

## **Expert Group on Communication and Awareness-Raising in Probation**

### **9 and 10 June 2025, Prague, Czech Republic**

#### **Participants**

1. Michael Baker (England and Wales) – Chair
2. Gail McGreevy (Northern Ireland)
3. Imants Mozers (Latvia) – *attending online*
4. Alexandra Maria Babuca (Romania)
5. Andrea Matouskova (Czech Republic)
6. Alexandre Dewaide (Belgium – Wallonia)
7. Hannan Amnad (The Netherlands)
8. Thomas Marecek (Austria)
9. Fatih Gungor (Türkiye)
10. Huseyin Sik (Türkiye)
11. Mirka Jakešová (Czech Republic)
12. Jana Špero Kamenjarin (Croatia)

#### **Background**

The launch of the Expert Group meeting on Communication and Awareness-Raising has been initiated by the discussions and outcomes of the 2024 Workshop on Working with Communities and Awareness-Raising held in Prague, Czech Republic. Media has created a significant part of our lives with coverages on variety of topics. Certain areas get naturally more attention than others, however, with some only a good or bad story sell. When it comes to criminal justice, and namely probation, the media coverage with a hint of positive attention is a process that can take a long time to achieve.

#### **Presentations and outcomes**

All expert members delivered presentations on the topic of communication and awareness raising in their jurisdiction with a special focus on the communication strategy, successful projects and initiatives, gaps and challenges facing, areas for improvement within the EU MS in general. Below an overview of issues that are in common or that vary from country to country.

## Differences

- Smaller vs larger jurisdictions (different way of communicating with a country of 10 mil vs 84 mil)
- No „official“ communication officers within the Probation Services (probation counsellor in Romania responsible for the public on the voluntary basis)
- Strategies – not applied in all countries (Romania, Czech Republic)
- Different relationship with media – more and less developed relations with journalists

## In common

- Strong need to communicate the essence of probation
- Use of website and social media (but working differently for each country e.g. in Belgium LinkedIn perceived as a job-hunting platform, X is dropping in the NL while in Turkiye it is very popular etc.)
- Good (authentic human-centered) stories are powerful but the bad stories sell better --> expert position for the media that communication teams or individuals within probation have can be seen as an advantage serving to change that narrative.
- Communication officers – usually a small team or no team
- Focus on general public and stakeholders -- > variety of tailored-made communication – special campaigns (Austria), a documovie (NI), international events and days (Czechia), Planting trees (Turkiye), Activity report (Romania), Podcast (Belgium), Stories of Hope (England and Wales), an entertainment TV show with a woman on probation in (Latvia)
- Budget issues -- > the first budget item to be cut is communication. Crucial to advocate for maintaining the resources to enable communication specialists to communicate on behalf of the organisation. Given that the probation services are in most cases funded from within the state budget it is also a matter of transparency.

## What has been discussed – to take into account

- Need to **set a strategic context and framework for CEP members**, collected messages, understanding a role of probation, common ways of how to deal with the problem and practical tips (stories of change, messages and communication tips for each market) --> long-term strategy to support all members (also for frontline practitioners) – how to maintain sustained attention?
- **Changing the way of communication within the society**
- **Target audience for the group? -- > Capability building** - enabling the frontline colleagues to advocate on behalf of the organisation

- **Broad scope of work for every probation service – supervision, mediation, victim's work etc**
- **Language** – offender, client, service user, probationer
- Support for advocating for the **resources on communication**
- Try to **fill in each others gaps on knowledge** – e.g. measurement of public perception in Romania
- **Output** stories (police - figures) vs **outcomes** (probation – stories of change)
- **Measurable data**

## **Actions**

The Expert group agreed to draft a strategic document that would support jurisdiction in their effort to raise awareness on probation, its work and impact it has, the necessity to invest in communication. The document is going to follow the structure of “why, how and what”. The first portion will cover why - “Why to invest in communication in probation” guidance document.

Following this, the following objectives were developed:

### **Build the Case for Investment in Probation Communication**

- Develop evidence and messaging to help colleagues to advocate for sustained and increased investment in communications.
- Show how effective communication improves outcomes for probation services, public safety, and community engagement.

### **Design a Communications Framework that can Scale-up**

- Create a framework that enables jurisdictions to begin with essential (‘must-have’) communication functions towards best-in-class practice.
- Support communicators to attract further investment in the function over time.

### **Equip Jurisdictions with Practical Communication Toolkits**

- Provide guidance for addressing common communication challenges, including:
  - Promoting success stories
  - Creating a distinct, recognisable probation identity
  - Handling issues and negative media or misconceptions

### **Strengthen Internal and Frontline Advocacy**

- Empower practitioners and operational staff to confidently represent the value of probation to external audiences.
- Encourage a culture where communication is seen as a shared responsibility across all levels of the organisation.

### **Promote Transparency, Awareness, and Cross-Border Collaboration**

- Foster a European network for sharing knowledge, innovative practices, and mutual support.
- Encourage open communication about challenges and successes to collectively improve the visibility and understanding of probation.

#### To do:

- Draft a report – Mirka by 16 June 2025
- Open a shared folder accessible for everyone – Mirka by 16 June 2025
- Everyone shares 5-10 reasons why it is important to invest in communication in probation and within 1 item elaborate on “must have, good to have and nice to have” – delivered to Mirka’s email by 15 September 2025
- Online follow-up meeting (to brainstorm on final 10 reasons) – proposed dates:  
**Thursday 2 October 2025 at 2 pm CET**
- Meeting in 2026 – agreed to invite an expert from outside the probation to participate. Experts asked to follow up on Mirka with proposals for the speaker and the venue (meeting preferably linked to a communication and awareness-raising event)

Links (to the website, YouTube, social sites etc): <https://www.cep-probation.org/recap-expert-group-on-communication-and-awareness-raising/>