

Justice

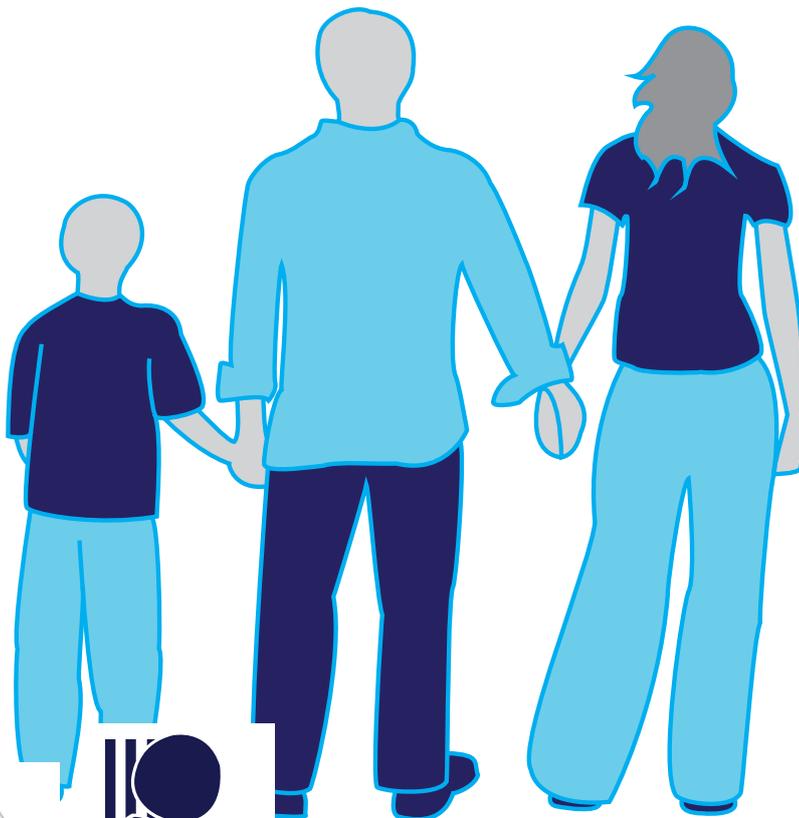
for Children of Prisoners

Special Edition Newsletter 4 of 4 - 2013

Looking Forward

Impacts, Successes & Obstacles

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Children of Prisoners Europe
formerly Eurochips

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Foreword

This final issue of our Special Edition newsletters, which includes an extremely wide variety of articles from across Europe, aims to look forward, both building on the practices and policies that are already in place and investigating how new practices can be implemented to increase the visibility of children with imprisoned parents. With articles focusing on international angles as well as national successes and projects, our contributors include researchers, lecturers, special rapporteurs, Children's Rights Commissioners and prison experts and deal with a number of different subjects relating to children affected by parental incarceration. From the issue of child-friendly visiting conditions around the world, to the implementation of relevant Articles from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; from the implementation of video-calling technology in a prison to the highly pertinent question of collecting and recording quantitative data on children of imprisoned parents, these articles form a rich and diverse foundation for future projects and, above all, an impetus for further research and investigation.

Our contributors emphasise the need for this group of vulnerable children to be given a stronger voice on the policy-making level. The – in some cases unstable – political and financial climate that several countries across Europe currently find themselves in may mean that more time and energy are being dedicated to bigger, more visible causes, deflecting attention away from the cause of children of imprisoned parents. We need to ensure that the attention we have received at the EU level through our joint publication of the COPING Project report earlier this year and through the European Commission DG Justice Operating Grant, which has funded these newsletters and been invaluable to our work, does not diminish with the completion of these projects. Now is the time to push for further attention at these levels and to keep the momentum going.

The process of compiling these Special Edition theme-based newsletters has been informative and educational. At the end of a very productive

year we feel that this project has formed a springboard from which we must proceed to the next level: implementing the good practices we have highlighted and endorse, and, in particular, putting into place our recommendations for data collection and the recording of information on children of imprisoned parents on both the national and international level. We are grateful to DG Justice for providing the impetus for creating this momentum, as well as a platform for fostering deeper collaboration with international organisations like UNICEF and Eurochild. In this way, we hope the needs and rights of children of imprisoned parents will be better understood, and the issue will be placed higher on policy agendas across Europe.

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1. Provisions for children of prisoners across the globe

The following is a question and answer session with Piera Barzano, Prison expert for the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime, Justice Section.¹

When you travel to different countries do you make a concerted effort to ask about the situation of the children?

“I see many places where, due to security issues, they only provide non-contact visits: it’s very sad for the children. I always try to remind the prison administration that they are not only punishing the father in these cases but also the children”

All the time. It’s more relevant if I’m visiting a female prison (although the Quaker United Nations Office, and in particular Oliver Robertson, have managed to convince me that having a father in prison is as bad as having a mother in prison, at least at a certain age). I always look at the visiting areas, even in male prisons and high security prisons. I see many places where, due to security issues, they only provide non-contact visits: it’s very sad for the children. I always try to remind the prison administration that they are not only punishing the father in these cases but also the children, who of course have done nothing wrong. Of course, I understand the potential security issues. This brings me to the question of searches of visiting children, and how they are carried out. For all of this, it is very helpful that we have the Bangkok Rules as international standards in place that I can refer to: it makes a stronger argument.

It’s also useful to explain to prison staff that family visits are not a luxury for prisoners. They shouldn’t be used as a form of punishment or a disciplinary

1. The views given in this interview reflect Piera’s personal opinion. She is not speaking on behalf of UNODC.

measure. Ultimately, it is often contact with their family that keeps the prisoner going, alive even.

Have you come across any examples of good practices in the countries you have visited, in terms of provisions for children of prisoners?

This summer I visited several prisons in Italy where, although they have large problems with overcrowding and prison conditions, I did see some positive initiatives being put into place. In Bollate Prison, for example, the prison governor seems to be particularly sensitive to the issue. While normal visiting hours are in the morning, there are extended hours in the afternoon so that children don’t have to miss school. The governor is also making efforts to create nice visiting areas outside; almost like a small park with grass and toys for the children. There is even a kiosk where the prisoner can buy a soft drink for the child. It is examples such as these which show a step in the right direction towards normalisation, making things as close to a normal life as possible. This is still a big challenge.

“it is difficult for children to open up if the area is very public”

I think it is important to have the visiting area outside of the main gated area of the prison. It is such a traumatic experience for a child to pass through all the security and endless doors of the prison, and it is difficult for children to open up if the area is very public – it understandably takes time for the child to feel comfortable to open up and rekindle a parent-child dialogue when their parent is missing out on so many things in their day-to-day lives.

In relation to that last point, what about prisons that provide telephone access for the prisoners to contact their children?

I know there are some very positive cases of this. For example, one aspect that really concerns me is the situation of foreign prisoners and women in particular, and how the opportunity of being able to talk via Skype with a video webcam can be of such great

1. Provisions for children of prisoners across the globe

value to these particular prisoners. This can even be used in developing countries as the costs are very limited. I heard recently that a Belgian prisoner in the Seychelles was able to speak to her children on Skype for the first time in four years. Even the prison staff were in tears.

You said that this topic is personally “dear to your heart”. Before the adoption of the Bangkok Rules, there was no firm international policy in place referring to children of imprisoned parents. Does the UNODC now take into consideration the importance of children of imprisoned parents?

It is true that I have a personal interest in this area. The issue of children of imprisoned parents regularly comes into our prison work as it is relevant to the Bangkok Rules. Indeed, it is thanks to these international standards that we are able to carry out

“we always raise the importance of the judiciary and prosecutors being aware of the implications of putting a mother in prison”

this kind of work: they ensure that the topic is high on our agenda. However, we have not developed clear guidelines regarding children of imprisoned parents, in the sense that we have not yet received a specific mandate on this issue. That being said, the UNODC Handbook on Women and Imprisonment is currently being updated to include the Bangkok Rules, and will be available online soon.

We have been trying to promote the importance of the Bangkok Rules over the last few months and there have been workshops on particular articles. In this context we always raise the importance of the judiciary and prosecutors being aware of the implications of putting a mother in prison: is it really necessary or are there other ways for her to pay her dues? Putting her in prison and leaving children alone or in the care of someone who is not trustworthy or in an orphanage has a higher social cost

than pursuing justice at all costs. Of course, this also depends on the country and is not always very easy to swallow for some authorities. We are also doing some research with Penal Reform International on the type of information we receive. It is important to know the profiles of women in prison from country

“I think it would be really interesting to do some work on imprisoned fathers because there is a lot less sympathy for them than for mothers”

to country: who they are, what are the main offences committed, how many of them are mothers and of those who are, who is taking care of their children? This is very important for the wider picture to make it easier to advise member states on some of the risks associated with keeping women in prison. It is always easier for me to be convincing if I have data, evidence and clear-cut cases at hand. Statements and principles do not always resonate with the political bodies, in other words: the policy makers. They need statistics and facts.

The other issue is that of high security prisoners who tend to be placed quite far away from their families, and the burden this causes in terms of cost and time. I think it would be really interesting to do some work on imprisoned fathers because there is a lot less sympathy for them than for mothers. It would be interesting to know how many fathers serving a long sentence are actually able to keep a constant and satisfying link to their children.

Are fathers mentioned in the Bangkok Rules?

Yes, they are mentioned in the preliminary observations. The Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) was very active in promoting this during the drafting of the Bangkok Rules: they made it clear that it is very important for fathers to be included. Of course another aspect, which is very important, is the stigma attached to having a parent in prison (for example in school). Although in some communities this can become a matter of pride, it normally

1. Provisions for children of prisoners across the globe

carries with it a huge stigma.

Let's look to the future. How can we take this issue further and make it more accessible to the wider public? How would you advise us on how we could work together to promote and raise awareness about this issue? How can we encourage agencies to establish such a "clear-cut policy" as you mentioned before? Or is it simply not on the priority list right now?

I don't know if it is really on the current priority list. I think the idea is to keep this issue in mind and on the agenda and make sure that efforts are made by media to provide information in the correct way.

"it is the duty of the state to ensure this role as a parent is preserved"

An issue which is cropping up more and more is that of ensuring that prisoners retain their human dignity. A lot has been done by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child with regard to children staying in prison with their mothers and with regard to the best interests of the child. However, not enough is being done to make sure that a parent in prison is still regarded as a parent. It is the duty of the state to ensure this role as a parent is preserved. This should be encouraged and we should continue advocating this at all levels. The media is a useful way to provide good information on this. It is always interesting to see that when there is an article about the rights of children of prisoners in the press, about two-thirds of people react saying we are wasting our time, whereas one-third do agree that it is a topic to consider: the fact that the prison is the deprivation of liberty but not of all liberties. Being a parent is one of those obligations and rights that need to be preserved. In my opinion it is one of the main ones. It has an impact on the future of society.

***Interview conducted by
Hannah Lynn
Project Coordinator
Children of Prisoners Europe***

2. The rights of children to maintain contact with imprisoned parents

In January 2013, the Commissioner for Children's Rights in Cyprus issued a Report on the basis of an investigation conducted by her on the rights of children to maintain contact with their imprisoned parent. The Report includes the Commissioner's suggestions and recommendations regarding the national legal framework, official policies and procedures being followed by the relevant authorities.

The Commissioner decided to carry out her investigation after having received a number of individual complaints in relation to some strict measures adopted by the Prison authorities relating to the communication of imprisoned parents with their children. These measures included the communication taking place behind special glass, thus not permitting physical contact between the child and the parent; and withdrawals of permissions given to parents to visit the child in their house without prior notice of the reasons, therefore seriously compromising the rights of the children who have very limited opportunity to keep in contact with a parent in prison.

In the context of her investigation, the Commissioner intervened in writing to both the Minister of Justice and Public Order and to the Director of Central Prisons. In an extensive correspondence with the latter, the Commissioner gave a comprehensive overview of the national and international legal framework with regards to children's rights in general and to the rights of children with an imprisoned parent in particular. The Commissioner requested that she be informed about prison procedures and rules regulating the communication of prisoners with their children, presented the complaints she had received and asked for the prison authorities' official position with regards to the complaints.

The Commissioner also visited the Central Prisons in order to form a personal opinion about the visiting rooms and spaces used by children when visiting their parent in prison. During her visit, the Commissioner discussed at a meeting with all prison stakeholders (prison administration,

officers from the Ministry of Justice and Public Order, members of the Prison's Council, the prison's psychiatrist and the prison's Welfare Officer) a number of issues regarding the rights of children with a parent in prison in general and their right to maintain a contact with him/her more particularly.

The Commissioner also held separate meetings with a representative of the Mental Health Services as well as with representatives of the Welfare Services.

A member of the Commissioner's Office visited the Central Prisons in order to observe the conditions under which the children's prison visits take place.

The main observations of the Commissioner included:

- The legislation regulating the operation of prisons makes no specific reference to the right of the child to communication with their parent. This legislation provides for the right of the imprisoned person to communicate and maintain contact with, amongst others, their family whereas the right of the child to communicate with their imprisoned parent is secured by the UNCRC (Article 9) which is directly applicable in Cyprus. Yet it became obvious that prison authorities consider the issue of communication between a child and their imprisoned parent not as a right of either the child or the prisoner but, for the most part, as a privilege given only to well-behaved prisoners.
- There is not any established institutional procedure for the provision of psychological support and/or consultation for the parent with whom the child lives.
- Children's visits to their imprisoned parent take place in the absence of any officer responsible for administrative issues that may arrive during the communication.

2. The rights of children to maintain contact with imprisoned parents

- As far as the “closed prison” is concerned, the visiting rooms for both the “closed” and “open” visits are far from being child-friendly. During “closed” visits the communication takes place using a phone machine and behind special glass without any physical contact.

The visiting area in the “open prison” was altered in a child-friendly way after the Commissioner’s intervention to the prison authorities.

In her final remarks, the Commissioner underlines that, despite any improvements that have been made due to the positive response of the prison authorities to some of her previous suggestions, the current conditions under which children visit their imprisoned parent, as well as the established relevant practices and procedures, do not fully comply with children’s rights. The Commissioner concludes her Report with a number of recommendations for actions to be taken with regards to the legal framework and the policies and procedures to be followed, in order to tackle the shortcomings.

Among other issues, the Commissioner recommends :

- That the Ministry of Justice and Public Order and the Directorate of Prisons in collaboration with other involved Ministries and Services consider amendment of the legislative framework in order to ensure its full harmonisation with safeguarding children’s rights.
- The amendment of the legislative framework to support the communication between a child and their imprisoned parent, primarily as a right of the child.
- That guidelines on how prison authorities should tackle issues related to the children and families of prisoners should be developed in collaboration with the prison authorities and the Ministry of Justice and Public Order, the Welfare Services and the Public Mental Health Services. Prison authorities should be made

responsible for the assessment of the implementation of

these guidelines and the result of their assessment is to be subject to external audit.



- That a committee responsible for prisoners’ visits is institutionalised. All prisoners should be informed about how they can submit a request to receive a visit as well as about the criteria and the procedures for decisions regarding issues of prisoners’ communication with their children.
- That prisons should adopt child-friendly security checks for visitors under 18 (physical checks/body scanner) which are in full compliance with children’s rights and more specifically to their right to privacy and physical integrity, security and safety. Prison personnel should be trained in child-appropriate search procedures as well as on more general issues related to children with a parent in prison.
- That every prison should have a designated “children’s and/or family officer”, appropriately trained to support children during visits.
- That children should be provided with age-appropriate information about the various aspects of their life that are being affected by the incarceration of their parent as well as the procedures and regulations in place when visiting their parent in prison. This information should be accessible to all in a child-friendly manner in different languages.
- That visiting hours should take into account school hours, the distances from the family home and the lack of cheap public transportation in order to avoid school absences and to ease the stress of visits.

Leda Koursoumba
Commissioner for Children’s Rights, Cyprus

3. A holistic, comprehensive approach to parental incarceration

The following is a question and answer session with Maria Herczog, Member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Perhaps we could talk a little bit about your work in general for the Committee on the Rights of the Child? How do you view its current progress?

Well, I find the speed at which things are achieved a little bit slow as I am very impatient! I would love to see more implementation of the Convention and to see more caring governments. I have recently felt some frustration there. However, I must say that looking at the progress, there have been a lot of things achieved too.

“when it comes to children, especially vulnerable groups of children who are already excluded or at risk of exclusion, their position has been weakening”

The current financial crisis is really blocking progress and some countries are even showing backwards steps towards more conservative regimes, for example. Some not so favourable directions are emerging, and when it comes to children, especially vulnerable groups of children who are already excluded or at risk of exclusion, their position has been weakening and that is quite visible. There are exceptions, of course, and countries differ widely, but even in the richest countries - the most developed countries - where they have frameworks, policies, even money, not everything is happening as it should.

This is obviously true when we look at children whose parents are incarcerated as they very often already belong to different vulnerable groups and this is an added burden that they have to face. Obviously, many of them come from poor backgrounds: the children are already excluded for many different reasons, such as belonging to minority groups, and

they are deprived of appropriate care and support. In other words, their characteristics are not only determined by the fact that their parents are in prison but also because they are often already on child protection services registers and are suffering for other reasons on top of the fact they have a parent in prison.

What should be happening at the national and/or European level?

One of the issues we've been tackling as a Committee is that expecting mothers and mothers of young children should not be incarcerated if it is not absolutely necessary. There are many alternatives and diversion opportunities, and the Committee often recommends that countries set up a diversion programme and an alternative be provided, as locking up people is neither efficient nor effective, as we know. Furthermore, if children are involved, this is not only a punishment for the parent but also a very severe punishment for the child.

Another issue is that more and more countries are allowing children into the prison system, which is a controversial concept. On the one hand, we welcome the idea that especially very young children who are breastfed or who are born in the prison should stay with their mother. While this may be the case, there are many issues relating to information and limited research, primarily that the parents (in particular mothers) do not get the much-needed support to become good enough parents. Parenting education is lacking and any motivation they may have is not strengthened. On the other hand, when the children reach a certain age, they have to leave the prison system even if their mother remains there, and this often leads to institutionalization of the children. It also quite obviously breaks the cycle of attachment and bonding with their mother. I accept that prison is not an optimal place to be brought up. The question is: why do those who are putting such mothers in prison think that prison is a good solution as a form of punishment? Rethinking is needed, and re-designing. However, I also accept that in the current climate there is sadly a pro-punishment and pro-prison wave emerging. In spite of all evidence

3. A holistic, comprehensive approach to parental incarceration

and clear research outcomes, the public still wants more people imprisoned. This is influencing children's lives.

Furthermore, these children are often stigmatised, which is an extra problem as it leads to a decline in educational achievement and emotional well-being. Many drop out of school as a result of the stigma and bullying. In other cases, the families experience feelings of shame. There was recently an article on imprisoned women in a Hungarian daily newspaper, most of whom do not tell their children that they are in prison.

“these children are often stigmatised, which is an extra problem as it leads to a decline in educational achievement and emotional well-being”

Instead they lie to their children and this breaks the trust between the mother and the child. The secrecy generates tension and trouble for children, and it is for this reason that I do not understand why governments support imprisonment so strongly in these cases.

What forms of alternative sentencing do you suggest?

I very strongly believe in Family Group Conferencing (FGC): alternatives like restorative justice where the parents are not imprisoned but instead are sentenced to community work somehow compensating the victims or reconciliation programmes which help them understand what they have done and also to support the victims involved. I don't believe in the punitive model because it is not efficient. It is not working.

“FGC is an optimal model because then children can participate, all family members are included”

I find Family Group Conferencing very interesting. Especially in cases where mediation is not suggested like in domestic violence cases, even child abuse cases, if it is carefully designed and managed. FGC is an optimal model because then children can participate, all family members are included – it is an education procedure. The family learn how to tackle issues and resolve conflicts. It is cheap, quick and efficient. We as a Committee often suggest that member states give it a try and there are some excellent programmes in Europe, for example in the Netherlands and in the UK.

“there is rarely a holistic, comprehensive approach that takes into consideration all the different aspects of the issue”

In many countries in Europe children refrain from visiting their parents in prison because the prisons are not suitable for visitation. This is another issue; that once a parent is imprisoned, there should be programmes in place to prepare children for visiting their parents and to facilitate a child-friendly environment. We must help not only the child but also the parent. Then the issue of rehabilitation and reintegration should be tackled. These programmes are often very isolated: there is rarely a holistic, comprehensive approach that takes into consideration all the different aspects of the issue. In other words, we need to consider not only the imprisoned parent but also the entire environment where the children are living and where the parents should be reintegrated and supported so as to prevent reoffending and to support the children to accept the parent and not feel hurt or ashamed.

It is also very frustrating that there is hardly any outcome or effectiveness measurements in European countries. Even in the countries that are investing a lot, indicators are missing, and in spite of evidence, i.e., children who are taken into the state system, governments are not looking at the system error, which is extremely important. If an algorithm were used, then you could clearly see the loopholes

3. A holistic, comprehensive approach to parental incarceration

and gaps in the system. There needs to be a rigorous methodology but once that's in place, even lay people who look at it could see the results.

Countries such as the Netherlands, the UK, Sweden and Norway, which may have some interesting initiatives in place, do not investigate whether or not these programmes are successful or not. They look at the input side (providing support and services) and don't measure whether this input is effective or how it could be improved upon. The end product assessment is always missing. Either that or they blame the children (the end product, so to speak) and not the procedure or lack of procedure.

Since your keynote speech at the Maastricht conference on Children with Incarcerated Parents in 2011, what improvements have you seen?

What we have achieved so far is to draw some attention to the issue (thanks to the Quaker United Nations Office). The Committee also learnt a lot from the Day of General Discussion: the publications and the European Survey were very useful. All this has created a lot more awareness, at least among child rights and child welfare specialists. But politicians are not listening. I think the media should be targeted and social media be used. Public opinion plays a huge role in this kind of topic.

In looking to the future, how do we go about promoting this and improving upon the current situation?

We are working on cost benefit and social return analyses and this should be more widespread: we should invest in children, as the recent EU recommendation stipulates (DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion). But just as when we invest in anything, we must make sure the investment is carried out well and that the outcome is successful. In any business investment, the outcome is always assessed, so why wouldn't we do the same with human investment or service provision?

“we should invest in children, as the recent EU recommendation stipulates”

If we look at research to do with incarceration, the results are really poor. There are some good examples/patterns (e.g., alternative sentencing, good reintegration programmes, follow-up monitoring, access support to the family members) and the efficiency is increased. It is not as easy as it sounds, but it can be done. It should be done.

*Interview conducted by
Hannah Lynn
Project Coordinator
Children of Prisoners Europe*

4. Implementing Skype programmes in prisons

The Czech Helsinki Committee has been striving to launch Skype programmes in prison for nearly two years. When we finally reached the phase of setting the concrete terms of cooperation with the Prison Service, two major events in early 2013 brought about further complications.

Firstly, the Director General of the Prison Service of the Czech Republic, who supported the project, was replaced by a new director. As a result, the project had to be renegotiated from square one. The second complication arose after the general pardon of the president of the Czech Republic in January 2013, when the female prison, originally designated for our purpose, was closed.

Meanwhile, we initiated negotiations with the interest group CZ.nic, which agreed to participate in the development of special software to ensure safety and security for our purpose. Under this partnership, we once again invited the representatives of the Prison Service headquarters to agree on the pilot project conditions and necessary preparatory measures.

“according to the law, phone calls in prison are subjected to many restrictions”

Despite expressing their willingness to participate in the project, the headquarters put forward some requirements which were financially and technically very demanding and that did not seem feasible as part of the proposed project. They also highlighted various legislative, operational and technical barriers. According to the law, phone calls in prison are subjected to many restrictions. Each phone call must be approved in advance



and it is always recorded. The Prison Service requires ensuring the same regulations for Skype visits. They also voiced concerns over having their internal IT system hacked.

“we explored how similar types of communication schemes operate around the world”

To strengthen our argument, we explored how similar types of communication schemes operate around the world. We found information about Skype calls in Benton Country Jail in the United States. They have a system that includes a monitor with microphone in each inmate pod house, which has between 30 and 60 inmates. Each monitor is connected to a main monitoring station that is constantly supervised by a corrections employee. The Skype computer is also connected to the visitation monitoring system. A visitor must schedule a visit a day in advance. They then set up a specific time, and the visitor calls them via Skype at this appointed time. Once a good connection is established and they can see the visitor on the monitor they connect the visitor to the appropriate inmate pod. Their monitor has a split screen whereby they can see the inmate and the visitor at the same time, allowing them to view the visit to ensure safety and security. If any inappropriate behaviour takes place, they can immediately terminate the visit. The system is relatively simple and works very well.

We presented this to CZ.nic and the Prison Service, but in the end CZ.nic decided no longer to participate, as such a system was less interesting for them as computer programme developers. The Prison Service suddenly refused to continue in elaboration of the project and referred us directly to the Ministry of Justice.

4. Implementing Skype programmes in prisons

After meeting with the deputy of the Prison Service in September, we definitively agreed on the following conditions:

- This type of communication will be called a “Skype visitation” because the form of visit better corresponds with a personal visit where there are fewer security measures than there are for phone calls (terminology proved to be more important than we had originally thought).
- The scheme will be launched in January 2014 in the women’s prison Svetla nad Sazavou because we have been cooperating with them for over seven years and their governor is very open-minded.
- We will start with the Skype visitation programme in one prison and this programme will be used on a rotating basis.

Following our discussion with the deputy, if the pilot project proves to be functional and efficient, they will be ready to roll out one Skype programme for each prison in the Czech Republic.

“we can still call this a small revolution”

The resulting project is only partially faithful to my original idea, yet we can still call this a small revolution.

Marketa Kovarikova
Czech Helsinki Committee

5. Hope across continents

Sarah Roberts of Families Outside describes her visit to two Ugandan prisons during this year's International Study Week on Children of Prisoners, hosted by Wells of Hope, which took place in Kampala in September.

It is perhaps no surprise that my first visit to a Ugandan prison felt, initially, very similar to the experience I had visiting prisons in Scotland; Luzira Upper Prison for men, situated on the outskirts of Kampala, was built in 1927, while Uganda was still under British rule. Entering the prison and going through the security felt pretty familiar to me, with its high external walls, barbed wire fencing and prominence of prison guards.

“I found myself asking, as I often do in Scotland, whether these men’s stories would have been different had they completed their education”

What was very different about this visit was that we were visiting death row prisoners. Although the last known execution in Uganda took place

several years ago, the men live in the knowledge that they will die in prison one way or another, and this makes their concern for their families, and their relationships with their children, all the more poignant.

In a focus group discussion, the men, clad in the death row uniform of white shorts and T-shirts, spoke about the importance of school and felt strongly that if they had received a better education, they would not be in prison; of twenty-five, only five of the men had completed primary school, with just three going on to secondary. As I listened to them talk (“Education is the key to the future”; “I don’t want my children to follow in my footsteps”; “Literacy is important”), I found myself asking, as I often do in Scotland, whether these men’s stories would have been different had they completed their education.

Later that day, we visited Luzira Women’s Prison. Eight women, in bright yellow dresses, were huddled on the floor; we were offered chairs to sit on, but it seemed wrong to do that, so we took off our shoes and sat with them (it is common in Ugandan prisons for prisoners to sit on the floor while visitors take a chair).

As their stories unfolded in Lugandan, we were grateful for the pauses for translation that allowed us to take in what they were saying. These stories were heartbreaking. Joyce (not her real name) was arrested in 2000. Her property was destroyed by those who arrested her, and her daughter (just a baby at twenty months) went to live with Joyce’s mother, ten hours away from the



voicing the needs
of families affected
by imprisonment



Francis and Sarah Roberts during the event in Uganda

5. Hope across continents

prison. She had lost hope, she told us, until about a year ago when Wells of Hope staff visited her in prison and listened to her story. Wells of Hope, our host charity for the study week, exists to support families affected by imprisonment. In this case, staff managed to track Joyce's mother and daughter and quickly established that a place at the Wells of Hope Academy boarding school would be helpful; Joyce's mother had been condemned by the community for her daughter's crime and was struggling to raise her granddaughter, never mind send her to school. Now Joyce's daughter not only receives education and support, she is able to visit her mother in prison three times a year (in Uganda one visit a year is considered good). "I had lost hope," Joyce told us, "but now I am a prisoner of hope."

In reflecting on these visits, I wondered what the Scottish (SPS) and Ugandan (UPS) prison services might learn from one another. It seems obvious to highlight where the UPS might make improvements: visits are a far cry from child-friendly, and in many cases, people travel extraordinary distances for just fifteen minutes with their relative; phone calls are not possible either into, or from, the prison; and there are practices, such as prisoners sitting on the floor, that are hard to understand. But the learning is not just one way. In both Ugandan prisons, I was struck by the sense of community among the prisoners. Communal cooking, singing, and dancing are common practice and give prisoners a sense of belonging and purpose; there was a spirit of togetherness among the prisoners that felt transformative. Joyce's declaration of being a prisoner of hope has stayed with me, and I wonder how many prisoners within the SPS would describe themselves like that?

"the International Study Week on Children of Prisoners made me appreciate the Scottish Prison Service in a new way"

There is something helpful about stepping out of your own culture and having the space to reflect on issues and challenges from a different perspective; the International Study Week on Children of Prisoners made me appreciate the SPS in a new way, but also gave me a vision for how things might be different, too. It helped me realise the importance of hope and left me with the feeling that if every prison service across the world had as its goal to nurture prisoners of hope, we would be living in a very different world.

To read more of Sarah's experiences in Uganda, visit the Families Outside Facebook page.

Sarah Roberts
Families Outside

6. A call for reliable data collection in Germany

Morning Tears is an NGO working for children of imprisoned parents in a worldwide context. Our main focus is on China and developing countries like Cambodia, but by founding Morning Tears Germany we have opened yet another office in Europe which not only focuses on fundraising but engages in projects within the country as well. Other European offices include Denmark, Belgium, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands.

“our understanding of the situation is always seen within a European context and we aspire to compare and learn from the different countries and their projects and social systems”

I started volunteering for Morning Tears when I was living in Shanghai, China and learned much about the traumatic situation which children face when they are separated from their parents. I also learned what we can do to rebuild the worlds which they had lost by providing them homes and offering psychological support. Upon moving to Germany, my view shifted to focus more on the stigma and trauma these children often face in other countries worldwide.

Understanding the situation in Germany became one of my main tasks for research. As Morning Tears is based in Belgium with the Morning Tears Alliance office, our understanding of the situation is always seen within a European context and we aspire to compare and learn from the different countries and their projects and social systems.

Although the situation in Germany differs from many other countries in Europe, data on prisoners and their children have so far mostly stemmed from estimates in comparison with other countries such as France. The German situation is actually very different from France, due to our federal government structure and a decentralized structure of both the laws on prisons as well as on

social welfare.

None of the federal states officially collects data on children of convicted parents. If data is collected upon incarceration, then it is not systematised. In Berlin, for example, prisoners are asked if they have children but the answer is not obligatory. Responding to such questions is only compulsory if it is needed for provision of social welfare or financial support.

“if data does not exist, no call for political action is needed”

When researching the data situation in Germany, the federal system complicates efforts to obtain collective data. Prior to the conference of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva 2011, the German government had been asked by the Green Party if data existed.¹ The answer to this request (1707231 Antwort kl. Anfrage) was that, overall, the number of children affected was not known, and that data collection was the legal responsibility of the federal states. Further collection was not planned: this they maintained because children in need would find support within the social welfare system without specifying the reasons.

Consequently, no specific data on children of imprisoned parents in Germany exists, which makes this group of children even more invisible than the children's own reaction to their stigma – not to talk about it in public. If data does not exist, no call for political action is needed.

In Germany, several small organisations work on a regional level for the support of children of imprisoned parents. A proper data collection in a nationwide context would bring more attention to the extent of the problem in Germany. Estimates go as high as 100,000 children being affected.²

The EU-funded COPING Project gathered data

1. Available in German

2. Schützwohl, 2012. Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft für Straffälligenhilfe (BAG-S) e.V.

6. A call for reliable data collection in Germany

in Germany via the NGO and university involved in the study, as they contacted all prisons nationwide and asked for prisoners to participate. One hundred and forty-five children in Germany between 7-17 years of age participated.

“a national data collection network would create a much louder voice for the children of prisoners”

To my knowledge, only one federal state, Baden-Württemberg, has a programme in place (Projekt Chance e.V.) which runs a data collection scheme in all prisons. The state itself, however, does not collect the data. This is the only programme gathering increasing amounts of data through their participants. The positive reception of Project Chance's father-child-group is an example clearly showing the needs of the children and families, which only surface once they are addressed systematically and over a longer period of time.

Reliable and continuous data collection, established inside the judicial system, would make the support for these children a more pressing matter to be addressed politically. Morning Tears can only agree with BAG-S (Federal Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders) recommendations for a family-friendly penal system, asking for statistical assessment. Reliable data might also strengthen combined efforts by small initiatives and organisations which all campaign

in their own terrain to secure funding. A national data collection network would create a much louder voice for the children of prisoners.

While prison laws and social intervention will remain the responsibility of the

federal governments and laws, it would be desirable to initiate data collection on a national scale and to do studies which further support in-depth data collection. This would surely enhance societal recognition of this group of children, and help establish a family-sensitive penal system tailored to the actual needs of children of imprisoned parents in Germany.

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morning tears
we believe in children

7. Involving children in research: Challenges & opportunities

The University of Huddersfield, England has been the lead organisation in an EU-funded study into the mental health and well-being of children (aged 7-17 years) of prisoners, involving NGOs and universities across Europe. The study, which was directed by Professor Adele Jones, was entitled Children of Prisoners: Interventions and Mitigations to Strengthen Mental Health (The COPING Project).¹ Data collection was undertaken in four countries (Germany, Romania, Sweden and the UK) and the study took place from January 2010 to December 2012. I work in the Division of Social Work at the University of Huddersfield, and had managerial responsibility for the conduct of a questionnaire-based survey among children and their non-imprisoned parents.

The survey faced a series of challenges. The first of these was determining the specific areas we should focus upon. We made these decisions on the basis of discussions within the research consortium, consultations with other “experts” working in this field and a review of previous research. We opted for quite an ambitious set of questions. The child questionnaire, for instance, incorporated three standardised questionnaires and six additional sections covering, for example, socio-demographic characteristics and the effects of parental imprisonment. One of the particular issues we wrestled with was whether we should enquire into any offending by the children. In the end, we decided against asking such questions.

Questionnaires can be a very effective means of gathering information. However, as they are designed to be self-completed, it is essential they are formatted in such a way that they are straightforward to answer. My colleagues and I had to spend a considerable amount of time reflecting on how the questionnaire should be structured around



1. Jones, A., et al., 2013 Children of Prisoners: Interventions and mitigations to strengthen mental health. University of Huddersfield.

areas such as font size and style, spacing and the use of graphics.

“none of the countries that took part in the COPING study kept a centralised record as to which prisoners had children”

In formatting the child and parent/carer questionnaires we were mindful of other considerations that were methodological but also ethical. Thus, we started the questionnaire with relatively neutral questions before moving on to increasingly sensitive questions but finishing with positive and empowering questions.

None of the countries that took part in the COPING study kept a centralised record as to which prisoners had children (although Sweden, unlike most, if not all other European states, does record this information in individual prisoner files). This meant that there was no feasible way of identifying the population that was of interest to us. Partly as a result of this, a range of methods were used to identify samples to take part in the survey. These included asking prison officers to identify prisoners with families (Germany), direct contact with prisoners (Romania), approaching families that were known to relevant NGOs (Sweden) and making contact with families as they visited prisons (UK).

Addressing some of these ethical procedures involved in the research, such as obtaining informed consent and upholding confidentiality, proved to be relatively simple. However, there were noticeably more ethical issues that we had anticipated, and also marked differences between the research teams as to how they had addressed or had wished to address the various ethical procedures.

Much of this complexity arose because there were quite different expectations surrounding research ethics in the four countries. In Romania, for example, there was no requirement – and indeed lit-

7. Involving children in research: Challenges & opportunities

tle infrastructure – to obtain ethical approval. In Germany and Sweden it is considered unethical to ask a person about their ethnicity based upon their physical appearance, whereas in the UK this is standard practice not only in research but also in the collection of official (i.e., government) statistics.

“it struck us that many of the participants welcomed the opportunity to be listened to”

The large majority of participants appeared to find the survey quite demanding, in terms of time and effort, but otherwise relatively straightforward. It also seemed that they did not find the questions too personal nor overly negative. On the contrary, it struck us that many of the participants welcomed the opportunity to be listened to, and to feel that their views and experiences could have some impact upon the development of services.

“our experience could be used as a ‘lever’ ”

The COPING project shows that there are a number of quite formidable obstacles to overcome in undertaking research with children of prisoners. At the same time, though, the project reveals that it is possible to collect comprehensive and valuable information on the situation of this marginalised group. This information can, in turn, be used to campaign for improvements in policy and practice. We feel that our experience could be used as a “lever”, to encourage governments to record statistics on the number and characteristics of children of prisoners. Such data collection exercises could also have a more aspirational goal; giving a voice to the views and experiences of children of prisoners who hitherto have been largely silenced.

*Bernard Gallagher
University of Huddersfield*

8. Filling the research gap: Women prisoners and their families

A considerable amount of research is available on the causes of crime, characteristics of offenders and the impact of imprisonment. However, most of this research overlooks female offenders and the minority women prison population. As a consequence little information is available on the backgrounds, characteristics and needs of female offenders and women prisoners, and even less so on the impact on their children.

“what kind of support do these women feel would help them most in building new, self-supporting lives with their families?”

To help address this gap, Penal Reform International (PRI) has started to engage in a multi-regional research project (funded by the UK Government) which aims to increase the knowledge about female offenders and the impact of their imprisonment on their lives and families. The research seeks to answer questions such as: what



Drawing from the Penal Reform International website

triggered their confrontation with the criminal justice system? Do they have dependent children? Where are their children living? What are the consequences for them of conviction and imprisonment? And perhaps most importantly: what kind of support do these women feel would help them most in building new, self-supporting lives with their families following release?

Answers to these questions are of more than just academic interest. Increasing the knowledge about the background, characteristics and social reintegration needs of female offenders is an important first step for policy-makers and practitioners to review and adjust legislation and policies in a gender-sensitive way.

Such action should be guided by the UN Bangkok Rules, a set of international standards adopted three years ago unanimously by 193 countries at the UN General Assembly. These Rules supplement other international standards, including the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners and the Tokyo Rules on Non-Custodial Measures, both lacking in gender-specific guidance. Notably, the UN Bangkok Rules represent the first set of universally agreed UN standards that address the situation of children whose parents are imprisoned, and recognise the critical role of research, encouraging it in Rule 67 which served as the inspiration for PRI's research.

PRI's research has covered four countries so far – Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan – with each country presenting its own challenges. Geared to enhancing the results, the methodology had to ensure that the women prisoners were voluntarily and confidentially participating in the survey, in order not to expose them to any risk of reprisals. The location of prisons was also a challenge. In Kazakhstan, our research team's journey to a geographically isolated prison in Kazakhstan – housing 1,000 women – highlighted the social isolation faced by women prisoners in a facility far from their homes and difficult to reach ([read a blog on this](#)). Data on the background of women in prison is sparse and prison registers do not in

8. Filling the research gap: Women prisoners and their families



Drawing from the Penal Reform International website

clude information on caretaking responsibilities. Failure to ask women prisoners at admission to voluntarily register any children hinders the prison administration's duty to facilitate contact with family, including their children, which is a crucial part of the successful rehabilitation of prisoners (see Bangkok Rules, Rules 6 on registration and 26 on facilitating contact).

The impact of women's imprisonment on their children becomes apparent when looking at the outcomes of the surveys from Georgia and Armenia as detailed in [Who are women prisoners? Survey results from Armenia and Georgia](#). PRI surveyed around 70 per cent of the female prison population in both countries and found that 8 in 10 women were mothers – this totalled 486 children affected in Georgia, and 221 children in Armenia, although not all children were listed as 18 years or younger.

Among the practical consequences of imprisonment, the most common in all four countries were the loss of jobs and housing. Relating to family life, nearly a quarter of women surveyed in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan had endured a family breakdown as a result of their imprisonment. On average, 44.5 per cent of women in Georgia and

Armenia responded that they required support with childcare and family reunification in order to help them build a new life upon release.

“facts and figures are crucial in developing a penal system that adequately meets the needs of both women in prison and their children”

PRI hopes that this research project contributes to filling the knowledge gap on women offenders and the impact it has on their lives, including their family life. We hope that research initiatives are also undertaken by other organisations, international and regional institutions and national governments. Facts and figures are crucial in developing a penal system that adequately meets the needs of both women in prison and their children – a vulnerable and frequently overlooked group.

Our research methodology and programmed database is available to other organisations and institutions who would like to embark on similar projects.

For more resources on women in detention, see Penal Reform International's [Toolbox on the UN Bangkok Rules](#) which includes a free online course and other guidance resources on a gender-sensitive criminal justice system.

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9. Coping and resilience: Strategies and signs

A basic definition of “resilience” is an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change. Children who are confronted with the situation of parental imprisonment are forced to adjust to a new way of life; it is how they adjust and to what extent, that demonstrates different levels of resilience to the often difficult situation in which they find themselves. According to the COPING Project report, “researchers often see resilience as a process that is affected by personality factors, biological factors, environmental systematic factors or an interaction between all three.”¹

Caution must be exercised, however, when using the term “resilience” as it is problematic to assume that any two children’s experiences of parental imprisonment will be the same. Resilience is the ability to bounce back from a traumatic event or situation. Thus, talking about the resilience displayed by a child automatically assumes that the child has experienced a trauma. However, as Alain Bouregba, director of the Fédération des Relais Enfants Parents in France, points out, this does not leave room for those children who do not experience trauma in relation to their parent’s imprisonment.

One of France’s most eminent proponents of the concept of “resilience” is Boris Cyrulnik. For Cyrulnik,² resilience is a natural, evolving and interactive process, which depends more on an individual’s environment than on the individual himself. A child who has been abandoned or neglected may recover from a situation if he or she is provided with a stable, emotional niche and a reassuring adult. He also talks of the importance of the society and culture that the child experiences, in enabling them to overcome a traumatic event. In order to help children who are affected by parental imprisonment, everyone who comes into contact with the child or whose actions affect the child involved must work together: there must be a collective effort. Appropriate public policies must also be put in place which endorse and en-

courage the support that the child’s environment can offer.

According to J. A. Norman (2000: 3), as cited in the COPING report, resilience is the combination of two conditions: “risk factors – stressful life events or adverse environmental conditions that increase the vulnerability of individuals – and the presence of personal, familial and community protective factors that buffer, moderate and protect against vulnerabilities”. It is Norman’s view that, “individuals differ in their exposure to adversity (vulnerability) and the degree of protection afforded by their own capacities and by their environment (protective factors)”.

Strategies of resilience

Children inevitably develop different ways of coping with their new family situation. It appears that opportunities for safe open discussion with primary caregivers, prisoner parents, and with classmates, friends and teachers can positively affect the child’s capacity for resilience. Discussion and sharing experiences and feelings can promote exchange of information and empathy; both of which can be reassuring for a child in such a position. Indeed, Cyrulnik deems that solitude or isolation is the surest way to prevent resilience.

That being said, not all children wish to or feel safe to discuss and share their problems. It should be underlined that in most cases one of the strongest desires of a child of a prisoner is to live as normal a life as possible. It therefore must not be overlooked that some children are liable to put a considerable amount of effort and energy into making their life appear normal, even if it is not. It is often observed that children do not let themselves show negative emotions or emotions that make them appear not to be coping with their parent’s imprisonment. Covering up their true feelings is a common coping strategy in these situations. It should not, however, be automatically interpreted as true coping with the situation. Suppression of a problem can be confused with resilience towards a problem. While suppression may have some

1. Jones, A. et al, 2013. ‘The COPING Project: Children of prisoners: Interventions and mitigations to strengthen mental health’. University of Huddersfield, p.62

2. See, for example, (in French) [and here](#)

9. Coping and resilience: Strategies and signs

seemingly positive effects in the short term, in the long term these effects can be harmful.

Maintaining positive and stable family ties, both with the imprisoned parent and also within the family unit outside the prison, has been shown to promote resilience. This resilience is enhanced in particular when the non-imprisoned care giver, “promote[s] all possible opportunities for contact between the child and the parent in prison”.³ In this way, family cohesion plays an important role in the resilience of the child to the problematic situation: “where the parents’ relationships were under strain, there was potential for children’s resilience to be adversely affected”.⁴

Key factors contributing to resilience include maintaining contact with the imprisoned parent, maintaining an open and honest relationship with the care giver and support from family and friends. Access to interventions and services appropriate to the child’s needs can considerably contribute to strengthening resilience. Other factors include the age of the child; the gravity of the crime committed and the length of the sentence; the child’s relationship with the imprisoned parent prior to imprisonment and the relative stability of his or her environment, at home and at school. Personal qualities such as maturity, self-esteem and self-worth also play an important role.⁵ Looking ahead, exchanging with other children whose parents are imprisoned, playing games, writing letters and striving hard at school may also be successful coping strategies.

Signs of resilience

There are various aspects of a child’s behaviour, which act as signs in demonstrating varying levels of that child’s resilience. These behavioural aspects can include social interactions, the child’s ability to juggle day-to-day activities with the stress of having a parent in prison, the child’s progress at school, and, of course, the child’s mental and physical health and stability.

3. Jones, A. et al, 2013. op. cit. p302

4. Ibid.

5 Ibid.

According to the COPING Project report, “children with a parent/carer in prison were found to be at significantly greater risk of mental health problems than their peers”.⁶ This may be, in part, linked to the internalisation of problems on the part of children, which can lead to emotional and psychological issues.

Studying children’s coping strategies is vital for researchers who wish to implement a “positive psychology” approach, in order to move away from a focus on the negative effects of parental imprisonment and towards encouragement for the promotion of resilience and the implementation of successful interventions to reduce the adverse impacts on children’s health and well-being that parental incarceration can cause.

The extent to which a child is able to cope with an adverse and unfamiliar situation is based on an interaction between the impact on their lives (risk factors) and the presence of support structures and personal, familial and community help (protective factors). The COPING project, and practitioners who have extensive experience of working with children whose parents are in prison, consider the rapport between risk factors and protective factors; they try to assess how protective factors can support a child of an imprisoned parent and how best to offer a child circumstances where they are most likely to benefit from these protective factors and develop resilience. Arguably, further extensive research on the coping and resilience strategies of children of imprisoned parents would increase our knowledge and understanding of their situations and needs and reinforce our capacity for successful interventions. Even without further research, it seems highly probable that if the panoply of COPING recommendations, created on the basis of current understanding, were implemented, then the general resilience of children with imprisoned parents across Europe would be significantly increased.

*Hannah Lynn
Editor*

*Project Coordinator,
Children of Prisoners Europe*

6. Jones, A. et al, 2013. op. cit. p302

10. The Italian Spazio Giallo model: an innovative resilience tool

Bambinisenzasbarre's pilot project Spazio Giallo (Yellow Space) provides a model for facilitating and supporting children visiting their parents in prison. The Spazio Giallo system offers both a child-friendly welcome area and a specially-designed "pathway" through the prison which encompasses all the different steps involved in visiting one's parent in prison, such as the security search and the waiting time, for example. In this way, children are actively involved in the entire procedure of the prison visit and the necessary protocols are explained to them in such a way as to help them understand the process. Specially trained professionals work closely with the children in order to support them in their "journey" through the prison visit. In this way, the Spazio Giallo model can be seen as a resilience tool for children of imprisoned parents.

Bambinisenzasbarre maintains that in Italy, 100,000 children visit their parent in prison every year (flow rate). In Milan, 5,000 children visit the city's three prisons: San Vittore, Bollate and Opera. Every child is granted six to eight hours of visits, which more or less amounts to a weekly visit with their imprisoned parent. This is the only way to maintain the essential bonds with their parent. Visiting a prison is a fine balancing act for all children, between what is likely to have a strong emotional impact and what could potentially have a traumatic one.



From a regional to a national network: the regions in Italy where Bambinisenzasbarre's Spazio Giallo project is already present and active.

The Spazio Giallo project, designed and put into place by Bambinisenzasbarre, puts together the various theoretical and practical aspects of a model for welcoming children and families into prisons and helping them adjust to and cope with the unfamiliar situation. This model has been set up and tested by Bambinisenzasbarre over 12 years, in cooperation with the Regional Superintendency of Prison Administration (Lombardy Prap) for the protection of child-parent relationships. The Spazio Giallo was created in response to the last European resolution on the European Prison Rules 2007/2116 (INI), which was approved in Strasbourg on 13 March 2008, as well as in relation to Article 9 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which concerns the child's right to contact with both parents, even if he or she does not live with them. The Spazio Giallo initiative was mentioned in the Italian Justice Ministry's report to the Italian Senate's Human Rights Committee (on 24 October 2013), regarding the process of acquiring special areas or spaces in prisons. Furthermore, these Spazio Giallo areas are designed to meet the demands of the recent Ministry proposal concerning support given to maintaining child-parent relationships in prison (Ministerial memorandum 10 December 2009: PEA 16/2007, Penitentiary treatment and parenthood – Facilitating the procedure and visits between a child and his/her imprisoned parent).

The model provides both a welcome area and a specially-designed "pathway" for children to follow while visiting their parents in prison: a three-part approach that involves the prison and its staff in the process of welcoming children into the prison and making them feel at ease:

- The Spazio Giallo itself: the social and educational space inside the prison, where children prepare for their visit with their parent.
- "Finding Daddy": a special pathway designed to lead the child through the prison. From the prison entrance, to the visiting area and right up to the prison's exit, this path passes through all the intermediate steps, such as the docu

10. The Italian Spazio Giallo model: an innovative resilience tool

- ment check, the search and possible confiscation of personal objects, the security search, the time spent waiting to be allowed to see their parent, the visit itself – the key moment of the path – and the subsequent separation as the child leaves the prison.
- A map to guide the children through the different steps of the process. The operational protocols for access to the prison become the steps of this child-friendly “welcoming path”, which help to mitigate any potential traumas caused by the impact of the unfamiliar environment of the prison which is often perceived as hostile.

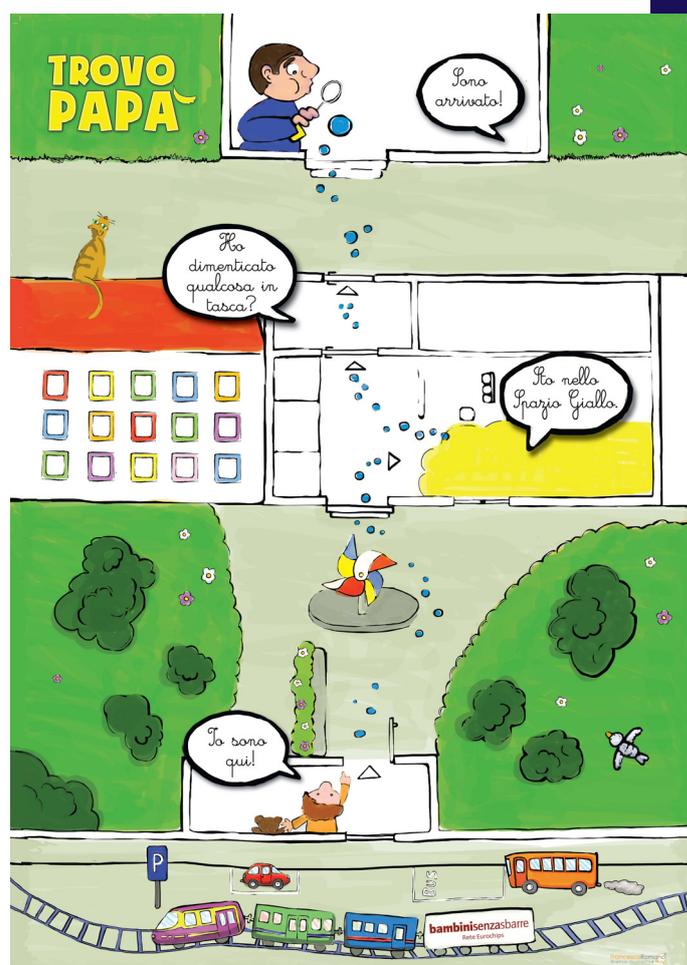
The Spazio Giallo is a special area for children within the prison where they wait to see their parent. Specially trained staff, such as psychologists, pedagogues and art therapists, work with the children in this waiting area and are ready to deal with any anxieties, expectations and questions the children may have, as well as to prepare them for their visit.

The Spazio Giallo model is a strategic connection point between the outside world and the inside of the prison. It has become an indispensable project thanks to the positive effects it has on the children: a change of attitudes in society, alleviation of the distress and trauma of a prison visit and the fact that it has started a whole social inclusion process by local authorities and their services.

The Spazio Giallo is an area where prison staff can learn new ways of interaction with the children and an opportunity for them to change their approach to children. In other words, the Spazio Giallo areas can be seen as a training space. Indeed, the day-to-day activities of the Spazio Giallo areas can provide innovative awareness-raising and training for prison officers. Working alongside Bambinisenzasbarre staff can bring about gradual shifts in their attitudes and approach towards children. This “work shadowing” technique has been successful in producing this outcome.

The first Spazio Giallo was launched in San Vittore (a pre-trial detention centre) in 2007 and then rolled out in Bollate prison (2009) and in Opera (a high-security establishment) in 2012. In 2013, the project expanded to three prisons in northern Italy and there are plans to roll out the project to prisons throughout Italy (see map below). The project has also been mentioned by the Italian Justice Ministry and was recognised as a model in the aforementioned speech given to the Italian Senate’s Human Rights Committee.

*Lia Sacerdote
Bambinisenzasbarre*



The map of the pathway created by Bambinisenzasbarre indicating all the steps from the prison entrance to the visiting area.

11. Conclusion

One of the main objectives of this series of four Special Edition newsletters has been to broaden our understanding of the various practices, regulations and judicial contexts that affect children of imprisoned parents. As a European network we strongly believe in the importance of sharing ideas and information. Indeed, we are very grateful to all our contributors for their support of this project and the valuable insights we have gained through their articles and interviews. Certainly we have learnt a lot from the process.

These newsletters have not only provided us with insight into the various good practices and initiatives being carried out across Europe, but they have also helped to further highlight certain gaps in the existing research and regulations, the most pertinent of which perhaps being the lack of national systems for recording and systematising data on this group of children.

The inability to establish accurate data on the numbers of affected children and other baseline measures (e.g., numbers experiencing scholastic difficulties, housing problems or financial hardship, frequency of prison contact) hinders our capacity to “report back” to policymakers and decision-makers on the success rates of preventive support mechanisms for affected children. We must continue to promote data collection at the national, pan-European and international levels.

We need both national and international agencies to implement proceedings whereby prisoners are asked whether or not they have children and if so, how many, how old, where they are currently living. We need prison services and other national agencies to log how many children visit their prison on any given day and how many prisoners who are parents do not receive visits from their children. With these four newsletters acting somewhat as our impetus, we are now in a position where we are able to launch further editions, investigations and research specifically into the topic of data collection and children of imprisoned parents. Through the collective efforts of all

of our contributors, we have learned much about the various practices and initiatives taking place across Europe and further afield. These contributions have enabled us to build our case as to why we need to encourage the collection of data relating to children whose parents are imprisoned at both the national and international level.

The newsletters have also expanded our database of contacts and information, which has opened new doors and is, of course, crucial in an ever-growing European network. Among others, we very much look forward to working more closely with Penal Reform International on the issue of data collection and prisoner questionnaires relating to their familial situations. The Prison Service in Slovenia collects data on prisoners’ family status, recorded in individual personal files. During recent discussions, the Slovenian Prison Service agreed to explore systematising this information. They are also members of an EU expert group on data collection, organised by Europris, an NGO that brings together EU prison authorities, which could bring the issue onto a European level.

These newsletters have been funded by a European Commission DG Justice Operating Grant which we were awarded this year and for which we are very grateful. We are also indebted to our main funder, the Bernard van Leer Foundation, without whose support we would not be able to carry out the work we do today.

We hope you have found these research newsletters a useful and interesting source of information and that they may form an educational base that may be tapped into for future research projects.

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