

**Is the day of a probation officer in Germany similar to the one of someone working in Romania? In the series 'A day in the life of a probation officer', we publish articles written by probation officers from different countries in Europe to see if their days look a like or are very different from each other. This article is written by Anna Ágó, probation officer of the Hungarian Probation Service in Budapest.**



It's 8 A.M., Monday morning in Budapest, the capital of Hungary. Probation officers that are working with adult and juvenile clients are sitting in their offices, waiting for their clients to arrive. The day is finished at 16.30. The only individual department for juvenile and adult offenders of Hungary is based in Budapest. Why is this necessary? At the department, we work with a huge number of cases. There are 1.8 million people living in Budapest, which is almost 20 percent of the Hungarian population. The probation service also takes care of the homeless. Since such a large number of the population is concentrated in Budapest, it makes it a perfect city to hide in and therefore it is highly favoured among the homeless. Just for comparison: the second largest city after Budapest is Debrecen with 200,000 inhabitants.

In order to become a probation officer you need to do a higher education degree, which is linked to the competencies a probation officer must have, such as pedagogy, law, sociology or other related fields. I have a degree in Communication and Sociology. Before becoming a probation officer, I worked in the communication and event management sector for more than six years.

## **The start of the day**

Let's go back to the office. The offenders are slowly gathering in the building. Mondays and Tuesdays are the busiest. On these two days, there is medical examination available for persons that serve community sentences. My clients are either waiting patiently or very impatiently in front of my office. I deal with the adult offenders. The probation officers' work is divided in two levels. On one hand, it exists of dealing with persons sentenced with community service, which is 80 percent of the cases. On the other hand, monitoring probation clients who receive probation supervision as a consequence of charge postponement or a suspended sentence.

We spend most of our time in the office. If we are not at our desks, we visit families, check addresses or workplaces that employ those who serve community sentences, we prepare reports at the court's request and we go around Budapest. We often find ourselves in situations, at locations, and in circumstances which require courage, empathy and often agility to deal with them. We go everywhere alone, due to the heavy workload, there is no other option. At the department the total number of probation officers is only 26.

## **Supervision hours**

I receive clients on Tuesday and Friday, when they come to my office I often need to be flexible. I also see clients besides my official reception days in case they aren't able to come on the regular visiting days. Tuesday is the day of the probationers sentenced to community service, because of the available medical examination. Friday is the the day for the other clients, the summons and hearings are usually on these days. I make appointments with my clients, but they usually see it as an

indication and show up whenever they like. This could result in four of them arriving at 10 o' clock, waiting in front of my office. On the remaining working days I deal with administration, substitution for absent colleagues and fieldwork.

## **Caseload**

I have a caseload of 355 probation clients, which is quite an average number at our department. It is a challenge to carry out the specific supervision orders, nevertheless we provide psychological counseling and other trainings to probation clients and victims.

All cases come with a crime and every convict has their own attitude towards it. There are some who regret their actions, but do not fully understand why they are being punished. It is especially characteristic for those who were punished for stealing or drug abuse. They often nod their heads and say that they have not committed a crime. As one of my colleagues once said "The chair at my table, where the clients sit in, functions as a 'magic chair' and whoever sits in it feels like they are innocent and believes that their punishment is unfair." We also have a lot of problems at the probation service with relatives and friends that provide false information to the authorities. They say they don't know where our client is and hide them.

Death is a sad case. It is hard to deal with when we don't hear something from a client anymore and later on receive a death notification. I will never forget my first case. One of my clients often disappeared, his parents were worried about him. One day his mother called from Norway to let me know that her son had disappeared again. I called his father a week later to ask if his son came home again. He said yes. I was happy about it and asked if I could speak to him on the phone. As a reaction, he bursted into tears and said his son returned to his heavenly father, to his creator. Two days before my call, the boy had jumped of a bridge in Budapest, he committed suicide.

## **Friday**

We finish at 2 p.m. on Fridays. We put the files back in the cabinets and lock them for a brand new start on Monday. There is one thing a probation officer should never forget, even on monotonous days of administration, what lies behind each file is human fate.