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**Mapping the Needs of Probation Officers**  
*Estonian Experience*

**CEP Workshop**  
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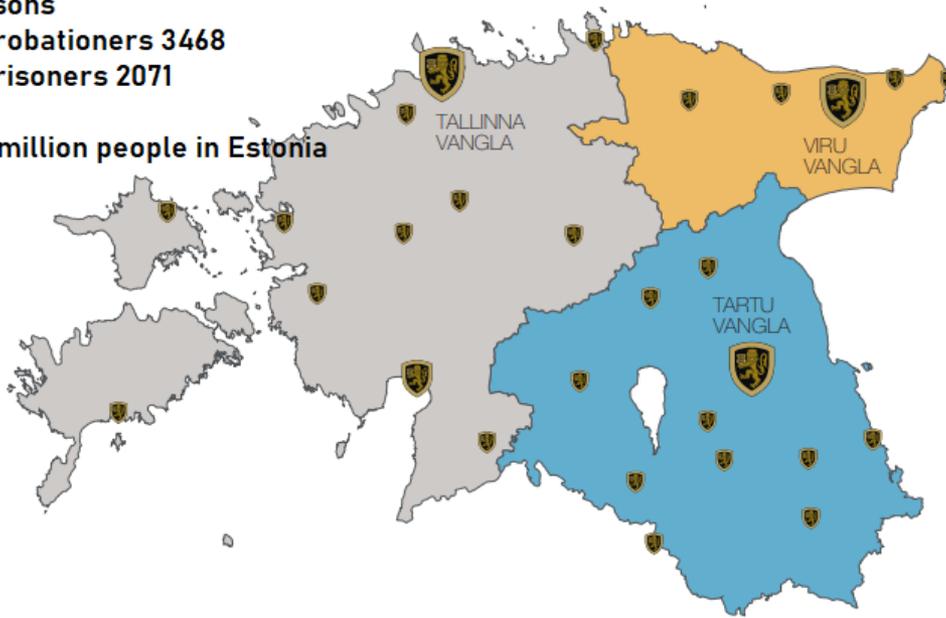
## Estonian Probation System

### Probation within prison system

3 regions managed by regional  
prisons

- probationers 3468
- prisoners 2071

1.3 million people in Estonia





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## **Staff Support and Psychological Well-Being**

### **What is offered for POs?**

**Psychological Counselling**

**Covision – structured case discussions with team members**

**Group supervision ( for example POs working with sex offenders)**

**Pre- and In-service training and everyday methodological support**

**Support measures in case of high case load**

**Other Motivators (sport compensation, flexible working time, events etc)**

### **How are we doing with staff-wellbeing?**

**What kind of support they need?**



## Staff Well-Being Survey (TRIPOD 2022)

### PROBATION RESULTS

- 125 POs were included, 113 answered, response rate 90% (general 81%)

Would you **recommend prison** as employer? **77% YES**, 23% NO (65%;35%)

Have you **considered quitting** lately? **52% YES**, 48% NO (53%; 47%)

**Critical group 19%** - negative attitude + considered quitting (28%)

3 MAIN AREAS (scoring in 7 point scale, **areas of concern scored >5**)

Goals and role clarity 5.7 points (5.7)

Management and cooperation 5.2 points (5.2)

**Work place well-being 4.6 points (4.7)**

### **Areas of concern**

Feedback, equal treating, talking about problems, salary equality, case load, acknowledgment



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## Mapping the needs of POs

- **Research by Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, autumn 2022**
- **In-depth interviews (n=13)**
- **Tallinn area Probation Officers and Managers (face to face)**
- **Prison Deputy Director (Teams)**
- **Head of the Probation Officers Council (Teams)**
- **DG Probation (Teams)**
- **Semi-structured**
- **Voluntary and confidential**
- **Interviews recorded, transcribed, coded**



## Mapping the needs of POs

### PRELIMINARY RESULTS

#### Need for Psychological Counselling

- **The need is there, especially after difficult cases (suicide, death, threatening officers etc), but POs are not using it.** *“I know that prison offers the psychological counselling, but I don’t know much about it and I would never go there. I would not trust that my secrets are kept confidential. If something happens, I would look for the help on my own”*
- **Need for anonymity** *“I would need an anonymous service. Maybe the list of outside service providers would help. My employer would never have to know it was me who went there”*
- **Need to normalize the use this kind of support** *“I would be hesitant to use it, even if I need it. Maybe it is because of the fear to seem weak. We should be able to cope on our own”*

#### Need for Supervision

- **Need for specialized supervisors** *“Outside supervisor was giving too general advice, it is useless in probation. I would need somebody who knows the system” “POs who work with sex offenders have supervision once a year and that is enough” “After social programme trainers training we do get a supervision for a while and it is very useful”*



## Mapping the needs of POs

### Need for team support

- **Open door policy in my team** *"After difficult client it helps if I can go right away to my colleague and get it off my chest. This is the most important support I need"*
- **Case discussions roundtables** *"I can ask anytime for couple of my colleagues to form a covision group and that really helps, because these people know the system"*

### Need for equality and belonging inside the prison system

- **Equality with prison officers** *"They would get extra pay for overtime, they have paid extra tasks if they feel like earning more, they have sport, health and motivation fund. We got lately sport compensation, but it is not enough compared to them. I would need to be treated more equally"*
- **Need to feel included and belonging** *"Sometimes I have the feeling that it is only about prison and the wellbeing is their staff. Like they have forgotten we are also part of the system"*

### Need for feedback

- **Balanced feedback** *"When something happens, for example probationer committed crime that caught media attention or probationer filed for complaint for MoJ, they just ask questions and want information. All I get for a feedback is the things that could have been different or improved. I also need to know what is well done"*

### Need for acknowledgment

- **Non material** *"I need that the prison management would visit us more, look us in the eye and talk to us"*
- **Extra money or free time for extra hours** *"I would really need that with these kind of case load they would already find money to pay the extra work. The letter of recognition and warm handshake in the end of the year is not enough" "Free days would be nice, but it is also like a punishment. Nobody is doing your job and you will have double after you come back"*



## Mapping the needs of POs

### Need for time and reflection

- **High case loads for longer time is constant pressure** *“The overtime is not paid, so I try to work very quickly. Its intense. After a while I noticed that I started to make mistakes. I forget to save documents, add attachment, mix up things. Afterwards I cannot believe that I did this kind of mistake”*

### Need for autonomy

- **Recommendations vs instructions to follow** *“I would need a lot more autonomy and room to decide. The guidelines should be recommendations for general cases, but officers discretion right should be also there and we should be trusted. I think it is time to revise all these instructions, because we are loosing the aim”*
- **Tools like risk assessment, tiering tool etc are not viewed as helping tools** *“Its all about risk assessment, if that point here is correct or not. Even if the whole case is well managed, it does not count. So finally you get what you assess. The whole effort goes to get the details right” “Case load should be divided equally. Our manager tries to keep it transparent and flexible, but the tiering system points are not proportional. So the tool that should be helping us is not”*

### Need for training and expert consultation

- **Mental health problems training and expert consultation** *“I notice that we get more and more clients with diagnoses and I would badly need training in this area. And maybe a prison psychiatrist or mental health nurse would also be available for expert consultation. Sometimes I don't know how even talk to the person or calm them down”*
- **Expert groups within the system who can give advice** *“We could establish expert groups from the probation officers. For example if somebody is interested in certain topic, they could get more training, cooperate and act as consultants to others. It would be also a good opportunity for self-development”*



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**THANK YOU**