

## **Inputs for the preparation of the meeting of experts as requested by GA Resolution 78/227**

The Department of Public Security (DPS) works to strengthen access to justice and the provision of effective legal aid in OAS Member States. By providing legislative and policy assistance, offering comprehensive training to criminal justice practitioners through a cross-sectoral, multidisciplinary, and integrated approach, and fostering international cooperation, the DPS enhances the capacities of judicial systems. These activities contribute to improving access to justice for vulnerable populations, reinforcing the rule of law, and ensuring equal treatment before the law, ultimately leading to safer and more secure societies in the region.

### **Strengthening the institutions that provide access to justice for victims of crime in El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and the Dominican Republic – Phase 2**

The Department of Public Security implemented the project “Strengthening the institutions that provide access to justice for victims of crime in El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and the Dominican Republic – Phase 2”. The project aimed to strengthen the capabilities of institutions providing comprehensive and integrated legal support services, including free legal assistance, to victims of crime in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic, addressing their multiple needs.

The DPS conducted the first phase in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala from August 2016 to March 2018. This phase involved mapping free legal assistance services in each country and establishing five victim support centers. These centers serve as coordination points for specialized free legal assistance services to address the needs of victims.

In this second phase, the DPS enhanced and/or expanded the capabilities of five projects focused on strengthening victim assistance centers in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, and increased the capacity of institutions providing legal assistance services to victims in the Dominican Republic.

The projects main results are:

- Over 130,000 individuals assisted at victim support centers.
- Four mappings of the current state of free legal assistance services were conducted in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic.
- A legal promotion network was established in the Dominican Republic, consisting of a team of 52 people across five communities.
- Digital portals and systems for legal assistance and victim support were implemented in Guatemala and El Salvador.
- A portal for victim registration and orientation was developed in coordination with the Public Ministry of the Dominican Republic.
- Two virtual hearing rooms were installed in Guatemala to enhance access to justice for women, children, and adolescent victims of violence.

- A national directory of institutions, NGOs, and other entities providing free services was created in Guatemala.
- A room for the attention of human trafficking and migrant smuggling victims was renovated at the Attorney General's Office of El Salvador.
- A playroom for victims and their underage family members was installed at the Attorney General's Office of El Salvador.
- Manuals and community training guides were developed.
- Personnel on free legal assistance topics were trained in the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala (395 people trained).

The project contributed to strengthening access to justice for vulnerable individuals with limited resources by enhancing free legal assistance services through collaboration with academic institutions, NGOs, and various government entities, ultimately improving the protection of victims' rights.

### **Improving the multisectoral response to human trafficking in Ecuador**

From 2020 to 2023, the DPS implemented the project "Improving the Multisectoral Response to Human Trafficking" in Ecuador. The project aimed to improve the legal and operational frameworks regarding trafficking in persons; enhance the capacities of governmental and non-governmental actors at the national and local levels in the investigation and prosecution of this crime, as well as in the identification, assistance, and protection of victims; create and strengthen local technical committees to combat human trafficking; and develop and implement communication campaigns to sensitize communities about the dangers and risks of trafficking.

One of the fundamental objectives of the project was to enhance Ecuador's capacity to combat and prevent human trafficking by strengthening the national legal framework and supporting the development and adoption of a standalone legislation aligned with international standards, thereby reinforcing the national response to this crime.

The project also contributed to strengthening the capacities of public officials from various institutions involved in combating trafficking in persons by developing a 40-hour course entitled "Integrated and multisectoral training to respond to human trafficking", resulting in the certification of 292 professionals. The course aimed to increase both the theoretical understanding and practical skills of participants regarding the crime of human trafficking within their specific professional domains. It adopted a gender-sensitive and human rights-oriented approach, focusing on areas such as victim identification, assistance, and protection, as well as the investigation and prosecution. Specifically tailored for members of the National Police, immigration officers, prosecutors, judges, and government officials directly engaged in victim assistance, the course provided essential knowledge to improve their ability to address human trafficking effectively, including by identifying vulnerable communities.

Additionally, the DPS conducted an integrated and multisectoral workshop specialized in trafficking in persons and oral litigation, developed in collaboration with the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador (PUCE) and its partners. This workshop included simulations of investigation and trial processes aimed at prosecuting those responsible for human trafficking. A total of 121 officials from the State Attorney General's Office, the administration of justice, and the National Police participated in the simulation processes. This scenario-based training helped officers navigate diverse situations involving vulnerable groups, in order to enhance their abilities to identify such groups and provide them with adequate assistance and protection.

Within the framework of the project, a workshop was also held for training on victim-centered police operations with a focus on human rights and gender, with the support of the NGO Alas de Colibri.

Moreover, the project supported the strengthening of the capacity of community-based organizations to identify labor and sex trafficking victims among vulnerable populations, especially Venezuelan migrants and LGBTQI+ individuals. One of the main activities in this field was the development of a catalog of institutions that offers assistance and protection services to victims of trafficking in persons addressing LGBTQI+ communities. Likewise, Guidelines for the Assistance and Protection of Adult Victims of Trafficking in Persons from the LGBTQI+ Community were developed. This document presents principles and guidelines on how to provide dignified, quality and specific assistance to members of the LGBTQI+ community throughout the entire process: from identification, assistance and protection to investigation and prosecution.

Lastly, 7 police operations were conducted under the project, which led to the arrest of 8 traffickers and the rescue of 8 victims.

Therefore, the project improved the capacities to investigate and prosecute trafficking in persons and to assist and protect victims of trafficking in persons, strengthened the preventive measures against trafficking in persons and promoted national and international cooperation, among others.

### **Enhancing the ability of Ecuador's justice system to combat security threats**

The objective of the project is to strengthen the capacity of the judicial system to achieve greater efficiency, effectiveness and agility in the investigation, prosecution, and control of threats to public safety.

The project includes the provision of in-depth training for more than 100 judges and prosecutors so that they are better prepared to investigate, prosecute and punish crimes; the provision of adequate equipment and technology that will enable judges and prosecutors to carry out their activities more quickly and effectively, and the improvement of existing infrastructure, including the courtrooms of the National Court of Justice, to make them more functional, secure and with updated technology.

Thus, the project will enhance the judicial system capacities to respond effectively to the population's demands for security, ensuring a fairer, faster, and more reliable administration of justice that contributes substantially to the security and well-being of Ecuadorian society. It will also reinforce public confidence in Ecuador's judicial system.

## **Program to Support efforts to prevent, investigate, and counteract criminal activity linked to the exploitation of Venezuelan refugees and migrants (PICAD)**

The DPS implemented the program “Supporting OAS member States efforts to prevent, investigate and counter criminal activity linked to the exploitation of Venezuelan refugees and migrants” (PICAD, for its acronym in Spanish).

The program aimed to strengthen the capacities of seven OAS Member States (Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guyana, Panama, Peru and Trinidad and Tobago) to prevent and investigate human trafficking and migrant smuggling, linked to the exploitation of Venezuelan refugees and migrants, and increase the understanding of the unique security risks they face, especially women and girls. The program also aimed to strengthen the provision of protection and assistance services to victims and survivors of these crimes, as well as to promote their inclusion in society, among others.

In the framework of PICAD, the DPS developed three police manuals for the safe management of human mobility and the identification of human trafficking and migrant smuggling crimes in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, designed and conducted six national "train-the-trainer" events for more than 150 officials, including police and migration officers and prosecutors, and replicated the training in the three countries, reaching more than 2,630 officers. The trainings focused on the prevention and investigation of human trafficking, smuggling of migrants and other criminal activities linked to the exploitation of Venezuelan migrants. Lastly, Finally, 17 officers from the National Police of Colombia, Ecuador and Peru participated in a Subregional Workshop on Gender and Human Rights on the Prevention, Detection and Investigation of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants and the Protection of Survivor Populations.

By developing targeted manuals, conducting extensive training, and organizing specialized workshops, the PICAD program enhanced the skills and knowledge of law enforcement and judicial personnel to prevent and investigate human trafficking and migrant smuggling, improve protection and support for victims, and promote the inclusion of survivors in society. Hence, the program contributed to addressing the challenges faced by Venezuelan refugees and migrants and advancing regional efforts to combat these serious crimes.

## **A new path: promoting a healthy environment and productive alternatives for juvenile remandees and offenders in Jamaica**

The Department of Public Security also works to strengthen criminal justice systems and promoting a healthy environment for youth. The Department of Public Security implemented the program “A new path: promoting a healthy environment and productive alternatives for juvenile remandees and offenders in Jamaica”.

A New Path was designed by the DPS/OAS and TRUST considering the high rates of juvenile delinquency in Jamaica and the multiple challenges imposed to the successful reintegration of juvenile offenders, such as the stigma among potential employers and the lack of support upon integration into the society, which lead to high recidivism rates. As such, A New Path sought to promote a healthy emotional environment for the youth in conflict with the law not only within correctional facilities, but upon their release, to

contribute to the reduction of juvenile recidivism and, ultimately, crime and violence in Jamaica. This was executed by way of (i) increasing economic prosperity for youth incarcerated; (ii) improving the educational status of young offenders; (iii) life skills and coping techniques; psychosocial support and well-being; and (iv) technical skills and vocational training.

Over its five-year duration, the project successfully achieved its objectives, assisting 2,441 young Jamaicans who had been placed in juvenile facilities. Across four facilities, 28 courses were offered in collaboration with 13 local organizations, certifying 1,057 youths in various activities. After release, 2,046 youths received psychosocial support from assigned case managers, aiding their reintegration into schools and communities.

Furthermore, the project facilitated economic insertion initiatives, with 271 youths participating in entrepreneurship training and receiving micro-grants, resulting in 49 new businesses. Additionally, 22 youths established micro-farms in rural communities and 143 youths enrolled in apprenticeships, gaining technical skills for job opportunities.

The project also contributed to systemic changes in Jamaica's juvenile criminal justice system by enhancing the Department of Correctional Services' capacity. This included developing a holistic reintegration curriculum, improving facility infrastructure, implementing case management approaches, and establishing an electronic case management system. Staff reported reduced conflicts and improved environments for youth growth and learning. Data revealed a less than 5% reengagement rate with the criminal justice system among project beneficiaries, highlighting the project's success in reducing recidivism.

### **Promote optimal use of alternatives to incarceration and better-informed judicial decision-making in Colombia**

The efficient implementation of alternatives to incarceration programs is an important aspect of an effective criminal justice system, and plays a key role in reducing recidivism; optimizing the use of state resources; depressurizing the prison system; and disrupting the use of prisons for the expansion of organized crime.

Decades of empirical research demonstrate that, when properly implemented, alternatives can break this cycle of recidivism. However, a key barrier to effective implementation of alternatives in the Americas, including Colombia, is the lack of reliable information on the specific background and needs of individuals that would allow officials to detect underlying factors, including but not limited to substance use disorders that drive the alleged offending behavior. They also allow for more informed decision-making about which alternatives to incarceration programs would best suit their specific circumstances; and identify related social services that could benefit them.

To address this issue, the Executive Secretariat of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission ("ES-CICAD"), in coordination with the DPS, is working on a project to "Promote optimal use of alternatives to incarceration and better-informed judicial decision-making" in Colombia. The project seeks to strengthen the protection of human rights and the rule of law by reducing overcrowding and addressing sentencing

problems to promote an effective criminal justice system. The project will pilot assessment instruments to provide information within the criminal justice system. An assessment instrument is being developed and piloted with selected persons in conflict with the law at the criminal enforcement stage, to better determine which alternatives could support their rehabilitation and reduce recidivism. After the pilot phase, the instrument will be adjusted based on the initial results and will undergo further validation before being implemented at scale.