

THE 1ST EVALUATION SEMINAR OF THE NATIONAL PROJECT "CHANCE FOR RETURN 2" (BRATISLAVA, 9 SEPTEMBER 2025)

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On September 9, 2025, the 1st Evaluation Seminar of the national project *Chance for Return 2* was held in Moyzes Hall, organised by the Corps of Prison and Court Guard (hereinafter "**CPCG**") in cooperation with the Faculty of Law of Comenius University Bratislava (hereinafter "**FL CU**"). The aim of the evaluation seminar, held under the auspices of the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic, was to present and evaluate, within the framework of the project's sub-activities (1. *Professional coordination of the steering committee*, 2. *Creation and provision of information and counselling services for clients*, 3. *Introduction and modification of standardised educational programs*, 4. *Digitalisation of services, programs and electronic tools*, 5. *Evaluation*, and 6. *Training of professional staff*), in particular the implemented partial, and innovative elements of linking separate penitentiary and post-penitentiary care policies.

The seminar was attended by several distinguished guests, including a representative of the European Commission in Slovakia, representatives of the Prison Service of the Czech Republic and the Probation and Mediation Service of the Czech Republic, the Academy of Applied Sciences in Poland, and various representatives of state administration authorities, including officials from the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic, the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, the Ministry of Labour,

Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, and the General Directorate of the CPCG. The event opened with a ceremonial introduction and speeches by distinguished guests.

The opening address was delivered by the State Secretary of the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic, **Mgr. Michal Sedliak**, who welcomed all participants. He was followed by **Col. Ing. Jozef Lančarič**, Deputy Director General for Economic Affairs of the CPCG, who emphasised the importance of the project and stated that it is demonstrably changing the lives of prisoners. Next, **Gabriela Šaturová**, the representative of the European Commission in Slovakia, addressed the participants, describing the project as a living example of European solidarity. She praised the project team and expressed her belief that *Chance for Return 2* will serve as an inspiration for other European countries. The ceremonial speeches continued with **Mgr. Michal Krivošík**, Deputy Director of the Social Affairs and Family Section of the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (hereinafter "**COLSAF**"), who thanked the CPCG and all colleagues for their joint efforts that enabled the project's progress. The ceremonial part was concluded by the Dean of FL CU, **Prof. JUDr. Eduard Burda, PhD.**, who appreciated that the principles of restorative justice and alternative punishments are entering public discussion as part of the European trend, while also stressing the importance of working with prisoners to ensure their reintegration into society. He also expressed gratitude to the State Secretary and the entire team of experts working on the *Chance for Return 2* project.

Participants were then introduced in detail to the project itself and its individual activities. In the professional part of the programme, presentations were devoted both to the overall framework of the project and to specific activities, highlighting their practical application and importance for the resocialisation process of prisoners. The first speaker, **Capt. JUDr. Jakub Lorko, PhD.**, Project Manager of *Chance for Return 2*, clarified the project's main goal: systemic support for persons in adverse social situations, with a focus on reducing the risk of their social exclusion. He also informed participants about planned activities within the project, such as the digitalisation of information and counselling services, the introduction and modification of standardised educational programs, and the strengthening of professional competencies of staff, while highlighting the importance of institutional cooperation and the linking of penitentiary and post-penitentiary care. Further expert presentations were given by project specialists and guarantors. **PhDr. Zuzana Valentovičová, PhD., LL.M.**, presented selected activities and outputs of the project, focusing on the steering committee's coordination activities, information and counselling services, and professional staff training. She provided details on the pilot testing of resocialisation and educational programs, admission and pre-release units, as well as the creation of practical manuals and information materials for prisoners and released persons. **PhDr. Lenka Kleskeň, PhD., LL.M.**, followed with a presentation on strengthening cooperation between penitentiary and post-penitentiary care through the *BRIDGES* project. She explained the importance of connecting prisons with employers, NGOs, and healthcare institutions, presented details on the pilot testing of educational and diagnostic programs, and emphasised the role of professional training, methodological support, and sustainability of project outcomes. Special attention was given to the use of modern IT tools as an innovative element in penitentiary care and resocialisation activities, presented by **Mgr. Martin Ludwig**, a project specialist.

Additionally, **JUDr. Bronislav Pongráč**, Director of the Department of Penitentiary Intervention at the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic, delivered a lecture on selected activities of the Ministry, with a key focus on the Multifactorial Resocialisation and Educational Program—a new educational program in the field of probation. He also

highlighted the link between the Individual Social Inclusion Action Plan, managed by the CPCG, and the work of social curators as well as probation and mediation officers.

Another contribution was made by **Mgr. Mária Marcinová**, Director of the Department of Child Protection and Social Curatorship at the COLSAF, who presented selected COLSAF activities. She emphasised their role as a partner in *Chance for Return 2*, focusing on comprehensive support for persons serving prison sentences and after release, aimed at reducing the risk of social exclusion. She also explained interventions provided by methodologists to prisoners in pre-release units and covered the areas of these interventions, including relevant statistical data.

The afternoon session was dedicated to a panel discussion on current issues of penitentiary and post-penitentiary care, involving both academics and practitioners. This session was opened by **Prof. JUDr. Jozef Čentéš, DrSc.**, Head of the Department of Criminal Law, Criminology and Criminalistics at FL CU, who stated that penitentiary and post-penitentiary care are among the most pressing issues of criminal policy and punishment in modern democracies. While imprisonment is traditionally seen primarily as a repressive measure, professional experience and criminological research clearly show that its purpose cannot be achieved without systematic care for the prisoner, not only during imprisonment, but especially after release. He then chaired the panel discussion, whose guests included: **PhDr. Gabriela Slováková, PhD.**, Director of the Probation and Mediation Service of the Czech Republic; **Mgr. Mária Marcinová**, Director of the Department of Child Protection and Social Curatorship at the COLSAF; **Mgr. Krzysztof Jasiński, PhD.**, rehabilitation pedagogue and former children's home educator from Poland, who also worked for more than twelve years as a probation officer; **JUDr. Daniel Petričko, PhD.**, Director General of the Section of Restorative and Alternative Justice at the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic; and finally, **Capt. JUDr. Jakub Ľorko, PhD.**, Project Manager of *Chance for Return 2*.

The panel discussion addressed several key topics reflecting the current state and challenges of penitentiary and post-penitentiary care in Slovakia and the V4 countries. Three main thematic areas emerged: the interconnection of penitentiary and post-penitentiary services, the effectiveness of sanctions, and proposals for necessary future changes. Panellists from diverse professional backgrounds shared experiences with continuous care, the role of probation and mediation services, social curatorship, and institutional partners, while also discussing the benefits and limits of alternative punishments. In conclusion, the panellists formulated specific recommendations for system improvement, as well as proposals for legislative and organisational measures that could help reduce recidivism and strengthen the integration of different sectors involved in the care of prisoners and released persons.

Panel participants emphasised the need for stronger connections between penitentiary and post-penitentiary care, highlighted the necessity of strengthening the institution of conditional release, and underlined the importance of systematic funding for NGOs, which can significantly contribute to resocialisation processes. The discussion provided space for exchanging professional opinions, analysing the current situation, and searching for solutions for further development in this field. The audience was also given the opportunity to ask questions at the end of the discussion.

The seminar confirmed the importance of *Chance for Return 2* as a tool for strengthening the system of resocialisation and reintegration of prisoners, emphasising the need for innovative approaches, systematic cooperation among judicial, social, and non-governmental institutions, and the sustainability of outputs in order to reduce recidivism and enhance social inclusion.

