



# OUR JOURNEY OF CHANGE

## Summary Report

### INNOVATIONS IN ADDRESSING CHILD TRAFFICKING (IACT) PROGRAM

Guanacaste and Puntarenas, Costa Rica

# About the IACT Program

From 2020-2025, the Warnath Group Innovations in Addressing Child Trafficking (IACT) Program strengthened the capacity of national and local government and civil society to address child and adolescent sex trafficking in Guanacaste and Puntarenas through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons.



**The aim of the IACT Program is to identify and apply effective practices to combat child sex trafficking through constructive collaboration, thoughtful analysis of policies and practices, and tailored skills training and technical assistance to enable sustainable positive change.**

**– Stephen Warnath, CEO & President**

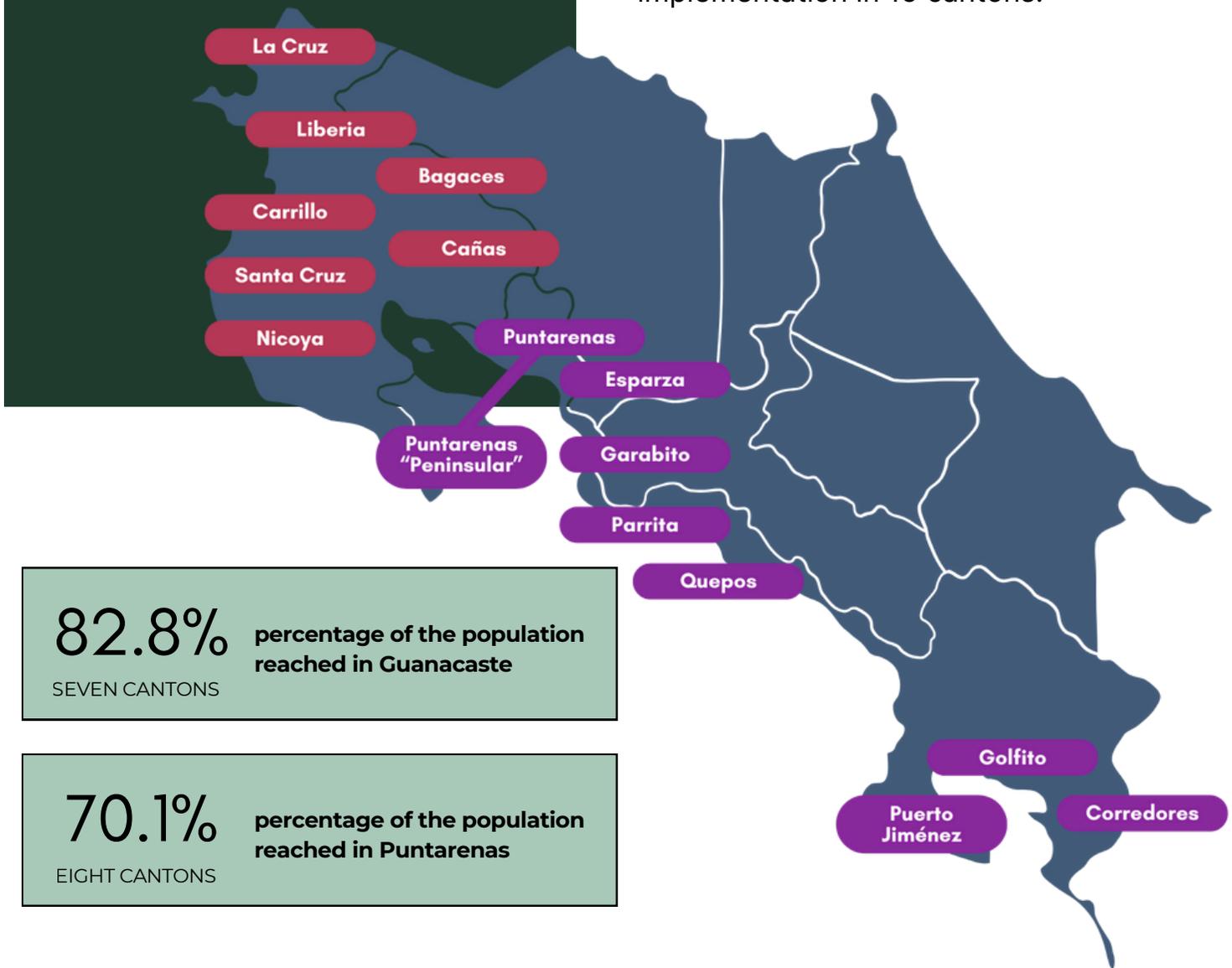
The IACT Program was organized around four fundamental axes:

<p><b>Prevent</b></p> <p>To prevent child and adolescent sex trafficking.</p>	 A top-down view of several children's hands, each wearing a colorful wristband, reaching towards the center.	<p><b>Prosecute</b></p> <p>To prosecute perpetrators of child and adolescent sex trafficking.</p>	 A group of approximately 15 people, including men and women in various attire, standing together for a group photo.
 A classroom scene with several young girls in red shirts and dark skirts standing in a line, looking towards a whiteboard.	<p><b>Protect</b></p> <p>To protect victims of child and adolescent sex trafficking.</p>	 An interior view of a courtroom with wooden desks, blue chairs, and a judge's bench.	<p><b>Partnership</b></p> <p>To work in partnership with government and civil society.</p>



The IACT Program was funded through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of State. The opinions, findings, and conclusions stated in this report are those of the author[s] and do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Department of State.

The IACT program was implemented in the provinces of Guanacaste and Puntarenas, as well as in San José. The program had a vast geographical and population coverage, with implementation in 15 cantons.



**82.8%** percentage of the population reached in Guanacaste  
SEVEN CANTONS

**70.1%** percentage of the population reached in Puntarenas  
EIGHT CANTONS

The IACT Program utilized seven building blocks to work toward transformative change.

- Component #1 Research & Learning**
- Component #2 Diagnostics, Collaboration, Coordination**
- Component #3 Training & Technical Assistance**
- Component #4 Strengthened Data Collection**
- Component #5 Access to Justice and Victim Rights Protection**
- Component #6 Enhanced Capacity for Identification, Referral, Reintegration**
- Component #7 Community-Based Prevention, Early Detection, and Risk Reduction**

# Component 1

## Research & Learning

The IACT Program conducted baseline research to document the scope and nature of child and adolescent sex trafficking in the two provinces where the project was implemented and inform and guide programmatic responses. This research on child and adolescent sex trafficking (CAST Study) had three main goals:

1

To understand the different forms of child and adolescent sex trafficking in Guanacaste and Puntarenas, as well as children and adolescents' experiences of trafficking for sexual exploitation.

2

To understand trafficked children and adolescents' knowledge and experiences of interventions (for example, identification, assistance, reintegration, and/or interactions with criminal justice authorities).

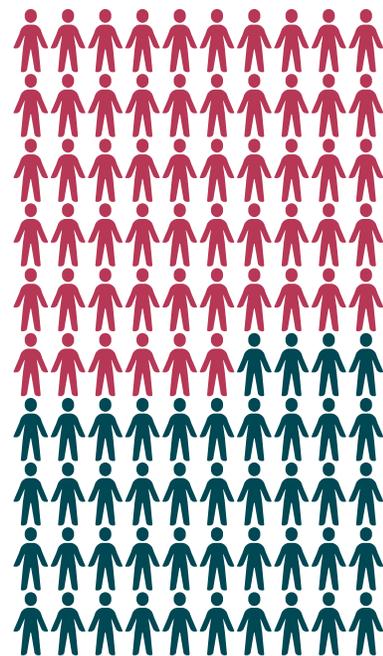
3

To estimate the size of the population (the prevalence of child and adolescent sex trafficking in Guanacaste and Puntarenas).

2,550 research participants surveyed

101 in-depth interviews with former child and adolescent trafficking victims

47 in-depth key informant interviews



56 OUT OF EVERY 100 PARTICIPANTS WERE TRAFFICKED AS CHILDREN

# Component 2

## Diagnosics, Coordination, Collaboration

Warnath Group conducted in-depth, forensic diagnostics to identify gaps, needs, and opportunities in the design and ongoing adaptation of the program. This included meetings and workshops with Government of Costa Rica officials and stakeholders to build and reinforce positive working relationships and obtain buy in with national, regional, and community-level leaders in government, civil society, and the private sector.

Diagnosics were an ongoing aspect of the IACT program, with regular and continuous consultations and discussions with institutions at the central, regional, and canton levels throughout the life of the program. The continuous diagnostic work of the IACT Program allowed Warnath Group to design and tailor the program workstreams to achieve sustainable impact.



Warnath Group held an in-country Dialogue Session with the Judiciary Sub-Commission on Trafficking in Persons in 2022, which engaged and consulted criminal justice stakeholders in the design of capacity-building efforts for criminal justice professionals to align with prosecutorial and judicial practice.



The IACT Program mapped gaps and issues in the anti-trafficking response across 15 cantons. Diagnostic work allowed for the identification of challenges in the anti-trafficking response and enabled targeted adjustments to training, technical assistance, and coordination mechanisms at the local level.

The program engaged 146 different institutions and organizations in diagnostics, coordination, and collaboration. Close coordination with central level inter-institutional bodies enhanced the impact and reach of the IACT Program. Work with the National Coalition Against Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Persons (CONATT) and the National Commission Against the Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents (CONACOES) focused on aligning the work of the program with national mandates, protocols, and decision-making structures.

# 146

**institutions and organizations  
with which the IACT Program  
coordinated and collaborated**

As implementation of the IACT Program advanced, diagnostics expanded to include direct engagement with program beneficiaries and stakeholders including:

- children and adolescents in cantons where the program was implemented, to understand risk environments, protection gaps, and access to support from their perspectives;
- trafficking victim-survivors, whose experiences informed the identification of operational gaps between institutional procedures and lived realities.

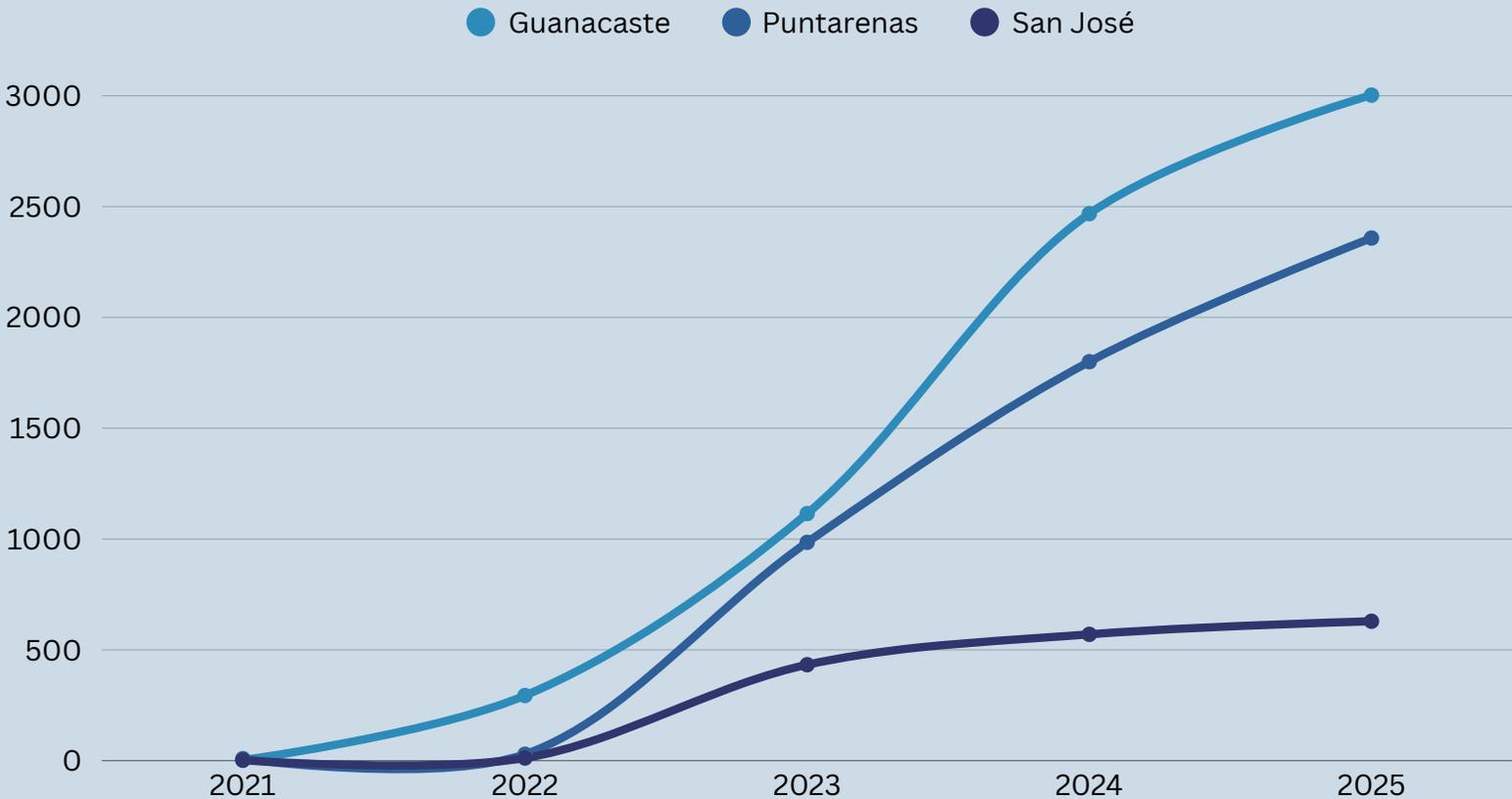


# Component 3

## Training and Technical Assistance

Training and technical assistance (TTA) were at the heart of the IACT Program, underpinning work across multiple components. Based on research and diagnostics, Warnath Group designed and customized professional training and technical assistance to strengthen practical skills and knowledge in prosecution, protection, and prevention. This process involved working with government institutions and NGOs to collaboratively identify issues and skill areas for training and design a tailored program of TTA over the course of the program.

**6,178** participants trained across Guanacaste, Puntarenas, and San José



## COMPONENT 3

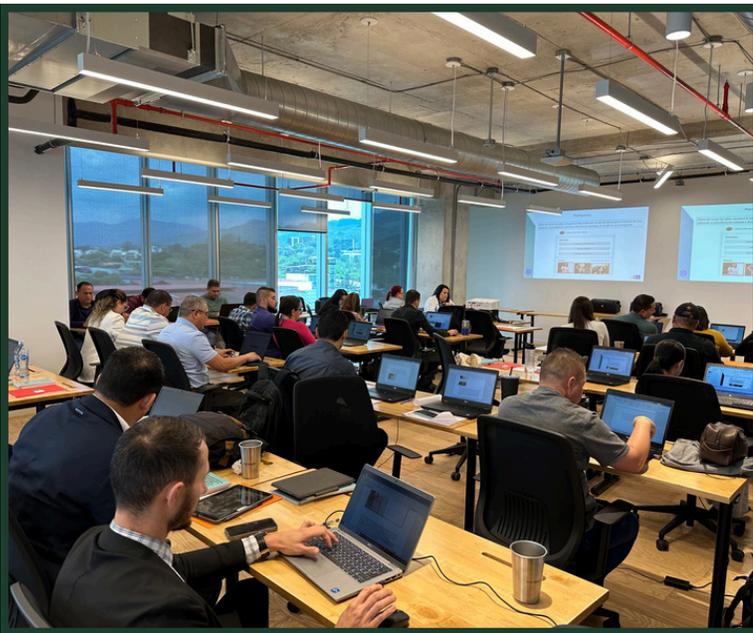
All IACT trainings were calibrated to the roles, responsibilities, and skill sets of participants and emphasized victim-centered, trauma-informed, and child-friendly principles and approaches. Trainings were evidence-based and incorporated learning from ongoing diagnostics with officials and stakeholders to tailor and improve content and methodologies. IACT's widely implemented foundational training laid the groundwork for subsequent advanced level skills-based trainings.

35

**foundational and advanced trainings focused on strengthening the prosecution of trafficking crimes**

The IACT Program implemented 35 foundational and advanced trainings with 496 professionals to strengthen the investigation and prosecution of trafficking crimes. These professionals were primarily from the criminal justice sector, but participants also included protection practitioners with roles and responsibilities in supporting victim-witnesses through investigations and prosecutions (such as child protection professionals, social workers, and psychologists).

The program also provided 22 technical assistance sessions to criminal justice sector professionals and embedded a criminal investigator on two field operations to provide technical accompaniment.



Trainings for criminal justice sector professionals addressed the following:

**Understanding the Crime of Trafficking in Persons**

**Applying Victim-Centered and Trauma-Informed Practices**

**Strategies for Building a Trafficking Case**

**Skills in Interviewing Child and Adolescent Trafficking Victims**

**Tactics and the Development of Field Operations**

**Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT)**

**Investigative Techniques and Criminal Analysis**

**Child and Adolescent Trafficking in the Context of Organized Crime**

**Online Child Sexual Exploitation**

## COMPONENT 3

The IACT Program implemented 216 foundational and advanced trainings with 4,322 practitioners working on different aspects of the protection of child and adolescent trafficking victims. These trainings resulted in stronger and more capable institutions, better equipped to preliminarily identify, refer, and assist child and adolescent trafficking victims with technical precision and within their institutional mandates. Trainings also fostered a culture of shared responsibility and inter-institutional collaboration. The combination of skills-based learning and standardized tools translated into measurable improvements in the consistency, timeliness, and quality of protection responses.

216

**foundational and advanced trainings focused on strengthening the protection of trafficking victims**



The IACT Program also provided tailored technical assistance and technical accompaniment to 432 protection practitioners. Technical accompaniment focused on the preliminary identification and referral of possible trafficking victims and ensuring that they received protection and assistance.

64

**trainings of trainers to equip participants to implement prevention activities with children and adolescents**

The IACT Program implemented 64 prevention trainings with 1,214 professionals to strengthen their capacity to reduce risk and prevent child and adolescent trafficking.



## COMPONENT 3

Eighty-seven percent of IACT training participants demonstrated specialized skills after training. The goal wasn't just knowledge transfer. It was building a network of professionals with the skills and knowledge needed to address trafficking, recognizing that effective responses require coordinated action across different fields of work.

Many practitioners applied learning from the IACT Program and made significant changes and improvements in their daily work. Criminal justice sector professionals investigated more trafficking cases. Child protection officials proactively identified more trafficking victims and referred them for protection and assistance. And educators worked to prevent trafficking from occurring in the first place.

87%

percentage of training participants who demonstrated specialized skills after receiving IACT training

118

TTA participants who went on to preliminarily identify a trafficking victim and take appropriate action

# Component 4

## Strengthened Data Collection

Through a series of technical assistance sessions with the Deputy Public Prosecutor's Office Against Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants (FACTRA), the IACT Program designed and built a data collection system to record and systematize trafficking cases as they move through the criminal justice process. This system tracks trafficking in persons cases from the initial reporting of a case, through its investigation and prosecution and eventual conclusion, enhancing an understanding of what is working well and where problems arise. This data collection system should build institutional capacity in the long-term to gather and generate reliable evidence to guide a more efficient, coordinated, and victim-centered criminal justice response.

# Component 5

## Access to Justice and Victim Rights Protection

To enhance access to justice and the protection of trafficking victim rights, the IACT Program implemented intersecting activities with both criminal justice sector and protection institutions.



### Developing and Strengthening Courses on Trafficking in Persons for Criminal Justice Sector Professionals

The Judicial School of Costa Rica (Escuela Judicial) is part of the Judicial Branch and is responsible for providing specialized training to Judicial Branch professionals to strengthen their knowledge and support the efficient administration of justice. In partnership with the Judicial School, the IACT Program developed four unique and tailored training modules on trafficking in persons, for a course to be delivered to judges, prosecutors, and Judicial Investigation Agency (OIJ) investigators.

IACT also provided technical assistance on FACTRA's trafficking in persons annual course offered to prosecutors. This included in-person sessions with FACTRA to discuss good practice to strengthen the course and a written technical assistance review of each module in the course, with the IACT Program providing recommendations to improve skills-based learning, case studies, practical exercises, and supplemental materials that could be utilized in the course. The IACT Program also created four videos for FACTRA, for use in the course. These videos provide step-by-step practical guidance for prosecutors on processing and investigating cases of trafficking in persons in the Public Prosecutor's Office.



Under this activity, the IACT Program observed trafficking in persons prosecutions as opportunity allowed. Observing trafficking in persons trials provided opportunities to identify and link trafficking victims with services and protections that were not being provided by the government or civil society. This not only provided a means of support to individual victims but also allowed the IACT Program to identify protection shortcomings for officials that needed attention in specific cases and as generalizable issues to address in the criminal justice process. The IACT Program also provided ad hoc technical assistance to prosecutors on trafficking in persons cases.



Trafficking victims involved in the criminal justice process require information about their right to legal counsel, their role and responsibilities as a victim-witness, and their right to seek civil remedies and damages. The IACT Program developed information to be shared with trafficking victims and practitioners working with trafficking victims. These materials, written in clear and accessible language, help victims to understand their right to legal counsel, available protection and services, and their right to seek civil remedies and damages.

## Child-Friendly Spaces

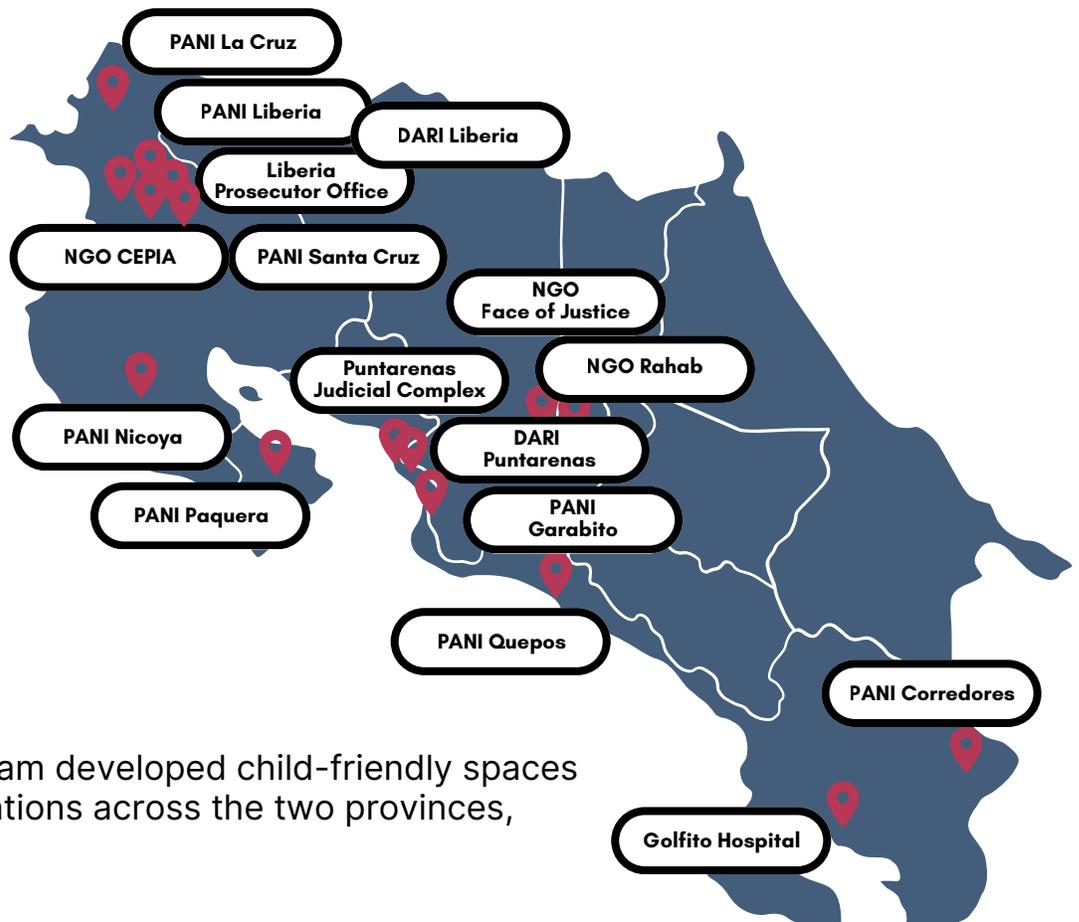


A child-friendly space is an environment that is designed to help children and adolescents feel safe, calm, and comfortable while they are interacting with practitioners. This environment is fostered through the physical design of the space, as well as through the provision of training and technical assistance to practitioners working in the space on child-friendly principles and approaches. Child-friendly spaces lead to enhanced protection of child and adolescent trafficking victims, as they help children and adolescents to feel supported while receiving assistance. These spaces also foster strengthened prosecutions by creating an environment in which child and adolescent trafficking victims are more likely to feel trust in practitioners and therefore be comfortable disclosing information about their experiences. Being safe, calm, and comfortable during the steps of protection – from preliminary identification or rescue through recovery and reintegration – promotes healing and reduces the risk of re-traumatization, which creates better long-term outcomes for child and adolescent trafficking victims.

The IACT Program developed 60 child-friendly spaces across 16 locations in Guanacaste, Puntarenas, and San José to support child-friendly, victim-sensitive, and trauma-informed identification, protection, assistance, and access to justice for trafficking victims. These spaces were tailored for different ages (infants, early childhood, children ages 8-12, and adolescents 13+) as well as different purposes. The IACT Program trained practitioners at all of these locations to be able to preliminarily identify child and adolescent trafficking victims from among the children and adolescents they work with generally, as well as in the steps of trafficking victim protection in Costa Rica to ensure they know how to respond in trafficking cases. IACT also provided specialized technical assistance based on the individual roles and responsibilities of practitioners and created a resource package on child-friendly spaces that is available to practitioners in the long-term.

60

child-friendly spaces developed in 16 locations across Guanacaste and Puntarenas



The IACT Program developed child-friendly spaces in strategic locations across the two provinces, including:

**Child Protection Offices**

With child protection practitioners (PANI) for use during initial conversations, screening interviews, and provision of assistance.

**Prosecutor Offices**

With criminal justice practitioners for use during forensic interviews, meetings with prosecutors, and provision of assistance from Department of Social Work and Psychology.

**Hospitals**

With medical professionals in healthcare settings for use during provision of medical care, counseling and mental health services, and meetings with social workers.

**NGOs**

With NGOs for use during the provision of services to child and adolescent trafficking victims.

## COMPONENT 5

Child-friendly spaces were developed in partnership with practitioners who committed to maintaining the space over time and were willing to receive training and technical assistance to strengthen their ability to interact with child and adolescent trafficking victims and know what to do to ensure their protection.



**Explore IACT Program  
Child-Friendly Spaces**



# Component 6

## Enhanced Capacity for Identification, Referral, Reintegration

Trafficking victim protection involves the preliminary identification, referral, assistance, and reintegration of trafficking victims. For a country's protection response to be effective, it needs to be embedded at the local level. The IACT Program therefore worked to develop community-level capacity for preliminary identification, referral, and reintegration utilizing intersecting activities as described below.

### Work with Canton-Level Multi-Disciplinary Teams



The IACT Program worked through multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs) to enhance the capacity and commitment of community-based practitioners to preliminarily identify possible child and adolescent trafficking victims and refer them to central level authorities for formal accreditation, protection and assistance, as well to report trafficking situations for investigation. The IACT Program worked through the existing Local Subsystems of Protection (SSLPs) run by the National Child Welfare Agency (PANI) to ensure sustainability of this work. The IACT Program engaged with 15 SSLPs and provided TTA to 1,150 MDT practitioners.

1,150

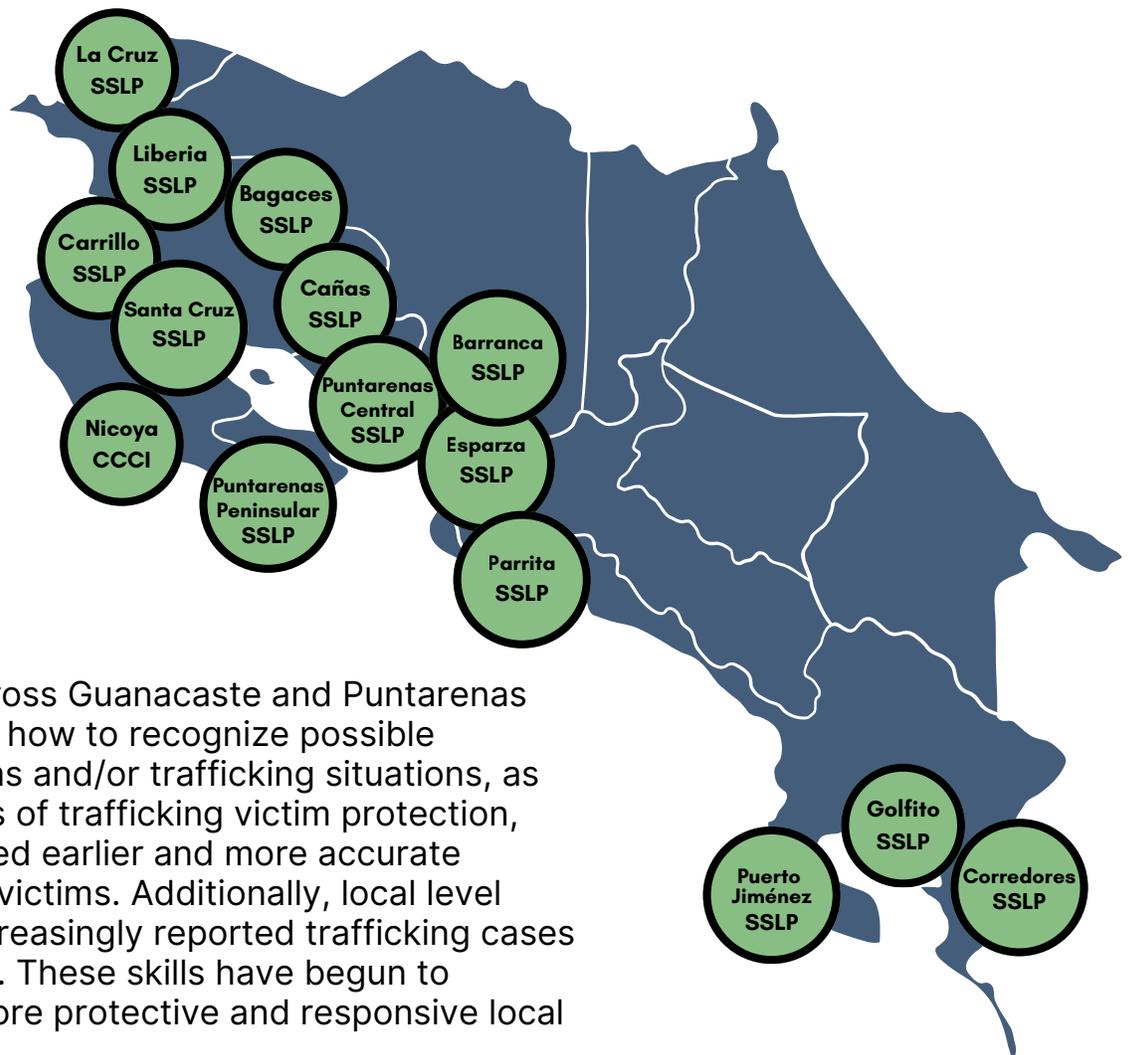
MDT practitioners who received IACT Program training and technical assistance

153

trafficking victims who received protection and assistance as a result of multi-disciplinary work

15

multi-disciplinary teams activated to strengthen the anti-trafficking response at the local level



Practitioners across Guanacaste and Puntarenas now understand how to recognize possible trafficking victims and/or trafficking situations, as well as the steps of trafficking victim protection, which has allowed earlier and more accurate identification of victims. Additionally, local level practitioners increasingly reported trafficking cases for investigation. These skills have begun to consolidate a more protective and responsive local environment.



Learn About the Steps of Trafficking Victim Protection





**Victim Assistance and Reintegration Services Through NGOs**

To expand the services available to trafficking victims, the IACT Program funded five NGOs to provide protection, assistance, and reintegration support to trafficking victims. A total of 462 individuals (trafficking victims and their children) received assistance including accommodation, healthcare, counseling, legal assistance, education, vocational training, and job placement.



**Before, I couldn't get out of bed, but since receiving help, everything has changed. My mind and my thoughts are more positive. Where I used to see chaos and wanted to die, today I'm more optimistic. I haven't given up and I won't.**

**– Trafficking Survivor**

**365**

trafficking victims who received IACT-funded assistance and protection

**97**

children of trafficking victims who received IACT-funded assistance and protection

By supporting NGOs working in different locations, with different target populations, and with different expertise, IACT enhanced both the reach and quality of victim-centered services while reinforcing sustainability at the community level



A Directory of Services is a vital resource for trafficking victims as it educates them about what trafficking in persons is, their rights and entitlements as trafficking victims, and the assistance and services available in their communities. To ensure that trafficking victims and practitioners have the information and resources they need about available assistance and services, the IACT Program developed a series of Directory of Services for different target audiences. This involved mapping all institutions and organizations in Guanacaste, Puntarenas, and San José that provide services to trafficking victims or other categories of vulnerable persons.



Access the  
Directory of Services



Directory of Services for Trafficking Victims:  
A Tool for Practitioners in  
Costa Rica



Directory of Services for  
Trafficking Victims



Directory of Services for  
Child and Adolescent  
Trafficking Victims

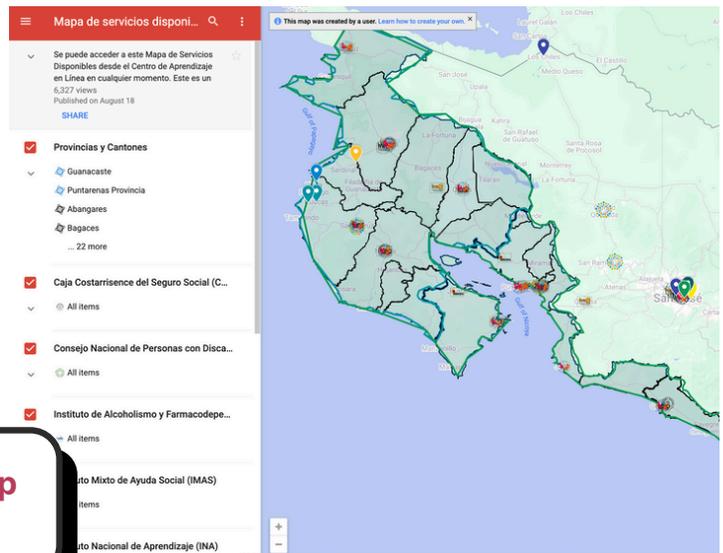
**3,629** printed copies of the Directory of Services distributed to practitioners across Guanacaste and Puntarenas

**3,653** printed copies of the Directory of Services distributed to children and adolescents

## COMPONENT 6

The Directory of Services reached thousands of individuals and became a practical entry point for protection and assistance. Before the IACT Program, many trafficking victims and professionals alike reported not knowing where trafficking victims could seek help. The Directory of Services bridged this gap by compiling all available local services in Guanacaste and Puntarenas and distributing this information widely through printed materials, community sessions, and online formats.

The IACT Program also created a searchable Map of Available Services for Trafficking Victims in Guanacaste, Puntarenas, and San José, which provides contact information for government and NGO service providers by geographic location. These services are also listed in the Directory of Services.



**Access the Searchable Map  
of Available Services**

**Learning Hub**  
**Le damos la bienvenida al Centro de Aprendizaje en Línea**

Innovaciones en el Abordaje Contra la Trata de Niñas, Niños y Adolescentes – Costa Rica



**VIEW IN ENGLISH**

Before the IACT Program, the laws, policies, and procedures addressing trafficking in persons were not readily available to practitioners, in electronic or hard copy versions. This was especially the case at regional and canton level institutions, where practitioners did not have easy access to information about trafficking in persons or their roles and responsibilities across protection, prosecution, and prevention.

To address this significant challenge to the anti-trafficking response in the country, the IACT Program developed the Learning Hub, an online platform that provides information, resources, tools, videos, and on demand learning on the following:

- trafficking in persons
- child and adolescent trafficking
- indicators of trafficking in persons
- the steps of trafficking victim protection in Costa Rica
- services for trafficking victims in Costa Rica
- supporting trafficking victim-witnesses in Costa Rica
- child-friendly spaces for child and adolescent trafficking victims
- implementing activities to prevent trafficking in persons
- anti-trafficking law, protocols, procedures in Costa Rica



[Visit the Learning Hub](#)

# Component 7

## Community-Based Prevention, Early Detection, and Risk Reduction

The IACT Program worked at the community level in 15 cantons across Guanacaste and Puntarenas to reduce risk, prevent child and adolescent trafficking, and protect children and adolescents. This involved grassroots activities to empower families, communities, and children and adolescents to reduce trafficking risk and ensure access to protection and assistance.

Prevention of child and adolescent trafficking is only effective when it is based on the realities and risks that children and adolescents face in everyday life and is linked to protection. The IACT Program used ongoing diagnostic work to achieve an in-depth and nuanced understanding of what those risks are for different children and adolescents in different family and

## COMPONENT 7

community contexts, as well as an understanding of the wider landscape of vulnerability, recruitment patterns, and barriers to protection and assistance. This diagnostic work was used to develop participatory methodologies adapted to the language, interests, and communication styles of children and adolescents, to significantly increase their learning and engagement in prevention and protection activities.

IACT Program prevention and protection activities with at-risk children, adolescents, and youth shared the same overarching objectives for participants:

1. To understand trafficking in persons, specifically child and adolescent trafficking (learn).
2. To be able to identify and avoid trafficking risk (prevention).
3. To learn where to get help if a participant or someone they know is a possible victim of trafficking (protection).

6,524

children and adolescents who participated in IACT Program prevention and protection activities

The IACT Program designed and tailored prevention and protection activities for different categories of children and adolescents and implemented sessions in cooperation and partnership with different institutions and organizations. This included the following:



Activities in Schools in Partnership with the Ministry of Education (MEP)

Activities in Alternative Schools in Partnership with MEP

Activities with Adolescent Mothers in Partnership with PANI

Activities with Participatory Councils in Partnership with PANI

Activities in Community Settings in Partnership with NGOs, Churches, Other Groups

Activities with University Students



## COMPONENT 7

The IACT Program developed two prevention and protection platforms.



KitViSS (Kit for a Safe and Healthy Life: Resources for Children about Trafficking in Persons) is a child-friendly and age-appropriate facilitated platform developed for children from 8-13 years of age to learn about trafficking in persons, how to identify risks, and where to get help.

KitViSS is accompanied by a Facilitator Guide to help education and child protection specialists use the KitViSS platform and materials to teach children about trafficking.

The Facilitator Guide was distributed in hard copy to 500 practitioners and accompanied by a physical kit containing all materials and resources needed to facilitate both online and offline KitViSS sessions.



IACTjoven (IACT for Youth) is an adolescent-friendly and age-appropriate platform developed for adolescents from 13+ years of age to learn about trafficking in persons, identifying risks, and seeking help. It was reviewed by the CONATT Special Technical Commission (CONATT CTE).

IACTjoven is accompanied by a Facilitator Guide to help education and child protection specialists use IACTjoven as a facilitated platform to educate adolescents on trafficking.

The IACT Program distributed 1,000 posters to schools and institutions with information about the IACTjoven platform.



[Access KitViSS](#)



[Access IACTjoven](#)

## COMPONENT 7

The IACT Program also implemented prevention and protection activities with community members in high-risk communities to increase understanding and awareness of child and adolescent trafficking, including how to identify risks and prevent children and adolescents from being trafficked. Activities were conducted with women's groups, community organizations, churches, parents' groups, parents of children with disabilities, and other community groups. Prevention and protection sessions focused on understanding trafficking in persons, identifying and avoiding risks (including online recruitment and grooming of children and adolescents), protecting oneself from trafficking, and how to seek help. These activities aimed to equip participants with the knowledge and confidence to take proactive steps to support children and adolescents who may be vulnerable or at risk.

The IACT Program also offered training of trainer sessions on both KitViSS and IACTjoven, to ensure that educators and other community members are trained to utilize these tools in implementing and expanding prevention and protection activities with children and adolescents in their communities.

1,231

practitioners and community members trained to implement prevention and protection activities



These results belong to everyone who made them possible: the governments of Costa Rica and the United States, the institutions and organizations on the ground, the practitioners on the frontlines, the communities who trusted this work enough to participate in it, and the child and adolescent trafficking victims who shared their experiences.



**Trafficking in persons, and in particular the trafficking of children and adolescents, constitutes one of the most serious human rights violations. For this reason, the work carried out by the IACT Program has been fundamental not only in raising awareness of this issue but also in developing tools for prevention, care, and inter-institutional coordination that strengthen the government’s response. These achievements are not only numbers or reports – they are transformed lives, safer communities, and more comprehensive protection for those who need it most.**

**– Omer Badilla, Vice-Minister of Governance and President of CONATT**

The Warnath Group, founded in 2009, is a boutique global advisory firm specialized in evidence-based programs to address trafficking in persons.

[www.warnathgroup.com](http://www.warnathgroup.com)