

COMPREHENSIVE ATTENTION TO INCARCERATED WOMEN

The Costa Rican Public Defender is committed to the resocialisation of incarcerated women

EUROsociAL supports the Public Defender in the signing of a protocol to formalise an inter-institutional network for women linked to criminal proceedings.



The Public Defender's Office of Costa Rica, whose model has inspired other Defenders in Latin America, has signed an inter-institutional protocol for a Network for the Comprehensive Attention of Women Involved in Criminal Proceedings and their Family Dependents in Vulnerable Situations. This protocol introduces significant changes in the Costa Rican criminal justice system and in public policies for social protection.

Usually, the paradigm in dealing with those that are disadvantaged and in conflict with criminal

law is exclusion. They are stigmatised within their communities and they often encounter important obstacles for labour rehabilitation. For women, former prisoners often suffer double discrimination: for the fact they are women and for having infringed the law. The treatment is usually disdainful, and opportunities to change become materially impossible. These women usually have the sociological profile of women with more than one dependent child, heads of households, who have not completed primary education and their occupations are poorly paid and unstable. Many of

JUSTICE



PUBLIC DEFENDERS

COSTA RICA

them work informally as traders or domestic employees.

The implementation of this Network means choosing a different paradigm: inclusion. The aim is to create conditions and opportunities for women in a vulnerable position that have gone through criminal proceedings and wish to build a dignified life project, both for them and for their families.

In Costa Rica, a series of initiatives aimed at changing the social and economic position of women linked to the criminal justice system has been run for many years, particularly for incarcerated women. The creation of this Network completes this process. The main goal of this Network is to establish an inter-institutional coordination body, aimed at the definition and the development of joint comprehensive actions, as well as keeping a constant and appropriate communication between the signatory institutions, within the corresponding competences, goals and powers.

INTER-INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION. A SUCCESS FACTOR

The Public Defender's Office, with the support of EUROsociAL, made initial contacts and held meetings in order to coordinate the efforts from different public bodies. In addition to the Defender, which leads the Network, the following bodies are members: the Judiciary, the Ministry of Justice and Peace, the National Women's Institute (INAMU), the Joint Social Aid Institute (IMAS), the National Learning Institute (INA), the Children's National Board (PANI), the Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Institute (IAFA) and the Costa Rican Narcotics Institute (ICD). Joint collaboration has been the key to drafting the Protocol.



EUROSOCIAL'S SUPPORT ITINERARY

2014.

- ▶ Specialist advice to design the Inter-institutional Network.
- ▶ Specialist advice to draft the Protocol for Comprehensive Care to Women Linked to Criminal Proceedings and their Family Dependents in Vulnerable Situations.
- ▶ Design of the training course aimed at Public Defenders and public and private institutions within the Support Network.
- ▶ Training aimed at Public Defenders and other institutions within the Support Network for the implementation of the protocol.

2015.

- ▶ Specialist advice for the inclusion of new organisations into the Network, both for the public and private sectors.

This coordination effort is an unprecedented event in the Costa Rican Public Administration.

Although there are still many challenges pending and expectations are high, and help is required not only at institutional level, but also from various social and business stakeholders, the results achieved so far show that it is going in the right direction. The coordination duties mean that women who come out of a detention centre have enough work and educational tools to subsist within the bounds of legality, and this reduces crime recidivism.

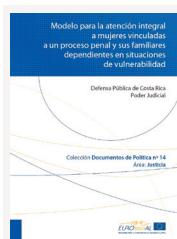
PROVIDING A DIGNIFIED LIFE PROJECT

A comprehensive response to the situation of women linked to criminal proceedings is provided through this support network, satisfying their basic needs such as: study programmes, institutions where they can leave their young children while they study or work, decent housing, school and family grants so their children can study, and even an allowance until they are reintegrated into society. One of the protagonists explains it this way:

"Two years ago I made a mistake, out of necessity; I was pregnant with my youngest child and I brought drugs into a penal centre. They caught me... I was given an eight year sentence. Then, I got to know about the Public Defender's Office. They summoned me and after four months, I was released due to the Psychotropic Drugs Law. It was really hard... I left six children, on the street. Today, thanks to the help from the Public Defender's Office, INAS, IMAS, I am advancing

step by step... I am trying to improve myself and to integrate into society again. The Public Defender's Office gave us hope to be released soon [...] When I was released I had nothing, I wasn't even able to buy a ticket, but when you have kids, you are always motivated to achieve whatever. I hadn't seen my kids in four months, and after causing them psychological harm, seeing them again was a shock for me, as a mother; returning home with them, cooking again for them, reading them a book or watching TV with them is really rewarding. But rehabilitation into society has been hard and has cost me a lot. I have been rejected for many jobs because of my criminal record. Now, I am going to study with the support from the Defender and INAS, but it's still hard... I need time and I have to take care of my children. But I see my future in capital letters, as the mother my kids deserve. I see myself with a career, studying, with a house for my kids... Yes... I see myself in capital letters".

PUBLICATIONS



- ▶ Model for the Comprehensive Care for Women linked to Criminal Proceedings and their Family Dependents in Vulnerable Situations

Coordinating Partner



Operating Partners



FIRST-HAND

▶ Cristina Ramírez

Ministry of Justice and Peace of Costa Rica



"Every time a former detainee is successfully integrated into life in the community, with her family and a stable job, she becomes a reason to celebrate, because this shows the effectiveness of a system that instead of stigmatising provides opportunities and contributes in overcoming the challenge of women who were formerly incarcerated in adapting to life. Training and work opportunities are, undoubtedly, an essential requirement for that".

▶ Marta Iris Muñoz Cascante

Director of the Public Defender's Office of Costa Rica



"In recent years the Public Defender's Office has understood that its role in the rehabilitation of incarcerated people is critical. The Public Defender has also shown that it can exercise a positive leadership in the design of public policies in favour of incarcerated people [...] This Network is an unprecedented model; and we can say that it represents the first affirmative action from public institutions in favour of vulnerable women linked to criminal proceedings, and it can be considered a good practice to be replicated not only in Latin America but also in other parts of the world".