*Translation from Latvian*

|  |
| --- |
| Council for the Judiciary of the Republic of Latvia |
| Court Communication Strategy |
|  |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
|  |

**Introduction**

1. The court system must comply with fairness in its activity and this fairness must be transparent. Therefore efficient cooperation thereof with public is a significant precondition for activity and development of courts. The court must provide information to public, thus increasing availability of courts, ensuring openness of the work of courts, facilitating transparency of the court proceedings, increasing public confidence to court system and understanding of work of courts and rulings rendered, at the same time eliminating the risk of corruption. Efficient communication shall result in public confidence in judiciary and institutions thereof, trust in fair court proceedings, which, in its turn, facilitates trust to the state in general.

2. Currently, the mass media acquire even bigger role in providing publicity of the work of courts. Even more often the society obtains information on the work of courts, both in general, as well as on the particular case, right from the mass media. Therefore, it is important to ensure fast opportunity for mass media to acquire sufficient and comprehensible information on the work of courts.

3. Therefore, it is important for the judiciary to have a well-considered communication strategy. The strategy must ensure that true and objective information on the work of courts is provided to public in a comprehensive way, without violating also the duties of courts, including providing objective trial, compliance with presumption of innocence and right for private life.

**Chapter 1**

**Purposes and** **tasks of court communication**

**1. Purpose of court communication**

The purpose of court communication is to promote effective operation of judiciary and public trust to judiciary, creating a positive image of the court and increasing its authority in society.

**2. Sub-purposes of court communication**

The court communication has the following sub-purposes:

2.1 To facilitate public trust to the court;

2.2 To achieve public confidence in fair, independent and competent court;

2.3 To achieve the sense of security that the court shall provide professional and trustful attitude;

2.4 To promote the rule of law, increasing public awareness that unlawful activities shall be assessed in court proceedings;

2.5 To facilitate public understanding of court proceedings;

2.6 To increase public awareness of the fact that settlement of disputes is to be sought also out of court;

2.7 To facilitate mutual cooperation between judicial institutions and within the framework of one institution;

2.8 To facilitate understanding of the employees of the court system of their role in the development of court system and to achieve their responsiveness in communication with public;

2.9 To promote the prestige and respect of the profession among the employees of the court system.

**3. Tasks of court communication**

Upon implementation of the purpose and sub-purposes of the communication, the courts shall have the following communication tasks:

3.1 To inform on the court proceedings and rulings concerning the issues of public interest or legal importance;

3.2 To perform crisis communication (the competence of the court, compliance with ethical rules or professionalism is in doubt) - to refute untrue information, to inform on response of the court system in case of discovered violations or unethical activities of judges or employees of a court, to communicate in a proactive manner in response to the reputation risk;

3.3 To explain the particularities of the work of courts and regulation covered by legal provisions on communication.

**4. Target audience of court communication**

Target audience of court communication comprises employees working in courts and participants of the court proceedings, journalists, organisations related to justice, academic staff, potential employees of courts and participants to proceedings, and public in general.

**Chapter 2**

**Principles of court communication**

**5. Communication shall be strategic and purposeful**

5.1 The court shall provide information to the mass media of its own initiative rather than only in response to questions asked by the mass media.

5.2 Communication shall not be the responsibility of the person responsible for that and the spokesperson only; it shall be a part of the work of a court.

5.3 Publicity, participation in public educational events, presentations during conferences, participation in discussions of judges and employees of the court shall be facilitated.

5.4 Public knowledge on the work of the courts and attitude towards the court shall be analysed to identify range of issues to be explained more broadly to target audience.

**6. Information is important and topical**

The topics regarding which the court provides information shall be selected pursuant to topicality of an issue in society or according to what information is necessary for the target audience. In order to determine what the events important for society are, both, the interest of journalists and public discussions taking place, as well as observations shall be taken into account.

**7. Feedback**

The public interests, established during regular analysis of the content and issues of the mass media, submitted complaints and research of public opinion, shall be taken into account during communication.

**8. Information shall be true, complete, accurate and operative**

8.1 The court shall provide true, comprehensive, accurate and operative information in a form understandable for public, in compliance with restrictions stipulated by legal provisions.

8.2 Replies to questions asked by journalists shall be provided within the shortest possible time and in accordance with the preferential procedure. Information provided for news shall be provided on the same day, when information is requested, the rest of information shall be delivered, upon mutual agreement on the time of delivery thereof.

**9. Equal possibilities**

Equal possibilities to acquire information, considering the needs and role of each target audience shall be provided for information provision.

**10. Communication shall be simple and comprehensible**

Information provided to public shall be easy to perceive and understand. Information shall not contain complicated legal terminology.

**11. Response to reputation crisis**

11.1 Unethical, non-professional or any other way of acting of a judge or employee of the court not corresponding to legal provisions, which has attracted public attention and causes threat to reputation, shall be reviewed in accordance with the procedure stipulated by legal provisions (such as, by judicial self-government institutions), informing the public on decisions.

11.2 Should the information available in the mass media fail to comply with the assessment of the particular situation, made by the Chairperson of the court, a self-government institution or a competent official may review the an action of a judge or an employee of the court.

11.3 The court may ask other persons or institutions (such as, the ministry, self-government institutions of other legal professions, associations of judges) to express their opinion on the particular situation, which has been criticized by the mass media.

11.4 The court shall indicate errors in facts or incompleteness in the information provided by the mass media.

**Chapter 3**

**Communication with public in general**

**12. The task of communication with public**

Courts shall facilitate awareness of role of the courts, work principles, as well as methods of alternative dispute resolution.

**13. Tools of communication with public**

13.1 An information stand shall be placed in the court.

13.2 Informative materials shall be available in the court.

13.3 The court shall have its web site or sub-section on the Internet portal *tiesas.lv*.

13.4 Courts shall organise an open day at least once a year.

13.5 Courts shall organise a shadow day for pupils once a year.

13.6 Judges or employees of the court shall read visiting lectures in the local schools or universities of law at least once a year.

13.7 Judges or employees of the court shall participate in conferences, write publications or be involved in other public events.

13.8 The court may provide information on work of courts and current events in social networks.

**Chapter 4**

**Communication with participants of the proceedings**

**14. Task of the communication with participants of the proceedings**

Courts shall provide information on procedural rights and duties of participants of the court proceedings, as well as course of the proceedings and opportunities of the court for directing the proceedings.

**15. Tools of communication with participants of the proceedings**

15.1 Participants of the proceedings may acquire information on the course of adjudication of the particular cases, to hear audio minutes and become acquainted with the wording of rulings on the portal *tiesas.lv*.

15.2 Informative materials available in the court shall include information on the procedural rights and duties of participants of the proceedings, as well as course of the proceedings.

15.3 Information on how the claim (application) is to be submitted, how to receive legal aid and in what cases the dispute may be adjudicated outside the court shall be placed on the information stand of the court.

15.4 Contact information of sworn advocates, bailiffs and notaries working in the court region shall be available in the court.

15.5 When sending court documents, information on the court proceedings (such as, procedural rights and duties, mediation possibilities) may be enclosed.

15.6 A contact phone for acquisition of information on the work of the court shall be operating in the court.

**Chapter 5**

**Communication with the mass media**

**16. General principles of communication with the mass media**

16.1 The court shall actively cooperate with journalists, for example, when providing information the mass media is interested in; suggesting journalists to write on issues, which are topical and of public importance, as well as ensuring education of journalists regarding the work of the court and legal procedure.

16.2 The court shall be responsive in cooperation with journalists; it shall be informatively proactive, being aware of the fact that the mass media are the most significant communication channel with public.

16.3 The court shall provide beneficial conditions for the mass media, including the use of WI‑FI, video, audio recording possibilities, in accordance with legal provisions.

**17. Duties of communication with the mass media**

17.1 The court shall inform the mass media on the court rulings the mass media show interest in, as well as other rulings of public importance.

17.2 The court shall explain particularities of the work of the courts and judges.

17.3 If necessary, the court shall respond to the criticism and recommendations made.

**18. Tools of communication with the mass media**

18.1 The court shall provide answers to requests of the mass media.

18.2 The court shall prepare press releases regarding the cases scheduled for adjudication or already adjudicated, as well as on the events in the court.

18.3 The court shall organise press conferences.

18.4 Judges and employees of the court shall give interviews and verbal or written comments, including comments after the abridged court ruling.

18.5 The court shall organise educational workshops and discussions.

18.6 The court, judges and employees of the court shall prepare articles for publishing in the mass media or shall recommend a current topic to journalists.

18.7 The court shall provide access to court rulings, materials of the case file and researches of the case-law in accordance with the procedure stipulated by legal provisions.

**Chapter 6**

**Organisational structure of communication**

**19. Persons responsible for communication**

Communication shall be ensured by:

a) Chairperson of the Council for the Judiciary regarding the work of the Council for the Judiciary and court system in general;

b) Head of the self-government institution of judges regarding the issues within competency of the relevant institution;

c) Chairperson of the Disciplinary Court regarding the issues within the competency of the Disciplinary Court;

d) Chairperson of the court on the work of the court;

e) Spokesperson regarding the court case or legal issue;

f) Employee of the court, who is responsible for communication.

**20.** **Duties of persons responsible for communication**

20.1 Persons responsible for communication shall:

a) Provide answers to questions. Should it not be possible to provide an answer, they shall explain the reason for refusal and agree with the person requesting for information on the time, when it will be possible to receive information;

b) Provide information of the initiative of themselves or the mass media and send it to all interested mass media (those, who have asked similar question or who might be interested in the relevant information)

c) Communicate pursuant to the particularities of the mass media (news or analytical mass media, press or electronic mass media, etc.);

d) Establish facts and collect information;

e) When preparing or providing information, if necessary, shall cooperate mutually or with other institutions;

f) Get involved in ensuring crisis communication.

20.2. Communication officers shall perform their duties themselves or ensure the implementation thereof.

**21. Duties of the Chairperson of the Court**

The Chairperson of the Court shall:

a) Express the opinion of the court;

b) Manage and ensure the communication work of the court;

c) If necessary, perform the duties of a spokesperson or a communication officer;

c) Reply to the questions asked by the mass media or provide information on the work of the court of his or her own initiative;

d) Report at various audiences (guest lectures, meetings, press conferences);

e) Prepare articles, provide interviews;

f) Manage the crisis communication;

g) Approve the annual communication plan and perform assessment of the communication work.

**22. Spokesperson**

Chairperson of the Court with consent of the judge shall determine one or several judges, who shall communicate regarding the court cases or legal issues. Chairperson may perform the duties of a spokesperson.

**23. Duties of the employee of the court responsible for communication**

23.1 Chairperson of the court shall determine an employee of the court responsible for communication, who shall:

a) Prepare and provide information to the mass media;

b) Collect and summarize information for a spokesperson, if necessary;

c) Maintain lists of the mass media and journalists;

d) Update information on the web site of the court or sub-section of the particular court on the portal *tiesas.lv* and social networks;

e) Coordinate distribution of informative materials to various target groups;

f) Update the informative stand of the court.

23.2 The Chairperson of the Court may determine that the employee of the court responsible for communication shall perform the following additional duties:

a) Prepare press releases;

b) Perform analysis of the content of the mass media and respond to information leaving an adverse impact to reputation of the court, providing additional information or explanatory comment;

c) Encourage journalists to write about current topics, problems faced by courts in their daily work and which may interest larger society;

d) Coordinate the spokesperson, if necessary, also the cooperation of other judges and employees of the court, and journalists;

e) Regularly discuss current issues with spokespersons and court communication manager in order to specify communication activities;

f) Get involved in ensuring of crisis communication;

g) Plan and provide public education events, which are provided by this strategy and communication plan of the particular court;

h) Involve employees of the court in the development and implementation of the communication plan;

i) Cooperate with the manager of court communication, implementing activities, provided by the Joint Communication Strategy of Judicial Institutions.

23.3 Chairperson of the court may assign the performance of duties to several employees of the court responsible for communication.

**24. Duties of other judges and employees of the court**

Should judges or employees of the court, who are not the persons responsible for communication, be asked questions, they shall explain the organisational structure of the court communication and shall encourage to address the employee, who is responsible for court communication.

**25. Reporting judge**

Communication on a particular case may be performed also by a reporting judge, who is not a person responsible for communication. The judge may choose whether to communicate with the mass media. At the same time, the judge shall take into account that communication is preferable in cases, where the abridged judgement has been announced and public is not aware of substantiation of the court, but they are important, as well as, in particular, in cases of public importance.

**26. Support**

26.1 Each judge and employee shall have an obligation to provide a support to persons responsible for communication, for example, when preparing necessary information, informing on situations, where crisis communication is required.

26.2The manager of court communication is operating with the Council for the Judiciary, who shall provide support (such as consultations) to the persons responsible for communication for the implementation of duties.

26.3The Ministry of Justice and Court Administration shall provide practical support for organisation of court communication, including, providing that the persons responsible for communication have an opportunity to participate in communication trainings at least once per two years.