

ASSESSMENT OF PROBATION EFFECTIVENESS (2015)

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On July 1st 2012 Probation Act came into force in Lithuania. Therein probation was defined as a conditional alternative to imprisonment, i. e. conditional release or suspension of custodial sentence, which essentially implied offender supervision. The main purpose of is to ensure effective resocialization of probationers and reduce the rate of their recidivism. In order to gain this purpose, Lithuanian probation system applies various measures, which are specified in the Probation Act.

Back in year 2000 correctional inspections were instituted and started to perform the functions of Lithuanian probation system. The Probation Act and the associated legislation were aimed at creating the new structure of probation system, which would follow proper principles, apply specific resocialization measures, offer help instead of control, involve governmental and non-governmental organizations and be capable of reacting to various probationers' needs.

Lithuanian probation services supervise about 20,000 persons a year. Although only nearly a half of these persons are the ones with suspension of custodial sentence or conditionally released, it is obvious that the effective probation services are at the best interest of both the sentenced persons and the whole society. Also, the effectiveness of probation services is the main condition that makes the whole probation system serve its purpose.

The success of probation services is related to public security, criminal recidivism reduction and the complex process of integrating sentenced people into society. Therefore, it is important to monitor probation system effectiveness, discover effective strategies of supervision and resocialization, give up ineffective practice and constantly provide recommendations in order to improve the effectiveness of probation system. When it comes to the effectiveness of probation system, it is understood as a level to which the main purpose of probation is gained applying a certain amount of resources. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of probation system, it is essential to pick appropriate criteria, which are the primary topic of this study.

Currently the decline of the rate of new pre-trial investigations against probationers is the main criterion of probation system effectiveness in Lithuania. In other words, official records of probationers' criminal recidivism are the major indicators of probation system effectiveness. Some other criteria have also been established but not all of them can be related to the actual probation effectiveness. Therefore the purpose of this study is to evaluate the criteria, which are applied to measure probation effectiveness in Lithuania, discuss their advantages and drawbacks and analyse the main indicators of probation effectiveness. Also, this study is aimed at analysing the foreign models and criteria used for evaluation of probation effectiveness and making recommendations suitable for Lithuanian context.

In the course of this study authors were analysing the legislation of probation and strategic planning, and also the statistical data of probation performance. In order to examine the experience of foreign countries, scientific publications, foreign legislation acts, statistical data and reports of probation services have been analysed. The analysis covered the experience of six countries, i.e. Ireland, England and Wales, USA, Canada, New Zealand and Germany. All of these countries have longstanding systems of probation, therefore, compared to Lithuania, they have gathered broader experience evaluating the effectiveness of probation system. Moreover, the purpose and functions performed by probation systems in these countries are quite similar to the ones in Lithuania, thereby the models of probation effectiveness evaluation applied there could be suitable for Lithuanian context.

At the end of this study authors suggest the options of creating the system of criteria for probation effectiveness evaluation in Lithuania. Authors emphasise that it is the formation of probation workers' identity that influences applied supervision methods, internalised mission, main goals and criteria of quality for applied measures. Contemporary probation system cannot be exclusively focused on formal control and registration of certain incidents. On the contrary, it should be oriented towards motivating, reinforcing and changing the tendency of probationers' behaviour.

Taking this approach, formal statistical indicators are not enough to evaluate probation effectiveness, therefore the main attention should be focused on the quality of applied measures, amount of provided service and rateability of decisions which can affect probationers' lives in a long time perspective.

This study may provide additional opportunities and measures of improving probation effectiveness and its evaluation in Lithuania. It may be interesting to probation practitioners and theorists as well as people concerned about current issues of penal enforcement.

The results of research (in Lithuanian): *Sakalauskas G., Jarutienė L. Probacijos veiksmingumo vertinimas. Mokslo studija. Lietuvos teisės institutas, 2015 (online).*