

STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONS TO COMBAT HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN COSTA RICA

COSTA RICA
2015-2018

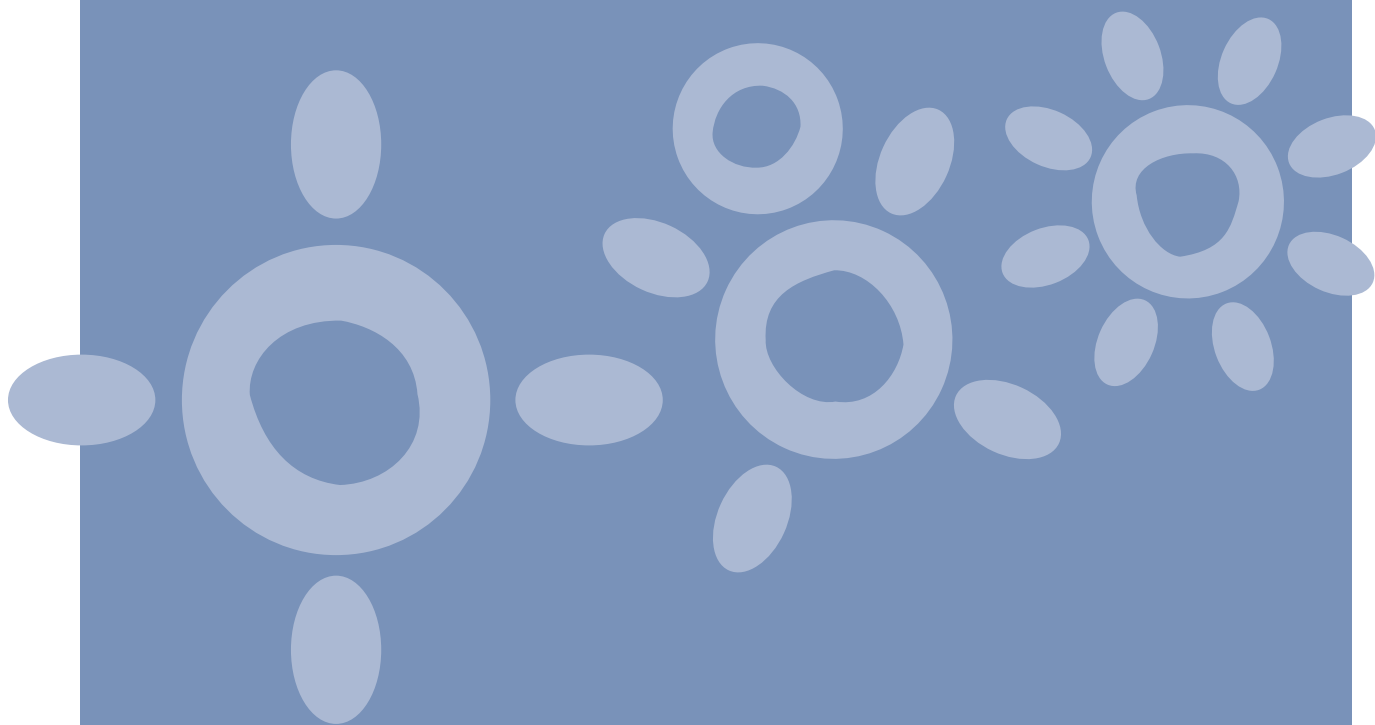


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Founded in 1994, the International Bureau for Children’s Rights (IBCR or the “Bureau”) is a Montreal-based international non-governmental organisation. Its mission is to promote and protect children’s rights around the world in a manner consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its three optional protocols. With experience developing projects to combat human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation in several countries (Burundi, Canada, Congo and Peru), the IBCR is now turning its attention to Costa Rica with a new project entitled “Strengthening Institutions to Combat Human Trafficking in Costa Rica”. This initiative aims to build capacities with a view to ultimately eradicating trafficking, particularly that of children for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Supported by Global Affairs Canada, the IBCR will dedicate three years—September 2015 to August 2018—to this undertaking.

THE IBCR’S STRATEGY: A PARTICIPATIVE APPROACH THAT ADDRESSES THE NEEDS EXPRESSED BY LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

The IBCR’s strategy is to adopt a participative approach that promotes cross-sector and inter-institutional dialogue among the police officers and legal officials who interact with children and other victims of trafficking as part of their work. Specifically, the project is targeting those who are able to actively contribute to the strengthening of their own capacities to combat the trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of persons, including children. The IBCR has carried out several missions in Costa Rica to lay the groundwork for this strategy.

CSE AND COSTA RICA’S TOURISM INDUSTRY

From 2012 to 2014, the IBCR carried out a project called “Preventing the Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents in Costa Rica’s Travel and Tourism Industry”. Conducted jointly with the PANIAMOR Foundation, this project was made possible with support from World Vision and financial backing from the Government of Canada. Its main focus was to prevent and raise awareness of the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents in Costa Rica’s travel and tourism industry.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND DEMOCRACY

Currently, the IBCR is also working with Lawyers Without Borders Canada on a project called “Protecting Children, Women and Other Vulnerable Communities” as part of the Voluntary Cooperation Programme financed by Global Affairs Canada. Spanning from May 2015 to March 2020, this project aims to improve the protection of the rights of children, women and members of impoverished or marginalised communities. It also aims to strengthen democracy and rule of law through access to justice.

Even though various initiatives have been implemented by Costa Rican organisations and the international community, the challenges within the country remain significant. These include increasing capacities among those involved in the fight against human trafficking and integrating institutional procedures designed to align their practices with international standards. That’s why the IBCR has committed to this three-year project to strengthen the institutions that deal with human trafficking cases in Costa Rica.

CAPACITY BUILDING FOR POLICE OFFICERS AND JUDICIAL SYSTEM PERSONNEL IN COSTA RICA

The purpose of the project is to strengthen capacities among police officers, personnel of the Judicial Investigation Body (OIJ), prosecutors and judges in the areas of detection, investigation and prosecution of human trafficking crimes, particularly those involving the commercial sexual exploitation of children. The project also aims to develop a community awareness campaign and encourage the private sector (i.e., informal workers in the tourism industry) to help prevent, identify and report these crimes. To get the project started, the IBCR conducted various activities to inform a mapping report that provides an overview of the various organisations involved in responding to cases of human trafficking in the country. This report provides recommendations for improved coordination between the agencies and organisations involved. It also identifies the various actors and explains their roles, functions, perceived needs and challenges with regard to the strengthening of capacities in the country.

PROJECTS STAKEHOLDERS

In line with the previously mentioned participative and interdisciplinary approach, this project also involves members of public institutions and local organisations who work on the strengthening of capacities to combat human trafficking. This approach ensures that goals are met effectively and that responsibilities are assigned to the various stakeholders. It also prevents overlap or gaps in the training on trafficking prevention. Recognising a need for coordination and knowledge sharing, a Steering Committee and Reference Group were created to support and guide the project as it develops.

Steering Committee

This committee is the bilateral mechanism responsible for coordinating, advising and supervising the project. The members meet at least once a year to discuss matters relating to annual reports, plans and budgets, and to assess the project's progress. Members of the Steering Committee include the Technical Secretary from the National Coalition Against Migrant Smuggling and Human Trafficking (CONATT) and representatives from the schools and training units involved in the project.

Reference Group

This group is responsible for providing policy guidance for the project, and for ensuring that it is consistent with the country's national policy on human trafficking. It also facilitates the implementation of the project's strategic plan and activities. Members of the Reference Group include representatives from CONATT's Technical Commissions for Information, Analysis and Research and Prosecution.

MAPPING EXERCISE

Upon completion of the first project phase, a mapping report was produced, providing an overview of the system that fights human trafficking in Costa Rica. This document includes an analysis of the existing legal framework, the formal and informal procedures used in countering trafficking, and the issues that affect inter-institutional collaboration on the matter. The report also includes recommendations on prevention, victim care and protection, prosecution, information, analysis, investigation, inter-institutional cooperation and training on human trafficking.

In addition to providing useful data for the various actors involved in the fight against human trafficking in Costa Rica, the mapping report will be used to fine-tune the project's intervention strategy to ensure its goals are met.

ACTIVITIES INVOLVED IN DEVELOPING THE MAPPING REPORT

The IBCR visited the National Police School, Judicial School, and the Training Unit of the Judicial Investigation Body (OIJ). During these observation visits, the IBCR learned about organisations' operating procedures, as well as their training methodologies and techniques.

A questionnaire was distributed to police officers and judicial system personnel throughout the country to assess their knowledge on human trafficking detection, investigation and prosecution.

In addition, the IBCR held 16 meetings and interviews with state actors, local non-governmental organisations, international organisations and UN agencies that work to combat human trafficking or to assist victims of trafficking.

Three 2-day thematic workshops were held with representatives from the police, legal and social sectors. The main objective of these workshops was to determine, based on the experience of the participants, how law enforcement mechanisms work (starting with the reporting of a crime) and how care and protection is provided to victims of human trafficking. The groups also examined existing mechanisms for collaboration between stakeholders.

To determine the level of confidence that children have in police and other actors involved in protecting children's rights, the IBCR held consultation workshops with two groups of 10 children, divided by age (6 to 8 years, and 9 to 13 years). These workshops allowed the IBCR to understand children's perspectives on the justice system and on their interactions with police.

Finally, some activities were held in outlying areas so that the IBCR could gain a better understanding of regional issues and of the diversity of concerns surrounding human trafficking in Costa Rica. In all, 164 people participated in the activities, with 47% of participants being male and 53% being female.

OTHER MAJOR MILESTONES

- 1. Develop standard operating procedures and terms of reference:** This step will be an opportunity to review the detailed and formalised protocols that enable the systematic completion of tasks within a given process. This includes supporting the signing of multi-sectorial memorandums of understanding among the various actors in the child protection system, as well as reviewing the terms of reference used to clarify the operating procedures of specialised bodies that handle cases involving children, including those of the police, legal system and other public agencies. The goal is to see whether it is possible, within the country's operational context, to make tangible and practical improvements to the interactions between these actors while ensuring that the best interests of the child are taken into consideration.
- 2. Develop training kits:** This step will allow the government to work together with the IBCR to develop comprehensive training kits used for initial training (for new recruits) and for specialised training (for more experienced staff). Each kit will include complete course material for instructors and participants, as well as tools for tracking and assessing what has been learned.
- 3. Create a pool of certified trainers for each stakeholder group:** This step will allow trainers from participating centres to be certified via a rigorous, evaluated process. Train-the-trainer sessions will examine adult education teaching techniques and skills sharing, and familiarise participants with the training kits.
- 4. Monitor the first courses taught at the schools adopting the permanent curriculum:** Once the trainers at participating training centres have been certified, the first courses will be given at the schools. The IBCR will be present to support instructors and assess the efficacy of the courses. Based on these experiences, training kits may be adjusted as needed or instructors may be assisted in examining the lessons learned.
- 5. Develop an advocacy strategy:** Throughout the process, careful monitoring will take place to ensure that the new training is added as mandatory, permanent and evaluated courses to the schools' curricula.

ANTICIPATED RESULTS

By implementing the capacity building project for Costa Rican police forces and legal officials, the IBCR and its partners expect to:

1. Add a mandatory and specialised professional development course into the programmes at the National Police School, Judicial School and other specialised training units, such as the Judicial Investigation Body (OIJ) and the public prosecutor's office.
2. Train specialised trainers, through whom the IBCR will implement an ongoing capacity building process for police officers, OIJ agents, prosecutors and judges across the country.
3. Contribute to the professionalisation and strengthening of capacities of key stakeholders involved in monitoring, preventing, investigating and prosecuting crimes of human trafficking in Costa Rica, with a view to improving institutional responses among local authorities.



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