

Reactivating and Supporting Human Trafficking Commissions in Paraguay

ATLAS SNAPSHOT

Winrock International's Attaining Lasting Change for Better Enforcement of Labor and Criminal Law to Address Child Labor, Forced Labor and Human Trafficking (ATLAS) project worked with governments in Thailand, Liberia, Paraguay, and Argentina to improve their ability to address child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking through strengthened laws, regulations, and policies; improved enforcement of existing laws; and increased coordination between actors.

The NGO Partner of the Americas (POA) led implementation of ATLAS in Paraguay. There, the project worked to strengthen coordination and responses to child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking at the local level by supporting Departmental Human Trafficking Commissions in five departments: Caaguazú, Itapúa, Guairá, Ñeembucú and Boquerón.

Originally, ATLAS planned to develop, refine, and disseminate at the local level unified enforcement procedures that would streamline processes for responding to cases of child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking. However, the project soon discovered it would be necessary to reactivate local Departmental Human Trafficking Commissions and to provide them training and other support before embarking on this work.

One example was the Departmental Human Trafficking Commission of Boquerón. Located in the Paraguayan Chaco, Boquerón is one of the farthest departments from the capital – due not just to distance but also lack of roads and communications infrastructure. As Rosa María Fernandez de Castro, Departmental Secretary for Women, Children, Adolescents, and Seniors since 2017, explained: "There are times that we feel very alone trying to respond to all of the problems that occur in our communities."

Beginning in 2020, ATLAS provided support for the Departmental Human Trafficking Commission and the departmental government to fulfill its role as coordinator of actions and policies to prevent and respond to trafficking in persons. This required that the project train all of the local institutions that work on the issue.



Rosa María Fernandez, Departmental Secretary for Women, Children, Adolescents, and Seniors.

"I remember when, soon after taking office, in 2017 I received a letter from the Ministry of Women where they informed me that due to my role I had the mandate of coordinating the Departmental Human Trafficking Commission," Fernandez recalled. "But the truth was with all of the work that I had, and not knowing the topic, I couldn't advance. That's why, in 2020, when contact with the ATLAS project began, I understood that finally I was going to have the technical support that I needed to reactivate the Commission."

In October 2020, ATLAS facilitated a first meeting of the member institutions of the Commission to define roles and responsibilities and provide basic training. In July 2021, the departmental governor officially reactivated the Commission, after which it received continued training, awareness-raising, and technical assistance from ATLAS.

In addition to Boquerón, ATLAS reactivated similar Commissions in Itapúa and Ñeembucú and supported fledgling Commissions in Guairá and Caaguazú with training and assistance. As a result, these five departmental governments are now better prepared to tackle child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking in their communities and are equipped with the institutional structures to do so.

By the end of the project, Fernandez was sure the government of Boquerón had adequate capacity to carry out anti-trafficking policies and recognized that this was largely a result of support from ATLAS. "I think there is a before and an after with regards to the ATLAS project in terms of child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking."