

National Agency for Crime Prevention, Execution of Non-Custodial Sentences and Probation

Measures taken against Covid-19

Georgia has taken important measures against COVID19, and the rapid steps taken by the Crime Prevention and Probation System have played an important role in this regard. Given the situation in the country and in accordance with the recommendations of the Government of Georgia (first stage), the Agency began to work, as far as possible, to gradually move employees to remote work mode, so that the Agency's functions as well as delivery of existing services would be carried out.

An action plan has been developed by the National Agency for Crime Prevention, Execution of Non-Custodial Sentences and Probation, according to which the probationers / beneficiaries would be released from mandatory obligation of appearance in bureaus immediately in the first stage. All convicts registered in electronic program were sent text messages (17452) to their telephone numbers indicated in the program stating that they had no obligation to register at the bureau by April 14. Relevant staff of the agency and bureaus were constantly providing the necessary and relevant information to them by hotlines and emails.

Above mentioned actions yielded quick and significant results, and in 2 days the number of mandatory obligation of appearance of convicts in bureaus was reduced to almost zero.

At the same time, the plan to transfer employees to a remote work mode was drawn up, according to which they had to be gradually removed from the work space, and nominal lists were made (in the form of a table). According to the table, certain employees of the agency would work full time, some of them would do remote work and some of them would take shifts (2 week shifts).

Remote employees were given VPN services and remote access to the organization's servers and databases. E-mail of bureaus and structural units was created. The mail was given to convicts and citizens for specific needs and services.

With the emergence of the internal transmission phase of the infection and the declaration of a state of emergency, the agency has further increased the number of remote employees, a total of three stages:

From March 14 to March 21.

Full time work - 79

Remote duty - 116

Full remote mode - 138

From March 21 to March 30.

Full time work - - 38

Remote duty - 89

Full remote mode - 143

Remote work mode, appearance once a week - 63

Since March 30, only 15 managers (10 heads of bureaus and 5 executive managers of the agency) continue to work on a permanent basis, while all the 318 employees have been transferred to a fully remote work mode and only in case of necessity such as a specific task given, the employees will appear at the agency.

It should be noted that in case of need to appear at work, the agency provides transportation from the residential address of the employees.

It is noteworthy that providing video conference service has not been suspended and citizens in all central bureaus have the opportunity (led by the head of the bureau) to use video conference service.

Since March 16, all offices of the Agency have been cleaned with disinfectant solutions, staff of the agency is also provided with special disinfectants, single and multiple masks, face shields, medical gloves and other hygiene items.

From April 16, on the basis of the decree of the Minister of Justice of Georgia, the term of release from mandatory obligation of appearance of the probationers at the probation bureaus has been extended until the end of the state of emergency. By the same decree, a different rule for the protection of the regime for probationers as well as conditionally convicted persons established by law was applied to certain categories of cases. In particular, after prior notification, at a certain category of cases, probation officers will periodically monitor probationers and conditionally convicted persons by visiting them at the residential address. Relevant protocols will be drawn up on the prior telephone notification and the visit to the place of residence. During the visit to the probationer's residence, the probation officer is obliged to follow the recommendations issued by the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia and the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health named after L. Sakvarelidze. The order also states that if, after prior notification, probationer will not be at the place of residence he or she will be fined in accordance with Law of Georgia on the Procedure of Crime Prevention, Execution of Non-Custodial Sentences and Probation.

By the same order, probationers, who, despite the expiration of the permit to travel abroad, are unable to return to Georgia due to the pandemic situation in the world, are also released from the obligation to obtain a permit.

In such circumstances, it is very important to continue to work with convicts in the direction of re-socialization and rehabilitation. All social workers, psychologists and lawyers employed in the Probation Agency have changed their mode of work and switched to remote services. Psychologists, social workers and lawyers communicate with beneficiaries using the technical means (Using both telephone and internet). With the help of the video call, the specialists provide consultations to the beneficiaries as needed and / or provide them with relevant rehabilitation programs.

Psychologists and probation officers are intensively involved in the management of high harm risk cases, given that social isolation dramatically increases the risk of depression, anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, self-harm, and suicide. Domestic violence can also occur. However, in times of crisis (incident of violence, self-harm or suicide, etc.) with special outfits, it is possible for social worker/ psychologist to visit the family.

In case of violence and / or neglect of children, the conclusion of the social worker for further response will be sent by e-mail to the LEPL “State Fund for Protection and Assistance of (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking”. However, parallel to that, active communication is carried out with the family, as well as with the Human Rights Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

As for the preparation of an individual assessment report for the trial or for the Prosecutor's Office of Georgia - the reports are prepared only in urgent cases, during which the social worker connects with the accused, his / her legal representative and conducts an interview using existing technical means (telephone, internet). In order to interview the accused in a special penitentiary establishment, the social worker is provided with video conference service.

As for diversion programs in Georgia, special measures have been also taken in this direction. All current diversion / diversion and mediation agreements have been suspended. Current diversion process has been suspended, including a deadline for professionals involved in diversion programs, except in exceptional cases. Involvement in diversion programs is possible only in exceptional cases, taking into account the best interests of the child and other objective circumstances, during which work with the child will be carried out remotely and obligation to involve them in activities that require visiting social places is prohibited according to the state of emergency declared by the government of Georgia. The mediation process has been suspended in addition to the above-mentioned exceptional cases in order to ensure the health of persons in conflict with the law involved in diversion programs, the victims and the professionals working with them.

Also, the implementation of pilot programs of restorative justice has been suspended until the end of the state of emergency.

The Referral Center of Juveniles with Difficult Behavior has moved to a remote work mode to prevent the risks of spread of “COVID 19” virus infection based on the state of emergency declared in the country.

Current cases in the center is being monitored by social workers through telephone communication, that means: communication with the minor’s legal representative at least every other day(counseling them through telephone) and if necessary, involve psychologists and other relevant agencies.

Regarding rehabilitation programs that cannot be carried out without face-to-face communication are temporarily suspended. However, in the case of parents / caregivers, recommendations are made remotely via the agency's Facebook page and video meeting.

It is important to mention that the Referral Center has launched an information campaign via social networks to provide parents with information on how to manage a child's free time in state of emergency and how to deal with the child's psychological state in a given situation.