

COSA process

Starting implementation

COSA can be implemented successfully in various national contexts. However, the COSA project model cannot be simply copied and pasted into any given national context. COSA is based on community involvement and involvement of a local network of professional organisations. Since Europe counts almost 50 different sovereign states and each nation has its own jurisdiction and set of institutions involved in sex offender management, the possibilities for COSA and the issues that need to be solved to install Circle projects are too many to be accounted for in a written description. Therefore it is strongly recommended to draw upon the expertise of the **CirclesEurope Association**. This association consists of specialists that have worked in transferring COSA from one (European) jurisdiction to another. This expertise is available to anyone who wants to start Circles in jurisdictions in Europe.

Adaptation study

In order to give an idea about implementation, it should be taken into account that the unique approach of Circles of Support and Accountability requires a thorough assessment of the feasibility of Circles within the given national context and research into the possibilities and needs for adaptation of the model within its ultimate – and not negotiable – quality standards. Any organisation thinking of introducing COSA for the first time and developing a COSA initiative should start with an adaptation study that addresses:

- The societal and political climate towards sex offender rehabilitation
- Possible financial resources for Circle projects
- The judicial context
- Availability of sex offender treatment
- Infrastructure for sex offender aftercare and risk management
- Volunteering

To carry out an adaptation study, it is advised to contact a research institute that is experienced in the field of probation. Having an overview over national jurisdiction, probation and aftercare organisation is helpful to guarantee that all issues are dealt with.

No-go criteria

The adaptation study should give an answer whether or not a situation is favorable for successfully introducing and running COSA. The

CirclesEurope Association devises a method to check to what extent conditions are positive (or negative) to effectively start up COSA implementation. Key in this method are 10 'no-go criteria'. Only if none of the no-go criteria apply to a jurisdiction, COSA has a chance to be implemented successfully.

These no-go criteria are:

- The problem of sexual violence is denied by the government
- There is very little or no chance to find sustained financial support for Circle projects
- There is very little or no professional expertise available in sex offender treatment
- There is no structured risk assessment available to circle projects and circle staff members are not competent to apply structured risk assessment by themselves.
- There are no legal possibilities for mandated supervision of sex offenders
- There are no professional institutions that are involved in sex offender rehabilitation
- The project organisation has no legal status and is not involved in the local network of sex offender aftercare
- There is no willingness to comply to the basic quality standards of COSA (the code of practice)
- There is no willingness to cooperate with other Circle Projects in an international framework
- There is no likely engagement of citizens in some form of non-paid activities for community development or community justice

Basic requirements

Once all conditions are favorable to COSA implementation, it should be taken into account that COSA is not a quick-fix . Any COSA initiative needs months of preparation (6 to 9 months is not unusual). Some basic requirements need to be in place, in order to prevent incomplete and therefore ineffective implementation, which can lead to unsafe practices and can damage the whole COSA enterprise. This vital work needs to be done and is also a way for all involved to really grasp the principles of what COSA is all about: a bold community response to fear and anxiety, based on inclusion, openness and hope.

These basis requirements are:

1. Financial resources to develop and sustain Circle projects
2. An adaptation study
3. A comprehensive description of the method

4. An implementation plan (scenario, time-table for dissemination, milestones)
5. A strategic communication plan
6. A network of professional organisations in the field of risk management
7. Personnel that is capable and willing to run Circle projects
8. An organisational structure of the Circle project with clear description of tasks and responsibilities, lines of communication and span of control
9. Systematically research and quality management and monitoring, in co-operation with a research institute

For more information, please contact us at the CirclesEurope Association secretariat at info@circleseurope.eu