

**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 alike or are very different from each other. This article is written by Mary Anne Zammit, a probation officer from Malta.**



A day at the office is surely guaranteed not to be like the other before it. Perhaps this was one of the reasons, amongst many others that kept me working at the Department of Probation and Parole for the past 23 years. Well, I always believed that working as a probation officer is a particularly rewarding career. It is a way of reconnecting offenders with the world outside, with their families and back to regaining themselves in the community.

The Probation Services in Malta came into effect in 1994 by the setup of a professional team made of probation officers. This came into effect after 1993, the University of Malta organized a Post Qualification Diploma in the Probation Services to train probation officers.

Since that day probation officers did not look back and what followed were several milestones and great strides which gave new structure to the unit. In 2002, more sanctions were implemented such as the Community Service Order, Combination Order, and the Provisional Order of Supervision during the pre-sentencing stage. Further on, in 2012, the Restorative Justice Act came into effect introducing parole and mediation whereby the focus centred on offenders and victims, whilst reinforcing the department as that of probation and parole.

What are the requirements to become a probation officer?

To become a probation officer, an individual has to obtain a first degree preferably in Social Sciences, Psychology and Criminology and then followed by a master's in Probation Services.

Probation officers have multiple tasks of compiling pre-sentencing reports and social inquiry reports, supervision of offenders while on probation order and supervision order, community service orders, treatment orders and provisional orders of supervision. Along with these are compilation of parole reports followed by the supervision of parolees.

The other tasks are the liaison with other professionals working in the criminal justice field such as home visits, field visits and attending the criminal court, juvenile court, and family court. This is where probation officers spend most of their time.

So, what is a particular day of a probation officer?

We get all types of offenders in one day and cases range from those of theft, drugs, fraud, sex offences to domestic violence. Clients start coming at our offices at around 6.30 am, particularly those who start working after. This enables them to keep their job while following the conditions of the Supervision or Parole. Meeting with clients is ongoing and at times we try to combine the sessions with the in-house psychologist assigned in case and the supervised urine testing. This saves time for our clients especially if they work in a tight schedule.

Consequently, the normal duration of a session takes half an hour or more depending on the situation presented by the clients themselves. Through the sessions with clients, the probation officer focuses on the care plan of the client concerned and ensure that he/she is following the conditions and the treatment. Subsequently, their behavioural pattern is analysed, and this is done by checking with family members and the professionals involved.

And it is not the first time that after the session the probation officer decides to file a breach of order given by the court. This is not uncommon in cases of drugs and domestic violence. In normal circumstances, the probation officer continues with the report writing and file updates and contacting other professionals.

At one point during the day, probation officers will have to go to the court. This entails either reporting the progress of clients in the case of provisional order of supervision or presenting pre-sentence reports. Perhaps, this is the most interesting moment, whereby probation officers present the courts with recommendations after a thorough compiling of information and risk assessment analysis. Overall, it is quite rewarding to have magistrates and judges relying on the sound and reliable reports of probation officers.

What makes the day more and more interesting is that a probation officer will never know what to expect during the day. Anything is expected during the day. A client can suddenly become high risk such in situations of a perpetrator breaching a protection order or a client quitting a rehabilitation program.

Overall, being a probation officer is a very rewarding and interesting job. Although it may create some frustrations, and at times it seems you are working in dust, there comes a ray of hope. Humans need to be given a sense of respect at one time or the other and faith that they can change. A successful day in probation is when probation officers see their clients back on track.