



MODERNISATION OF THE JUDICIARY IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC IMPROVED SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC REHABILITATION OF OFFENDERS



Switzerland is funding a project for modernising the judiciary and for improving the social and economic rehabilitation of offenders in the Czech Republic. The project is based on experiences gathered by the canton of Zurich.

Under the communist system, little attention was paid to individual needs when imposing prison sentences. It focused on repression and neglected prevention entirely. Following the transition to democracy and a market economy with all its consequences, offending rates increased and Czech prisons began to fill up. The «Expansion of probation and rehabilitation programmes: strengthening of prevention measures and reducing recidivist rates» project seeks to meet this challenge and improve the Czech criminal justice and prison systems. The capacities of judicial institutions will be strengthened so they can utilise alternative forms of punishment instead of simply detaining offenders in an environment which fosters criminality and reoffending behaviour.

The recidivist rate in the Czech Republic is one of the highest in Europe and is three times higher than in Switzerland. The project will also support the introduction of rehabilitation programmes for offenders from prisons and other places of detention. Until now, no assistance has been provided for prisoners' release and their reintegration into society.

The planned measures include the introduction of specific programmes for juveniles, speeding offenders and white-collar criminals such as fraudsters. Particular attention will be paid to women and members of the Roma minority. Only 10% of the country's prison population are women, but they face particular problems during reintegration. Although they account for only 3% of the Czech population, up to a quarter of prisoners are Roma.

Particular attention is also paid to mitigating risk factors such as unemployment and insolvency which tend to lead to failure and recidivism. When prisoners return to normal life, they often have debts and have great difficulty in meeting their obligations.

SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH SWITZERLAND

The project is the result of a close partnership forged in the early 1990s between the Probation and Mediation Service of the Czech Republic on the one hand and the Zurich probation and enforcement services (BVD) and social service department plus the Association for the Development of Probation Services in Eastern Europe (VEBO) on the other hand. A project to be run in the Czech Republic gradually evolved based on the experiences of Swiss experts on probation and social work within the penal system.

Experiences will be exchanged in both directions however: certain parts of the project which have not yet been introduced in Switzerland will be trialled in the Czech Republic so that both sides can benefit from this project.



EXPECTED OUTCOMES

A number of outcomes on different levels are expected: Firstly, by increasing the use of alternative punishments and the number of offenders released on parole, the project will take some of the pressure off Czech prisons. This will not only make the prisons easier to run, it will also cut the overall cost of prison services for the Czech Republic. The savings made can be channelled into rehabilitation measures. As rehabilitation improves, the crime rate falls, which benefits society and also makes the Czech Republic more attractive to investors and skilled workers.



Probation and rehabilitation programmes are an essential factor for the successful reintegration of specifically defined target groups, and they can significantly contribute towards the reduction and prevention of recidivism among adults and juveniles offenders as well. These programmes can also help reduce the numbers of inmates in our prisons, as well as strengthen crime prevention efforts and significantly reduce government expenditure on prison services.

This project is intended to render efforts in the area of criminal justice in the Czech Republic more effective and efficient, to promote an effective partnership between state and non-state institutions and to support the strong partnership that exists between the Czech Republic and Switzerland in this area.

I am delighted to be able to participate in this joint project.

Pavel Štern,
Director, Czech Probation and Mediation Service

THE PROJECT IN BRIEF

SUBJECT

Modernisation of the judiciary

COUNTRY

Czech Republic

PARTNERS

BVD (Probation and enforcement services of the canton of Zurich)

VEBO: Swiss Association for the Development of Probation Services in Eastern Europe

STARTING POINT / BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Czech prisons are overcrowded and are unable to carry out offender rehabilitation work. Prison costs are steadily rising, while recidivist rates are high and general public safety is declining. Measures to modernise the justice and prison system are urgently required.

PURPOSE

The project seeks to encourage release on parole and the implementation of rehabilitation programmes in order to assist the social and economic reintegration of offenders and lower the high recidivist rate in the Czech Republic. The project will also reduce government spending and increase public safety.

ACTIVITIES

The most important activities are the introduction of rehabilitation programmes and monitoring their implementation.

TARGET GROUPS

- Offenders given prison or suspended sentences
- Prison officers and Justice Ministry staff
- Victims of crime
- General public

COSTS

Total project budget:

CHF 1.7 million

Swiss contribution:

CHF 1.4 million

RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Probation and Mediation Service of the Czech Republic

DURATION

2011 – 2016