



**CEP-EuroPris expert group meeting on Domestic violence in prison and probation
Online, 22nd February 2021
From 14.00 till 16.00h CET**

Participants

EuroPris		CEP	
Sarah Henfrey (chair)	England	Sabrina Reggers	Belgium
Václav Jiříčka	Czech Republic	Simona Svetin Jakopič	Slovenia
Anne McQuaid	Ireland	Fredrik Olausson	Sweden
Tuija Muurinen	Finland	Anna Sanya Lázaro	Catalunya
Anna Maria Vella	Malta	Carmel Donnelly	Ireland
		Geraldine O'Hare	Northern Ireland
Kirsten Hawlitschek	EuroPris	Willem van der Brugge	CEP
		Anna Esquerrà Roqueta	CEP
		Mirjam van der Kooij	CEP

Apologies: Juraj Zajac, Slovakia

Report

Group chair Sarah Henfrey (United Kingdom) opened the meeting by welcoming everyone. She said she hoped that all were doing fine and that she herself started to get quite fed up with the corona situation and lockdowns. However the meeting agenda looked really interesting and she looked forward to hearing the presentation of Work With Perpetrators and to share experiences in the group.

Kirsten Hawlitschek (EuroPris) took over expressing the same warm welcome and saying that she had been present at the first group meeting in 2019 but not at the second one in 2020 as at that time her (former) colleague Friederycke was responsible. She indicated that Domestic Violence had become an important and urgent topic during the corona lockdowns and that it was therefore very useful to have this meeting. Also it would be good to keep in mind the workshop planned for December – for this another expert group meeting (hopefully face to face) would be relevant to start with the preparations. Perhaps one of the topics for the workshop could be the evaluation of intervention programs as this had been set as one of the goals of the group? She said it would be good to invite other EU Member States to contribute to the collection of good practices (to be found on both the EuroPris and CEP website) and to perhaps promote this collection during the workshop?



Willem van der Brugge (CEP) also addressed his welcome words to the group and indicated that the last meeting of this group, February 2020 in Hasselt Belgium, had also been the last physical meeting for CEP.

He said that today was the European Day for Victims of Crime – coincidence or not? And he thanked the group members who had contributed to the special edition newsletter on Domestic Violence. Then he introduced the first presenter – Ms. Alessandra Pauncz, Executive Director of the European network organization Work With Perpetrators (WWP EN).

Alessandra thanked Willem and the group for the invitation to speak. She started by shortly describing her organization: an EU network founded in 2014 and with now over 60 members, sustained by funding from the European Commission. The organization had started as a network, exchanging (good) practices and working on perpetrator programs as these were considered of pivotal importance for the community response to violence. The WWP network is mainly composed of organizations that directly or indirectly work with perpetrators, but also researchers and some umbrella organizations take part. Membership is either full or affiliate.

Then Alessandra mentioned the topics she would be addressing during her presentation: guidelines to work with perpetrators during Covid-19 ; the specific forms of violence that had increased during the pandemic ; and the lessons learnt.

The guidelines

The first lockdown in 2020 had severe consequences for many organizations – also Italy (where one of the WWP offices is based) was completely unprepared and there was much uncertainty of how long the lockdown would take. The issue of Domestic Violence created a lot of concern and it became clear that no intervention would 100% guarantee safety. For this reason a crisis management approach was taken up with different goals: to reduce the risks, increase the perpetrator's coping mechanisms and reducing his/her stress, to mitigate effects of violence on family members and to continue to listen to survivors' voices.

The main difficulty was the mix between personal and professional lives, which made it necessary to draft a flowchart to identify the different levels of risks and recommendations. The higher the risk, the more intense the support needed to be.

At the end of March 2020 the guidelines were issued and published on the organization's website: <https://www.work-with-perpetrators.eu/covid-19> . Many partners were relieved that even during Covid-19 it was in this way still possible to be/remain in contact with the perpetrators.

Increased forms of violence

During Covid-19 an increase in cybercrime was seen. This was not completely unexpected but it was certainly worrying and a serious problem. "*Stalkerware*" is a software that can be used to take over one's online device (mobile phone) without his or her consent, meaning that the stalker totally takes over the control – he or she can make video's, record things, reading browser data and steal phone calls logs.

Alessandra described the differences between "*Stalkerware*", Parental Control and Malicious spy programs. "*Stalkerware*" is very easy to come by and download on the internet – like downloading an app. There is even a technician helping you with problems during the installation. The tool is meant for partners but can be abused by others for other purposes. It has a cheap promotional price and the number of people using it is frightening. The highest numbers are for Germany and Italy, but also in other countries it is on the raise and has been so especially during the lockdown.



Lessons learnt

The last point that Alessandra wanted to highlight were the lessons learnt during the Covid-19 period: reflections after a year of pandemic. The need was felt to re-assess what was done with perpetrator interventions. It became clear that organizations working with perpetrators had transformed their interventions and programs in order to also manage and treat online perpetrating. This was encouraging to see – many countries had done and developed new and different methods, especially in the online field. An updated version of the Guidelines is scheduled for January 2021. Alessandra concluded by mentioning the challenges for the future: to keep the contact with victims safe when providing online support, and to adapt materials including online techniques. In fact online programs can also do something extra: some men would never have followed treatment programs if not online – the “not being face to face” made it feel much more easily accessible, and safer.

Sarah thanked Alessandra for her presentation and said it was fascinating to hear the developments and the lessons learnt. So much had happened online during the last year – for sure this needed to be included in the work methods and programs. She asked the group if anyone had questions?

Kirsten Hawlitschek (EuroPris) said that listening to Alessandra’s presentation she almost had the feeling that the issue of Domestic Violence was less an issue during Covid-19, while there were many threatening signals of people being locked in their homes which would have a negative effect – was this feeling correct?

Alessandra answered that in first instance this was indeed the case because WWP only worked with perpetrators already in their programs and no new intakes were done. Only in the summer, when the lockdown restrictions were lifted a bit, an increase was seen as new cases were allowed. She said that for the actual moment it was difficult to say – there was not enough data to come with concrete figures, so she understood that Kirsten had this feeling/impression.

Anna Esquerrà (CEP) indicated that it was crucial to develop guidelines, as Alessandra had described, and she wondered how/if it was possible to emotionally engage with perpetrators when working online? Were different methodologies used?

And secondly, when implementing the interventions, had they considered to work together with victim organizations?

Alessandra answered that many programs had a psychological approach (including role plays for example) which made them always very engaging, even though online. In the beginning it was new and difficult, but in the course of time they had included new aspects like showing parts of movies and/or emotional images, which worked very well.

Regarding the cooperation with victim organizations Alessandra indicated that this depended on the case, but that at least one quarter of all perpetrator programs had been coordinated with victim services.

Willem wanted to know if there were any figures on how many perpetrators had been victims themselves in their past/childhood? Alessandra said that she did not know – the WWP programs were always based on the “here and now” and did not dive into one’s past.

As second question Willem asked if there were differences between the profiles of cybercriminals and “normal” perpetrators? Alessandra answered that there was not a single profile for offenders of cybercrime – there were many different types, often mixed with having committed other offences as well.



Sarah once again thanked Alessandra for her contribution and moved on to the group session during which the individual members would share their knowledge and experience of the current (pandemic) situation.

When no one volunteered to go first Sarah Henfrey did so herself. She told the group that during the severe lockdowns in the UK the number of cases of Domestic Violence (DV) had increased. Besides Probation Services also the police had made more “flags” for cases in which DV was involved and there was an increased pressure on victim services. Many men were (already) on perpetrator programs, and the Probation Service had continued working with them in order to have them complete their programs. Currently the organization was gathering statistics on the results of these programs. Another problem was the one of backlogs of interventions: courts continued to impose programme places on new offenders, while there was no possibility to help them – a situation creating difficult problems.

Sarah said that her organization was not yet in the position of delivering group trainings – there were now only 2 groups using social distancing, and for the rest everything took place individually. Everybody felt the pressure on delivering more online perpetrator work, but it was simply not always possible. Also the staff members had to work in a completely different way and were struggling with the question what was safe to do online, especially when there were children and family members in the background?

Geraldine O’Hare (Northern Ireland) took the floor as second presenter. She said that in her jurisdiction there had been several lockdowns which had led to an increase in DV cases, and an increase in reports/reporting. PBNI was working closely together with other criminal justice agencies (like the police) on high risk offenders, but still the situation remained difficult.

The program sessions were delivered remotely, but this was often tiresome for both parties. There were however positive aspects: clients were much more engaging – it seemed to help them that they did not need to travel and that the sessions had a clear and limited time frame. There were very few drop-outs from trainings, and very few offenders returning to court for a second time. The police had set up a special domestic abuse group.

A result of this was that the staff might want to continue working in this way? Geraldine realized that of course there were advantages, but that on the other hand face-to-face contacts could never be replaced by online ones – it remained difficult to engage perpetrators in the programmes remotely. She concluded by saying that at the moment PBNI was in the process of a research investigating how probation does (and did) under Covid-19, and that she appreciated the good work that was done in partnership with external organizations.

After Geraldine Carmel Donnelly (Ireland) took the floor. She said that also Ireland was under a lockdown which led to challenging situations. The police operated pro-actively with regard to high risk victims and reported 17% more DV cases, and also the courts had prioritized Domestic Violence. NGO’s that delivered programs had not had new intakes for many months and were focusing on the people already under programs. Probation workers had to adjust to contacts via telephone instead of face to face. Carmel indicated that there were worries about the anxiety of probation staff members, and that revised guidelines had been drafted on how to work with Domestic Violence cases under crisis management. In fact when working online probation officers felt much more closely involved in the perpetrators’ worries which could be hard. The challenge therefore was now to balance the engagement to keep the work doable – perhaps create a mix of online and face to face work?



Anna Sanya Lázaro (Spain Catalonia) told the group that in her jurisdiction during the lockdown the physical violence had decreased but not the psychological one, in which often also children were involved. Her organization had noticed an increase of 41% more calls to the emergency phone line, regularly based on the fact that the economic damage caused by Covid-19 made it impossible for the victim to leave his or her present relationships.

Catalonia did what she could to make it easier for victims to enter help services – communities started up a campaign named “safe places for gender-based violence”, hanging messages with these words on shops or other places indicating that people could safely go there and ask for help. Also a specific whats-app chat was created to provide emotional support.

Anna Sanya said that all probation officers everyone worked from home, doing the interviews by phone – guidelines on how to do this had been set up. Even though this brought difficulties in separating work life and private life, the probation officers remained very involved with their clients and these clients were very grateful for the continuing support, especially because the probation workers did their best to offer flexibility in the sense of applying broader time frames during which they were available for the work.

The Covid pandemic had even created more types of community work – tasks specifically related to the corona situation.

Simona Svetin Jakopic (Slovenia) indicated that in her country there had been an increase of 13% in DV cases – probably even more as surely not all victims had sought for help. The most urgent reason was that people were now together staying at home, a situation leading to more homicide and alcohol abuse. The number of juveniles feeling neglected because of schools and services being closed did not grow.

Simona said that in Slovenia the Probation Service did not work with victims – this was done by several NGO’s. Here lower figures were measured, until summer 2020 when the world opened up a little (less restrictions) and more requests for help came in.

Probation staff had to adapt to online working and to learn to do without the (normally very important) non-verbal communication. In the beginning there was also hardly any equipment for online work/meetings, and the organization of community work activities was really hard because the homes for elderly (one of the regular addresses) were completely isolated and closed for the rest of the society. Perpetrators were referred to a special NGO that kept on working during Covid because treatment for drug abuse and counselling were not available.

Simona concluded by saying that in Slovenia they were planning to implement new programs for DV offenders, including risk assessment and multi-agency cooperation with other institutions.

Sabrina Reggers (Belgium Flanders) said that in Belgium (Flanders) there had indeed been an increase in DV cases. There were no official statistics (for example from the police or social services) and also the term “more cases” always depended on the interpretation of these words, but it was sure that even though not always the numbers had grown, the severity of the cases surely had.

For many people it was difficult to adjust to the new reality, and the Houses of Justice had been working closely together with other partners like the police and social services in order to try and help as many people as possible. Much was done online, but there were also still face-to-face meetings. A creative new way of working was doing outside walks while talking with offenders or victims. The quality of online services had improved a lot – organizations had been thinking already before corona to start and use it, but the pandemic had left them no choice and simply forced them to do so. Sabrina said that in general staff members felt closer together like a group, and that media and politics had given more attention and funding for the work with DV cases which was very positive. She also emphasized the importance of multi-agency cooperation for DV cases.



Anne McQuaid from Ireland indicated that she recognized much that Carmel had said, and that also in prisons the work was done both face to face and via video connection – all group work was put on hold. Currently there were corona outbreaks in two prisons, and the inmates there were locked up for most of the time. Prison staff were strongly concentrating on first aid for psychological problems (like depression) as these occurred a lot and could have very serious consequences.

Fredrik Olausson (Sweden) started by saying that in his country there had not been a complete lockdown in society. SPPS (the Swedish Prison and Probation Service) had accredited the PREDOP program for offenders just before the pandemic – Denmark and Finland would follow shortly in taking up this program. It was an online program so very suitable for the corona pandemic work conditions as everything needed to be done online. Group programs turned out to be very difficult to do, as well as hybrid ones. Individual ones on the contrary worked very well. Fredrik said that SPPS did not work with victims – this aspect was taken care of by the municipalities.

Tuija Muurinen (Finland) told the group about the lockdown in Finland that started last year in March – she had been working from home for almost a year now! The numbers of DV cases had increased and there were many assault reports having taken place in private residences – people having problems at home because of losing their jobs, and getting more aggressive as a consequence. Young people were often more violent towards each other and small children (between 5 and 9 years old) were the victims. The Criminal Sanctions Agency had taken up actions like making available more emergency hotlines, opening up chat connections for quick contact and immediate help to victims, and offering online groups for sharing DV cases.

Tuija said that it was difficult to speak with families when one of the partners did not feel safe having the other one around, and this had not changed when working online – telephone or video contact was often even less private than a meeting at a probation office. Also in prisons the situation was difficult – during Spring 2020 the staff could not visit the inmates and was done online which made it hard to address sensitive topics. Prison and probation workers were trained to recognize stalking.

Václav Jiricka (Czech Republic) was the last group member to share his experiences. He said that in his country in the beginning of the lockdown everyone was very obedient to the rules, which resulted in a raise of DV cases only later. At that moment many more help phone calls came in and the number of people behaving violently increased – people who had not been violent before. Victim's Impact Programs had been developed, but unfortunately could not continue when in October 2020 the state of emergency was announced because of the high number of infections in prisons. Many special units had to close and less specialized programs could be conducted. Just before the pandemic the Czech prison service had been developing Restorative Justice programs (Building Bridges) for the work with offenders and victims together (not the specific victim of the offender, but unrelated ones), but unfortunately this had to be stopped as well due to the pandemic and the lack of finances. However positive experiences had been gathered.

Sarah thanked everyone for the contribution and said it was reassuring to hear the same challenges all over Europe.

Kirsten also thanked the group for sharing their experiences – she said that many had struggled through this difficult year and had done well despite the circumstances. Online work would never be a replacement for face to face contacts, but it could surely add something and had positive aspects – perhaps in the future the new way of working would be a combination of the two? It was important to not only look at the negative points, but also at the lessons learnt and positive aspects. For example, people might feel closer together now and had experienced a lot of mutual understanding.



She said that it would be good to plan a next meeting on the evaluation of programs and asked Alessandra if the group could use the work already done by WWP? Alessandra confirmed this and said that she would invite the WWP research director to join this next meeting.

Kirsten concluded by informing the group that she would be leaving EuroPris by end of April or May, so that most probably she would not be seeing the group members again. She thanked all of them once again and said that their experiences had been very interesting to hear.

Willem took over to officially close the meeting. He said that since online events were relatively easy to organize it would be possible to meet more often. He recognized Sarah's and Kirsten's point of the shared stories and experiences – *"we are all in this together"*.

He said to be looking forward to the workshop at the end of the year, and invited the group members to think about possible topics to be addressed.

