



CASE STUDY

Non-profit organisations working in penal affairs managed to reach a common approach towards their strategic partner

This case study was developed by Glopolis and it captures the story of the most significant change that happened to the civil society organisations (CSOs) network thanks to the Stronger Roots Program. The network was awarded EUR 13,200 under the project and was provided with 21 hours of capacity development support.

Network

Association of Organisations Working in Penal Affairs

Country

Czech Republic

Period when the change was observed

September 2020 – December 2021

The most significant change that the network achieved

There is a great variety of **members present in the Association of Organisations Working in Penal Affairs**. A total of 16 members focuses on a plethora of topics, including social care, employment support, indebtedness and addiction of those formerly imprisoned, and many more.

Some member organisations maintained **diverging views on how to address the preparation of prisoners for their release** and the subsequent support they should receive. The key question was the stance towards the General Directorate of the Prison Service, as this state organ is capable of partially influencing, for example, to what extent released prisoners stay out of prison.

Thanks to the Stronger Roots programme, the member organisations were able to synchronise their views, discuss their priorities, and **coordinate their stance** towards the General Directorate. They reached a conclusion that the Association's goal is not to criticise the General Directorate and pressure the medialisation of what does not work, but rather to **constructively cooperate** with it.

Some members of the Association, who preferred a sterner approach towards partners, left during the deliberation period. On the other hand, **new members**, who identified themselves with the Association and its views, joined.

An internal consensus further **improved the relationship** with the General Directorate. Frequent joint meetings and the first common project for establishing points of contact for families of those incarcerated are evidence of this. The project is a reaction to the Covid-19 pandemic, during which the Prison Service had to limit visits in prisons. In order to facilitate contact between those incarcerated and their families, the Prison Service worked with the Association to set up points of contact and enable virtual visits to be held.



18

meetings of the member organisations



31

hours filled with discussion



30

participating people



16

member organisations

„We are open to cooperation with non-governmental organizations that complement and build on our services. We therefore welcomed the Association’s offer to create contact points for families who do not have access to technology”, says the Representative of the General Directorate.

How the project contributed to the change

The Association made use of an external facilitator, who led it through the methodology of outcome mapping. This is a specific method used to plan and evaluate projects. Member organisations first thought



“If you want to improve relations with key partners, you have to address not only the changes you want to see from the partner, but also the changes you want to make on your side.”

Zuzana Tinglová, Association of Organisations Working in Penal Affairs

about the **changes that could be made in the Association itself**, as this was the most straightforward task that would positively reflect on building stronger relationships with any partner. Furthermore, the Association granted more discussion space to its members, along with their feedback and engagement.

Thanks to an experienced facilitator, they were able to view the General Directorate from a different point of view. Up to this point the view that “cooperation

is needed to achieve certain aims” prevailed, but it did not take into account the **partner’s point of view** and its situation.

Therefore, the Association began to investigate why some problems in the prison service actually exist (e.g. why prisoners are not adequately prepared for life after being released from prison) and what are the real General Directorate’s capacities to effectively address these problems. The Association discovered

that these problems were rooted in wider conditions, such as that the General Directorate does not have enough staff and has limited financial resources. This further helped to realise that **some changes will require a longer time horizon** and that the strategy for institutional cooperation will have to reflect this reality.

Why is the change important

It is important that the Association is united and that all **members act together in a consensus**. It is a key factor that allows the Association to make and promote any potential changes of the prison system.



Meeting with people with prison experience who have successfully re-integrated into society after release / Photo by Association of Organisations Working in Penal Affairs

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The Stronger Roots Program is jointly implemented by a consortium created by Open Society Fund Prague (CZ), Open Society Foundation Bratislava (SK), Glopolis (CZ) and the NIOK Foundation (HU). The Program aims to increase the resilience of civil society organizations and their networks in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, strengthen their social capital and embed them in the communities and societies in which they operate. Within the Program, the concept of transversal collaboration was developed and tested on 9 networks of civil society organizations.

Glopolis is an analytical and networking center with an 18-years long outstanding think-tank experience in research, policy monitoring, advocacy and campaigning, relationship development, resource mobilization and facilitating collaboration at the Czech, CEE and EU-wide levels. Glopolis mission is to support transversal collaboration beyond the non-profit sector towards resilient civil society and sustainable democracy. Therefore, it seeks out and expands the field of shared aspirations of the CSOs, governmental and business representatives and engages them in solving common, societal challenges.