

Prague, 31. 3. 2020

## **Information, measures and protocols adopted by the Probation and Mediation Service of the Czech Republic during the COVID-19 outbreak**

### **COVID-19 in the Czech Republic**

The first three cases of the COVID-19 infection were confirmed on 1. 3. 2020 and to this date there have been more than 3000 confirmed cases. With an increasing number of the infected the Government of the Czech Republic declared a state of emergency on 12. 3. 2020. Schools, universities, hotels, restaurants and shops except for grocery stores, drugstores, pharmacies, petrol stations, haberdasheries and a few others have been shut since then. Effective from 16. 3. 2020, a national lockdown was imposed except for travel for work, health facilities, family visits and other necessary travels; entry bans for all foreigners for 90 days and travel bans for Czech citizens and residents with valid temporary or permanent residency permit for 90 days were put in place. As of 19. 3. 2020, wearing any kind of respiratory protective equipment (facemasks, scarfs, respirators etc) outdoors and in public institutions (probation service, prison, courts, MoJ etc) was imposed. Special operating hours for elderly citizens 65+ in order to avoid the COVID-19 infection were put in place the same day.

### **Measures adopted by the Probation and Mediation Service**

Given the epidemiological situation in the Czech Republic and emergency state declared by the Czech Government on 12. 3. 2020 the Management of the Probation and Mediation Service adopted within a couple of hours new methodological standards on probation and mediation agenda implemented during the COVID-19 outbreak. Measures imposed to reduce the risk of the COVID-19 infection are following: cut in regular operating hours of Service Centres and separation of probation staff at all Service Centres to several small teams, entry ban on Service Centres, replacement of face-to-face consultations by other types of communication (phone, email etc), compliance with workplace hygiene procedures and other safety instructions.

Regard to situation the management evaluated if the scheduled activities both at the Service Centres and in the field did not pose a risk to the staff and if in accordance with our methodological standards these activities were necessary to be carried out. Each agenda was assessed in an individual manner and with respect to current state of condition.

The Service had a stockpile of hand sanitizers which was distributed to Service Centres. Initial shortage of facemasks was covered by [home-made production](#) of the probation staff. These masks were then distributed to other Service Centres as well as to hospitals, homes for the elderly, social care centres, juvenile centres etc. Supplies of respiratory protective equipment and hand sanitizers have been replenished in recent days.

## **Measures on execution of alternative sentences and measures**

Protection of the probation staff and assessment on necessary daily probation and mediation agenda were the first priorities. The necessity for suspension, postponement or limit of activities in relation to individual cases, risk and needs assessment and other circumstances has been regularly evaluated by the probation staff since then.

Information on suspension of any probation and mediation agenda or changes to operating procedure is forwarded as necessary to our clients (offenders and crime victims), relevant authorities involved in criminal proceedings (Police, courts, Prosecutor's office) which assigned the Service Centre with enforcement of particular agenda (execution of alternative sentence, mediation etc).

## **Individual consultations**

Individual face-to-face consultations have been limited. The necessity for suspension, postponement or limit of activities in relation to individual cases, risk and needs assessment and other circumstances has been regularly evaluated since then. The probation officers were recommended to reduce the number of face-to-face consultations and use phone or email communication instead.

In case a face-to-face consultation is absolutely necessary the probation staff is to check in advance the local epidemiological status with relevant authorities and contact a client over the phone checking up on current state of health including information on imposition of quarantine, travel to [risk epidemic countries](#) during the last 2 weeks, possible meeting with people in quarantine or people diagnosed with the COVID-19. The same procedure has been applied with relatives of clients and cooperating institutions.

## **Field work**

The necessity for suspension, postponement or limit of activities is applied where possible. Field work duties have been limited except for house arrest supervision without electronic monitoring bracelet.

## **Suspension of alternative sentences and measures**

Probation and Mediation Service have no legal right to suspend alternative sentences and measures imposed by the courts. So far no request to suspend the alternative sentence has been submitted to the courts.

## **Community service and group activities**

Given the possible risk of the COVID-19 infection and its fast spread most community service providers temporarily interrupted execution of community sentence.<sup>1</sup> The probation staff has since then verified with the CS providers what the conditions for execution of CS are, and whether the providers enable to continue. With clients the probation staff checks up on current situation and state of health and if necessary the probation staff report to the courts. In case it is not possible to continue in community service, probation staff informs both clients and relevant courts.

Group activities were stopped until further notice including programs implemented in prisons. In this case probation staff follows the rules of respective prison.

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<sup>1</sup> The CS providers have to follow the state of emergency declared by the Czech Government as well.

## **House arrest**

Supervision of clients under house arrest is carried out without a direct face-to-face contact. Probation staff does not enter the place of living and applies so called visual contact supervision instead. To secure both safety and hygienic procedure only company cars are used. Clients under house arrest with the electronic monitoring bracelet are tracked 24/7 therefore the direct face-to-face contact with these clients have been reduced to necessary operation considering all the risk and spread of the COVID-19 infection. No protective equipment enabling us to perform face-to-face contact with the client has been currently available.

## **Prohibition on entering sport, cultural and other events**

Given the suspension of sport, cultural and other public events this particular sentence is not applied to the fullest extent. If necessary, supervision is enforced without the need to report to the Police station.

## **Alcohol and drug testing**

Alcohol detection using a saliva sample and breath tests has been limited. Alcohol testing of clients under the electronic monitoring supervision has been going on without any restrictions.

## **Cooperation with the Prison Service of the Czech Republic**

Probation staff follows the rules implemented by the Management of the Prison Service and Prison Governors. The Prison Service of the Czech Republic adopted measures on entry ban for relatives a couple of weeks ago. In case the visit of a probation officer to the prison is absolutely necessary the respective probation officer contacts the prison governor. The same procedure applies to juvenile detention centres.

## **Victims Counselling Offices**

Counselling officers and probation officers specialised on work with victim perform consultations by phone and email until further notice.

## **Internal communication**

The Probation and Mediation Service Management have paid very close attention to internal communication. The Management keep informing the probation staff about current developments, adopted measures and protocols as well as supporting the staff in order to cope with temporary changes to operating procedures. Director General, Dr. Andrea Matouskova, has been a part of Crisis Management Team at the Ministry of Justice.

## **External communication**

Except for regular internal communication the Probation and Mediation Service use the [company website](#), [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). These channels are used to communicate with our fans (clients, staff, students, local and international partners, cooperating organisations etc).

## **Example**

Dear clients of the Probation and Mediation Service.

You might seem this exceptional situation we all have recently been experiencing does not bring any positive effect to your life. But the opposite may be true. It is this particular time which imposes both chance and challenge on your life in order to prove that you are able to handle the situation caused by the COVID-19 outbreak as successfully as other people around you, and demonstrate that you are capable of living your life in accordance with the law and rules. Although you might seem that your behaviour without regular personal contact with our probation officers is less supervised than before the emergency state had been declared always remember that breach of the rules will sooner or later have its consequences. Therefore we recommend you not to forget about us as we keep thinking of you! The community will certainly appreciate your responsible behaviour and will have stronger reason to believe in your reintegration and resocialisation. We would like to thank to all of you who have recently been calling to our offices and trying to cope with this situation.

Not only offenders but crime victims as well are the clients of the Probation and Mediation Service. We wish you to successfully manage the situation and remind you that our counselling offices remained open for email and phone consultations.

We look forward to see you soon at our Service Centres!

Probation and Mediation Service team.