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## Juvenile Justice Reform in St. Lucia: Endline Findings from a Longitudinal Study

### Background

In response to disproportionately high homicide and crime rates, member states in the Caribbean have committed themselves to juvenile justice system reforms. Given the challenges of implementing multijurisdictional juvenile justice system improvements, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is working to support member states to transition their juvenile justice systems from a punitive model to a more rehabilitative approach. USAID contracted Social Impact, Inc. to implement a study to track the status of reform in St. Lucia (STL), St. Kitts and Nevis (SKN), and Guyana (GUY).

St. Lucia passed its Child Justice Act and Child Care, Protection, and Adoption Act in November 2018. The CJA represents a significant milestone in juvenile justice reform, providing a framework for juvenile justice that establishes a preference for diversion from the court system. The 2018 CJA emphasizes that the safety, welfare, and well-being of children should be a paramount consideration, with detention used as a last resort.

To help inform St. Lucia's ongoing juvenile justice reform process, this report examines the details of how the Act has been implemented, highlighting where progress has been made and where critical elements remain to be implemented.

### Study Design

This study uses a comparative, longitudinal qualitative research design. Interviews with key informants in the juvenile justice sector were conducted at three different points in time: baseline (2017), midline (2019) and endline (2021). At endline, the research team spoke

with 29 government officials, probation officers, detention facility staff, judges, and court officials; 6 youth in detention; and 4 youth on probation. The interviews were oriented around the following sets of questions:

Q1. Have milestones in the juvenile justice reform project been achieved?

Q2. How many youths are enrolled in diversion programs compared to youths in more traditional programs (e.g., detention)?

Q3. What is the quality and perceived effectiveness of court, diversionary/alternative sentencing, rehabilitation, and reintegration processes?

Q4. How likely is it that reform efforts will be institutionalized and sustainable?

Although the findings of this brief pertain to St. Lucia, parallel studies were also conducted in St. Kitts and Nevis and Guyana. Findings from those studies are summarized in the [main report](#), as well as in the [St. Kitts and Nevis](#) and [Guyana](#) country briefs.

### Overall Findings

Notable progress has been made by the government of St. Lucia toward advancing the juvenile justice reform process since the midline assessment, especially in the implementation of diversion. The number of youth in detention has also declined, with a notable decrease in the number of youth being held at Bordelais (the adult correctional facility). Despite this progress, the experience of youth in detention is largely unchanged from the midline assessment, as we detail below.

Overall, we find that the current juvenile justice system in St. Lucia demonstrates a primary focus on rehabilitating juveniles who have committed minor offenses, with little progress or planning for youth who have committed serious offenses.

### Interagency Coordination

At endline, though coordination challenges persist, the majority of individuals we spoke to noted that there is good coordination between various entities involved in CJA implementation. At the national level, a Technical Committee has been set up specifically to look after issues related to the Juvenile Justice Reform Project (JJRP). A recommendation that has yet to be implemented is the Child Justice Management Unit to oversee the reform process after the close of the JJRP, which has been delayed due to resource constraints. Another point of progress in coordination is the initiation of Initial Inquiry meetings, designed to identify potential diversionary measures for the youth in conflict with the law.

While the Royal St. Lucia Police Force has continued to employ community policing practices beneficial to juvenile justice objectives, as at midline respondents noted that the police have yet to be fully integrated into and sensitized on the juvenile justice reform process.

### Diversion and Alternative Sentencing

Over the past two years, St. Lucia has made notable progress towards integrating diversionary processes into the juvenile justice system. The most significant achievement noted at endline is that youth are being diverted from the system via pre-trial and post-trial diversion mechanisms. In addition, a national diversion strategy has been submitted to the Cabinet for approval. Stakeholders also reported general progress in terms of accepting diversion as an approach in St. Lucia.

At endline, the Department of Probation and Parole appears to be leading pre-trial diversion processes and coordinating Initial Inquiry meetings. Post-trial diversion via the Family Court has also been operationalized. The majority of diversion orders made by the court are for Supervision and Guidance, with Probation given the responsibility for designing the diversion program for youth. On

diversionary programming, there is consensus regarding the lack of sufficient diversion programs for youth. Though a list of *potential* diversion options exists, there is still a critical need for a set of official diversion programs

*“We use Probation as one of those diversion options basically, and more specifically do psychosocial activities and other programs with them. Nothing has been added to the current options we have... I cannot safely say there’s any particular diversion program.”*

- Juvenile Justice Reform Stakeholder

to be formalized so that the Court and probation officers have more structured options to divert youth to. Probation officers continue to use assessment tools, including the Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth. The Department continues to have one officer dedicated to supervising juveniles, and at endline had three additional officers supporting on juvenile matters.

### Detention Facilities



In St. Lucia, the number of juveniles in detention has substantially decreased from 38, reported at midline, to 13 at endline. Detained youth are still being held in two detention facilities, Bordelais Correctional Facility and the Boys Training Center. Despite the CJA’s assertion that 16–18-year-olds are still classified as children, juveniles charged with serious offenses are still often detained at Bordelais.

At BTC, there is still no on-site medical or mental health services – the Center is reliant on local hospitals and clinics to provide these services. Bordelais has an on-site medical unit, but only one clinical social worker to provide mental health support to approximately 500 incarcerated people and no on-site psychiatrist. BTC continues to offer a selection of vocational training opportuni-

ties, but there still appears to be little to no oversight by the Ministry of Education of the academic education being provided. Bordelais offers some educational, vocational, and life skills programs, but youth at the facility appeared to not have access to these programs at the time of end-line data collection.

*“And in terms of education... that is lacking severely and it is time that the Ministry of Education steps in to do something about this element at the Center because, yes - you give him the vocational skills and you're giving him life skills, but he is still going out there and he really can't write properly. So that sort of defeats the purpose.”*

- Juvenile Justice Reform Stakeholder

The majority of youth respondents did not report any acts of physical abuse, neither at BTC nor Bordelais – a positive development since baseline and midline. Forms of punishment reported at BTC consist of labor (such as landscaping) and being subjected to time in the facility's solitary confinement space. Though the youth at Bordelais did not report any punishment, juveniles at Bordelais are sometimes subjected to unintended solitary confinement by way of being the only juvenile at the prison. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted operations at both facilities, halting or reducing the scope of programming and in-person visitation.

## Reintegration

Reintegration was consistently mentioned as one of the highest priority areas for juvenile justice reforms in St. Lucia. Some stakeholders noted a trade-off – that part of the price paid for making advancements in diversion was that focus could not be given to building reintegration programs.

Experiences reported by youth at both facilities varied widely – some youth reported having no conversations at all with family, counsellors or probation officers related to rehabilitation and re-entry, while others had already secured a job ahead of leaving detention. BTC still operates a two-year aftercare program, though it seems to be significantly underfunded and under-resourced. As was the case at baseline and midline, Bordelais still has little in place with regards to re-entry programming.

## Recommendations

Based on these high-level findings, we offer five topline recommendations:

1. The government should continue training and sensitization activities, including trainings on the proper process and procedures for handling cases involving juveniles. For the police in particular, training should be conducted for all officers on the force.
2. The government needs to ensure that BTC and Probation have the resources they need to adequately fulfill the responsibilities within their scope, and that both entities are rigorously monitored. To this end, the government can consider conducting an assessment of BTC and Probation by interviewing staff, youth, and other key stakeholders to identify strengths and weaknesses of current operational strategies and pathways for creating a more systematic and rehabilitative experience for youth.
3. To ensure that juveniles are no longer sent to Bordelais, the government should fund and equip BTC so that it has the capacity to house juveniles charged with serious offenses.
4. The Ministry of Equity, Social Justice, Empowerment, Youth Development, Sports and Local Government can identify dedicated funding to expand and systematize BTC's aftercare program.
5. To promote rehabilitation and successful re-entry after detention, the Ministry of Equity can collaborate with the Ministry of Education in developing, executing, and monitoring educational and vocational programming provided to youth while in detention.

A full set of recommendations is available in the [main report](#).



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