

# Offender Supervision in Europe

COST Action IS1106



*Members of the Action at our meeting of the Working Groups and Management Committee in Bratislava, Slovakia, on 27 October 2013*



## Welcome to the second annual newsletter of COST Action IS1106.

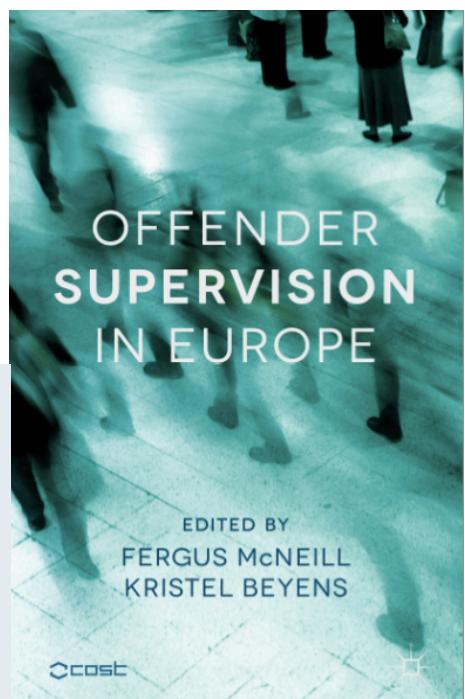
We began our work on 'Offender Supervision in Europe' on March 27, 2012. Back then four years seemed a long time. Now that we are two years through the Action, it seems much shorter!

This newsletter summarizes our progress during the second year of the Action. It includes brief resumes of the

work of each of our four working groups, and an account of our progress in and plans for our work.

One of the highlights of year 2 was the publication of our first book (pictured below); the result of a lot of hard labour in the first 18 months of the Action. That book provides an excellent summary of what we learned from reviewing research on offender supervision in Europe – as a lived experience, as a practice, as a locus of decision-making, and as a site of

offender supervision as a lived experience, as a site of decision making, as a penal practice and as a locus of European governance.



## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 2-6. Progress reports from our working groups on 'Experiencing supervision', 'Decision-making and supervision', 'Practising supervision'
- 4. The Offender Supervision in Europe Blog / Funding Success
- 6. Short-Term Scientific Missions
- 7. From Invisibility to 'Super-Visibility'

[continued from page 1...]

existing research, that research also has some serious limitations – both in terms of its substantive focus and geographical coverage, and in terms of its methodological and theoretical sophistication. And so we find ourselves with a lot of work to do.

This year, we have held working group and management committee meetings in Bratislava and in Malta, as well a writing workshop in Scotland (linked to the development of our second book, ‘Community Punishment and Europe, which is due to be published by Routledge next year), and a core group meeting of office bearers in Sweden. While we have enjoyed each other’s company and our travels, we have been working very hard.

Fortunately, we have also discovered new friends and colleagues to share the workload. The map (on the right) shows the countries involved in the Action, highlighting in blue our new members. The involvement of Greece and Serbia was formally confirmed and, as we go to press, the good news is that Portugal is set to join the Action for years 3 and 4.

We have also simplified the organization of our work. At the end of year 1, we decided to suspend the smallest of our working groups, which had been focused on European norms and standards, partly in order to allow its members to bring their particular legal and normative expertise to the development of the empirical projects being developed in the other groups.

That development is the subject of the short contributions that follow from each of the three remaining working groups. However, we also report below on what has been learned through ‘short-term scientific missions’ by scholars in the Action, on our first success in securing additional research funding, on the development of our blog, and (on the last page) on events and opportunities to get involved in year 3.



## Working Group 1: Experiencing Supervision

Leaders: Ioan Durnescu (University of Bucharest) and Christian Grafl (University of Vienna)

By the time of our most recent meeting, in Malta in March 2014, our working group included representatives from 14 different jurisdictions: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, England and Wales, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, The Netherlands, Romania, Scotland, Slovenia and Switzerland.

In the first year of the Action, we undertook a pan-European review of the literature that is available in Europe on experiencing supervision. The findings were published in our chapter in the Action’s first book. In spite of the long history of supervision in Europe we were surprised to note that literature is rather scarce in reflecting the lived experience of supervision.

However, the available literature seemed to indicate that community supervision is still perceived favorable by stakeholders. The literature also suggests that although there are some similarities in perceptions across Europe, there is evidence that the lived experience depends to a large extent on its local contexts, on the way supervision is constructed in each jurisdiction and so on.

[contd....]

## Working Group 2: Decision-Making and Supervision

Leaders: Miranda Boone (University of Utrecht), Martine Herzog Evans (University of Rheims) and Niamh Maguire (Waterford Institute of Technology)

This year, we were very happy to welcome new members from Greece and Ireland to our working group. Since the working group is very active and the sitting chairs were not able to attend all the meetings, we invited a third co-chair and are very happy that Niamh Maguire of Waterford Institute of Technology (Ireland) agreed to share this job with us.

After the conference in Liverpool last year, the working group finished the chapter in the Action's first book. Our main results were that empirical studies of decision-making linked to supervision were scarce, in particular in relation to decision-making in the pre-trial and release phases. As for the research that has been conducted, it concentrates on factors that influence decision-making and not on decision-making processes. Our review of the existing literature also made clear that research was concentrated in only a few countries and that breaching of offender supervision measures is an almost totally neglected topic.

In Bratislava in October 2013, we took our first steps towards developing a comparative research methodology for studying decision-making in offender supervision. Cyrus Tata (of the University of Strathclyde, Scotland) presented a very inspiring plenary paper on studying decision-making processes. In the working group sessions, Gill McIvor (Scotland) and José Cid (Spain) presented papers on a range of strategies for studying decision-making and focused on highlighting which strategies they found successful as well as those that they found to be less successful. Kristel Beyens (Belgium) and Niamh Maguire (Ireland) presented their experiences with vignettes as a research method for doing national and comparative research and the members of the working group discussed extensively the advantages and drawbacks of using vignettes and other research methods for doing comparative research. [contd...]



## Working Group 1 (continued...)

The chapter concluded by recommending more comparative research on lived experience of supervision and more innovation in the methodologies employed. After reflecting on the conclusions of our own review, this year we met in October 2013 in Bratislava and in March 2014 in Malta. Our discussions have centred on developing new ways of capturing the subjective experience of supervision. After much debate, we settled on three new ways of advancing this line of research through diaries, 'photo-voice' and a European survey.

We have been working to develop a framework of prompts for diaries entries that we might ask supervisees to complete (either in video or audio files or in written form).

The dairies might well be linked to our ambitions for a 'photo-voice' project. This plan started from the observation that a new visual method of exploration of supervisees' experiences of supervision would be helpful and would enable participants to feel empowered and enriched by the process of being involved in a creative research project. By utilizing photographs taken and selected by participants, respondents can reflect upon and explore the reasons, emotions and experiences that have guided their chosen images. This visual approach is a potentially powerful research tool to examine in an initiative and engaging manner supervision experiences from the offender's perspective.

The Euro-Barometer or the "Euro-Supervision Survey" is more concerned with how the experience of supervision can be captured in a systematic and comparative way. To this end, based on the existing literature, a sub-group decided on a number of dimensions within which to develop survey items, such as: supervision as a lived experience, supervision as a human service experience, supervision as a punishment, supervision as rehabilitation, and supervision and procedural justice.

Based on these dimensions, a set of questions have been developed. These questions are now being piloted in four different jurisdictions to check if they are relevant for eliciting the experience of supervision, if they are well understood, if they can be easily translated in different jurisdictions and so on.

Clearly we have a lot of work to do! In year 3 of the Action, we plan to pilot test our research approaches and instruments so that we can share the results and refine our methods at our meetings in October in Belfast and in March in Athens. We hope by next summer to have some research findings to report – and some more to say about the development of these methodologies for comparative research.

## Funding Success for Electronic Monitoring Project

Some members of the decision-making group (Kristel Beyens (Belgium), Anthea Hucklesby (England & Wales), Frieder Dünkel (Germany), Miranda Boone (the Netherlands) & Gill McIvor (Scotland) prepared a proposal on Electronic Monitoring for the European Commission-Directorate of General Justice Action Grants that was granted in December 2013. The overall aim of this study is to compare the operation of EM for adults in four member states (five jurisdictions) in order to examine its use at all stages of the criminal justice process and its effectiveness in terms of providing an effective and humane alternative to custody and reducing prison populations.

The research has already started (in May 2014) and is coordinated by the University of Leeds. This project can be regarded as the first successful research grant deriving from the COST-project and we hope many more will follow.

More information is available via the project website and twitter feed:

<http://emeu.leeds.ac.uk/>

<https://twitter.com/EMintheEU>

*Members of the Core Group at a recent meeting at Lund University*



## The Offender Supervision in Europe Blog [www.offendersupervision.eu](http://www.offendersupervision.eu)

### Spreading the word about the Action

This guest post comes from Lol Burke of Liverpool John Moores University.

Given that one of the core objectives of the COST project is to facilitate an exchange with those directly concerned with the delivery of offender supervision I took advantage of an invite to speak at the inaugural professional conferences of the Probation Institute in England and Wales to promote the work of the Action and disseminate some of the emerging findings from the working groups. The Probation Institute is a newly formed, independent not-for-profit organisation, which is aiming to become a recognised centre of excellence for probation practice and to develop a strong probation profession across private, public and voluntary

#### Archives

Select Month

Search

#### Tweets

- Fergus McNeill @fergus\_mcneill 2 Jul PIs RT Working with young adults in supporting processes of desistance [siris.org.uk/1c1Hv7b](http://siris.org.uk/1c1Hv7b) via @irisorg 13 Retweeted by Offender Supervision Expand
- Offender Supervision @COST\_OSE 30 Jun PIs RT (this time with free open access copy) Penal Evolution and Probation [offendersupervision.eu/blog-post/pena...](http://offendersupervision.eu/blog-post/pena...) via

On our blog/website, we have already published 41 blog posts, including contributions from across Europe and from the USA (see:

<http://www.offendersupervision.eu/archive>). The posts have discussed a very wide range of topics. For example, one of the most popular (judging by the comments generated and the tweets and retweets) concerned our Chair's reflections on spending an afternoon talking to his daughter's school class about punishment, rehabilitation and supervision. That post can be accessed here:

<http://www.offendersupervision.eu/blog-post/11-year-olds-on-punishment-and-supervision> Other posts have allowed members to report on their reflections from various Action activities.

The blog/website also delivers free online access to a wide range of documents and resources produced by and through the Action, including our Annual Newsletters and Briefing Papers from each of the Working Groups (see: <http://www.offendersupervision.eu/documents-and-resources>). The blog has received over 7,000 visits to date.

We have also made available video (see:

<http://www.offendersupervision.eu/international-conference/conference-multimedia>) and audio

(<http://www.offendersupervision.eu/documents-and-resources>) recordings of conference and workshop events, seeking to ensure that our work in progress – as well as our 'products' – are readily accessible to a wide audience. This access is encouraged in part through our Twitter feed (@COST\_OSE); we now have over 600 followers, and our chair's Twitter account (@fergus\_mcneill) has over 4,000 followers.

## Working Group 3: Practising Supervision

Leaders: Gwen Robinson (University of Sheffield)  
and Kerstin Svensson (Lund University)

The work we have done during this second year of the action has taken as its starting point the conclusion drawn after the review of research on offender supervision practice in year 1. We found that this is a field with a low level of innovative methods and that the methods typically used to research practice provide us with knowledge about what workers say they do, but much less about what they actually do. To know what practice is, and to begin to make comparisons between jurisdictions, there is thus a need to move beyond ‘stories’ about practice (mostly derived from interviews) and to attempt to do studies of what practitioners are actually doing.

‘Brain storms’ among members of our group led to an agreement to pursue ‘pilot research’ in three methodological domains and thereafter we divided into three sub-groups: Visualizing, Observations and Diaries. Each member decided which sub-group to join for the “pilots”.

The visual methods sub-group aims to test the utility of visual methods (photography) for representing and comparing probation practice in different jurisdictions. Their work began with a brief review of some of the literature on visual research methods, and it was decided that we would each identify at least one practitioner in our own jurisdiction and ask them to take part in a pilot of the method. Initial discussions centred on issues around ethics, access and structured versus structured approaches.

[contd...]

*Members of the Action at our Writing Workshop in Loch Lomond, Scotland*



### Working Group 2 (continued)

In preparation for our Malta meeting in March 2014, we worked on identifying the types of research data that could be collected in different jurisdictions, as this would influence our choice of research methodologies. For example, in some countries access to court reports might not be problematic whereas access to the judiciary might be impossible.

Representatives from each jurisdiction filled in a matrix designed to capture the possibilities in terms of research data and methods. We began our meeting in Malta with an overview of this matrix by Dr Trevor Calafato (Malta) and it emerged that the most popular methods were interviews, focus groups and vignettes and that while access to the judiciary was possible in many countries it certainly was not easy.

In Malta we decided to choose vignettes as a method to explore the topic of breach comparatively. From our discussions in Bratislava we learned that the method of vignettes seemed to offer great potential in terms of doing comparative research, despite its drawbacks. We chose the issue of breach to focus on as our review of the literature showed that there was a dearth of research in Europe on this important issue in all decision-making three phases (Boone and Herzog-Evans 2013: 85-86).

The aim of our meeting in Malta was to develop a number of vignettes that could be used to examine the issue of breach in comparative contexts. We managed to leave Malta with an outline of two comparative vignettes that we developed further in the next months. In the coming months these vignettes will be piloted in a number of jurisdictions to test how useful vignette methodology could be for exploring the issue of breach in offender supervision comparatively.

We have had a busy year and have faced many challenges but we have made real progress and are now in a position to pilot test the use of vignettes in a comparative study.

We are also very pleased that the open conference of the Action (in Athens, probably on 16-17<sup>th</sup> April, 2015) will be on compliance, breach and enforcement – topics that we consider extremely important and, until now, neglected.

## WORKING GROUP 3 (CONTINUED)

When members of the group met to compare the initial images that had been collected, we found much that was similar as well as some interesting variations between the sets of pictures. The group decided to continue with the pilot in order to collect more images from a wider range of jurisdictions, and then to spend some time, first separately and then together, thinking about how it might be possible to analyse the images collected.

The ‘observations’ sub-group aims to answer the question: What kind of knowledge can be obtained about probation practice by using observations as a research method? To narrow the scope of the pilot research, they aimed to look at first meetings between probation workers and clients. A small-scale pilot was carried out in four jurisdictions: Romania, Denmark, Sweden & Belgium. Ten observations were done: 1 in Sweden, 1 in Denmark, 3 in Romania and 5 in Belgium. Transcripts in English from the observations were distributed and read by the members of the sub-group. From these they noted that the transcripts were very different, even though a common framework had been used. We also noticed that sometimes we used different terminology to describe similar situations and vice versa. That meant that on different occasions they used the same words but actually were trying to describe something different. From this they agreed to take some more time to properly analyze the empirical data and try to identify all the points where a comparison may be possible. They plan to make a better framework for our observations; a more clearly defined observation scheme that in the future would make it easier to compare data.

Valetta, Malta



*Members of the Action enjoying dinner at the invitation of the University of Malta*

The ‘diaries’ sub-group aims to learn more about how to use of diaries/narratives to describe the professional life of practitioners. The work of the group started with a discussion on whether a structured or an open approach should be used, or maybe a combined approach. From that they started looking at more concrete examples of diaries and shared experiences from working with this format. They chose to downsize the project to a single trial with 1-2 participants each. The reason for this was both to gain experience from collecting this type of data; and to ascertain the scope and amount of information they would get from it. They chose to make a structured form for collecting daily activities over a period of one week. They also wanted to get some reflection from the probation worker about the whole week, to ascertain whether this was a typical week etc. The schedule for piloting the diary starts with further work to prepare the diary in a simple excel-format and translate it separately for the test in the different countries. They will also be developing a consent form to be used in the different jurisdictions.

Piloting and analysis of data in all three sub-groups will continue throughout the summer and autumn on 2014. Each sub-group is currently preparing a paper to be presented at the annual conference of the European Society of Criminology in Prague (September 2014) and a full report of each pilot study will be written up for publication. It is hoped that, by these means, we will make a contribution to one of the aims of the Action, which is to find new ways of making the normally hidden domain of offender supervision more ‘visible’, and ultimately aid public understanding of what it involves.



## SHORT-TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSIONS: A BRIDGE TO UNDERSTANDING

According to the COST guidelines the aim of a Short Term Scientific Mission (STSM) is to contribute to the scientific objectives of a COST Action by allowing researchers the opportunity to travel to other institutions and countries. In the second year of the Action four STSMs were granted to the researchers listed in the table below.

The aim of Ioan Durnescu's STSM was strongly connected to the Action itself. Coming from the University of Bucharest, he met with Prof. Christian Grafl and Christina Enengl (Vienna University) in Vienna to work on a chapter that summarized the results of the Action's working group 'Experiencing Offender Supervision'. **The results have been published in** the Action's first book. This STSM demonstrated the efficacy of a face-to-face meeting when writing an article together.

The second STSM was completed by Meritxell Carbonell Guerrero from the University of Girona, who visited Prof. Gill McVor at the University of Stirling for a period of two months. Her aim was to study community-based services for women offenders in Scotland and to learn about gender-responsive policies in Scotland. Her purpose was to use these results for a comparison between the Scottish and the Catalan system. As well as reviewing the literature, Meritxell interviewed several practitioners working with women offenders. She concluded that in Scotland since the mid-1990s the penal system has been studied and evaluated from a gendered perspective, such that the needs of women offenders and the negative effects of prison, especially for mothers, have been highlighted. Since 2002 the Scottish Government has expressed the wish to reduce significantly the number of women in prison and to promote community treatment. But due to a lack of resources community sanctions in this field could not play the envisaged, significant role they were intended to play, although a new community order, the Community Payback Order (CPO) had been introduced. Gender-responsive policies were in the meantime established by local agencies and organizations (including in the third sector). Meritxell sees a major step towards the development of gender-responsive policies in the year 2012, when the Commission on Women offenders was established by the Cabinet Secretary for Justice.



After an analysis of the situation in Catalonia, Meritxell will provide a comparison between the gender-responsive policies towards women offenders in Catalonia and Scotland. Her STSM shows how fruitful it is – especially for a younger researcher – to personally meet an expert from a foreign country to assist when looking at a different criminal justice system with different policies. Such views are hard to come by through academic literature and media but particularly fruitful for the comparison of our knowledge on offender supervision in Europe.

Similar conclusions can be reached concerning the third STSM conducted by Louise Kennefick and Deirdre Healy from Ireland. During their STSM they visited Prof. Fergus McNeill at the University of Glasgow in order to discuss his experience of conducting an oral history project on the subject of probation, as they intended to replicate his methodology in an Irish context. During the mission, the Irish researchers were able to meet other colleagues from Scotland experienced in oral history research. The STSM resulted in an application for funding and demonstrates how a mission, even a short one, can develop the skills of early-stage researchers through receiving immediate, face-to-face feedback on a project plan. Furthermore this STSM led to the development of relationships between experts from Scotland and Ireland and broadened the understanding of offender supervision across the Irish and Scottish jurisdictions.

The last and longest STSM in the financial year 2013-2014 was undertaken by Anna Meléndez from Barcelona who visited Prof. Joanna Shapland at the University of Sheffield for three months. During her mission, Anna discussed her findings and her data on restorative justice and desistance in Catalonia with Prof. Shapland and her research team who are among the leading international experts in this field. The deeper understanding of the analysis and explanations in Prof. Shapland's research enabled Anna to improve the interpretation of her results and will additionally make her results more comparable to the existing research literature on desistance and restorative justice in Europe. This STSM helped to improve both the knowledge on offender supervision in Europe and on research methods in this matter. Anna plans to publish her results in a criminological journal.

The four STSMs in the financial year 2013-2014 varied in their concrete aims but were all successful in enhancing our knowledge on offender supervision in Europe and comparable research. We hope they will serve as encouragements for other researchers who want to share and compare their knowledge in this field.

Beneficiary	Date	Venue
Dr Ioan Durnescu	5-11 <sup>th</sup> August 2013	University of Vienna, Austria.
Ms Meritxell Carbonell Guerrero	12 <sup>th</sup> Aug - 12 <sup>th</sup> Oct 2013.	University of Stirling, UK.
Dr Louise Kennefick	12-16 <sup>th</sup> August 2013.	University of Glasgow, UK.
Dr Deirdre Healy		
Ms Anna Meléndez	1 <sup>st</sup> Sept - 30 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2013	University of Sheffield, UK.

## FROM INVISIBILITY TO ‘SUPER-VISIBILITY’: YEARS 3 AND 4

*Reflections from our Chair, Fergus McNeill  
(University of Glasgow)*

In a number of ways, year 2 of the Action has been all about creativity. Having identified the limitations of existing research upon (and thus perhaps public and political dialogue about) supervision, we have had to set our minds to the challenge of imagining something better. That is a big challenge – it’s not just about the technical expertise that we can muster as a group of scholars and researchers; there has to be some ‘art’ in our work at this stage.

For me, one of the key themes of this year’s work, partly inspired by Gwen Robinson’s work (and in particular her conference paper at the European Criminology Conference in September 2013) has been the ‘invisibility’ of supervision. There is, of course, a lovely irony in that phrase, and it has served to provoke a response and a commitment amongst us in the Action to do something about it. Thus, we have coined the term ‘super-visibility’ to describe our ambition to bring supervision into plain sight.

That ambition raises complex issues of representation and misrepresentation. Many of the creative ideas for innovative comparative research that we have developed this year (and described above) directly or indirectly offer new modes of representation – for example, in oral histories, diaries, photographs, vignettes – and suggest a different role for research participants and partners in the process. It’s no longer all about us determining which data to seek, choosing which of it is most interesting and telling our readers what it means. In many of the pilot studies we are beginning to undertake, we find ourselves in a somewhat different relationship with participants – allowing them to decide what is meaningful and significant, and perhaps helping them to explain how and why.

Though we’re not yet at the stage of analyzing data to any significant extent, we’ll face some interesting dilemmas and challenges when we do. Perhaps the most complex of these will be negotiating exactly what our role is in selecting and representing those experiences, practices and decision-making processes of supervision – and to what extent we are prepared to share those decisions with our participants. The answer to that question will inevitably influence the sort of super-visibility that emerges.

Perhaps these are some of the issues, alongside the many other challenges of comparative research, that experienced and early stage researchers will engage with at our **Training School in Barcelona in January 2015**.

One benefit of our creative approach is that we may well have research ‘artifacts’ to display. The photographs that are likely to be produced in pilot studies in two of the working groups could, for example, form the basis of an exhibition at our final conference in March 2016, perhaps with some text from diaries accompanying them in written or audio form.

At that final conference, we might be even more ambitious. One of my own current projects in Glasgow involves musicians, artists, criminologists and people with convictions in songwriting (see [www.voxliminis.co.uk](http://www.voxliminis.co.uk)) – and



we have recently used some of the songs in a public event which certainly succeeded in unsettling people’s assumptions about prisoners, punishment and rehabilitation.

Maybe it is too fanciful to talk about a ‘Euro-super-vision’ song contest, but who knows where our imaginations and energies might take us!

We’ll know more this time next year; after meetings in Belfast in October 2014 and Athens in April 2015, as well as the Training School in January. The Athens meeting will combine working group and management committee meetings with a **public conference on compliance, breach and enforcement** – topics chosen because they cut to the heart of so many of the issues that supervision raises for those subject to it, for those who practice it, for those who make decisions about it, and for those on whose behalf those decisions are (putatively) made.

I am very confident that this time next year we’ll have some very interesting preliminary findings to report – and some creative ways of communicating them. We may not be ‘super-visible’ by next summer, but we’ll be heading in that direction.