



Support for Fathers, Support for Children: A Briefing of the Papa Plus Initiative

BACKGROUND AND THEORY

In the European Union, some 800,000 children are separated from a parent in prison. The pan-European network Children of Prisoners Europe (COPE) has been working with the Fédération des Relais Enfants Parents (FREPE) for 20 years to support initiatives across Europe that focus on preserving and strengthening bonds between children and their parent in prison, as well as working for a positive future for these children. Psychological studies have proven multiple times that children with an inmate parent are at higher risk for a range of ill effects. In addition, the incarceration of a parent can often expose an array of other issues in a family situation including financial issues, housing shortages, and stigma.

The Papa Plus initiative was launched in 2018 as a response to a lack of programming specifically for fathers in prison and the prison staff working with them. An estimated 96 per cent of incarcerated parents are fathers in Europe. Given that fewer support mechanisms are in place for imprisoned fathers, the child-father relationship is more prone to suffer. Many fathers experience difficulties in remaining responsible, committed parents; many lose contact with their children. As a consequence, an exponential number of children are adversely affected by the imprisonment of their fathers. These difficulties are compounded by the humiliation, alienation and exclusion common to many prison settings, which can negatively impact parenting and distort the child-parent bond, with the child "taking charge" of the parent emotionally and the child's need for emotional support from the parent going unmet. In some cases, if adequate support for the parent is not provided during incarceration, the child's inability or refusal to meet the parent's emotional needs can have deleterious repercussions following the parent's release back into the home.

BULGARIA

Bulgaria signed the UN Convention on Child Rights in May 1990, ratifying it in June 1991. For the 12,500 children in Bulgaria who have a father in prison, support systems are not always well-established, and the child-parent bond may suffer. The Papa Plus

programme came as a response to the need for such support systems, developing out of a support initiative for imprisoned mothers by the Sofia-based organisation Child and Space. Child and Space carried out a one-year study that involved fifty women and mothers with children living both in and outside the prison, as well as professionals working in the Social Action and Rehabilitation sector. The project had two axes: workshops with imprisoned mothers and training professionals working in the Social Action and Rehabilitation sector. Given what was seen to be a general lack of awareness among prison staff of what is at stake for both children and parents in the carceral context, there was a move to create Papa Plus to support fathers' positive parenting, including training surrounding how to preserve and strengthen the child-father bond and how to promote communication and contact with families in order to facilitate reintegration after time served.

COPE aims to implement its Papa Plus parent support model for imprisoned fathers in Bulgaria, through close collaboration with Child and Space. COPE's training of Child and Space staff will be carried out ensuring consideration of their previous experience and expertise. Child and Space will train prison staff to consider the needs of children and their imprisoned parents in their everyday work. While facing these challenges it is imperative for COPE, FREP and Child and Space to bear in mind the core values of our mission; children's rights.

PAPA PLUS

The ultimate goal of the Papa Plus programme is to enhance the protection of children's rights and wellbeing by supporting the bond between father and child, and in so doing supporting a more respectful and calm prison atmosphere. Dynamic security—the idea that promoting family contact calms the prison atmosphere—is a central tenant of Papa Plus, demonstrating the kinds of reciprocal relationships that can emerge when prison administrations and staff work with prisoners to support them as parents. The program itself focuses on integrating techniques and practices currently utilized by FREP in France into the Bulgarian penitentiary system. Aspects such as training for all people that might come into contact with a child. It also works with parental support specifically for fathers. This initiative included producing a 'Papa Plus' video created to be utilized as a training tool for prison services in rethinking their approach when speaking to and disciplining parents.

The overall backdrop to the Papa Plus initiative is [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2018\)5 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States concerning children with imprisoned parents](#), in particular Articles 26 through 27.5 of the Recommendation:

Selection

26. Persons who work with prisoners who are parents shall be selected on criteria that include child-aware sensitivity, interaction skills and abilities to support the child-parent relationship.

Training

27.1. Staff involved in the admission of prisoners who are parents shall be appropriately trained to interact with them in a sensitive manner.

27.2. Training shall be provided to all persons who work with children of prisoners and with imprisoned parents on the following: how to respect children's needs and rights; the impact of imprisonment and the prison setting on children, the parental role; how to support prisoner-parents and better understand the particular problems faced by such prisoners.

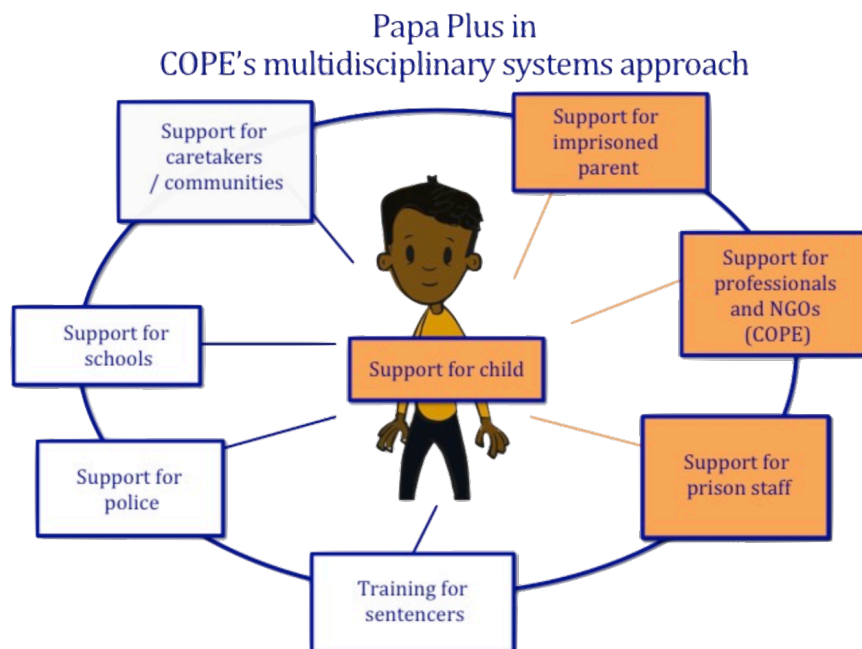
27.3. Such training should include making visits child-friendly and how to search children appropriately.

27.4. Training programmes shall be evaluated and revised regularly to ensure they reflect changing populations and social circumstances and up-to-date practice.

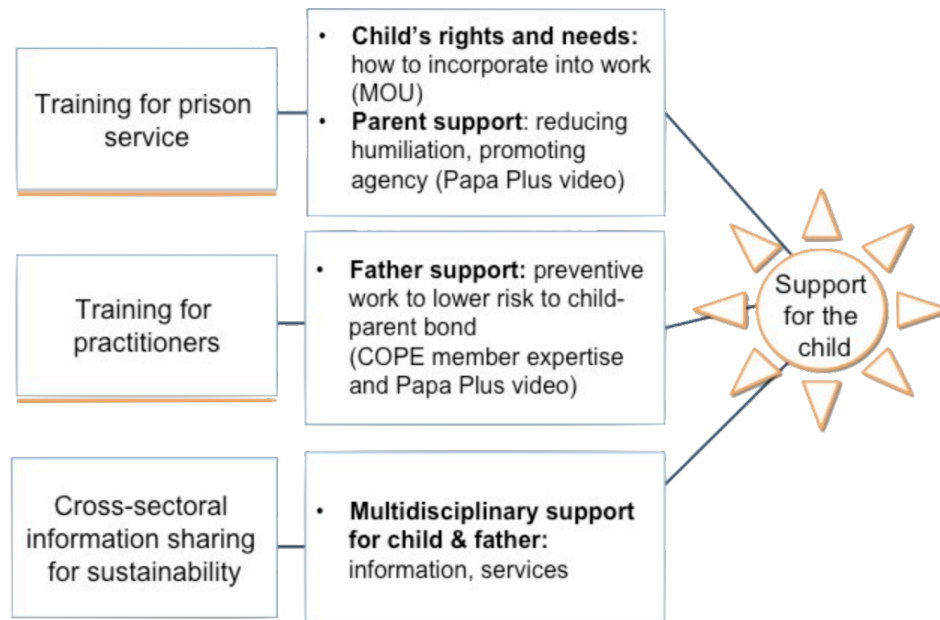
27.5. Persons who deal with children of prisoners shall be kept informed of current national law and practices and international and regional human rights law and standards relating to children, including this recommendation.

THE PAPA PLUS MODEL

Papa Plus offers concrete pathways for supporting and strengthening the child-father bond, minimizing risks to the relationship and protecting children's healthy development. It also serves to raise awareness of prison personnel on how their daily work can incorporate children's rights and needs, and offers ways for accessing further help, advice and support as a parent from relevant cross-sectoral agencies. The cross-sectoral Papa Plus model, illustrated in the graphic below, can be replicated across Europe, geared and tailored to the specific needs of each specific context, and can serve as a vehicle for the cross-fertilization of COPE expertise and good practice. It fits solidly within a multidisciplinary support systems framework that is crucial to progress for children affected by the imprisonment of a parent.



Papa Plus Parent Support Model



SOME TRAINING RECOMMENDATIONS

Support for the relationship between children and their imprisoned parents, in this briefing, involves support for the child-parent relationship and support for the parent as an individual in society and in their role as parent. When implementing training sessions such as Papa Plus for prison staff:

- * Be self-reflective: remain aware of the biases and judgements you as an individual bring into the room¹;
- * Remain as concrete as possible in discussions with prison staff when working towards a shift in attitudes;
- * Identify areas in which the work of prison staff intersects with the overall aims of the prison support initiative and how their work can be enhanced;
- * Break down into small groups as much as possible (mixing together prison officers and family contact officers);
- * Work with what already exists (e.g., build on an existing initiative or one that used to be in existence);
- * Ensure that there is some kind of follow-up to the training sessions, even if only a report to the justice ministry documenting discussions and highlighting challenges and needs;
- * Take a systems approach when carrying out the training—how every action and reflection can create a cascade effect that can contribute to the institutionalising of its action and reflection and its sustainability.

¹ With acknowledgement and thanks to Ann Adalist Estrin for her emphasis and guidance on this point [cf for example "Responding to the Need of Children and Families of the Incarcerated: 12 Guiding Principles", in *Contemporary Research and Analysis on the Children of Prisoners*, Ed Liz Gordon, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018.

PARIS LAUNCH

On 13 February, the project was officially launched. The launch took place at COPE and FREP's new shared office space, and was an intimate evening of presentations and fruitful discussion followed by live music and conversation. Through presentations from FREP Director Emmanuel Gallaud, COPE director Liz Ayre, FREP president Alain Bouregba, and Vessela Banova, psychoanalyst and therapeutic director at Child and Space, invitees were able to learn more about each of the three organisations involved: the "Papa Plus" model, the theoretical and ethical approach behind its development; and the Bulgarian context in which the initiative will be rolled out.



Children of Prisoners Europe (COPE)
<http://childrenofprisoners.eu/>
<https://www.facebook.com/networkcope/>
@networkcope

contact@networkcope.eu

8-10 rue Auber | B.P. 38 | 92122 Montrouge | France



This report has been produced with the financial support of the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme of the European Union. The contents are the sole responsibility of Children of Prisoners Europe and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission.