations, but also in those where the capacities are rather low. The paper analyses this trend with an emphasis on the development in the Czech Republic, Germany, Spain and France – countries where the prison systems markedly differ from each other and which have dissimilar socioeconomic conditions and legislation. Key factors, such as penal policy, legislative amendments and broader socioeconomic influences have a fundamental impact on the number prisoners and their structure.

While men form a much larger majority of prisoners, the growth in women prisoners is a phenomenon that demands attention not only in terms of capacity but also in terms of the costs and

necessary support for their successful resocialization after return to society from prison.

### 2 Basic information on the Prison System of the Czech Republic

The Prison Service of the Czech Republic is under the authority of the Ministry of Justice. The Prison Service of the Czech Republic cooperates with the Probation and Mediation Services of the Czech Republic, though they are two independent organizational state units that operate under the Ministry of Justice. The Prison Service of the Czech Republic ensures the penitentiary care and Probation and Mediation Services ensures the subsequent postpenitentiary care.

There are 35 prisons and remand centres with approximately 20,000 prisoners, in the Czech Republic. The task of the Prison Service of the Czech Republic is to enforce detention, punishment, forensic detention, maintain order in court buildings and the Ministry of Justice, and also to provide escort services between prisons, to courts and to health facilities.

Czech prison staff is divided into two groups, where one group comprises uniformed officers and the other group comprises civilian employees. The uniformed officers form about two thirds of the staff, including for example the directors and their first representatives, supervisors and guards, preventive officers, escort officers or dog handlers, and one third of the staff are civilians, such as psychologists, social workers, teachers, educators, health workers, chaplains, administrative workers, workers in the logistics department and the economic department. The total number of employees is around 11,000. (Jůzl, Vlach, 2022)

#### 2.1 The number of imprisoned individuals and the growth over time

Over the last ten years, the prison population in the Czech Republic has fluctuated between 18,000 and 23,000 prisoners. Based on data from the Prison Service of the Czech Republic, several significant changes occurred in this period. In 2012, the number of prisoners hovered above 23,000, which was at the time when the Czech prisons were conspicuously overcrowded. In 2012, overcrowding of Czech prisons approached 110% of their capacity. In 2013, the number of imprisoned individuals dropped to an average of 16,388, because of the presidential amnesty. After the significant drop in imprisoned individuals in 2013, a resurgence in the numbers is recorded, specifically from 2014 to 2017, when it almost reached the limit of 23,000. From 2018, there was a slight dip in the number of prisoners, which stabilized around 20,000 imprisoned individuals. The use of alternative punishment and improved conditions for imprisoned individuals upon release contributed to this change. Since 2020, the number of imprisoned people remains stable, at around 19,000 to 20,000. This number is influenced not only by punishment policy but also by the passing of the Act on Conditioned Release and alternative punishments, which helped lower the number of prisoners. (Statistical yearbook of the Prison Service of the Czech Republic)

According to available statistics, women comprise a small portion of the prison population in Europe, usually around 5% of the total number of prisoners, with minor differences between individual states. In 2022, women made up about 5.3% from the total number of prisoners in Europe, which amounts to one woman in every 12 prisoners. For example, women comprise 8.5% of the prison population in the Czech Republic, which is above the European average. In Germany and Spain, this share hovers around 5%. In several countries, women have a higher prison representation, for example in Northern and Western Europe, while in Eastern Europe this portion is a little lower. The number of women in prisons around the whole world in

recent years has been growing, even when the number of places has been falling. (Czech Statistical Office)

## 2.2 Structure of the prison population

In the Czech Republic, the prison population comprises two main groups, specifically the alleged offenders and the people serving a sentence.

**Alleged offenders** are individuals who have been charged with a criminal offence but have yet to receive final sentencing. This group includes both people in custody and those awaiting trial. On average, alleged offenders make up approximately 15% of the prison population in the Czech Republic. Individuals in this category may be in custody for a variety of reasons. For example, it could be to prevent their escape, their influencing of witnesses or repeat offences. The length of the custody can significantly vary, depending on the complexity of the case and on how quickly the trial proceeds. It is important to emphasize that alleged offenders are considered to be not guilty (due to presumption of innocence) until their guilt is proven in a trial.

In the Czech Republic, the length of custody is regulated by the Criminal Code (Act No. 141/1961 Coll. Sec. 72), and it depends on the severity of the criminal offence for which the individual has been charged. The maximum lengths of custody are as follows:

- 1 year for either-way offences where the upper limit of a sentence is a maximum of 5 years,
- 2 years for crimes where the upper limit of the sentence ranges between 5 and 10 years.
- 3 years for especially serious crimes where the upper limit of the sentence is at least 10 years,
- 4 years for especially serious crimes for which an extended sentence may be given.

Three types of custody exist that are distinguished by reasons and circumstances under which they may be imposed. (Act No. 141/1961 Coll. Sec. 67 Criminal Code)

### Flight risk custody

This type of custody is imposed if there is a justified fear that the alleged perpetrator will flee or go into hiding to avoid prosecution or punishment. Typically, it is imposed on individuals that do not have a permanent address in the Czech Republic or who will avoid the criminal proceedings. One example would be individuals suspected of a serious crime who would flee abroad.

### Anti-collusion custody

Anti-collusion custody is imposed in cases where there is a justified fear that the alleged perpetrator will influence witnesses or the co-accused, thus impeding the criminal proceedings. It is the strictest form of custody and is used, for example, in cases of organized crime or corruption where the alleged perpetrator could influence key witnesses.

### Anti-reoffence Custody

This custody is imposed if there is a justified reason that the alleged offender will reoffend or will complete the offence they planned. It is intended to prevent an additional crime being committed such as individuals with prior criminal offences that could continue in illegal conduct.

Each type of custody has its specific conditions, and each is subject to a strict legal framework so as to ensure the protection of the rights of alleged perpetrators and the justice system. Alleged perpetrators often face psychological pressure and uncertainty because their future is unclear, which consequently has far-reaching impacts on their health. The prison system attempts to ensure delineated conditions to protect the rights of the alleged perpetrators. However, instances of isolation may lead to psychological impairment and anti-social behaviour. (Act No. 141/1961 Coll. Sec. 67 Criminal Code)

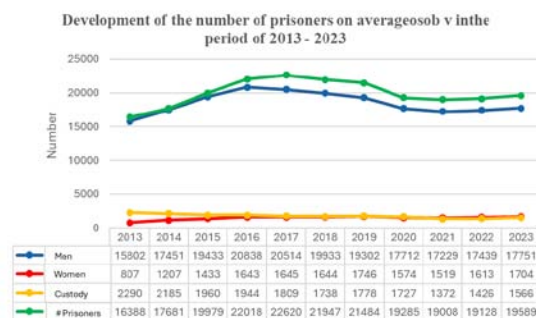
## People serving sentences

People serving sentences comprise the majority of prisoners in the Czech Republic, approximating about 85%. These individuals were finally sentenced by a court and serve a prison sentence (see Graph 1). People serving sentences may be distinguished by the nature of their offence, the length of the sentence and other factors, such as their age, gender and criminal history.

Sentences may be of various lengths and often include not only the prison sentence itself, but also other injunction such as a fine or relinquishment of certain rights. As part of a prison sentence, people serving prison sentences have a set programme of rehabilitation that includes such activities such as education programmes, work activities and therapeutic interventions that aim to facilitate their reintegration into society upon release. (Vlach, 2021)

The life of people serving prison sentences is often characterized by strict rules and structure. People serving prison sentences must adapt to the prison regime and conditions which may pose an immense challenge to them. At the same time, it is important that the prison system is geared towards exemplary resocialization and preparation for the return to society, which also includes psychological support and assistance in searching for employment and housing upon release. In the Czech Republic, penological recidivism is very high – approximately 70% of prisoners return to prison after releases. (Statistics from the Prison Service of the Czech Republic)

Graph 1: Overview of the number of imprisoned individuals in the Czech Republic in the period 2013-2023



Source: own research (Statistical yearbooks Prison Service of the Czech Republic)

Individuals in prison are serving prison sentences that have their own rationale and reason, which is specifically to protect members of society from perpetrators of criminal offences and simultaneously prepare those perpetrators for a life of freedom upon release. Therefore, staff in prisons prepare for individuals serving sentences suitable rehabilitation programmes, such as a set of purposefully selected activities that, while taking into account the nature of the criminal activity and the specific length of the sentence, serve to prepare them for life upon release so that after serving the sentence they can reintegrate into society and lead, if possible, an independent life in accordance with the norms of the given society.

The success rate of a programme depends not only on the person serving the sentence and his inner motivation, but also on the professional high-quality expert staff of the Prison Service of the Czech Republic so the individual serving the sentence successfully reintegrates into society. For this reason, considerable emphasis is placed on the professional and expert qualities of the staff, but also their personal qualities that enable them to carry out the educational and therapeutic activities and be in direct contact with people serving prison sentences while simultaneously resisting their overt or covert pressure directed at obtaining unauthorized advantages, information or violation of external and internal security of prison facilities.

As stated above, the task of the staff of the Prison System of the Czech Republic is to prepare an individual serving prison

sentences for reintegration into society with the aim that said individual will lead a lawful life and not commit other criminal offences. This task is very demanding as the majority of prisoners have repeated conflicts with the law behind them and, at the same time, they are personally and extremely complicated individuals. (A number of prisoners suffer from a range of forms of personality disorders; the most common forms of addiction – primarily alcoholism, drug abuse, gambling addiction, etc. – are very widespread.) In the Czech Republic, penological recidivism hovers around 70%, i.e. the individual recommits a criminal act without consideration of its severity or the length from the previous sentence. (Jůzl, Vlach, 2022)

### 2.3 Women serving time

The number of women in prisons across Europe in recent years has slightly grown. This growth can be attributed to changes in criminal policy, especially connected with the criminalization of drug offences. Even when it grew or declined in several European countries, in other regions such as Asia, Africa and Latin America, the number of women in prisons has generally skyrocketed.

According to Eurostat statistics from 2002, one in twelve adult prisoners in Europe was a woman, which is reflected in the European Union numbers, where the share of women hovers around 5–6%. For example, a slight increase from 1,433 women in 2015 to 1,613 women in 2022 was seen in the Czech Republic. Furthermore, this trend is often connected to the growth of drug-related criminality.

The following summary provides a detailed glimpse into the situation in several European countries:

- **Great Britain:** The number of women in prisons in 2023 hovered around 4,000, which represents roughly 5% of the total prison population. This number has stabilized in recent years.
- **Germany:** The share of prisoners that are women has amounted to 5–6% over the long term. In 2023, there were approximately 3,000 women in prisons.
- **Spain:** The number of women in prisons slightly rose. In 2022, there were roughly 4,000 women, which represented about 7% of the prison population.

One of the main reasons for the incarceration of women is drug-related offences, which comprises a large part of their sentencing. This trend is noticeable not only in the Czech Republic but also in other European countries. Alternative punishments, such as house arrest or conditional sentencing, are often used, which contributes to the reduction in the number of women in prisons in several countries. In the Czech Republic, where a stricter criminal policy predominates, this trend, however, is not evident. While a drop or stagnation occurred in the number of women in prison in the majority of European countries, the numbers grew in Asia and Africa. In Asia the number of women in prisons in the last decade grew by more than 50%, while in Europe the share of women has remained between 2–9% of the total prison population. This difference can be attributed to a variety of approaches to criminal policy and socioeconomic factors. (Eurostat, online)

In the Czech Republic, the number of women in prison has grown over the long term. In 2015, there were 1,433 women in prisons. In 2022, the number had grown to 1,613, representing 8.5% of the total population. This growth can be explained primarily by the criminalization of minor drug offences and tougher penalties as part of the criminal policy. The year 2024 saw additional growth of up to 1,705 women, indicating a continuing trend. (Statistical yearbook of the Prison Service of the Czech Republic)

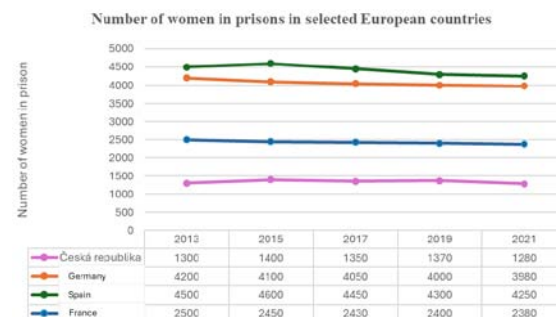
#### Statistics of women in prisons in Europe

According to available statistics, the share of women in the prison systems in Europe hovers around 5% of the total prison population. However, individual countries diverge from this average. For example, in the Czech Republic, women comprise

approximately 8% of all prisoners, which is higher than the European average. On the other hand, the share of women of the prison population is around 4%.

Graph 2 below depicts the number of women in prisons in selected European countries over the last ten years.

Graph 2: Overview of the number of women in prison in selected European countries

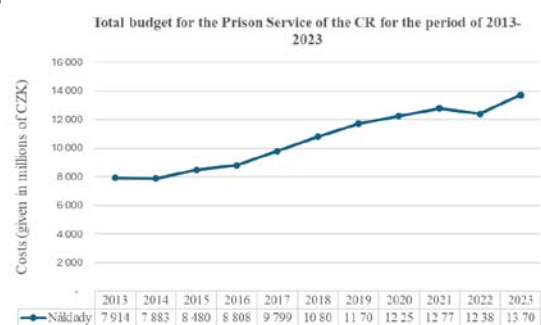


Source: own research (Eurostat, online)

### 3 Economic aspects of the prison system in the Czech Republic

The total costs for the prison system: The total operational costs for the prison system in the Czech Republic has been around 12 billion CZK annually in the latest years and has tended to spike recently due to inflation (see Graph 3). For example, costs for the Prison Service in 2014 was around 8 billion, and in 2023 this amount was about 14 billion. That is a growth of 75% over the course of ten years (Statistical yearbook of the Prison Service of the Czech Republic). These expenses include not only the direct prison costs, but also investment into infrastructure of prisons, rehabilitation programmes focused on resocialization and reintegration of prisoners and other associated expenses such as staff payroll, etc. Thus, the operation of the prison system in the Czech Republic represents a significant financial burden on the state budget.

Graph 3: Total operational costs for the Prison Services in the period 2013 to 2023



Source: own research (Statistics from the Prison Service of the Czech Republic)

#### Costs for a single prisoner in the Czech Republic

According to the available data, the cost for a single prisoner in the Czech Republic for the year 2023 approximately amounts 1,916 CZK per day (see Graph 4). These costs include meals, healthcare, prison operation, staff pay and other expenses. Annual costs for a single prisoner are around 700,000 CZK on average. (Statistics from the Prison Service of the Czech Republic)

#### The rate of employment of prisoners in the Czech Republic

The percentage rate of employment of prisoners does not correspond to the real rate of employment. For example, the average state of incarceration over the past 6 years is 20,000 convictions, but only 14,346 people serving sentence were recorded as fit for work on average, from which the employment rate of incarcerated people is calculated. Inmates with adequate

medical fitness are included in the register of inmates eligible for work, and only prisoners for whom the prison in question, due to their skills and qualifications, has an appropriate place of work. The employment rate in Czech prisons is below 60%. (Juříček, Vlach, Kopencová, 2022)

If we express these real figures in terms of the prescribed costs for serving a sentence, the Prison Service loses the opportunity to increase the income of 40% of people in prison through this mechanism. The prescribed costs of CZK 1,500 per calendar month for serving a prison sentence, which the prisoner has to pay, inadequately reflect the real costs. The ineffective employment policy is therefore the main cause of the deficit in the prison system. The low reimbursement rate, and thus the return on the money invested back into the system, is also linked to the completely ineffective mechanism for collecting debts from prisoners during their incarceration and after their release, which creates a 'debt spiral' for most prisoners, which they experience during their imprisonment and are unable to break even after their release. (Juříček, Vlach, Kopencová, 2022)

Graph 4: Average costs for a single prisoner in the Czech Republic for the period 2013 to 2023



Source: own research (Statistics from the Prison Service of the Czech Republic)

#### 4 Proposals to improve the prison service through economic self-sufficiency

The prison system in the Czech Republic faces significant financial and organizational challenges, among which are especially the need to lower operational costs and increase the efficacy of the resocialization programmes. One of the innovative solutions as to reach these goals is a legislative amendment that would allow prison facilities to operate as a business and generate profit. This reform would not only support the economic independence of the prison services, but it would also create new opportunities for effective reintegration of people in prison upon release into society. The following proposals are steps that may help implement this model:

##### Adaptation of the legal framework

For the prison services to be able to enter the market and effectively compete with commercial entities, it is necessary to change the relevant legislation. A new legal framework should allow prison facilities to establish businesses and sell products, thus generating their own income. This change would not only support their economic independence but also create opportunities for the people in prison to develop work skills and responsibilities, which are important steps for successful reintegration.

##### Corresponding regulation and protection of the rights of people in prison

Together with the adaptation of the legal framework, it is necessary to protect the rights of every person in prison. Legal protection should include clear rules for working conditions, wages and other benefits as to prevent the possible abuse of a low-paid workforce. Work should be focused on the development of practical skills that are in accordance with the requirements for the labour market, thereby increasing the chance of employment for incarcerated people upon release.

##### Development of business activities and cooperation with external partners

By supporting business activities directly in the prison facilities, prison services could not only generate their own profit, but also create new possibilities to cooperate with commercial partners. These activities could include the production of foodstuffs, which would not only improve the material conditions of the prisons, but also contribute to strengthening the work habits of prisoners and their future employability.

##### Increased quality of the resocialization programmes

Financial profits from the business activities could be invested into development of more high-quality education (requalification) and resocialization programmes that would assist prisoners better prepare for their return to everyday life. Education and therapeutic programmes can significantly contribute to the successful resocialization and reintegration and lower the risk of recidivism.

The proposals above would allow prison services to create profit through business activities, which would allow economic savings, but also benefits for the social and employment integration of prisoners. This approach could result in a more effective and modern prison system that would better fulfil both its security and resocialization missions.

##### Additional measures to lower the operational costs

###### Streamline the delivery services

- **Contracts with suppliers:**  
Reviewing current contracts that have been entered into with suppliers on the grounds of reducing food expenses and costs for hygienic products and other operational materials.
- **Local sources:**  
Prioritizing local suppliers, which not only lowers transport costs but also contributes to supporting the local economy.

###### Embracing technological innovation

- **Monitoring technology:**  
The use of electronic bracelets to monitor alleged perpetrators or people serving sentences, which may lower housing costs in prison facilities and offer a cost-effective alternative to a traditional prison.

###### Support of alternative punishments

- **Alternative punishments:**  
Broadening alternative punishments, such as house arrest with electronic monitoring, may lower prison costs.

#### 5 Conclusion

In closing, it can be argued that the prison system in the Czech Republic, as well as Europe as a whole, faces challenges that are not only evident in the variable number of people serving prison sentences, but also in the demographic structure. The growth in the share of women in prison is one of the phenomena that reflect broader social and legal changes. In the Czech Republic, this trend is evident in absolute numbers – the number of women in prisons has been growing here in recent years.

A focus on preventive measures, alternative punishment and support for the resocialization process as part of penitentiary and post-penitentiary care is crucial for the future of the prison system and its financial sustainability. Alternative punishments represent a possibility to significantly help lower the prison system costs as well as lower the rate of recidivism. They are particularly proven for minor offences, in which case incarceration would be excessively repressive and ineffective (restorative and retributive approach in justice). For this reason, support of these alternative punishments may contribute to lower the prison overcrowding and provide a definite chance on the part of society to an individual who committed a criminal offence the possibility to reintegrate into society and atone for their act.

A very important factor, which is monitored by society, are the costs for prisoners as well as the whole prison system. So as to achieve economic efficiency in the prison system, it is necessary to optimize the operation costs of prisons. This includes not only

the reasonable use of living space and human resources but also the introduction of technological innovation that may lower staffing costs and improve the organization of the prison system. What is especially important is the implementation of educational and labour activities as part of the rehabilitation programme focused on skills increasing chances of employment upon release because it represents a key investment into the reintegration of prisoners into society. In this way, it both increases the chance for successful return to ordinary life and reduces the costs associated with the prison system.

An interesting proposal that could bring additional sources of finance to the prison system is the possibility of its partial economic self-sufficiency. Introducing business subjects directly in the prison facilities could open new opportunities to cooperate with commercial partners and offer prisoners the opportunity to engage in productive activities, which would consolidate their work habits and contribute to their successful resocialization and reintegration. Business activities not only generate sufficient income for the prison services, but could also contribute to the improvement of the material conditions in the prisons and to strengthening work and education activities. Here it is necessary to significantly support the work opportunities and business projects in the prisons through the employment of people serving prison sentences. Currently, the number of employed prisoners hovers under 60% from the total number of prisoners fit for work. (Statistical yearbook of the Prison Service of the Czech Republic)

The long-term goal remains the creation of the kind of prison environment that not only fulfils the expressed purpose of serving a sentence but at the same time respects the basic human rights and supports successful reintegration and resocialization of people serving prison sentences. This approach would not only lower the costs of repeated imprisonment, but at the same time it would contribute to a safer and more stable society that can effectively manage the issues of criminality and recidivism.

#### Literature:

1. JUŘÍČEK, P., VLACH, F., KOPENCOVÁ, D. 2022. Overcrowding in Czech Prisons or Is Private Prison the Solution? In: Nálepová, V., Blaštková, M. (eds.). Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference ECONOMIC POLICY: Post-Pandemic Challenges and Opportunities of the Czech and European Policy. Ostrava: Vysoká škola PRIGO, 2022, pp. 126-140. ISBN 978-80-87291-32-0
2. JŮZL M., VLACH F. 2022. Modern Approaches in Czech Prison Staff Education and Training Against a Background of Comenius' Thoughts. In: Tušer I., Hošková-Mayerová Š. (eds) Trends and Future Directions in Security and Emergency Management. Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems, vol 257. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-88907-4\\_24](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-88907-4_24)
3. VLACH, F., RAK, R. 2021. Czech prison staff training and enhancement in the times of pandemic. In L. Gómez Chova, A. López Martínez, I. Candel Torres. EDULEARN21 Proceedings. 13th International Conference on Education and New Learning Technologies. Spain. Published by IATED Academy, pp. 4880-4889. ISBN 978-84-09-31267-2. doi:10.21125/edulearn.2021.1007. <https://library.iated.org/view/VLACH2021CZE>
4. EUROSTAT. In 2022, one out of 19 adult prisoners were women [online] [2024-11-09]. Available on: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Prison\\_statistics#In\\_2022.2C\\_one\\_out\\_of\\_19\\_adult\\_prisoners\\_were\\_women](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Prison_statistics#In_2022.2C_one_out_of_19_adult_prisoners_were_women)
5. The Czech Prison Service. Statistics. Available on: <https://www.vscr.cz/sekce/statistiky-1>

**Primary Paper Section: A**

**Secondary Paper Section: AH**