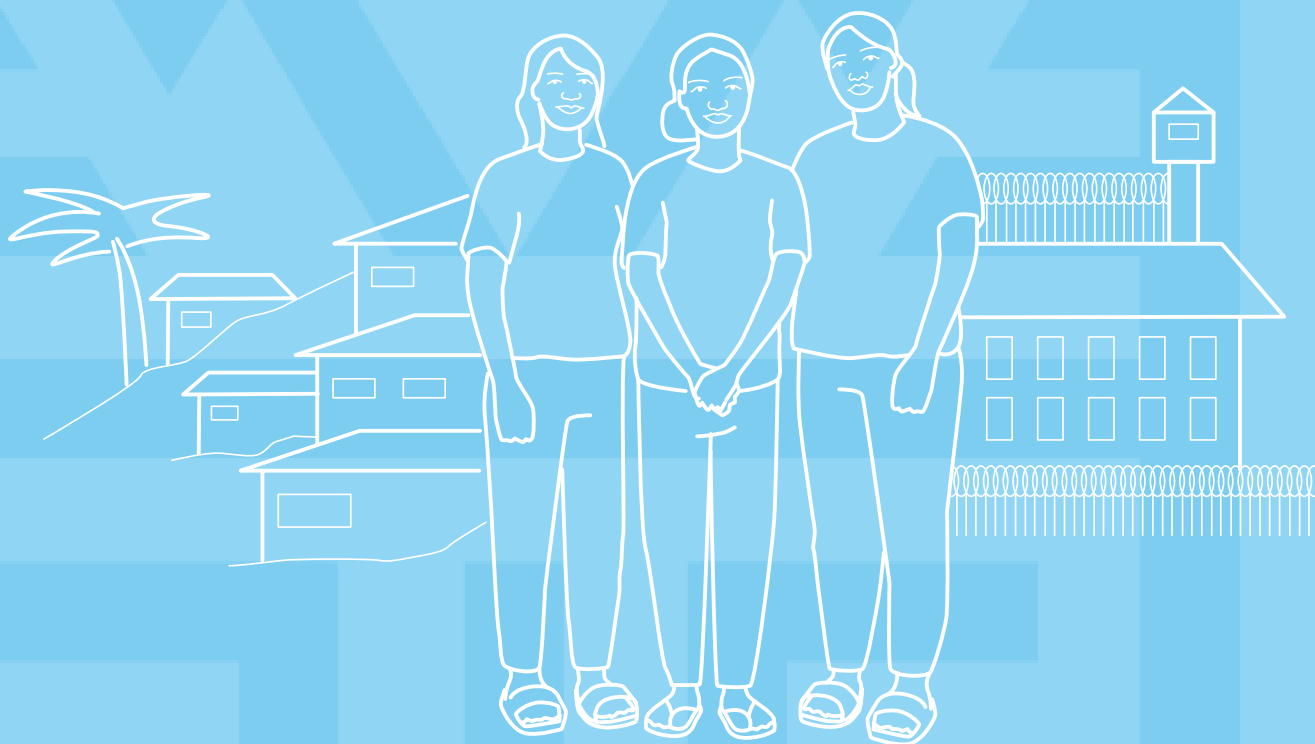


PHILIPPINES

IN THE PHILIPPINES, A GENDER-RESPONSIVE
COMMUNITY-BASED PARALEGAL SYSTEM IS
CENTRAL TO ADDRESSING THE JUSTICE BARRIERS
FACED BY WOMEN IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW.



JUSTICE FOR WOMEN, JUSTICE FOR ALL

ADVANCING THE COMMUNITY-BASED JUSTICE MODEL IN THE PHILIPPINES

INTRODUCTION

In 2020, UN Women launched a justice pilot in nine communities across the Philippines to address the justice barriers faced by women in conflict with the law (WICL). The initiative engaged formal and community-based justice providers, as well as community members and grassroots organizations, to collaborate on the delivery of a holistic, gender-responsive and people-centred approach to justice.

The Philippines has the seventh highest rate of incarcerated women in the world as of 2021, with 16,439 women in prison, approximately 10 per cent of the national prison population.¹ Women in conflict with the law face a range of hindrances to effective access to justice:

Barrier 1: Gender stereotypes and stigma inhibit women's access to essential services and lead to inequitable treatment by law enforcement officers.

Barrier 2: Many women lack the legal literacy to engage proactively with formal and community-based justice, including encounters with law enforcement, the court system, plea bargaining, sentencing, rehabilitation and alternative dispute resolution.

Barrier 3: Law enforcement, legal, judicial, corrections, and community-based professionals and practitioners often lack awareness of the gender-based considerations necessary to deliver effective access to formal and community-based justice and outcomes that will promote women's rehabilitation, community reintegration, prevention of recidivism and attainment of their full rights and potential.

To better respond to the justice barriers faced by women in conflict with the law, and to support formal and community-based justice providers to deliver holistic access to justice, UN Women launched a justice pilot model in nine communities in the Philippines to achieve the following aims:

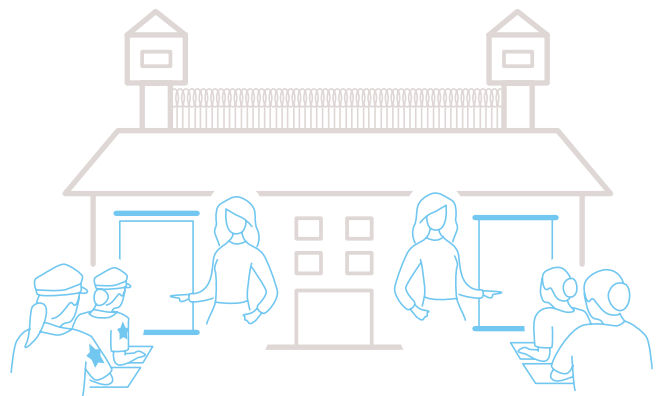
1. **Increase awareness** among women and communities on women's rights to justice, including the rights of women in conflict with the law.
2. **Build the capacity** of the women community members to document, monitor, liaise and facilitate interactions with informal and formal justice actors.

FROM WITHIN: WOMEN IN PRISON AND JAIL PERSONNEL

In collaboration with local partner, StreetLawPH, UN Women established a partnership with the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology, which enabled direct access to three women's detention facilities in the cities of Cebu, Mandaue and Lapu-Lapu.

Through the partnership, jail personnel and women deprived of liberty were engaged in a six-month course on national laws and policies for the protection of the rights of women in conflict with the law. These trainings have **supported 15 jail wardens/personnel** to directly address the needs of women detainees using gender-responsive and human rights-based approaches, and it **enabled 52 women deprived of liberty to serve as paralegal aides** to assist their fellow women detainees in documenting cases and seeking social or legal services.

The model and its capacity-building efforts have been recognized by jail authorities and other actors in the formal justice system, including judges and public attorneys, and civil society organizations.



HIGHLIGHT

The women paralegal aides trained under the programme have directly contributed to the release of a woman through a successful plea bargain and the release of a pregnant 15 year old who had been charged with drug-related offenses.

¹ www.prisonstudies.org/country/philippines

PREVENTION AND BEYOND: COMMUNITY PARALEGALS

UN Women partnered with the Partnership of Philippine Support Service Agencies (PHILSSA) to **deliver a series of paralegal trainings for 123 civil society organizations and 765 community leaders** to equip them with skills and knowledge to facilitate the documentation and referral of cases.



Support referrals to local district courts



Legal assistance to women in conflict with the law



Support reintegration and rehabilitation

Legal clinics were established in all nine communities, which were supported by paralegal volunteers. The legal clinics provide the necessary space for paralegals to discuss complex cases with facilitators or receive technical assistance on justice procedures.

COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION

Under the initiative, paralegals and community leaders **engaged more than 700 participants in community-based dialogues**, including representatives of local women-led civil society organizations, women human rights defenders, governments, justice actors and community members, to share and collaborate on gender-responsive people-centred justice solutions to address the barriers faced by women in conflict with the law.

Community-based initiatives have been central to creating social, normative and policy change, and they enabled paralegal volunteers and community leaders to develop a community-based, gender-responsive paralegal system for early intervention, prevention of crime and provision of assistance to women in conflict with the law.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS ADVOCACY

The project engaged women's groups, women human rights defenders and policymakers in specialized advocacy trainings to address abuse, discrimination, stigmatization and marginalization of women in conflict with the law and increase national awareness on the need for a national policy agenda concerning women in conflict with the law. The project offered training on the following topics:

- **Evidence-based and gender-responsive advocacy** for prevention of crime and incarceration.
- **Gender-based discrimination** pre-, during, and post incarceration.
- **Non-custodial and restorative** justice measures for women.

KEY QUOTES



This project is such a big help for us who has this for advocacy – VAWC (violence against women and children) and protection of children. It is important because we have the duty not only to inform them of their human rights but also to make these rights accessible to them”.

Gender and Development Focal Point of Barangay Commonwealth in Quezon City



This project will have such a huge impact because our barangay lacks mechanisms to assist (women). We do not have a VAWC desk, and many do not know their rights. Now that we have conducted sessions on women's rights, the impact is significant”.

Secretary of the Women's Council of Barangay 5-A of Davao City

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Learn more via asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/focus-areas/governance/womens-access-to-justice