

## CHILDREN IN CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND THE RIGHT TO COMMUNICATE WITH THEIR FAMILIES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Milica Kolaković-Bojović\*, Ana Batričević

Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research, Belgrade, Serbia

### Abstract

Triggered by the proactive approach of Serbian Penal Administration and its decision to, supported by the German NGO Help e.V, procure the ICT equipment to substitute in-person family visits and ensure regular communication during the lockdown, the authors decided to assess the impact of this pilot project on the right of the children in correctional institutions to communicate with their family members within the scope of the restrictions ordered to fight the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The authors also explored the attitudes of children in those correctional institutions and of the professionals working with them to get additional perspectives. The results showed that this measure significantly contributed to preserving contacts and family relations in the changed environment, although it cannot completely replace family visits and direct contact. Furthermore, the results of the research showed that the lack of IT literacy, but also the difficult financial and social context of the families of the origin of the children in correctional institutions, remain a significant obstacle for bridging the gap in family connections caused by COVID-19. Finally, the research showed that there is a need to procure more equipment and to increase the frequency of calls and the time available for communication with the family for all users.

**Key words:** juveniles in correctional institutions, the right to communicate, COVID-19 and modern technologies, child friendly justice and COVID-19.

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\* Аутор за кореспонденцију: Милица Колаковић Бојовић, Институт за криминолошка и социолошка истраживања, Грачаничка 18, 11000 Београд, Србија, kolakius@gmail.com

## МАЛОЛЕТНИЦИ У УСТАНОВАМА ЗА ИЗВРШЕЊЕ КРИВИЧНИХ САНКЦИЈА И ПРАВО НА КОМУНИКАЦИЈУ СА ПОРОДИЦОМ ТОКОМ ПАНДЕМИЈЕ COVID-19

### Апстракт

Покренути проактивним приступом Управе за извршење кривичних санкција и њеном одлуком да, уз подршку немачке невладине организације Help e.V., набави ИКТ опрему како би се обезбедила редовна комуникација деце у поправним установама са породицама током изолације, аутори су одлучили да истраже њихове ставове у погледу овог пилот пројекта како би се проценио њен утицај на право деце у поправној установи да комуницирају са члановима своје породице током изолације и других рестриктивних мера усмерених на сузбијање пандемије изазване вирусом COVID-19 током 2020. године. Аутори су такође истражили ставове стручњака запослених у тим поправним установама како би добили додатну перспективу. Резултати су показали да је ова мера значајно допринела очувању контаката и породичних односа у промењеном окружењу, иако не може у потпуности да замени породичне посете и директан контакт. Надаље, резултати истраживања показују да недостатак информатичке писмености, али и тежак финансијски положај и социјална угроженост породица из којих потичу деца у поправним установама, остаје значајна препрека за премошћавање јаза у породичним везама узрокованог COVID-19. Коначно, истраживање је показало да постоји потреба за набавком додатне опреме, како би се повећала учесталост позива и време који за комуникацију са породицом има на располагању сваки корисник.

**Кључне речи:** малолетници у поправним установама, право на комуникацију, COVID-19 и модерне технологије, правда по мери детета и COVID-19.

### INTRODUCTION

The right of the children deprived of liberty to uphold contact with their family members has been recognized as one of the basic rights of persons deprived of liberty. Prisoners shall be allowed, under necessary supervision, to communicate with their family and reputable friends at regular intervals, both by correspondence and by receiving visits. An untried prisoner shall be allowed to inform immediately his family of his detention and shall be given all reasonable facilities for communicating with his family and friends, and to receiving visits from them, subject only to restrictions and supervision as are necessary in the interests of the administration of justice and of the security and good order of the institution (UN, 1955: 92). This right was further developed in the field of child friendly justice, where it has been comprehensively recognized as an integral part of the right to fair and humane treatment and is essential to the preparation of juveniles for their return to society (UN, 1990, par. 59). The UN Convention on the Rights of a Child (art. 37(c)) underlines that a child shall have the right to

maintain contact with his or her family through correspondence and visits, save in exceptional circumstances (UN, 1989).

Within this right, “juveniles should be allowed to communicate with their families, friends and other persons or representatives of reputable outside organizations, but also to leave detention facilities for a visit to their family... Should the juvenile be serving a sentence, the time spent outside a detention facility should be counted as part of the period of sentence.” In addition to this, every juvenile should have the right to receive regular and frequent visits, in principle once a week and not less than once a month, in circumstances that respect the need of the juvenile for privacy, contact and unrestricted communication with the family and the defense counsel. Every juvenile should have the right to communicate in writing or by telephone at least twice a week with the person of his or her choice, unless legally restricted, and should be assisted as necessary in order effectively to enjoy this right. Every juvenile should have the right to receive correspondence. (UN, 1990: par. 60-61)<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, contact with the outside world through visits from family and friends has a double role – it is a crucial prerequisite for the proper reintegration of a child, but also has a notable positive impact on the psychological health and well-being of children deprived of liberty. The importance of this right is immense, and it therefore requires a careful approach to its potential restrictions and/or limitations, as in terms of the quantity (e.g. frequency and a length of visits or phone calls) as from the perspective of the modalities (in vivo/via phone/ or email/ Skype, etc.) and the environment of visits (space, furniture, privacy). An additional factor that frequently prevents exercising the right to contact with family and friends could be seen in fact that the institutions that detain children are often poorly located geographically, making visits from families difficult – especially those of socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds (Nowak, 2019: 269).

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<sup>1</sup> In the same manner is the General Comment No. 24 of the UN CRC par. 95(e) which underlines that the staff of the facility should promote and facilitate frequent contact by the child with the wider community, including communications with his or her family, friends and other persons, including representatives of reputable outside organizations, and the opportunity to visit his or her home and family. (CRC, 2019) Indirectly, this right is guaranteed also through the pars. 13 and 26 of the Beijing Rules: 26.5 In the interest and well-being of the institutionalized juvenile, the parents or guardians shall have a right of access. (UN, 1985)

*COVID-19 pandemic as an environment of the restrictive access to communication for children deprived of liberty*

The appearance of the COVID-19 by the end of 2019, which after the first registered case in China, spread like wildfire throughout the world, put into question the complete picture of the world we used to know. In just a few weeks, passenger traffic was almost completely suspended and the measures prohibiting physical contact and the obligation to maintain physical distance were ordered. A lockdown was largely implemented over the world. All of this has meant months of separation for millions of families around the world. For those families whose members, either parents or children, were incarcerated, the pandemic has brought cancelation of the, already limited communication through the visits (Bateman, 2020: 4). Phone calls are often the main channel of communication between parents in prison and their children, and the restricted regimes made it more difficult for people in prison to gain access to phones (Minson, 2021: 9). Both they and their families are likely to be anxious about the risk of the transmission of Covid-19 (HLPR, 2020: 2). This continuous fear of unknown danger, accompanied with the lack of information on the health condition of their loved-ones, and the disruptions in routine because of COVID-19, can trigger depression and anxiety, but also worsen the existing mental-conditions among juvenile justice population – conditions and diseases that are often related to previous trauma (Barnert, 2020: 2).

Considering this, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet has said, ‘Imprisonment should be a measure of last resort, particularly during this crisis’ (Bachelet, 2020). The High Commissioner urged governments and relevant authorities to work quickly to reduce the number of people in detention, and to examine ways to release those particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, but also continue to provide for the specific health-care requirements of women prisoners, including those who are pregnant, as well as those of inmates with disabilities and of juvenile detainees.<sup>2</sup> According to the World Health Organization (hereinafter: WHO) data in 2019, there were 1,410,000 children deprived of liberty in the administration of justice globally (WHO, 2021).

This UNOHCHR recommendation should be applied not only in terms of the need to protect children from the COVID-19 infection, but also to reduce other negative impact of the pandemic on their physical and mental health, caused by the limited physical activities, changed educational regime, but also by the cancellation of the family visits and contact with their loved ones. Considering this, in situations where in-person visits are restricted or prohibited as part of contagion prevention efforts, it

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<sup>2</sup> See also: (UNODC, 2021, p. 4)

is essential that other means of maintaining contact are made easily and freely available for all families (ACPH, 2020: 15). This should include the provision of, or extension of, the use of free telephone and video calling, emailing and instant messaging, and free or subsidized postal contact (Halton, 2020: 3). It is also important that the contact of this kind be frequent and flexible, to minimize anxiety and distress for children. Cost should never be a barrier to a child's contact with their family (Halton, 2020: 5). However, this alternative regime should be strictly time-limited and applied exclusively during the pandemic. Normal visiting procedures should be resumed as soon as it becomes safe, since there is no alternative to direct communication which can completely substitute it.

*Response to the COVID-19 restrictive measures  
in the Serbian penal system*

Since the very first case of the COVID-19 infection was confirmed in Serbia on March 6<sup>th</sup> 2020, the major concern of the authorities, but also of the citizens was to ensure the highest level of safety and to prevent the disease from spreading. The Serbian Government opted for a very restrictive regime, including the closing of schools, a lockdown, physical distancing, travel restrictions, etc. For children deprived of liberty, these measures have implied an almost unbridgeable obstacle to see their families.

Recognizing an urgency of the situation, as a part of Help's project "Support to Socio-Economic Stability in the Western Balkans 2019-2020," funded through German Development Cooperation, the Prison Administration decided to establish alternative mechanisms of communication during periods of banned physical visits, such as state of emergency and similar situations.

Some of the main criteria were the urgency to reestablish communication, mobility of the equipment and the low price, since there were no large resources available or enough time to plan and ensure additional budget. Therefore, with the support of the Help e.V., equipment worth 4,078.56 euros, 16 tablets with a paid internet package of 20 GB per month for the next 24 months, was donated with the consent of the Administration, for the use in nine institutions for the execution of penal sanctions. Two of the 16 tablets have been procured to be used in the Correctional-educational Institution for Juveniles in Kruševac and 3 for the Juvenile Prison in Valjevo.

Of course, this step was followed by the requirement that the equipment must be used in strictly controlled conditions in order to avoid abuse in any way, while respecting legal procedures and human rights.

The above mentioned tablets and internet packages were offered to juveniles for the purpose of video calls with their family members, using the Viber application, to avoid additional costs for the family members of juveniles. The average frequency of such calls was weekly.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Research Phases and Sampling*

The research was conducted as a part of the comprehensive Impact Assessment of Re-socialization program applied by NGO Help e.V. (Improvement of the treatment programmes in correctional institutions for adults and juveniles – SOE03-19)<sup>3</sup> in 2020. The Program included various activities designed to support the treatment, reintegration and post-penal care, including workshops, training and the procurement of the equipment aimed at improving living conditions and the treatment in the correctional institutions, but also at gaining professional skills and increasing (self)employment opportunities for convicted persons.

The initial time frame to conduct the research was May-October 2020. Despite challenging circumstances related to collecting data in COVID 19 environment, no extension has been applied and all the data collected. Therefore, all of the three stages of the research were finished within the restrictive COVID 19 environment:<sup>4</sup>

The research was conducted in three phases (May-June, July-September and September-October).

Research Phase I: In this stage, the authors prepared a comprehensive, in-depth questionnaire for the beneficiaries and the prison staff to enable them to express their attitudes on the program comprehensively in writing, and therefore to substitute *in vivo* interviews. The questionnaire was distributed in electronic form through the email.<sup>5</sup>

Research Phase II: Based on the information gathered through the questionnaires, a set of additional questions for the phone call interviews was developed. After the data collection and analysis, the experts gathered the last set of information through in-depth qualitative telephonic interviews with ex-prisoners who are beneficiaries of the self-employment

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<sup>3</sup> Help e.V. Program subjected to the assessment was implemented in the period initiatives relevant for the scope of this analysis, covering the period from September 2014 to November 2020, through the several stages: Poverty reduction and enhancement of employment opportunities of marginalized and vulnerable population groups in Serbia (Help e.V.: Project Nr.: SER 99-13) May 2013-December 2016; Support to micro businesses in Serbia, phase II (Help e.V. Project No.: SER 126) June 2016- December 2017; Support to the socio-economic stability in the western Balkan 2017-2019 (Help e.V.: Project No.: SOE-01 – 17); “Support to socio-economic stability in the western Balkans region 2019-2020” (Help e.V.: Project No.: SOE-03 – 19)

<sup>4</sup> The authors thank to the Prison Administration for enabling the conducting of the Research through the distribution of the questionnaires, but also through the phone calls and email to substitute the initially planned interviews in the correctional institutions.

<sup>5</sup> To enable prison administration management to choose modalities of collecting and sharing findings with the members of the expert team (hard copy originals of the questionnaires were sent by mail, scanned originals sent by email or electronically filed questionnaires).

program support. Finally, experts conducted interviews with the representatives of the prison administration (hereafter: PA) and partner NGOs Help e.V.

Research Phase III: In this stage, all the information collected was analyzed and the conclusions and recommendations defined based on the findings.

As mentioned, the subject Program included various activities aimed to support the treatment, reintegration and post-penal care. Therefore, the whole research included 265 individuals in total, where 252 persons were included through the questionnaires distributed via the management of the correctional institutions, 7 persons (10% of the total) are ex-prisoners / Help e.V. self-employment program beneficiaries, 2 persons from PA, 2 Help e.V. representatives and 2 NGO representatives. The stratification of the sample and the selection of the participants were made in cooperation of the authors, the Prison Administration and the management of the 6 correctional institutions where the Program activities were implemented<sup>6</sup> so as to reflect the real structure of the prison population and Help e.V. beneficiaries as much as possible.<sup>7</sup>

For the purpose of this paper, we will focus on the research component related to the procurement of the ICT equipment/tablets and the accompanying internet packages for the juvenile correctional institutions.

As stated, two correctional institutions for juveniles received ICT equipment (Correctional-educational Institution for Juveniles in Kruševac and Valjevo Prison for Juveniles). However, since the focus of the research was on the right of the children sentenced on the penal sanction which assumes deprivation of liberty, we focused exclusively on the Correctional-educational Institution for Juveniles in Kruševac. The reason for this is because there is almost no juveniles in the Valjevo Prison for Juveniles, due to the fact that some of the young people there have been sentenced to the penalty of juvenile prison being 18-21 years old in the moment when the crime is committed, or they have become adults during the enforcement of the sentence.

In an attempt to get two different perspectives of the impact of this alternative method of communication with the families, the research included both the juveniles who serve the educational measure and the professionals employed in the correctional institution, where 70% of the interviewed were juveniles.

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<sup>6</sup> Correctional Institution in Sremska Mitrovica, Correctional Institution in Niš, Correctional Institution for Women in Požarevac, Correctional-educational Institution for Juveniles in Kruševac, District Prison in Vranje and District Prison in Sombor.

<sup>7</sup> The role of the Help e.V. management in this regard was limited to providing data and contacts upon the Expert Team request, in order to ensure the integrity of the research process.

*Table 1. Status/Affiliation of interviewed persons*

Institution	Juveniles	Employees
Correctional-educational Institution for Juveniles in Kruševac	49	21
%	70%	30%
TOTAL 70		

When it comes to the age structure of the interviewed who serve the correctional measure, it appears that even if they committed a crime as juveniles, most of them (71.4%) have already become adults at the moment when the research is conducted.

*Table 2. Age of the interviewed juveniles*

Institution	Under 18	18-21	21-40
Correctional-educational Institution for Juveniles in Kruševac	11	35	3
%	22.4%	71.4%	6.1%

Although at first glance it may seem irrelevant, the data on the age structure of professionals in correctional facilities is important for shaping their views on the procurement and use of ICT equipment, both in terms of their computer literacy, to accept novelties and to support children in its use, and in terms of perceiving potential obstacles to reaching the maximum benefits of this type of communication, as well as ways to overcome them. Considering this, most of the interviewed employees (81%) were middle-aged, while 19% were young. None of them were over 65.

*Table 3. Age of the interviewed employees*

Institution	21-40	40-65	Over 65
Correctional-educational Institution for Juveniles in Kruševac	4	17	/
%	19%	81%	0%

When it comes to the gender structure of the sample, males were predominant (95.9%), since that reflects the gender structure of the all wards in the institution. For the employees, the sample was almost ideally balanced.

*Table 4. Gender of interviewed persons – juveniles and employees*

Juveniles	Male	Female
Number	47	2
%	95.9%	4.1%
Employees	Male	Female
Number	11	10
%	52.4%	47.6%

For the same reason as for the age structure, an education level of the interviewed persons is important, in order to frame the expectations, but also the results in terms of the capacities to master the ICT skills and to accept novelties. While, as expected, the employees are mostly highly educated, barely 15% of wards finished high school.

*Table 5. Education level of interviewed persons – juveniles and employees*

Category of interviewed	No Elementary School Ed.	Elementary School Ed.	High School Ed.	Secondary School or Faculty Ed.
Juveniles	10	32	6	1
%	20.4%	65.3%	12.2%	2.1%
Employees	/	/	6	15
%	0%	0%	28.6%	71.4%

### FINDINGS

Asked to evaluate the introduction of the alternative to the in-person visit model, the interviewed persons evaluated the program in which they participated in a way that 31.4% ranked it as excellent, 45.7% as good, 20% as satisfactory and only 2.9% as unsatisfactory. However, significant differences were present between the evaluation done by juveniles and by employees in the correctional institution, since 40.2% of juveniles evaluated the measure as excellent, while only 9.5% of employees did the same. This still doesn't mean that they were not satisfied, having in mind that even 76.2% of them evaluated this alternative method of communication as good.

*Table 6. How the interviewed persons evaluate the program in which they participated*

Institution	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Juveniles	20	16	11	2
%	40.2%	32.7%	23.4%	4.1%
Employees	2	16	3	0
%	9.5%	76.2%	14.3%	0%
Total	22	32	14	2
%	31.4%	45.7%	20%	2.9%

Differently from the general evaluation, where respondents were offered four possible answers, for further evaluation they were free to provide the main reasons why they liked, or not, this model of communication.

When it comes to **juvenile respondents**, as the positive sides of this measure, they mostly referred to the possibility to talk to their family members even in the situation of the lockdown and travel restrictions. It is

important to mention that the juveniles frequently used the phrase “to see my family members” which illustrates a great difference between this model of communication and the phone calls. Obviously, this kind of emotional exchange and opportunity to express their emotion nonverbally means a lot to juveniles. In addition to this, some juveniles express that this was their very first opportunity to use a tablet device or the Viber application.

Finally, some of their answers shed light on certain unexpected, but priceless aspects in terms of how the resocialization and reintegration processes of juveniles can be fostered, through the stimulation of the positive emotions in the contact with the familiar persons and objects:

- *“I was able to see our pets and the house in which I grew up.”*
- *“The fact that I could see the people that I miss the most.”*
- *“My parents do not have to spend money to see me.”*

When it comes to the negative sides of this measure, the juveniles mostly referred to the frequency of calls, since they preferred to have them on a daily basis. In relation to this, they expressed that there is a need to procure more tablets in order to ensure better frequency of usage, but also the calls that last longer. Some juveniles disagreed with the choice to exclusively use the Viber application since there are juveniles whose family members do not use Viber and don’t know how to install it, or, cannot install it since a mobile number is required. Furthermore, some family members have no access to the Internet at all, or do not possess smartphones.

When asked about the possible continuation of this project, but also about the possible ways to improve it, the juvenile respondents unanimously suggested the continuation, and provided several concrete suggestions. Namely, in addition to the previously mentioned need to increase the number of devices, they suggested expanding the use of the tablet devices to other applications apart from Viber. This suggestion appears in several variations, from the modality which assumes the use of these tablet devices in parallel, to communicate and to increase ICT and other skills and knowledge, to the ideas to make these devices available for playing video games and/or other ways to spend a spare time.

- *“The length and the frequency of conversations should be increased.”*
- *“The juveniles should be allowed to talk not only to their family members but to other persons as well.”*

The **employees in the correctional institution** considered this alternative model of communication as “suitable for and effective on juveniles”. They said that positive effects on juveniles of such communication in continuity were visible. The employees underlined the positive effect on juveniles and the impact of the application of educational measures. They emphasized these benefits especially for those juveniles whose fam-

ily members do not live in Serbia and therefore cannot travel to visit them even in periods when COVID-19 restrictive measures are temporarily suspended. They concluded that, “generally speaking, this way of communication has beneficial effects on all juveniles, since it facilitates a stronger emotional interaction between them and their family members and encourages them to express their emotion, which has a positive impact on their future behavior.”

In some cases, they expressed that they experienced personal and professional satisfaction due to effects of this alternative way of communication:

*“My greatest personal benefit from this Project comes from the satisfaction and happiness that the juveniles felt in the moments when they talked to their family members, which also has a positive impact on further work with them.”*

However, much like the juveniles, in terms of the negative sides of this innovation, they considered the number of procured tablet devices insufficient. They also considered that some additional pieces of equipment would be useful, for example, a tablet holder that would prevent the tablet devices from potential damage. They also said that they faced a serious lack of time needed to organize calls between juveniles and their family members. They expressed some concerns in terms of the juveniles’ equality in their access to this alternative model of communication, due to previously mentioned challenges caused by family members’ poverty or IT illiteracy, which prevents them from communicating with their children in the correctional institution. They mentioned that they experienced situations where juvenile’s family members do not use Viber, or any other social networks or apps which could be used for the purpose of video call.

When it comes to the employees’ attitudes in terms of the continuation of this way of alternative communication, including some suggestions for improvement, as expected, they suggested increasing the number of tablet devices, but they articulated this idea more clearly than the juveniles. Namely, they said that the number of tablet devices should be increased, so that each pavilion of the Correctional Institution could have its own tablet device, since a larger number of tablet devices would allow the conversations between juveniles and their family members to last longer, as well as allow the employees in the educational-correctional institution in Kruševac to communicate and work with juveniles’ family members online/without additional travel costs or their absence from the work space. In order to manage this, but also to allow the larger number of juveniles to use this channel of communication, the employees also suggested expanding the list of free applications which can be used to contact with family members.

### *DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS*

As the research findings showed, that there is a unanimous support to the introduction of the alternative modalities of the communication between incarcerated juveniles and their family members, obviously the focus should be put on the reasons they might triggered the differences in evaluation of this pilot project as “excellent” or “good” identified between juveniles and employees. Namely, in both categories, more than 75% of respondents evaluated this innovation as “excellent” or “good”, but there is a significant majority of the employees/professionals who rather see it as “good”, but not “excellent”. The reasons for that could be seen in the light of the unexpected “cure” for the suffering of the juveniles deprived of seeing their families, which make them happy, but also in terms of their preferences to use modern technologies. Contrary, the employees, as professionals, are more aware of all the limitations of such a substitute, and see it rather as a temporary, or transitional solution, either until all are back to the “old normal”, or until shortcomings identified in this transitional stage are overcome.

Additional finding that is worthy of further analysis is related to the equality principle in terms of exercising the right to communicate with the family members, either using face-to-face visits or using alternative virtual tools. Namely, it seems that the respondents from both groups opened a can of worms, of sorts, since raising the important question of substituting in-person visits of those whose family members have no access to the Internet, smartphones or computers, due to poverty or ICT illiteracy, thus revealing inequality at play. The same, or even bigger challenges are the families from vulnerable groups whose juvenile members are deprived of liberty and these people daily face challenges in their attempt to organize regular, in-person visits. Frequently, they don’t possess personal vehicles and cannot afford public transportation tickets for all (or any) family member(s). Some of them have never left their place of living or have no idea how to travel since they are illiterate. With this in mind, it seems that this pilot should be used also to explore to what extent this “online modality” can substitute hardly affordable in-person visits, especially in situations where the distance between the place of living and the correctional institution is great to the extent that the smartphone or tablet is cheaper than a travel ticket. In addition to this, there is no reason to limit the choice of application exclusively to Viber, since the only criteria should be that the application is free of charge, in line with the privacy standards, and that the app does not require a high configuration/performance of the device.

Finally, it seems that there is a great capacity for the multipurpose use of the procured devices. There is no doubt that e-literacy must be one of the educational backbones in correctional institutions, since it significantly influences further reintegration process, especially in terms of em-

ployment and self-employment of the young people released from the correctional institutions. However, in addition to communication and education, the use of electronic devices such as computers or tablet devices should be included as a way to creatively spend spare time, (Halton, 2020: 5) if followed by a proper selection of content and the support of the professionals working in the correctional institution. It may contribute to the creativity of the young people, especially in terms of various forms of scientific and artistic content that can be developed or learnt by these young people. Together with the possibility to keep in touch, not only with the family members, but also to see their homes, pets and other familiar contents, a proper use of electronic devices in the context of treatment and the organization of spare time, can stimulate positive emotions and motivate juveniles to change their life attitudes.

The last, but not least, worthy of further consideration, is the suggestion made by the professionals working in the Correctional institution in Kruševac which refers to use of online communication between professionals and parents within the scope of the preparation allowing the employees in the educational-correctional institution in Kruševac to communicate and work with juveniles' family members online/without additional travel costs or their absence from the work space. Considering the great importance of the proper preparation for the efficient reintegration processes (Stevanović, 2020: 60) this alternative way of communication may ensure continuity in communication, but also a better insight in the family environment.

### *CONCLUDING REMARKS*

The pilot project analyzed in this paper showed that sometimes an unexpected circumstance, like the COVID-19 pandemic, could serve as a kind of booster to encourage the introduction of new, innovative approaches to juvenile justice. The commendable decision of the Prison Administration to introduce the alternative to in-person visits during the restrictive measures appears to be approved by the positive evaluation of the users themselves. Even more, this pilot has opened a new horizon in terms of the possible expanded use of the procured equipment for the purpose of juvenile education and treatment, but also to enable the professionals in the Correctional Institution to maintain continuous contact with the parents/legal guardians of the juveniles placed in that institution, as a part of the preparation for the release from the institution. Finally, it showed that a donor's responsiveness sometimes prevails over the amount of available budget, because it enables immediate and well-targeted intervention, in line with the real needs of the beneficiaries. Out of any doubt, this initiative should not be abandoned by getting back to the "old normal". On the contrary, it is up to the Prison Administration to

build upon it and develop a modern approach to the communication, treatment and the preparation for release, based on the usage of the modern technologies.

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## МАЛОЛЕТНИЦИ У УСТАНОВАМА ЗА ИЗВРШЕЊЕ КРИВИЧНИХ САНКЦИЈА И ПРАВО НА КОМУНИКАЦИЈУ СА ПОРОДИЦОМ ТОКОМ ПАНДЕМИЈЕ КОВИД-19

Милица Колаковић-Бојовић, Ана Батрићевић

Институт за криминолошка и социолошка истраживања, Београд, Србија

### Резиме

Покренути проактивним приступом Управе за извршење кривичних санкција и њеном одлуком да, уз подршку немачке невладине организације Help e.V., набави ИКТ опрему како би се обезбедила редовна комуникација деце у поправним установама са породицама током изолације, аутори су одлучили да истраже њихове ставове у погледу овог пилот пројекта како би се проценио њен утицај на право деце у поправној установи да комуницирају са члановима своје породице током изолације и других рестриктивних мера усмерених на сузбијање пандемије изазване вирусом COVID-19 током 2020. године. Аутори су такође истражили ставове стручњака запослених у тим поправним установама како би добили додатну перспективу.

Резултати су показали да је ова мера значајно допринела очувању контаката и породичних односа у промењеном окружењу, иако не може у потпуности да замени породичне посете и директан контакт. Даље, резултати истраживања показују да недостатак информатичке писмености, али и тежак финансијски положај и социјалну угроженост породица из којих потичу деца у поправним установама, остаје значајна препрека за премошћавање јаза у породичним везама узрокованог COVID-19. Коначно, истраживање је показало да постоји потреба за набавком додатне опреме, како би се повећала учесталост позива и времена које за комуникацију са породицом има на располагању сваки корисник.

Као резултат истраживања, аутори су дошли до закључка да пилот пројекат представља добру основу, како за даљу употребу ИКТ као алтернативних видова комуникације између малолетника у васпитно-поправним установама и њихових породица, тако и између запослених у служби третмана који са породицама малолетника раде у контексту припреме за отпуст из установе. Најзад, ауто-

ри сматрају да треба размотрити вишенаменску употребу набављених, или уређаја који ће тек бити набављени, тако да, осим у сврху комуникације, буду коришћени у едукативне сврхе и у контексту организације слободног времена малолетника, чиме би се унапредила њихова знања, вештине и креативност, а тиме и подigli ефекти третмана и поспешила реинтеграција након отпуста.