



Report - Children visiting parents/grandparents in prison

September 2024

The Office of the Commissioner for Children received a concern regarding children visiting their parents in prison. The concern was regarding the lack of adequate facilities for children to visit their parents/family members at Corradino Correctional Facilities (CCF).

Once this concern was received, the Commissioner immediately contacted the Ministry for Home Affairs, security and Employment to share the concerns received and to schedule a meeting/visit to CCF.

The Commissioner for Children visited CCF and held a meeting with the CEO of the Correctional Services Agency, Mr Christopher Siegersma on the 11th of September 2024.

During the visit the Commissioner discussed the current procedures in place for prisoners who have children or grandchildren and also expressed the concerns of the Office regarding visitation.

The Office of the Commissioner for Children would like to raise the following points:

Identification of dependents/significant others

The Commissioner was pleased to note that procedures are in place for the early identification of dependents and significant others upon admission to CCF and taken into consideration upon the drawing up of a care plan. This allows the psycho-social team within CCF to support inmates to make the necessary arrangements for visitation and contact with children once the initial assessment is completed.

Contact

The Office of the Commissioner for Children was pleased to note that in between visits, inmates are able to make contact with their children/grandchildren via phone as often as they like and are also able to schedule skype calls which are both conducive to fostering meaningful communication with children.

Visitation CCF

The Commissioner was informed that those inmates who are allowed to leave prison, can have contact visits with their children at a child-friendly premises in Marsa which is run by the NGO Mid-Dlam għad-Dawl. However, this is not always possible due to the high demand. The other visits are held at CCF.

The Commissioner visited the visiting room at CCF which is not specifically allocated for children's visits in spite of some visits being held there.

Whilst improvements have been made with regards to body searches and the possibility of body contact, the Commissioner expressed concern over the **lack of availability of child-friendly facilities at CCF** which are crucial to avoid traumatising of children as well as to promote positive family bonding experiences. CEO, Mr Siegersma agreed that collaboration with the Office would guarantee children's rights.

Visit to Marsa Facility

The Commissioner for Children also visited the Marsa visitation facility on the 11th of September and witnessed visitations between families in a child-friendly environment. The Commissioner also spoke to inmates and their children as well as other professionals present. The welcoming environment, which is based outside of prison, is ideal for children to feel at ease also since both inmates and CCF officials were dressed in casual clothes. Such a child-friendly environment enables children to build relationships and bond with the inmates through play and other shared activities. This collaborative initiative between the Ministry for Home Affairs, Security and Employment, and NGO Mid-Dlam għad-Dawl, is a positive one and fosters supportive relationships that benefit both the family and society.

During her visit, the Commissioner was informed that to date, around 400 sessions have been held in these facilities with more than 50 prisoners and 90 children participating. This Office notes that such initiatives are the way forward and it is important to keep investing in this sector, for **all children** with family members in prison, to benefit from such child-friendly facilities.

The Commissioner for Children would also like to acknowledge the work being done by the NGO Mid-Dlam għad-Dawl and thank them for their dedication and continuous efforts in favour of children's rights.

In view of the above report, the Commissioner is putting forward the below recommendations which will be sent to all relevant authorities.

Recommendations:

Long-term

1. **Investment in child-friendly facilities** like the one in Marsa to accommodate **all visits** with the possibility of such a facility to be made available closer to CCF or ideally adjoining to the main building with a separate entrance for visitors. This facility should be part of the services offered by the Correctional Services Agency. This will enable ease of access and would also reduce security concerns. Arrangements should also be made for inmates who are still awaiting their sentence to also be able to make use of such a child-friendly facility.

Short-term

2. **Allocation of child-friendly spaces** at CCF, in both the men's and the women's sections, in which only families with children are present for the visits. Such spaces should:
 - Have **nappy changing facilities** for babies and toddlers as well as the possibility for them to have their essential needs met such as the use of dummies and feeding facilities including bottle feeding.
 - Have **availability of toys, books and other items** to enable children to play with their family members.
 - Be a **welcoming environment** which does not look intimidating.
 - Be **accessible** for all including those with mobility issues.
3. **Age-appropriate information** should be given to children about the rules and procedures of their visit for example security checks should be explained to children in an age-appropriate and friendly manner.
4. **Ongoing training of professionals and security officials** on children's rights and how to create child-friendly spaces which guarantee children's rights.

Children with imprisoned parents or family members are entitled to the same rights as all children and it is the duty of the Office of the Commissioner for Children to ensure that all children have access to their rights as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Office will continue to advocate for the rights of those children whose family members are in prison and will also lend its expertise for the implementation of these recommendations as required.