

Training of New Social Workers in Italy's Juvenile Justice in times of the COVID-19 Pandemic

As was to be expected, the emergency due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, which hit our country so hard, also had repercussions on the ordinary course of the activities of our *Juvenile and Community Justice Department*, thus posing questions on how to re-organize work, with dimensions never thought of before. This has affected any sectors, including staff training.

In particular, the training course entitled “*Arianna - The Thread of Social Work for a Community Justice*”, aimed at 323 newly recruited social workers, had just started a few weeks before the onset of Covid-19 in Italy. It was divided into 4 classroom modules, for a total duration of 5 weeks. It had been inaugurated on 22nd January 2020 by the Minister of Justice, Attorney Alfonso Bonafede. On 23 January 2020, the young social workers had had the opportunity to listen to the presentation delivered by the Secretary General of the **European Confederation on Probation**, Mr. Willem van der Brugge, with his stimulating historical-social overview of the figure of prison service workers for adults and minors and the evolution of methods in the probation field, including digital technologies.

The first two modules could take place regularly, as initially planned. As for the third module, one could easily affirm that the CEP Secretary General's invitation to enhance the use of new digital technologies was not unheard of. In fact, due to the rapid spread of the contagion, our Department immediately realized that it was necessary to stop the transfers of hundreds of trainees from all the Italian regions, who were initially due to personally attend classrooms of the various working groups led by their respective tutors. The online platform *Ipazia* (www.ipazia2020.it) was put in place to host *Arianna's* lessons, thus allowing a remote but fruitful dialogue between new recruits and their trainers, who connected from 4 different virtual training rooms in Rome, Verbania, Castiglione delle Stiviere and San Pietro Clarenza. This third distance-module ended happily on 27 April 2020. For the last 2

training weeks, scheduled from next September, the way they will be conducted will depend on the evolution of the pandemic in Italy.

At any rate, this groundbreaking experience has certainly allowed the new recruits to develop also new technological skills, implemented for the first time on such a large scale in this emergency phase, besides the qualifying contents typical of the social service profession. We are confident that all of them will be able to take advantage of, and then transfer into their future work on the ground, the spirit of this concrete example of problem-solving that was experienced by our governmental agency in such a complex period and that actually set a trend in the training of juvenile justice practitioners.