

# INTERNATIONAL OFFICE

Probation doesn't stop at the border

About the work of  
the International Office



**The activities of the International Office can be split into three main categories:**

- **Guidance and counselling for detainees abroad**
- **The International Desk**
- **International cooperation**

# Probation doesn't stop at the border

**All over the world Dutch citizens are serving prison sentences – often in dire conditions. They can't speak the language and know nothing about the laws and procedures. The International Office was set up to provide help and support for Dutch citizens in prisons abroad.**

## What is the International Office?

The International Office is part of the Dutch Probation Service, a Dutch organization that promotes the rehabilitation of detainees. We work on behalf of three probation organizations in the Netherlands: the Dutch Probation Service (for detainees), Verslavingsreclassering (for addicts) and Leger des Heils (Salvation Army). Our mission is to assist and support Dutch citizens serving prison sentences abroad. We do this by providing information and advice and by deploying volunteers. We endeavour to lower the risk of recidivism by preparing detainees for their return to the Netherlands while still serving their sentence. We also run an International Desk which organizes, coordinates and advises on the transfer of sentences within Europe and the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Last but not least, the International Office is a strong advocate of international cooperation in all aspects of probation in order to improve the quality of rehabilitation practices and services in other countries.

## The International Office network

The International Office is a small but enterprising department that falls under Reclassering Nederland (the Dutch Probation Service). We work in the Netherlands with regional coordinators who are each responsible for a specific part of the world. The rest of the staff consists of a director, a coordinator of international relations and three secretarial workers.

We work closely with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (government departments, consulates, embassies) and we have a large group of enthusiastic volunteers who visit Dutch citizens in prison on our behalf. The work of the International Office is co-funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Security and Justice.

## Guidance and counselling for detainees abroad

Detainees need the guidance and counselling provided by the International Office because imprisonment in foreign countries is invariably complicated. Dutch citizens detained in foreign prisons usually spend a long time in remand. This situation is made more complex because they are usually unfamiliar with the language and culture, they have hardly any access to legal aid or support services, they live in very poor conditions, and they are a long way from family and friends.

### Common problems associated with detention abroad:

#### Long periods in remand

Detainees in foreign prisons often spend a long time remanded in custody. Continuous uncertainty about the length of the sentence creates problems when important decisions need to be made about, for example, childcare or terminating the rental on a home in the Netherlands.

### **Limited legal aid**

Good legal aid abroad can be costly and is therefore unattainable for many detainees. Language problems make it difficult to communicate effectively with local lawyers.

### **Uncertainty about the release date**

Even when a sentence has been imposed, the release date may still be uncertain because of unclear parole and transfer procedures or because fines must be paid first.

### **Language and culture problems**

Detainees in foreign prisons are faced with communication problems. The culture, the customs, and the laws and procedures are unfamiliar. They may speak only a few words of the language – or none at all – so they can't follow educational courses while in prison.

### **Isolation**

People who are detained far from home have very little contact with the home front. It is very difficult for them to find out which practical matters need to be organized to limit the potential damage from the detention.

#### **Why do detainees need guidance and support?**

The aims of the International Office are:

- to help to limit the damage suffered by Dutch detainees abroad by providing information and advice;
- to encourage Dutch detainees abroad to reflect on their behaviour;
- to prepare Dutch detainees abroad for their return to the Netherlands.

### **Limiting the damage**

Dutch citizens arrested abroad upon suspicion of a crime will first receive a visit from the Dutch Embassy. They will be given information about the International Office and an opportunity to fill in the probation service intake form which authorizes the International Office to provide guidance and support. The International Office works on a voluntary basis; there is no obligatory legal framework as in the case of the Dutch Probation Service.

### **Inventory of the problems**

The regional coordinator of the International Office explains the procedures and how things work in general to the detainee and his or her contact persons in the Netherlands. If possible, the detainee is also visited by a volunteer. During the remand period we try to prevent damage as much as possible by providing specific information and advice. To do this, we first need to compile an inventory of the detainee's problems. We look at housing, work and education, income, debts, physical and mental health, addiction problems, social ties and past contacts with the justice system.



*The detainee receives regular visits from a volunteer from the International Office.*

#### **Reflection on behaviour**

Detainees receive regular visits from a volunteer from the International Office. During these visits they are encouraged to reflect on their behaviour and to think about the future. The volunteer writes a report of each visit for the International Office so that we can work proactively on improving each detainee's self-sufficiency.

#### **Preparing for the return to the Netherlands**

After serving the prison sentence abroad, there comes a point when the detainee will return to the Netherlands. All sorts of practical matters then need to be organized, such as finding somewhere to live, getting money and organizing healthcare. The International Office urges detainees to obtain information about everything that needs to be in place upon their release. Some things need to be arranged quickly. That is why it is so important for detainees to think carefully about their life after they leave the prison.

#### **Aftercare**

When the sentence has been served and the detainee has returned to the Netherlands, the role of the International Office ends. All that we do then, if necessary, is pass on information to the mainstream support organizations in the Netherlands. We do this only if the person concerned has given permission. Ex-detainees can apply for aftercare only in the municipality where they were registered at the time of their arrest abroad.

### **The International Desk (Buitenlandbalie)**

The International Desk at the International Office performs executive, coordination and advisory tasks relating to the transfer of criminal sentences within Europe and the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

#### **European law**

The International Desk was set up after the EU passed a law which enabled Dutch citizens imprisoned in other EU countries to be transferred more quickly to the

Netherlands and serve the rest of their sentence there. This law also extends to Dutch citizens with an alternative or suspended sentence in another EU country. The same applies in reverse to EU citizens detained in the Netherlands.

### **Databank**

The International Desk has built a databank to assist probation workers and partners at home and abroad with European transfers. This databank contains information about probation practices, specific conditions, community service, behavioural interventions and important agencies in different EU countries.



*The International Office is committed to achieving intensive international cooperation in probation.*

### **Judicial process**

The International Desk plays an important role in the judicial processes for European transfers. The recommendations, reports and expertise of the International Desk enable the Dutch authorities that implement the transfers (the Public Prosecution Service, IRC Haarlem (centre for international justice) and the International Transfer of Sentenced Persons Division at the Judicial Institutions Service) to exercise the required care and attention.

### **International cooperation**

The International Office is committed to achieving intensive international cooperation in probation. We work within the general framework set by the Ministry of Security and Justice to improve the quality of probation services in other countries.

### **Joint projects**

The International Office participates in the regular meetings on the rule of law at the Ministry of Security and Justice. During these meetings we coordinate activities and engage in discussions with other partners in the justice chain, such as the Judicial Institutions Service. The majority of the projects are funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the European Union. Joint bilateral projects are carried out

in association with Dutch embassies. In this way we contribute to government policy on the rule of law in other countries and to the further professionalization of probation practices in Europe.

### **Caribbean Netherlands**

Responsibility for probation on the islands of Bonaire, St Eustatius and Saba rests with the Stichting Reclassering Caribisch Nederland (SRCN/foundation for probation on Caribbean Netherlands). The Ministry of Security and Justice has delegated the Dutch Probation Service to oversee the work of the SRCN. The justice system in Caribbean Netherlands is under heavy pressure and there is an urgent need for probation. The International Office supports the work of the SRCN.

**Want to find out more about the work of  
the International Office?**

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