

Prisoner Reintegration in Hungary, with Special Regard to the Freedom of Religious Practice

Bálint Pintér¹ and Anita Nagy^{2,*}

¹Law Student and Theologian, Faculty of Law, University of Miskolc, Hungary

²Department of Criminal Procedural Law and Criminal Enforcement Law, Institute of Criminal Sciences, University of Miskolc, Hungary

Abstract: This study aims to demonstrate that persons convicted and serving their sentence in a penal institution in Hungary are afforded the opportunity to exercise and live out their religion. The realization of this right is supported by an assortment of instruments and institutional arrangements; among these, the role of a prison chaplain being of particular and noteworthy significance.

Overall, these mechanisms may contribute, not only to the effective enjoyment of freedom of religion and the practical opportunity of religious observance, but also to successful reintegration—namely, enabling a convicted person to re-enter and participate in the general community as a full member of society, and to be free from any stigma or undue labelling because of their past.

Keywords: Reintegration, prison chaplain, reintegration services, freedom of religion, religious, faith-based units.

INTRODUCTION

The action of and conviction for committing a serious criminal offense does not take place without leaving a trace or having consequences. Perpetrators are often subjected to legal disadvantages that require them to serve several years in a correctional institution. However, multiple factors warrant close consideration. Focus should not be placed solely on the institutional tools available during incarceration, but also on what can effectively pave the way for the reintegration of inmates into society. For this reason, this study examines how ensuring the right to freedom of religion and offering the opportunity for religious practice in a penal institution can contribute to the success of this lengthy process. Pursuant to Constitutional Court Decision No. 13/2001 (V.14.) AB, convicted persons are not merely the objects of the correctional system, but also subjects under the law, vested with both rights and obligations.

This study reviews the practice of the freedom of religion within a correctional institution as a fundamental right. It examines how this freedom can be actualized within an individual and in the collective lives of inmates inside detention facilities. Closely linked to this is the mission of prison chaplains, who hold a distinct legal status. Finally, we present several initiatives, highlighting the significance of faith-based housing units, which provide both a dedicated space and a structured aftercare framework.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a doctrinal and dogmatic legal research methodology to examine the Hungarian reintegration framework. The analysis is grounded in a systematic review of primary legal sources, including the Fundamental Law of Hungary, the Criminal Code, and the Act on the Execution of Punishments. Furthermore, we synthesize institutional regulations and Constitutional Court decisions to evaluate the practical enforcement of the right to religious practice. By integrating domestic legal analysis with broader criminological discourse, this paper aims to bridge the gap between statutory objectives and the functional realities of correctional chaplaincy.

1. Conceptualizing Reintegration

We begin with a fundamental premise: the concept of reintegration presupposes the commission of a criminal offense for which one has been convicted and imprisoned. In certain instances, the mere threat of a custodial sentence materializes into an actual penalty imposed and executed within a correctional facility. The Criminal Code explicitly defines the general purpose of punishment: namely, to prevent a perpetrator from committing further offenses, thereby ensuring the protection of society. In this connection, Act CCXL of 2013 regulates the constituent elements and depth of this concept in greater detail. In Section 83, Paragraph (1), the legislature addresses the enforcement of the legal disadvantage—as established in the final judgment—and mandates that its execution must facilitate inmates' successful and effective reintegration

*Address correspondence to the author at the Institute of Criminal Sciences, University of Miskolc, 3515 Miskolc-Egyetemváros, Hungary; E-mail: anita.nagy@uni-miskolc.hu

into society, enabling them to become law-abiding citizens. The statute specifically addresses those who are excluded from the possibility of parole, namely individuals serving life imprisonment, where the protection of society becomes an even more paramount objective. Another key statutory provision is Section 164, Paragraph (1), which explicitly states that convicted persons must acknowledge the offense they committed and also its danger to society, and they must do everything within their power to mitigate its consequences. Author Gergely Tamás Katalán writes about the "triad of penal objectives," which comprises the social reintegration of the offender, the specific prevention of recidivism, and the enforcement of the statutory legal disadvantage.

In public discourse, however, these concepts are frequently conflated and virtually used as synonyms: namely, reintegration, resocialization, and rehabilitation. Resocialization entails the internalization of the norms and rules necessary for an individual's effective participation in society. By contrast, the concept of reintegration is narrower. Resocialization, therefore, still considers it necessary to acquire the knowledge appropriate and sufficient for effective participation in society. Another concept routinely mixed into this context is rehabilitation. Fliegau (1992) also sheds light on the distinctions between these terms. In his view, the primary objective of rehabilitation is to maintain and improve the physical and psychological condition of an individual. It possesses a much broader toolkit, incorporating medical and psychological methods alongside educational ones.

In conclusion, it can be stated that from a legal-dogmatic perspective, the concept of reintegration partially encompasses elements of both resocialization and rehabilitation; nevertheless, these terms must not be conflated, and a clear distinction must be maintained amongst them.

1.1. Institutional Actors in Reintegration: The Central Inmate Assessment and Methodology Institute (KKMI), the Risk Assessment and Treatment System (KEK), and Reintegration Programs

Having clarified the concept of reintegration, it is worth addressing its institutional instruments. The primary entity is the Central Inmate Assessment and Methodology Institute (Központi Kivizsgáló és Módszertani Intézet or KKMI). The regional aggregate units of this institution conduct assessments based on the Risk Assessment and Treatment System

(Kockázatelemzési és Kezelési Rendszer or KEK). It is a complex professional mechanism, which evaluates and subsequently manages inmates' incarceration-related and recidivism risks. The procedures it uses encompass the selection of appropriate reintegration programs, risk assessments of convicted persons, and other evaluations designed to support administrative decision-making. The need to establish a standardized risk assessment system arose from the objective of monitoring convicted persons throughout the entire duration of their sentences, from intake to release. By continuous data collection, the system provides appropriate insights to gauge the probability of law-abiding behavior post-release. Essentially, it functions as a predictive tool that assists in making individual decisions, based on the evaluation of the compiled data.

The KEK system comprises multiple stages. The first stage, centered around intake and initial assessment, is of paramount importance. With the exception of county correctional institutions, convicted persons must initially be placed in an intake unit. This first impression considerably determines the subsequent quality of the relationship between the correctional institution and the inmate. It serves as an overture that establishes the foundations of mutual cooperation, together with building institutional and interpersonal trust: both of which are indispensable to the success of the reintegration process. Concurrently, inmates are prepared for serving their custodial sentences and are familiarized with the given facility's rules and regulations. This orientation can be conducted on both an individual and a collective basis.

To illustrate the complexity of this process, the figure in Appendix 1 is provided.

The methodology of risk management and individualization within the Hungarian correctional system is structured as a progressive process. The primary framework maps a linear transition from *Risk Analysis and Assessment* through *Differentiation and Regime Classification*, ultimately leading to *Individualization*. Structurally, the *Risk Analysis and Assessment* phase unfolds across five key operational stages: (1) intake and orientation; (2) risk analysis; (3) the formulation of an individualized detention program plan; (4) administrative decision-making; and (5) the continuous review of risk indicators. This architecture directly informs the *Core Reintegration Programs within Risk Management*, which are operationally tied to the individualization process. These targeted rehabilitative

measures encompass compulsory and voluntary education/training, institutional employment, structured religious practices and pastoral care (specifically when conducted within formal reintegration frameworks), specialized risk-reduction courses (such as assertiveness-building, aggression-management, and drug-prevention programs), and social group work addressing post-release employment, family ties, and transitional housing.

Notably, the Hungarian correctional system has evolved from a traditional regime classification model to a more dynamic credit-based system. Under this framework, inmates accumulate credits through active participation in rehabilitative programs, allowing them to progress toward more favorable categories based on their demonstrated behavioral changes. This shift reflects a more individualized approach to risk management and progression.

The reintegration process is facilitated not only by the KKMI and KEK systems, but also, to a significant extent, by targeted rehabilitative programs. These initiatives aim, for instance, to develop cognitive and social skills, or to enhance the post-release labor market integration of inmates. What do these programs entail precisely? They encompass inmate education and vocational training, employment, recreational and cultural activities, the maintenance of family and social ties, as well as associated systems of incentives and disciplinary sanctions. It is of particular interest that participation in education is compulsory until the age of 16; the Act on National Public Education, though, allows this requirement to be extended up to the age of 23. But in a correctional situation, Act CCXL of 2013 caps the upper age limit at 21.

Inmate employment within a correctional institution is mandatory; however, under general labor law, it does not constitute an employment relationship, but is governed entirely by the framework and regulations of the correctional facility. It is crucial to emphasize that this practice does not amount to forced labor, nor should it result in stigmatization or carry connotations of social disapproval for convicted persons.

Communication with the outside world can be maintained through institutional telephones, sending and receiving parcels, receiving visitors, and written correspondence. The system of incentives for inmates reflects their willingness to cooperate. Conversely, the objective of disciplinary sanctions is to restore institutional security and to serve as a deterrent to

others, thereby dissuading them from committing further infractions.

Thus, it is clearly evident that convicted persons possess not only obligations but also rights to the same extent. Rights, by nature, carry opportunities. From this perspective, focus shifts away from the legal disadvantage itself toward enabling inmates to develop to the fullest extent possible within a given institutional framework, thereby paving the way and preparing them for social reintegration post-release.

2. Freedom of Religious Practice in Correctional Institutions

Facilitating and preparing the way for the free practice, expression, and realization of religion is important for the successful societal reintegration of convicted persons. However, the exercise and manifestation of this fundamental right within the framework of a correctional institution are subject to distinct opportunities and potential limitations.

2.1. Freedom of Religion as a Fundamental Right

Following the logic of the vertical hierarchy of legal sources, the Fundamental Law explicitly states that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. Act CCVI of 2011 also establishes that this is a basic right for everyone. Compared to the Fundamental Law, this statute provides added scope, stipulating that no person shall suffer any disadvantage or enjoy any advantage on the grounds of choosing, adopting, professing, manifesting, changing, or practicing their conscientious or religious beliefs. In other words, it strictly prohibits both positive and negative discrimination. Act CCXL of 2013 specifically addresses the freedom of religion, narrowing the scope of the general rules by focusing explicitly on convicted persons. Inmates also retain the freedom to choose, change, and practice their religious and conscientious beliefs. However, an individual dimension also emerges, as the legislation utilizes the term "care" [religious care]. This provision of care may be delivered by an ordained minister, an ecclesiastical legal person, a member of a religious association who performs religious ceremonies professionally, or any other individual authorized by a religious association. In addition, inmates are permitted to keep books, written materials, and devotional items in their possession, provided that these items facilitate the free practice of their religion.

Furthermore, orientation and legal substantiation are facilitated by IM Decree No. 6/2014 (XII. 19.), which

stipulates that the practice of religion cannot be occasional or spontaneous in nature. Instead, its specific time, location, and manner must be designated in accordance with the internal rules of the correctional institution, thereby ensuring harmony with the exercise of statutory rights and obligations. This framework must neither be restricted nor overextended. Inmates possess the right of initiative, for instance, to contact an ordained minister. The establishment and maintenance of this contact must strictly take place without surveillance. This guarantees the development of a personal and confidential relationship, allowing them to connect freely, voluntarily, and without external control. However, the IM Decree also establishes a clear boundary: an inmate's religious practice may not, in any manner or capacity, compromise the order and security of a correctional facility.

Thus, freedom of religion is inviolable and inalienable; it is an inherent right of every human being. Therefore, it cannot be revoked by the State since it is not a law that was once enacted, nor can an individual voluntarily waive this right. On the one hand, fundamental rights operate within the vertical relationship between the individual and the State, and on the other hand, within the horizontal relationship between individuals or groups of individuals. Whichever dimension is considered, it presupposes mutual respect. Given the unpredictable nature of social relations, even under stable, structured, and ordinary living conditions, the realization of these rights is not without friction. Furthermore, inmates find themselves in a fundamentally unique legal status characterized by a so-called "penal regime of statutory coercion." When examining the basic rights enumerated in the Fundamental Law, some are suspended, while others are restricted or modified. For instance, the rights to personal liberty and freedom of assembly are suspended. The freedom of the press and the freedom of expression are restricted. Conversely, those rights that remain unaffected by detention are not modified; these include the right to human life and dignity, the right to physical and mental health, as well as the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This complete, unconditional freedom is further supported by the reasoning found in the following decision of the Constitutional Court: *"The State cannot coerce anyone into a situation that would bring them into conflict with their own self, that is, which is incompatible with an essential conviction that defines their personality..."*

What remains to be clarified by all means is the distinction between freedom of religion and freedom of conscience, as both appear similar at first glance. It is a fact that these concepts are interconnected, yet they are not identical. Conscience is not free because man, as a sovereign subject, has the opportunity to choose freely among ideological currents; rather, it is free because this domain of human life is reserved for God, and, therefore, cannot be restricted by man. When considering freedom of religion, however, defining its substance is highly challenging, as it varies and differs from one religion to another. Constitutional Court Decision No. 4/1992 (II. 12.) reinforces this element of religious freedom, ensuring that anyone may live in accordance with their convictions.

In conclusion, it can be stated that while freedom of religion is crucial within correctional institutions, it does not by itself grant any exemption from maintaining the internal order of detention facilities. Subject to certain limitations, inmates in their unique situation are afforded the opportunity to live out their religious beliefs. Religion is far more than a set of prescribed, mandatory rules of conduct; it plays a powerful, defining role in the development and shaping of human personality. Through it, convicted persons may encounter a value structure that, for one reason or another, they were previously completely unacquainted with, or were aware of but failed to comprehend correctly.

2.2. Religious Practice of Inmates

Inmates often perceive their own situation as hopeless, and it is perhaps precisely due to and within this state of despair that a heightened receptivity to religion emerges. Self-confrontation is the foundation of this entire process. Inmates must progressively gain a clearer understanding of their own condition: why they are being detained, what exactly they did wrong, what the consequences of their actions were, and the extent to which the dangerousness of their offense to society materialized during its commission.

Church participation/cooperation in the reintegration of inmates, highlights a fundamental paradox: while the primary function of a correctional institution is the secure isolation of an offender to protect society, its ultimate objective is successful social reintegration. This creates a tension between a rigid, security-oriented carceral environment and the inherently subjective, liberating potential of religious practice. Within this context, religious observance risks being

perceived as another layer of 'systemic control' rather than a path to genuine self-reflection. To overcome this, chaplains must navigate a narrow path between facilitating institutional order and providing a space for true spiritual autonomy, which is a core component of the desistance process—the active, long-term journey of moving away from a criminal identity. In this process, churches serve a dual objective: from a theological perspective, the goal is to win over inmates' hearts and lead them to faith; from a correctional perspective, the aim is to reduce recidivism and improve inmate manageability. Although the primary objective of penal institutions is not religious education, they cannot remain passive, as this cooperation represents a prime example of State and Church collaboration toward common community goals.

Under Article VII of the Fundamental Law, church bodies and the State operate separately. While there is no statutory obligation to cooperate, Article VII emphasizes that churches may cooperate with the State, provided that both parties intend to jointly pursue community goals. The parliament shall decide, upon the request for the formal recognition of a given religious body, and the specific conditions of such cooperation shall be determined by a cardinal law. In the present case, the common objective of the church communities and the State—here specifically penal institutions—is to accomplish the reintegration of inmates in the most effective manner possible.

Although the law does not explicitly enumerate such categories, I distinguish between individual and communal dimensions of living out one's religion. Within the individual dimension, I include the books, religious artifacts, and devotional objects kept in an inmate's possession, as well as pastoral care by an ordained minister, and also private prayer. Regarding the communal aspect, I highlight worship services. Furthermore, prayer constitutes a mixed category bridging both dimensions.

Inmates are permitted to keep books, devotional objects, and written materials in their possession. However, a prerequisite for these being allowed in a facility is that such items be indispensable and necessary for the practice of an inmate's religion—for instance, by facilitating spiritual attunement and internal reflection. Naturally, all objects are subject to prior inspection and screening. In the case of a crucifix, for example, it is thoroughly examined to ensure it possesses no characteristics capable of causing

physical injury. Furthermore, regarding devotional objects, they must be assessed as to whether they are deemed necessary for the practice of religion at all. In this evaluation, the formal opinion of an ordained minister or church authority may even be requested.

As mentioned above, prayer constitutes a mixed category, as it encompasses not only communal gatherings, but also the private prayers of an inmate. Organizing worship services or the Holy Mass undoubtedly imposes an additional operational burden on an institution, given its obligation to ensure the opportunity for participation. Furthermore, communal worship cannot take place just anywhere—such as a corridor or a larger cell—but rather in a chapel specifically designed for this purpose. Such a venue holds paramount importance for reintegration, as it provides a dedicated space for the prison chaplain's ministry, communal prayer, and the execution of religious programs. It can mean a great deal to inmates, since a separate place allows for interactive dialogue and spiritual stillness. It is a place where they can briefly escape the monotony of the institution and experience a sense of belonging.

During the Holy Mass and worship services, the Christian faith aims to lead individuals toward repentance; this means that faith helps one experience the pain caused by sins—that is, committed offenses. A radical transformation of life is impossible without repentance. During the Holy Mass, the proclamation of the Word takes place, when a priest or a commissioned person with a degree in theology reads passages and excerpts from the Holy Scriptures. Then commentary on the passages read is given, following which inmates may also participate.

In-prison marriage, for instance, constitutes a special case, yet it is neither extraordinary nor unusual during the period of detention. Baptism, on the other hand, occurs less frequently.

Thus, during the execution of their sentences within an institution, inmates are provided with the opportunity to exercise freedom of religion as a fundamental right. Something new may begin in their lives, allowing them to view themselves and their place in the world differently, and in this way become more likely to find hope and purpose. These can lay the groundwork for successful societal reintegration, and also for the development and maintenance of mental health. Ultimately, being a mentally healthy individual means

being in harmony with oneself, as well as with one's individual and natural environment.

As early as 1838, József Eötvös, in one of his works, emphasized that faith, gained by consolation, is truly capable of bringing about the moral regeneration of a prisoner. It partially educates those within an institution and ensures their well-being following their release.

2.3. The Role, Activity, and Legal Status of a Prison Chaplain in Reintegration

I use the generic term "chaplain," as titles vary across denominations (e.g., pastor, parish priest, etc.). What exactly is the role of a chaplain in the reintegration process? Is it connected to mental health, pastoral care, or psychotherapy? Without delving into a detailed presentation of conceptual differences, the chaplain's role aligns most closely with pastoral care. In a broader sense, anyone who addresses the holistic needs of the human being can be considered a pastoral caregiver. From a narrower perspective, it refers to ministry conducted under the authority of and within a specific church. Its theoretical framework is rooted in pastoral psychology, which lies at the intersection of theology and psychology. The primary task of a pastoral caregiver is to recognize and understand the problems of persons in distress, to offer active listening and attention, to support their decisions, and to harness their internal resources. What makes this form of helping unique is that the two-way relationship characteristic of a typical dialogue expands into a three-way dynamic, as chaplain and inmate invite God into their midst—the One in whom their relationship is rooted and toward whom it is directed. The role of a chaplain is complex, with pastoral care constituting its largest and purest dimension. This role is not merely an occupation, a profession, or a craft, but a vocation, as it engages the whole person in the process. Consequently, it carries a unique sense of mission rooted in faith in God and a dedicated service to one's fellow human beings. Clinical psychologist and psychotherapist Prof. Dr. Emőke Bagdy aptly captures this with the term "vocational personality". This is the outcome of a lengthy developmental process through which an individual's personality matures to fulfill their calling.

The other question is whether, from a legal perspective, a chaplain's ministry is of a state or of an ecclesiastical nature. In fact, it is both. This dual legal status can be based on IM (Ministry of Justice) Decree No. 8/2017 (VI. 13.) and Act CCXL of 2015. Section 1, Subsection (1) of the IM Decree states: "*prison*

chaplain: an ordained minister, or a person commissioned with this task by a church or denominational superior, who performs activities within the scope of prison chaplaincy services on a regular basis." It is evident from this provision that a chaplain is a person commissioned and appointed by some church; therefore, their legal relationship with a church is indisputable. Meanwhile, Act CCXL of 2015 establishes that prison chaplains hold a law enforcement administrative service status. In cases where they are appointed, recalled, or when their job description is defined or modified, such actions may only be taken on the basis of prior consultation with the respective church or denominational superior.

Their activity is deemed a ministry, which is expressly defined by IM Decree No. 8/2017 (VI. 13.). It encompasses a wide range of religious practices, such as, worship services, Bible studies, and the study of holy books—all of which facilitate an inmate's practice of religion. These services and rituals are always scheduled for a specific time, based on prior consultation with the prison governor. Naturally, prison chaplains on their own cannot be expected to organize the services or the escort of inmates. The governors of the correctional institutions ensure these arrangements, and, therefore, close cooperation must exist between them and the chaplains. The decree mentions not only worship services but also various religious activities that reinforce the practice of religion. Although not explicitly named, these can be understood to include, for example, Bible and prayer groups, or religious education closely linked to the study of books. Through this education, inmates develop a foundational catechetical knowledge, thereby receiving moral guidance. Small-group sessions prove to be the most effective, as participants are not merely present—as they might be during a Holy Mass—but are active contributors to the process.

Personal dialogue is the most direct manifestation of pastoral care. The very presence of the chaplain conveys a message. Chaplains are present not as a lawyer, a correctional officer, or a physician, but as a servant of God. Patient listening and empathy are crucial, but empathy does not equate to agreement. Throughout their conversations, a chaplain's task is to point out that the question of guilt and sin is not fully resolved by the rendering of a judicial verdict. Primarily, a chaplain helps an inmate avoid self-deception. Chaplains must gently make an inmate realize that a half-truth is not the truth, but a lie. A fruitful process can only begin after inmates become capable of speaking

the absolute truth before both themselves and a chaplain.

If the defining characteristics of prison chaplaincy were to be examined systematically in bullet points, they would be the following:

- At the core human dignity: a focus on human dignity
- Close cooperation between the Director General of the Hungarian Prison Service and the different church bodies
- Support for convict social reintegration
- Recidivism prevention through the provision of socially appropriate moral guidance
- An ecumenical spirit

It has become evident that the role of a chaplain is highly complex: they operate at an intersection where ecclesiastical and law enforcement perspectives meet and frequently clash, but yet ultimately function in a complementary manner.

The Hungarian experience resonates with broader comparative criminological discourse, which increasingly recognizes the role of faith-based interventions in desistance. International studies suggest that prison chaplaincy contributes to recidivism reduction not merely through formal religious instruction, but by fostering social capital and providing moral guidance that supports an inmate's prosocial identity formation. Integrating these insights, the Hungarian chaplaincy model serves as an ecumenical bridge, balancing law enforcement mandates with the restorative needs of an individual. The primary tension lies in a chaplain's dual identity: while acting as an advocate for an inmate's spiritual growth, chaplains are also bound by the institutional rules of a given law enforcement authority. This requires a chaplain to act as a 'cultural translator' between the church's unconditional acceptance and an institution's focus on order and risk management.

3. Faith-Based Units and other Religious Movements

Provided that a given institution has a cooperation agreement with the respective religious community, an inmate may be placed in a faith-based unit based on the decision of the Reception and Detention Committee (Befogadási és Fogvatartási Bizottság or RDC). Unlike

general detention areas, faith-based units operate on a foundation of intensive community interaction and shared values. Within these units, inmates engage in daily, structured communal activities, such as Bible studies or group prayer sessions, which foster a supportive micro-environment. This environment reduces the pervasive 'us vs. them' dynamic of the general prison population, encouraging prosocial behavior through peer accountability and frequent, direct interaction with both the chaplaincy and the reintegration staff. The law sets forth specific conditions: the expected time remaining until release must not exceed three years, the inmate must agree in writing to adhere to the operational rules of the unit, and a reintegration officer must put forward a proposal after prior consultation with a prison chaplain.

Finally, certain religious movements can also contribute significantly to the successful reintegration of inmates. Inmates may encounter these initiatives not only within the walls of an institution, but their presence is also prominently visible within the churches. Examples include the Prison Cursillo (*Börtöncursillo*), the Mécses Charitable Service (*Mécses Szeretetszolgálat*), and the Alpha Course.

Among these three, I will briefly highlight the Mécses Charitable Service. Its unique feature lies in the fact that anyone, regardless of religious affiliation, can apply by contacting the email address mecsesbp@gmail.com. Applicants provide their contact details, a brief personal introduction, and mention how they learned about the initiative. This is a ministry—specifically, a pen-pal service. Essentially its aim is to establish anonymous connections with inmates through correspondence. The interaction can help inmates retain their humanity or even initiate smaller or greater transformations in their lives. This ministry is explicitly reinforced by Section 3, Subsection (3) of IM Decree No. 8/2017 (VI. 13.): “*Pastoral care for inmates and persons detained on other legal grounds may also be provided within the framework of a pen-pal service maintained by an ecclesiastical legal entity.*” [1] In this scenario, the correctional institution does not grant permission for correspondence with a specific individual—as their identity remains strictly anonymous within this movement—but rather authorizes the activity of the correspondence itself.

Numerous opportunities are available for inmates—beginning from their initial entry into a correctional institution to the phases following release—to exercise and experience freedom of religion in the most complete manner possible.

CONCLUSION

Freedom of religion within the correctional system is not merely one fundamental right among many, but a right intrinsically linked to the very core of human dignity. Although the practice of religion may be restricted only within the narrowest possible scope and under strict conditions, its substantive core cannot be rendered meaningless.

Affording opportunities for the practice of religion and freedom of religion is not a privilege; rather, it serves as a way to prepare inmates for future law-abiding behavior and also support their reintegration into society upon release—rendering it a vital re-integrative tool. It directly contributes to the prevention of recidivism, which is in the interest of the state.

The dual legal status of a prison chaplain is not a legislative contradiction, but rather a legal necessity. This duality strikes a balance between the protection of fundamental rights and the maintenance of institutional order, ensuring that the exercise of religious freedom can be realized both substantively and procedurally within the carceral environment of the correctional system.

Based on all of the above, it can be concluded that the exercise of this right is not merely a constitutional requirement, but a key prerequisite for the success of reintegration. In this spirit, let us conclude with the poignant reflection of Pope Francis, who reminds us that effective rehabilitation requires a sense of future and hope: “Setting aside his prepared Spanish text, the Pope offered the participants two images to take back home to their countries and regions. Firstly, he said, one cannot speak about debt repayment by prisoners without offering them a window and one cannot change his life without seeing a horizon. He asked the participants to make sure their prisons always have a window and a horizon. “Even a life sentence, which for me is debatable, would have to have a horizon,” he stressed.”

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

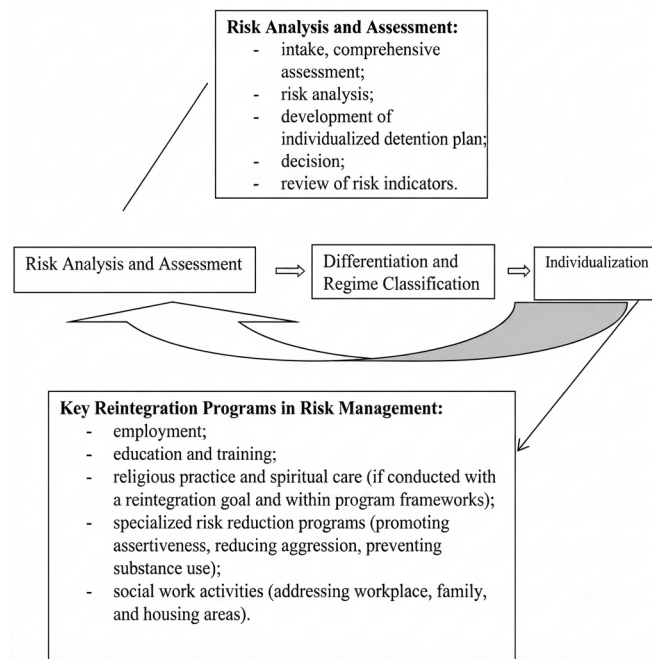
AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Bálint Pintér Conceptualization, methodology, writing—original draft preparation. **Prof. Dr. Anita Nagy:** Supervision, validation, writing—review and editing. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

ETHICAL STATEMENT

This study is a doctrinal and dogmatic legal analysis based on public legal sources, constitutional decisions, and institutional regulations. It does not involve human subjects, clinical trials, or personal data processing; therefore, institutional ethical board approval was not required.

APPENDIX 1: METHODOLOGY OF RISK MANAGEMENT AND INDIVIDUALIZATION



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