



**Fostering Child-Friendly Legal Environments
through collaborative networks**

Training Needs Assessment Report Greece



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Author/s	Natasha Alexopoulou, Centre for European Constitutional Law Angeliki Karantzali, Society of Social Psychiatry P. Sakellaropoulos
Contributor/s	Christine Maerkl, Society of Social Psychiatry P. Sakellaropoulos Argyro Kaltsa, Society of Social Psychiatry P. Sakellaropoulos
Reviewer	Panagiota Fitsiou, Society of Social Psychiatry P. Sakellaropoulos
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Table of Content

Table of Content	3
1. Introduction	4
2. Research Methodology	5
2. National Framework.....	6
2.1 The legal framework regarding the rights of children victims of crime in Greece..	6
2.1.1. Legal framework.....	6
2.1.2 Child protection actors in Greece	9
2.2 Challenges related to the application of child-friendly justice by lawyers, focusing on child victims of crime	14
2.2.1. Systemic inefficiencies of child protection.....	14
2.2.2. Lack of upholding the rights of children victims of crime.....	18
2.3 Practices, tools and methods applied in justice involving children, with a special focus on child victims of crime	20
2.3.1 Protocols for cases of children victims of crime	20
2.3.2. Personal data protection policies	24
2.4 Best practices, guidelines and recommendations for lawyers when representing child victims of crime	25
1.4.1. Practices to enhance practitioners' communication skills.....	25
1.4.2. Practices targeted at enhancing lawyers' awareness on children's rights	30
1.4.3. Practices targeted at enhancing children and field professionals' awareness on children rights	31
3. Training needs of lawyers.....	33
4. Conclusions.....	34
References.....	36
Legal framework	37
Institutions and resources (in Greek).....	37



1. Introduction

In the frame of project *FOSTER - Fostering Child-Friendly Legal Environments through collaborative networks* (co- funded by the Justice Programme of the European Commission, JUST-2023-JACC-EJUSTICE/ number: 101160568), five organisations from four EU countries (Greece, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Hungary) conducted research, aiming to identify the current state of the art regarding the rights of child victims of crime, focusing on the training needs of lawyers, who come to represent and support them.

In Greece, the project is implemented by:

The [Centre for European Constitutional Law – CECL](#), project coordinator, a leading public benefit foundation and research institute. Its areas of focus include Justice and Fundamental Rights, Democracy and Public Institutions, and Social Policy and the Welfare State. CECL is a training provider with extensive experience in the training of judges, prosecutors, lawyers, and other legal professionals, closely collaborating with the Greek School of the Judiciary, Bar Associations, and other professional associations at the national and European level. CECL also hosts the national focal point for FRANET, the multidisciplinary research network of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), and is a member of the Greek National Human Rights Institutions (NHRI), and

The [Society of Social Psychiatry P. Sakellaropoulos – SSP. P. Sakellaropoulos](#) a non-profit non-governmental scientific organisation, which was founded in 1986 and provides high quality mental health services in Greece as part of the National Plan for Mental Health “Psychargos” of the Ministry of Health. It focuses on prevention, timely intervention, human rights promotion in mental health, advocacy and networking and it operates 35 mental health units in 5 Prefectures, including mobile mental health units and day centres for children and adults, rehabilitation units. It also provides training to professionals, including teachers, judges, prosecutors, legal experts, police officers, journalists in the framework of community awareness rising.



2. Research Methodology

CECL, leader of the research activities, provided the frame for the implementation of the research activities through a Research Protocol, which included the axes of the research, questionnaires for semi- structured interviews and focus group discussions, as well as templates for consent forms, summary templates to document the research activities and finally, template for the national TNA reports.

CECL and SSP P. Sakellaropoulos collaborated on the implementation of both desk and field research activities in Greece. The desk research was carried out during September and October 2024. The literature review focused on the following topics: the legal framework concerning the rights of child victims of crime; practices, tools, and methods used in justice systems involving children—with particular focus to child victims of crime; best practices, guidelines, and recommendations for lawyers representing child victims; and challenges regarding the application of child-friendly justice.

In addition, from October to early December 2024, the aforementioned organisations conducted field research covering the same topics. This research targeted lawyers, state authorities, NGO representatives, and other professionals involved in judicial procedures concerning child victims of crime and child protection. In total, CECL and SSP P. Sakellaropoulos conducted 12 interviews and 3 focus group discussions, engaging 29 participants overall.

In detail:

- From October 18th until December 2nd, 2024, CECL organised six interviews with practitioners of various fields (including child protection actors, law enforcement and legal professionals) and one focus group on October 31st 2024 with ten lawyers and legal advisors working independently or in collaboration with Civil Society Organisations);
- From October 23rd until November 22nd, 2024, SSP. P. Sakellaropoulos organised six interviews with health care (including mental health) professionals and two focus groups on October 24th and October 31st 2024 with a total of seven representatives of Civil Society Organisations (Ploes, Smile of the Child, Doctors of the World) and health care professionals from public hospitals (Paidon Agia Sofia, Aglaia Kyriakou, Paidon Pentelis, G. Papageorgiou General Hospital) supporting children.

The partners mentioned above summarised the results of the interviews and focus groups, along with the literature review findings, and compiled the information into the National Training Needs Assessment report in January 2025.



2. National Framework

2.1 The legal framework regarding the rights of children victims of crime in Greece

2.1.1. Legal framework

Greece has a rich legal framework on the protection of children rights. The country has ratified international conventions of the United Nations and the Council of Europe and as a member of the European Union, is obliged to follow the provisions of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and secondary EU law.

The legal definition of a child is any individual under the age of 18 (article 1 of Law 2101/1992).

Professionals working with children, such as teachers, doctors, social workers, and law enforcement officers, have a legal obligation to report suspected cases of child abuse under several laws. Additionally, professionals are protected by law when making such reports in good faith, if the report turns out to be inaccurate. According to Article 23 of Law 3500/2006, as modified by Law 5090/2024, professionals, such as teachers, social workers, psychologists, probation officers, sport coaches, and doctors are obliged to report immediately any case where they discover or are informed that a crime of domestic violence has been committed against a minor. These professionals are protected from legal penalties, and they are only called as witnesses if there is no other evidence to prove the crime.

Greece has established a specific procedure for the examination of a child victim in Article 227 of the Greek Code of Criminal Procedures and Ministerial decision 7320/2019.

In detail, the examination of the child victim of crimes against sexual freedom and integrity (such as rape and sexual abuse), human trafficking and domestic violence, is conducted at one of the Autonomous Offices for the Protection of Child Victims of Crime (“Children’s Houses”, see below in detail). Where these do not operate, in premises specially designed and adapted for this purpose. The



examination is held without undue delay and with as limited a number of interviews as possible.

Children examined as witnesses for crimes are entitled to have a specifically trained child psychologist or child psychiatrist, or if one is not available, a psychiatrist or a psychologist from the Children's Houses present during the child's examination. The expert assesses the child's ability to understand the proceedings, their mental and psychological state and prepares the child for the examination.

The examination of the child is carried out by the investigating officers and the judicial officers through the child psychologist or child psychiatrist.

The child's parent or legal guardian may be present during the testimony, unless the investigating officer issues a reasoned decision prohibiting their presence, especially due to a conflict of interest or potential involvement in the investigated case. The defence may request that specific questions are posed during the child's statement. These must be pre-submitted in writing and can be declined by the child psychiatrist or child psychologist if they are considered possible to affect the mental state of the child.

The child victim's statement must be recorded both in writing and audio-visually. The audio-visual recording replaces the child's physical presence in the following stages of the proceedings. If recording or projecting the statement during the main proceedings is impossible, the written statement is read instead. However, if the child has reached the age of eighteen at the time of the hearing, he or she may appear in person if it is considered necessary. There is also the possibility that the prosecutor or the parties ask for further examination of the child if it is considered necessary. If the judge of the court approves the application, the child's examination is held by the abovementioned professionals and process without the parties' presence.

Ministerial decision 7320/2019 established the Autonomous Offices for the Protection of Child Victims of Crime – "The Children's House". The Children's House are staffed by specialised personnel and equipped with the necessary infrastructure for children of different age and developmental stage. The Ministerial decision includes principles to be followed during the child's individual assessment and the provision of their statement, including treatment of children from different cultural backgrounds, and a special structured protocol containing model questions, answers and scenarios for the victims' interviews.



However, the operation of the Children's Houses has been subject to severe delays, as reported by the Greek Ombudsperson in its 2020 report¹. Of the four Houses for Children originally planned (Athens, Patras, Piraeus, and Thessaloniki), only the Children's House in Athens is fully operational; the Children's House in Piraeus is also co-located there. The others are not operational due to a lack of appropriate infrastructure and staff. The Greek Minister of Justice has announced that the Houses in Thessaloniki and Crete will open in early 2025².

The Children's Houses have the authority to conduct forensic interviews with child victims, however it is not an exclusive authority, meaning that other bodies also undertake forensic interviews and the child may need to give repeated interviews³. *"The child's interview is recorded for many reasons. To keep their words... And for... that testimony to go to court, for everyone to see what the kid said. And not have the same kid go to everybody's offices. The big failure... is the non-implementation of the law"* (Professor - Expert in child forensic interview).

In addition, although the protocol is established, no training is provided. While there have been efforts in the past by the NGO ELIZA and the National School of the Judiciary, there is no official training organised by the state.

The rights of children who have experienced a crime against them are regulated by Law 4478/2017⁴ which integrated Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime.

Among other, the law establishes the right to receive information from the first contact with a competent authority, the right to make the complaint in a language that they understand or by receiving the necessary linguistic assistance, the right to receive information about their case, the right to interpretation and translation, the right to receive support from victim support services, the right to be heard

¹ The Greek Ombudsperson, Annual report, 2020, <https://old.synigoros.gr/resources/ee2020-p00-plires-keimeno.pdf>

² Online press article

<https://socialpolicy.gr/2025/01/%CF%80%CE%B1%CE%B9%CE%B4%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%AE-%CF%80%CF%81%CE%BF%CF%83%CF%84%CE%B1%CF%83%CE%AF%CE%B1-%CF%83%CF%80%CE%AF%CF%84%CE%B9-%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%85-%CF%80%CE%B1%CE%B9%CE%B4%CE%B9%CE%BF%CF%8D.html>

³ UNICEF Greece, An Assessment of the Child-Friendliness of the Juvenile Justice System in Greece, 2023, accessible in English and Greek, <https://www.unicef.org/greece/en/reports/assessment-child-friendliness-justice-system-greece>. The assessment was led by the UNICEF Country Office in Greece and the Ministry of Justice and it was carried out by Coram International with the support of Terre des Hommes Hellas.

⁴ Accessible in NOMOS legal database.



during criminal proceedings, the right to legal aid, the right to avoid contact between victim and offender, the right to protection of privacy, the right to protection, the right to an individual assessment of victims to identify specific protection needs. However, as pointed out by the participants of our research activities and the literature review⁵, the system lacks proper coordination amongst the actors involved, and lack of trained professionals.

In terms of legal aid, child victims of crimes against personal and sexual freedom and sexual dignity are entitled to legal aid in respect of any civil and criminal claims they may have according to article 1 of Law 3226/2004. The Prosecutor, the investigating judge or the court, may, if it is deemed necessary, appoint a lawyer from the special list of the relevant bar association as an ex officio measure for the child victim of the aforementioned crimes.

Regarding protection of privacy and confidentiality, article 20 of Law 3500/2006 foresees confidentiality obligations of police officers for victims of domestic violence. Police authorities investigating the case are prohibited from giving information to the public, which might reveal the identity of the victim or the perpetrator. In addition, article 352 B of the Criminal Code, which deals with victims of crimes against sexual freedom foresees penalties for anyone who publishes information which could lead to the disclosure of the identity of the minor victim between reporting and the court's decision.

2.1.2 Child protection actors in Greece

The Department for Minors and the Child Public Prosecutor

The Child Public Prosecutor deals with children either involved with the justice system as perpetrators or victims of crime. The Department for Minors, is a separate and partly independent service of the Public Prosecutor's Office, and acts as the main guarantor of the rights of minors⁶.

⁵ UNICEF Greece, An Assessment of the Child-Friendliness of the Juvenile Justice System in Greece, 2023, accessible in English and Greek, <https://www.unicef.org/greece/en/reports/assessment-child-friendliness-justice-system-greece>. The assessment was led by the UNICEF Country Office in Greece and the Ministry of Justice and it was carried out by Coram International with the support of Terre des hommes Hellas.

⁶ Tsiardakli, The role of the Child Public prosecutor, <https://ppothess.gr/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/%CE%A4%CF%83%CE%B9%CE%B1%CF%81%CE%B4%CE%B1%CE%BA%CE%BB%CE%AE-%CE%9F%CE%BC%CE%B9%CE%BB%CE%AF%CE%B1-%CF%83%CE%B5->



The Greek Police

The Greek Police has the responsibility to receive and investigate reports of crimes, in collaboration with the prosecuting authorities. Especially regarding domestic violence⁷, under the Greek Police, 73 Services and 63 Offices operate throughout the country⁸.

The Deputy Ombudsperson for Children Rights

The Greek Ombudsperson is an independent authority aiming to protect citizens' rights; in the frame of the authority, operates a Deputy Ombudsperson for Children Rights in Greece since 2003 with the mission to defend the rights of minors. The Ombudsperson investigates violations of children's rights by institutions or individuals and proposes ways to protect them, monitors the implementation of the relevant legislation and makes recommendations to the state to take measures to their best interests, meets children, listens to their views and discusses with them the problems affecting them⁹.

The National Centre for Social Solidarity (“Ethniko Kentro Kinonikis Allilegiis” – EKKA”)

EKKA’s mandate is linked with the provision of protection and psychosocial support, as well as coordination of the network of social support services to individuals, families and vulnerable social groups¹⁰. In terms of child protection¹¹, EKKA supports child victims by collaborating with legal and social services, offering procedural guidelines. EKKA operates the 24 hour seven days a week Direct Social Assistance Hotline “197”, which is the central, guiding reference point for the entire system of direct social assistance services, providing

[%CF%86%CE%BF%CE%B9%CF%84%CE%B7%CF%84%CE%AD%CF%82-%CE%BD%CE%BF%CE%BC%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%AE%CF%82-%CE%99%CE%99.docx](#)

⁷ Greek Police, Official Website, Domestic Violence <https://www.astynomia.gr/odigos-tou-politi/chrisimes-symvoules/endooikogeneiaki-via/>

⁸ Greek Police, Offices against Domestic Violence <https://www.astynomia.gr/file/2024/07/Grafeia-Domestic-Violence-thlephona.pdf>

⁹ Ombudsperson for Children Rights, Official website, <https://www.synigoros.gr/paidi/profile-stp.html>

¹⁰ **National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA)**, Home [online], available at: www.ekka.org.gr [Accessed 16 September 2024].

¹¹ National Centre for Social Solidarity, Child protection, <https://ekka.org.gr/index.php/el/paidiki-prostasia>



counselling and psychological support and the National Child Protection Hotline "1107" which provides telephone counselling, psychological and social support to children, parents, teachers and other professionals, refers to the relevant social services, receives reports on children at risk and forwards reports to the relevant authorities¹².

Responsible person for Child Protection

Law 4837/2021 foresees that each child protection structure or organization appoints a Responsible person for Child Protection and informs the National Center for Social Solidarity ("E.K.K.A."). The responsible individual is tasked with collecting and recording reports of child abuse incidents, forwarding them to the competent Prosecutor or the nearest police authority, or potentially to the Social Services of the first-level municipal authorities, as well as the organisation's management¹³.

The Institute of Child Health

The Institute of Child Health is the first centre with scientific work on the health and development of children via a multidisciplinary approach¹⁴. The Institute's activities expand on issues of paediatrics, mental health, primary care, health promotion and quality of life for children and families. Among other, the Institute has drafted protocols for the identification and management of child abuse cases to be used by professionals, as will be further analysed below.

Children public Hospitals for treatment of children and Community Centres for the Mental Health of Children

Child psychiatric clinics and departments in public hospitals, as well as community centres for the mental health of children operating all over Greece are usually the first to identify a case of child abuse. Moreover, the health care

¹² National Centre for Social Solidarity, Presentation of "197" and "1107" Hotlines

<https://ekka.org.gr/images/KOINONIKON-PAREMBASEON/%CE%A0%CE%91%CE%A1%CE%9F%CE%A5%CE%A3%CE%99%CE%91%CE%A3%CE%97%CE%A4%CE%97%CE%9B.%CE%93%CE%A1%CE%91%CE%9C%CE%9C%CE%A9%CE%9D.pdf>

¹³ National Center for Social Solidarity ("E.K.K.A."). Retrieved from [E.K.K.A. Εθνικό Κέντρο Κοινωνικής Αλληλεγγύης - Υπεύθυνος Προστασίας Ανηλίκων -Ν. 4837/2021 \(Α 178\)](https://ekka.org.gr/images/KOINONIKON-PAREMBASEON/%CE%A0%CE%91%CE%A1%CE%9F%CE%A5%CE%A3%CE%99%CE%91%CE%A3%CE%97%CE%A4%CE%97%CE%9B.%CE%93%CE%A1%CE%91%CE%9C%CE%9C%CE%A9%CE%9D.pdf)

¹⁴ Institute of Child Health, Official Website, <https://ich.gr/%cf%80%ce%bf%ce%b9%ce%bf%ce%b9-%ce%b5%ce%af%ce%bc%ce%b1%cf%83%cf%84%ce%b5-2/>



facilities provide psychiatric and psychological support to children, often ordered by the Juvenile Prosecutor. Examples of such facilities included the Child Psychiatric Clinic¹⁵ in "Agia Sophia" General Children's Hospital of Athens¹⁶, the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Department of "Panayiotis and Aglaia Kyriakou" General Children's Hospital of Athens¹⁷, the Department of Child Psychiatry of Pendeli General Children's Hospital¹⁸, the Centre for Child Mental Health of Athens¹⁹, the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Department²⁰ of the "G. Papanikolaou" General Hospital of Thessaloniki²¹.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

NGOs are key players in addressing systemic gaps, offering training, advocacy, and direct support for child victims. Unfortunately, due to space constraints in this report, we are only able to reference a select number of NGOs, primarily those whose mandates are specifically focused on the protection of children's rights.

Since 2020, **UNICEF** has a formal presence in Greece (Office of UNICEF in Greece), which is to provide assistance to the State to fulfil their obligations to children under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Office participates in a wide range of programmes, by conducting research and trainings, among other, in child protection, child friendly justice and monitoring of implementation of children rights²².

ELIZA is a non-profit organisation in Greece dedicated to the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect by raising awareness, advocating for child safety, and providing specialised support services. ELIZA helpline "10454" offers support to professionals working close to children who may suspect that a child

¹⁵ <https://paidon-agiasofia.gr/tmimata-kai-klinikos/psychiatrikos-tomeas/paidopsychiatriki-kliniki-panepistimioy-athinon/>

¹⁶ <https://paidon-agiasofia.gr/>

¹⁷ <http://www.aglaiakyriakou.gr/>

¹⁸ <https://paidon-pentelis.gr/>

¹⁹ <https://www.kepsya.gr/>

²⁰ <https://gpapanikolaou.gr/iatrikh-yphresia/psychiatriko-tmima-paidion-efivon/>

²¹ <https://gpapanikolaou.gr/>

²² The Office of UNICEF in Greece, Official Website, <https://www.unicef.org/greece/en/what-we-do>



is being neglected or abused. The helpline offers psychological support and guidance on procedural legal issues²³.

The Smile of the Child offers legal, psychological, and social support to child victims of abuse, neglect, and human trafficking. They work with legal professionals to ensure child-friendly justice and provide training and resources on child protection. "The Children's House" established by the abovementioned NGO (different from the Children's Houses established by Ministerial Decision 7320/2019), is a day care centre dedicated to providing individualised mental health services to children and adolescents who have been victims of abuse, neglect, domestic violence, and children who have been exposed to severe traumatic experiences²⁴. The Smile of the Child operates the 24 hour, seven days a week, SOS - National Helpline for Children "1056". The helpline receives reports of children at risk, activates procedures for on-site intervention for the protection of children at risk, manages requests for accommodation of abused children in the organisation's shelters, and coordinates with other services. It is connected with the European Emergency phone number "112". The helpline is also available in form of an application "Chat 1056" addressed to children²⁵.

The Network for Children's Rights encourages actions, by implementing surveys, campaigns and programmes, to ensure that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is implemented in Greece, to guarantee respect for diversity and to put an end to discrimination²⁶.

ARSIS – Association for the Social Support of Youth specialises in the social support of youth at risk and victims of crime, as well as in the advocacy of their rights by implementing, among other, educational and street work activities²⁷.

ARSIS and the Network for Children's Rights are implementing partners of the National Emergency Response Mechanism (NERM) for Unaccompanied Children in precarious conditions, a Mechanism coordinated by the General Secretariat of

²³ <https://eliza.org.gr/oi-draseis-mas/grammi-eliza-10454/>

²⁴ The Smile of the Child, *Home* [online], available at: www.hamogelo.gr [Accessed 16 September 2024].

²⁵ <https://www.hamogelo.gr/gr/el/sos-1056/>

²⁶ Network for Children's Rights, Official Website, <https://ddp.gr/en/the-network/>

²⁷ ARSIS, Official Website, [Αρχική | ARSIS](#)



Vulnerable Persons and Institutional Protection of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum. The Mechanism includes a hotline which is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and is available in six languages.

Terre des Hommes Hellas contributes to the improvement of the child protection system and to the reform of social assistance. Their projects emphasise on restorative justice and the development of educational materials in various aspects of child friendly justice for professionals who work with children²⁸.

SOS Villages Greece²⁹ offers family-like care to children who cannot grow up with their biological parents through programmes to promote the concept of foster families. The organisation provides a wide range of services on accommodation, psychological support, education and emergency response in many territories of Greece.

2.2 Challenges related to the application of child-friendly justice by lawyers, focusing on child victims of crime

2.2.1. Systemic inefficiencies of child protection

According to our research, Greece, **lacks a holistic approach** to support child victims of crime. In detail, there is lack of specialised services and trained professionals, as well as lack of coordination among the competent authorities and organisations. There are **gaps in the services** provided to children, difficulties in referral and lack of infrastructure.

In detail, an interviewed prosecutor elaborated on the delays on lack of available housing services, the back and forth of the child in order to take the necessary medical examinations so as to be accepted in an accommodation facility, the lack

²⁸ Terre des Hommes Greece, Projects - Child-Friendly Justice. Available at: <https://tdh.gr/en/projects-child-friendly-justice> (Accessed: 18 September 2024).

²⁹ SOS Villages Greece, Official Website, <https://sos-villages.gr/en/sos-childrens-villages-greece-3/>



of information between professionals who have examined the child which results in children not being protected because their individual medical and other needs have not been identified. In practice, children who are removed from the family environment are often accommodated in hospitals as a provisional protection measure. However, this provisional measure can last from days up to three months (Police officer of child protection unit). It has occurred children to be abused during their stay in the hospitals (Professor - Expert in child forensic interview). Children are often so frustrated and tired from the gaps of the child protection system that they ask that they return in the abusive family environment (Public Prosecutor).

The process is inconsistent, there is a fragmentation of services, there is understaffing. There are cases of children that are left “unclaimed”, in limbo, and if there is no personal contact minors feel lack of protection (psychologist of the Institute of Child Health, participants of the NGO focus group).

In addition, judicial and other child protection authorities and services are severely **understaffed**, making it difficult to support children throughout the process (lawyers’ focus group). The Deputy Ombudsperson for Children’s Rights highlighted that understaffing poses the greatest challenge, significantly impeding the ability to identify a child’s best interests and provide effective support.

A participant of the lawyers’ focus group mentioned: *“I want to talk about understaffing which I think is the primary problem; there is no real social service in the municipalities... and at psychiatric level it is very, very difficult overall to make a referral...”*

Lack of staff and other systemic issues of the criminal procedures in Greece cause **delays in court proceedings**, which lead to re-traumatisation of the children involved. It can take up to five years between the initial examination and the trial (Lawyer working in child protection).

Apart from that, there is **no uniform protocol or policy** for the treatment of cases involving children who have been victims of crime; there are regional or profession-specific protocols (which will be further analysed in the following section), but it mainly depends on the internal procedures of the respective organisation handling the case (psychologist, participants of NGOs focus group).



When it comes to forensic interview of children victims of crime, and although Greece has established the Children's Houses and the respective protocol with Ministerial Decision 7320/2019, these Houses are not operational, apart from the one established in Athens. This leads to repeated examinations of the child. As pointed out by a police officer interviewed (police officer), a child victim will need to testify about the abuse experience around 7 times in average, and even 15 times in some cases.

Professionals who participated in the research activities reported that **intersectoral collaboration** for example among prosecutors, lawyers, police officers, social workers, NGOs, is in general terms very good. However, there is **no homogenous approach** among professionals which leads to uncertainty (Deputy Ombudsperson for Children Rights, lawyers focus group).

“These multi-traumatised and multi-victimised children need settings and active community networks to support each other in order to support children. Shared sense of responsibility.... Unfortunately, we see the opposite! [...]” (Psychologist, NGO focus group).

In addition, often the area of responsibility of each professional is not clear, which can be confusing, especially for the children (lawyers' focus group). Differences in the priorities, aims and approaches of professionals handling the case of a child victim (e.g., psychologists, police, lawyers) create tension in the collaboration (police officer). A negative practice reported by an interviewed psychologist is that often prosecutors enforce measures of psychotherapy of children, disregarding their consent and the importance assessing the role of the family involvement (psychologist).

One challenge pointed out repeatedly during our research is the **role of the family** and how professionals should collaborate with them. It is crucial for the professional to be aware of the conflict of interests which may occur between the child and the family, especially in cases where a family member is the perpetrator of the crime or aware of it, but also to make sure that the family will not affect the child by retraumatising them or even forcing them to behave in a certain way, (police officer, Deputy Ombudsperson for Children Rights, lawyers' focus group, NGOs focus group).

A participant of the lawyers' focus group mentioned: *“A minor wanted to report her family and they had taken her to the police station where she was absolutely*



exposed to the relatives... And they kept the pressure on her the whole time until the child broke...".

"Handling a case with a child victim is a long-term, dynamic process. Some of the children, even if they need to be removed for a short period of time from their environment, they can go back to their families, their familiar environment, healing from trauma, but those families need professional support and legal advice. In cases that we can work with family to assure that the environment will be improved to be suitable for the child, we prefer to invest in this effort than choose the solution of an institution. It is important that lawyers are aware of this aspect that this is the best benefit of the child. The most important is "accompanying child and family in the whole process, timely and direct response to children's need and a solid focal point in cases that parents are involved in criminal cases" (Psychologist, NGOs Focus Group).

In addition, the legal representation of the child in court often depends on the family's stance, intentions and financial means, which can lead to the child not being represented in the procedures and not exercising their rights. The child's testimony is often deconstructed during the trial by the defence attorney claiming the child as unreliable or mythomaniac (lawyer). It is not a rare phenomenon for defence attorneys in criminal hearings to adopt an aggressive approach or label children as "lying", "oversensitive" or "victim". Moreover, lawyers who represent the family of the child prioritise winning the case, over the child's well-being, instrumentalising the child and neglecting their needs.

The majority of the professionals who participated in our research activities mentioned that lawyers lack the necessary knowledge and skills to deal with cases where a child is involved as victim of crime.

"Too often the lawyers who take on children's cases are not trained. They do not know what children's rights are. They don't know what child-friendly information means... The same applies to the competent authorities, i.e. the child's first points of contact with the justice system." (Deputy Ombudsperson for Children Rights).

"There is difficulty in cooperation with lawyers and the hospital has a regulation that prohibits the exchange of information with lawyers. In our experience the lawyer can cause problems by misinterpreting words and diagnoses in the interest of his client..." (Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist).

The research highlights significant concerns regarding the treatment of sensitive information related to child victims of crime in Greece. Participants emphasized



a lack of trust towards the police, often attributed to inadequate training in handling such cases. Furthermore, the media's role in publishing details from cases involving children was identified as a major problem, as it can lead to the identification of the child and cause further harm, such as retraumatisation and a loss of trust (Deputy Ombudsperson for Children Rights). Despite the fact that it is a criminal offense to disclose such sensitive information, and the National Broadcasting Council has the authority to impose sanctions on the media, little action has been taken to address this issue, even though the Ombudsperson for Children's Rights has repeatedly raised concerns (Deputy Ombudsperson for Children Rights, Public Prosecutor).

In all interviews and focus groups, a common concern was the lack of adequate education and training for professionals (lawyers, prosecutors, judicial staff, and practitioners working with child victims) in managing cases of abuse and violence against children, particularly in terms of how to communicate with children and collaborate with the involved actors.

2.2.2. Lack of upholding the rights of children victims of crime

According to a police officer interviewed, in the case of a child victim of crime, information about the child's rights and the procedures is provided in writing to the child, and the parents are also informed (Police Officer). However, the majority of the interviewed professionals pointed out that there is a lack of information provided to child victims of crime. Some professionals highlighted that, in certain cases, even when a child is removed from the family environment, the child is taken by the police from school without prior notification and without any personal belongings (Psychologist, Public Prosecutor).

In addition, the right of children **to be heard and participate in the process** is often violated. *"The child's voice in the proceedings is not heard. Their trauma is not heard and expressed..."* (Lawyer).

According to participants in the lawyers' focus group, in practice, the exercise of the right to be heard and to participate in the process depends on how well-informed professionals are about children's rights, as well as their perception of whether the child is mature enough for their age to understand and process the information. This often leads to the neglect of the child's right to participate, due to the general belief among adults that children are not capable of understanding what is best for them. Juvenile prosecutors sometimes fail to involve children in



decisions, neglecting to uphold the principle of the child's best interests, which should be assessed on an individual basis.

“Children do not actually take part in the process that concerns them, despite what the international conventions stipulate, but when you put the child into the process the results are wonderful...” (Public Prosecutor).

Regarding the right to **legal aid**, for children who are called as suspects or accused of crime, this right is arranged immediately by the police or the prosecutor, but for child victims of crime, legal representation is addressed only when considered necessary.

“If the child comes to testify as a victim and does not have a lawyer, but the parent is informed... there is no contact with the bar association... However, if the need arises i.e. the child is on his/her own, there is no parent either, then the Public Prosecutor will be informed” (police officer).

“In case the family has not arranged for a lawyer... we refer the family to the relevant office of the bar association... And if the parent is the perpetrator of the crime... we will appoint a guardian and they will deal with the legal aid issues” (Public Prosecutor).

A participant in the lawyer's focus group shared that she has never seen any referral by the authorities of a victim of crime to legal aid. Although the law grants children the right to legal aid in cases of serious crimes such as sexual violence, domestic violence, or human trafficking, there is no automated referral process, leaving children unaware of this right. As a result, legal aid is not always provided, and children often lack support during the process. Additionally, there is a widespread belief that legal assistance is unnecessary since the child will only give a statement and not appear at the hearing. This lack of legal support leads to the undermining of the child's testimony during hearings, as the prosecution often fails to effectively counter the defense's arguments.

In addition, the lack of expertise among lawyers involved in legal aid was highlighted in the focus group: *“The lawyer assigned to you through legal aid and how they handle the case is completely random.”*

Another major issue raised by all participants in the research activities is the **lack of interpretation services** and the absence of training for interpreters. From the experiences shared, there are significant challenges in providing adequate interpretation for children involved in judicial proceedings. According to the lawyers' focus group, the interpretation system is fundamentally flawed, with no clear framework regulating the qualifications of interpreters. Additionally, delayed payments to interpreters result in decreased interest from professionals, making it difficult to secure their engagement. Non-governmental organisations,



such as METADRASI, often fill critical gaps left by formal systems, but this cannot address all cases. In many instances, practitioners are forced to rely on phone interpretation due to a lack of available interpreters; some interpreters even volunteer, though they are understandably reluctant. Furthermore, the lack of specialised training for interpreters leads to uncertainty about what is being interpreted, the quality of the interpretation, and how it is delivered. For children in particular, training in cultural mediation and a child-friendly approach is essential. The abolition of the official translation service of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs has had significant consequences for the operation of the judicial system (Public Prosecutor).

It is worth mentioning that (mental) health professionals are not enough informed about resources of legal aid. *“I don't think that (legal aid) exists, only NGOs have legal advisers [...]”* (Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist).

Participants in our research also highlighted the lack of specialised professionals to identify and address the needs of children with disabilities or developmental disorders (expert in child forensic interview).

2.3 Practices, tools and methods applied in justice involving children, with a special focus on child victims of crime

2.3.1 Protocols for cases of children victims of crime

Participants highlighted the use of protocols for handling cases of child victims of crime, particularly in health care and NGO settings. However, a key issue raised was the absence of national standardization, resulting in fragmented practices across services. In addition, their effectiveness is often hindered by a lack of specialised training for professionals and inconsistencies in their implementation.

Moreover, as mentioned by a participant of the lawyers' focus group: *“It is not so much a problem of common protocols... but rather that these procedures cannot be followed in practice as the gaps in real life are so extensive that the protocol cannot work...”*.

The Protocol for Child Forensic Interview



As previously mentioned, Ministerial Decision 7320/2019 established the Children's Houses, which includes a structured protocol for the forensic interview of children who testify as victims of crime. This protocol is based on the Barnahus model, which provides a safe, supportive environment where children can receive necessary services, such as forensic interviews, medical examinations, and psychological support, all under one roof (expert in child forensic interview).

The term "forensic examination" refers to the process of interviewing the child victim to investigate whether a crime has been committed against them. Key provisions of the protocol focus on creating a child-friendly and secure environment to minimize re-traumatisation. The facilities are equipped with advanced technical systems to record children's statements, reducing the need for repeated interviews.

The staff at the Children's Houses consists of professionals with expertise in child protection and psychology, skilled in conducting individual assessments, preparing children for interviews, and offering comprehensive support services. These professionals work to develop a tailored support plan for each child and ensure coordination with other service providers, including social and legal aid services, local authorities, and NGOs focused on child protection.

Article 2 of the Protocol outlines key principles, including treating the child with respect and in line with the best interests of the child. It prohibits any acts of discrimination, harm, or disclosure of information that could reveal the child's identity. The protocol also includes a process for individually assessing the child's needs, particularly the risk of secondary victimization. To prepare the child for the forensic interview, a child psychologist evaluates the child's developmental stage, understanding, memory skills, language abilities, and capacity to distinguish between truth and lies. The protocol provides clear steps to guide the interview process, along with an annex detailing interview stages and sample question-and-answer sequences tailored to various scenarios that may arise during interviews with children.

Protocols and Guidelines of the Institute of Child Health³⁰

The Institute of Child Health has drafted the following Protocol and Guidelines:

- ✓ The **Protocol for the Investigation, Diagnosis and Management of Child Abuse and Neglect**. The Protocol is addressed to professionals of health care, mental health care, welfare services, education, justice and law enforcement. The Protocol

³⁰ Available at: <https://ich-mhsw.gr/?p=700> [Accessed 21 September 2024].



works as a model for the management of incidents and child abuse and neglect: it provides lists abuse or neglect indicators, provides information on reporting, offers a summary of relevant legislation, and clarifies the roles, duties and responsibilities of professionals (psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker, educator) from the moment of suspicion to legal intervention and the timeline for each stage.

- ✓ The **Guide for the Implementation of the abovementioned Protocol**, which is designed to educate professionals on how to diagnose, manage and investigate cases of abuse and neglect, providing them with detailed information for each step.
- ✓ The **Child Abuse and Neglect Law Index in Greece**, which includes the basic principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, useful terminology on abuse and neglect, reporting obligations of professionals and specific issues such as privacy and support for child victims of abuse and neglect.
- ✓ The **Informative Leaflet about Child Abuse and Neglect cases** which summarises the indicators and steps to be taken by the professionals, as foreseen by the Protocol for the Investigation, Diagnosis and Management of Child Abuse and Neglect.

As reported by the practitioners who participated in our research activities, the abovementioned protocols are used or consulted in various child and adolescent psychiatric settings.

Protocol and Guidelines for professionals of the NGO ELIZA³¹

NGO Eliza has also drafted relevant protocols, as follows:

- ✓ Protocol of Guidelines for the management of child abuse incidents for police officers, which includes the steps and the approach of police officer in case of suspicion of a child's abuse. ELIZA also implemented trainings with police officers³².
- ✓ Protocol for the Identification and Management of child physical abuse incidents for health care professionals, which focuses on the indicators of physical abuse against a child. This Protocol is accompanied by a case management guide with summarised information.

³¹ Information poster for health professionals available at: <https://eliza.org.gr/protokolla-odigoi/> [Accessed 21 September 2024].

³² Protocol of Guidelines for the management of child abuse incidents for police officers. Retrieved from [Αστυνομικοί | ELIZA](#)



Those protocols are applied in four hospital-based child protection units founded by ELIZA organisation³³ contributing to the early identification, assessment, and medical care of children experiencing any form of abuse or neglect, timely notification of the prosecuting authorities and effective collaboration with families and other professionals to support the child holistically.^{34, 35}

However, participants of our research activities emphasized on the localised use of Protocols by NGOs or public children's hospitals. In most references, the effectiveness was described to be hindered by lack of specialised training of professionals and inconsistencies in the implementation. *"The Guide of the Child's Health Institute does not include the interview. It is not clear ... how the professional can work. In many cases professionals say that they follow the Protocol but they do it in the wrong way"* (Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist). *"The Protocol is a "compass" but the involved staff needs substantial training how to handle child victims."* (Child and Adolescent Psychiatric resident doctor).

Protocols Against School Bullying³⁶

The Ministry of Education has launched a dedicated website to address the issue of school bullying, allowing students and their families to report incidents online. Additionally, three protocols have been developed for educators and school administrators. The first protocol provides definitions related to school bullying, the second focuses on prevention, and the third addresses case management.

Another notable resource for educators is the guide developed by Mrs. Panagiotaki and Mrs. Themeli (2021)³⁷, which aims to inform teachers about child

³³ Child Safety Care Unit at P. & A. Kyriakou Children's Hospital, Child Safety Care Unit at Attikon Hospital, Child Safety Care Unit in Alexandroupolis, Child Safety Care Unit in Thessaloniki.

³⁴ Available at: <https://eliza.org.gr/en/our-work/hospital-based-child-protection-unit/> [Accessed 21 September 2024].

³⁵ **ELIZA - Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Home** [online], available at: <https://eliza.org.gr> [Accessed 16 September 2024].

³⁶ Ministry of Education, Protocols Against School Bullying. Retrieved from <https://stop-bullying.gov.gr/institutional-framework>

³⁷ Panagiotaki, M., & Themeli, O. (2021). A guide for the identification and management of incidents of abuse and neglect by educators. Retrieved from [«Οδηγός για την αναγνώριση και](#)



abuse and neglect. This guide outlines indicators of different forms of abuse and neglect, as well as the steps to be taken, with an emphasis on creating an environment of trust and safety for the child.

2.3.2. Personal data protection policies

Regarding measures to protect the personal data of children involved in judicial proceedings, particularly child victims of crime, participants in the lawyers' focus group noted the absence of a uniform policy beyond the general provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, Regulation 2016/679).

However, child protection services and NGOs have established internal measures and processes to protect personal data. Additionally, practitioners are bound by professional codes of conduct, which include obligations of non-disclosure and confidentiality (psychologist, lawyers' focus group).

Pretrial investigations are subject to strict confidentiality by law, which is especially crucial for information shared by children (police officer). However, the fact that often children's testimonies in cases of sexual abuse and exploitation were published in the media, reveal systemic failures in safeguarding their anonymity and privacy (Deputy Ombudsperson for Children Rights, Expert in Child Forensic Interview, Public Prosecutor). The solution does not seem to lie in stricter regulations, but in raising awareness and fostering collaboration with journalists and media owners (Deputy Ombudsperson for Children Rights).

Mental health professionals and social workers involved in the research expressed awareness of the mandatory confidentiality and adhere to the procedures of their respective hospitals, services, or NGOs. However, they reported inconsistencies, particularly when it comes to sharing critical information necessary for the child's benefit and continuity of care. These challenges were noted to be especially acute in rural areas.

As one child and adolescent psychiatrist explained, "*The children are not protected... There are no adequate protection processes for digital records... They are circulated between professionals using a USB with no control... The solution could be for data to go directly to specific police facilities, with access under control.*"



2.4 Best practices, guidelines and recommendations for lawyers when representing child victims of crime

1.4.1. Practices to enhance practitioners' communication skills

Participants of our research activities gave some valuable inputs regarding good practices when communicating with a child in order to build trust and avoid retraumatisation:

Building trust with a child victim of crime

Building trust with a child requires time, training for the involved professionals, and a personalized approach—skills that can be developed. Practitioners should receive relevant information about the child in advance and adapt their communication style to the child's age, developmental stage, and specific circumstances (psychologist).

A key aspect in establishing trust, as noted by a professional, is the environment in which the child is welcomed. "The primary issue is the space in which we welcome a child... Second, how you sit. You have to be close to the child, but you can't have physical contact... You have to make the child feel comfortable. The third thing is how you will talk to them at the beginning about general subjects, asking about their school or what they like to do" (Public Prosecutor).

Health care professionals also emphasized that trust is built on stability, continuity of care, smooth transitions, timely responses, and being clear and honest with the child.

"[...] We are trying to create a relationship based on trust, which may take time, it will not be established in one or two meetings. We use key communication principles and active listening" ³⁸. (Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist). *"We need*

³⁸ Carl Rogers (1987) Active Listening in Communicating in Business Today R.G. Newman, M.A. Danziger, M. Cohen (eds) D.C. Heath & Company, 1987

https://wholebeinginstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/Rogers_Farson_Active-Listening.pdf



to respect the time that a child may need. If you push the child, they might be re-traumatised” (Psychologist, NGO focus group).

A lawyer participant mentioned the importance of creating a friendly atmosphere: *“The sense of familiarity; to show that we understand them, that we understand what they want to say, that we have common perceptions, we have been to the same places, we use a common language and understanding.”*

Discussing subjects that may seem irrelevant to the meeting can help facilitate communication and build rapport. Additionally, if the professional observes signs of discomfort or anxiety in the child, a "discharge" break can help the child relax (expert in child forensic interview, lawyers’ focus group). Practitioners should avoid asking directive or multiple questions that may overwhelm or confuse the child (expert in child forensic interview).

Younger children benefit from drawing and games, while adolescents may engage more effectively through activities like board games (psychologist, Public Prosecutor, Deputy Ombudsperson for Children Rights). Other tools that can help establish a friendly environment and make communication more accessible include comics, short videos, and doodle books (Deputy Ombudsperson for Children Rights). When conducting individual assessments of a child's personality and needs, psychologists highlighted the importance of using screening tools, psychometric evaluations, and questionnaires for both parents and children to enhance understanding and communication (psychologist).

It is also crucial for professionals to have a clear understanding of their own expertise and capabilities, as this allows the child to feel they are in capable hands. Practitioners should be honest with the child and avoid raising false expectations (lawyers’ focus group). Consistency and systematicity are also necessary (Deputy Ombudsperson for Children Rights), though often hindered by understaffing.

Professionals need to be mindful of their non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions or posture, to avoid conveying unintended messages to the child (expert in child forensic interview, lawyers’ focus group). They should also be cautious not to inadvertently make the child feel questioned or criticized.

“Children must be well informed from the beginning about the process, what its purpose is, what it includes, and when it will be completed- the questions should be open- the child should be given space – you need to explain that it's okay if they don't know or don't understand” (Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, NGOs focus group).



At the same time, professionals should avoid adopting parental attitudes or imposing authority (lawyers' focus group). *"In many cases, children come from inappropriate family environments... the professional should not replicate anything associated with a parenting role; you don't criticise, you don't blame the victim. You should proactively emphasise that the responsibility lies with the perpetrator, as victims often seek to understand what they did wrong. It's crucial to avoid admonishing them, which is a common trap that many lawyers fall into."*

A participant in the lawyers' focus group also stressed the importance of addressing one's own biases, stress, and fears. Supervision is vital for managing these challenges.

"On-going training and on-going supervision within a team is crucial. Your judgement may be affected by the difficulty of the case, family dynamics, the personality of other professionals for example, lawyers..." (Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist).

To provide holistic support for the child, working within multidisciplinary teams is crucial (Deputy Ombudsperson for Children Rights, Expert in Child Forensic Interview, Public Prosecutor, lawyers' focus group, NGOs focus group).

As a police officer noted, "In the examination of a child, communication must be child-centered. Questions should be clear and easy to understand. Answers should be documented exactly as the child provides them." The officer also mentioned that, as there is typically no infrastructure available for video recording the child's testimony, police officers must take detailed notes during the interview, including non-verbal cues and behaviors (e.g., trembling, voice fluctuations) to accurately capture the child's emotional state.

Trauma informed approach

Efforts to address mental health and psychosocial support in Greece highlight the increasing recognition of the need for professionals, including lawyers, to be trained in understanding the psychological and emotional needs of children, especially those in challenging situations. Most participants in the research emphasized that all child victims are traumatised and must be approached with a trauma-informed approach. While professionals' knowledge of trauma-informed care is valued, it was noted that this approach is often lacking in police and prosecuting authorities (Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist).

Child victims are at risk of secondary victimization when providing testimony during preliminary investigations and courtroom proceedings, due to the repetitive and often intrusive nature of questioning. Using appropriate interviewing techniques that prioritize empathy and sensitivity is critical to



reducing this risk, protecting the child from further harm, and ensuring the integrity of their testimony. As one expert in child forensic interviews explained: "Too many times children change their testimony because they think that speaking to so many people and being asked the same thing means they haven't done it well, so they change their answers... There is overwhelming fear. Who are the people asking me? Am I going to get punished too? The perpetrator threatened me... I accepted his gifts... I'm ashamed to say these things. I'm ashamed of the words. I'm ashamed of people..." (Expert in child forensic interview).

Empathy techniques, such as reflecting the child's emotions and offering reassurance, are key to supporting the child during the process. *"It's very important to thank them for talking to you... I remind them that they are not to blame for any of this... It's not just about getting the answer I want, but about respecting the child and activating their memory..."* (Expert in child forensic interview).

"Communication and alliance with the child are necessary, to understand the child in a holistic way, which includes understanding trauma. There are trauma informed approaches, but the important thing is a reliable supervision of the professionals that implement them". (Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist).

As one prosecutor shared: "What I learned is that these children should not be touched, especially those who have trauma... I learned that from mental health experts. Trauma is the first thing that determines how we treat a child" (Public Prosecutor).

The need to minimize the number of times a child is asked to recount their traumatic experiences was emphasized as it can also prevent memory distortion and emotional distress (expert in child forensic interview). Parents are advised by the police not to ask the child about the event to prevent additional trauma (police officer).

In addition, professionals must be trained in trauma-informed practices to ensure that children are not framed as victims. It's essential to allow the children feel that the traumatic event does not define who they are (Deputy Ombudsperson for Children Rights). A participant from the lawyers' focus group noted: "The question of what you will do next is crucial... I am a child who has a life. I'll go play, hang out with my friends, and keep going with my life."

"We strive to have protocols for addressing trauma, such as recognition that the child is a victim of trauma, identification of signs resulting from trauma, privacy issues, processes that do not re-traumatise the child" (Pediatrician).



A notable practice implemented by the Thessaloniki police department to avoid re-traumatization is having female officers conduct interviews with child victims of sexual abuse or violence, recognizing that the majority of abusers are men.

Dealing with cases of children with additional vulnerabilities

Children with additional vulnerabilities often face systemic barriers in accessing justice. Legal practitioners, lacking consistent support from qualified professionals, rely on personal resources and networks to provide necessary assistance (Deputy Ombudsperson for Children Rights).

This issue is compounded by the lack of trained professionals in Greece, particularly for children with disabilities (expert in child forensic interview, Public Prosecutor). Communication with children with developmental disorders presents significant challenges, requiring practitioners to adopt alternative communication methods. One lawyer in the focus group stated: *“There is no provision for interpretation in sign language or for children with sensory impairments. There is no provision for children with mobility problems, visually impaired children...”*.

At the same time, children with disabilities have an increased vulnerability to abuse and exploitation (Deputy Ombudsperson for Children Rights). Tailored approaches are essential for effective communication with these children. A Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist highlighted:

“Developmental age is important. Using vocabulary that the child uses, avoiding metaphors for children on the autism spectrum, considering their tendency to tire more easily, and repeating questions when dealing with mental disabilities or depression.”

As one psychologist emphasized, schools play a pivotal role in supporting children with disabilities, but also children from different cultural backgrounds, or victims of school bullying (psychologist).

Certain groups of children, such as Roma children, face systemic marginalisation, discrimination and severe rights violations in justice processes (Deputy Ombudsperson for Children Rights).

A lawyer from the focus group commented: *“Many times children are forced to be perpetrators themselves... Adults make children steal. In one legal aid case, a juvenile had at least 20 similar offenses, but there was no context or accountability for the adults involved. It’s an institutional issue...”*.

As mentioned by participants of the lawyers’ focus group, unaccompanied children with migrant background also frequently experience rights violations,



including hate speech, violence, and lack of access to basic rights such as information and interpretation. The operation of specialised police units for identifying unaccompanied children in the frame of the National Emergency Response Mechanism (NERM) have been praised and it is suggested that this example is extended to cover other vulnerable groups.

The sensitivity of professionals should include respect on diversities of children they work with. Some participants of our research activities noted the need for gender-inclusive approaches, respecting every child's identity and experiences. *"Intersectional approach and all identities are included and approached accordingly. "We treat every child in an equal, but differentiated way according to their needs"*(Social Worker).

A commendable initiative by the NGO "BABEL" involves training interpreters in therapeutic processes for refugees and migrants, effectively bridging cultural and language barriers to support these children.

Addressing these issues requires systemic reforms, specialized training for professionals, and the extension of best practices like those implemented by NGOs and specialized police units. With targeted efforts, the justice system can better protect and support vulnerable children.

1.4.2. Practices targeted at enhancing lawyers' awareness on children's rights

In the lawyers' focus group, a legal practitioner from UNICEF Greece highlighted a training initiative implemented in February 2024 in collaboration with Athens Law School. Attended by approximately 25 lawyers and law students specialising in Criminal Law and Criminology, the training focused on enhancing child-friendly legal services by emphasising the rights of the child and principles of child-friendly justice. The sessions were based on training materials developed by the UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, with plans to establish the programme as an annual event.

Additionally, under the EU funded FAIR Project, a practical handbook for lawyers was developed in 2018 to support the representation of child clients and improve access to justice for migrant children. This comprehensive guide offers tools and recommendations on child-friendly communication, understanding children's rights, and prioritizing a child's best interests in legal proceedings. It underscores the importance of psychological awareness and interdisciplinary collaboration



with social workers and psychologists to ensure holistic and sensitive legal representation for children in vulnerable circumstances³⁹.

1.4.3. Practices targeted at enhancing children and field professionals' awareness on children rights

Terre des Hommes (TDH) Hellas has launched several impactful initiatives to promote child-friendly justice. The i-RESTORE and i-RESTORE 2.0 projects⁴⁰ focus on advancing the use of Restorative Justice for child victims by enhancing national stakeholders' knowledge and empowering children to advocate for better protection. Another innovative effort, the “i-Access My Rights”⁴¹ project, developed an AI chatbot that provides child victims with information about their role and rights in criminal proceedings, presented in a child-friendly manner.

To address knowledge gaps on children's rights, the Greek Police, particularly the Subdirectorate for the Protection of Minors in Thessaloniki, Greece organizes training sessions for schools, parents' associations, and field professionals. These trainings aim to help participants identify indicators of child abuse and delinquent behaviour among children (Police Officer).

The Deputy Ombudsperson for Children's Rights also conducts trainings for field professionals, focusing on children's rights and child-friendly communication. However, as emphasized by the interviewed representative, more specialised training is needed for key stakeholders, including prosecutors and lawyers. In addition to professional training, the Ombudsperson's office conducts empowerment sessions for children participating in consultative bodies, enabling them to understand and claim their rights.

As part of the EU-funded “Child Front” project⁴², a comprehensive e-learning platform has been developed to support prosecutors and judges across civil, criminal, and administrative branches of justice. This platform provides training on children's rights in judicial proceedings, child psychology, and child-friendly

³⁹ **FAIR Project**, *Practical Handbook for Lawyers: When Representing a Child, Training Materials on Access to Justice for Migrant Children*, Module 6, April 2018.

<https://www.icj.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Europe-FAIR-module-6-Training-modules-2018-GRE.pdf>

⁴⁰ [i-Restore 2.0: Προσβάσιμες Ποιοτικές Διαδικασίες Αποκαταστατικής Δικαιοσύνης για Παιδιά που έρχονται σε Επαφή με το Νόμο | Terre des hommes Greece](#)

⁴¹ <https://tdh.gr/en/i-access-my-rights-smart-justice-children-aid-artificial-intelligence>

⁴² [CHILDfront: CHILDfront](#)



communication, aiming to promote the consistent application of European child-friendly justice policies and legislation.



3. Training needs of lawyers

Findings from the literature review and field research reveal a consensus among practitioners on the urgent need for enhanced training for lawyers working with child victims of crime. Participants consistently highlighted the absence of systematic training on children's rights and child-friendly justice. The training lawyers receive is typically due to their personal initiative and is provided by external institutions or NGOs rather than as part of their formal education.

Participants in the research assessed lawyers' competencies in key areas critical to representing child victims, such as understanding the legal framework, child psychology, communication with children, and child protection services. The majority rated the overall level of knowledge and experience among lawyers poorly. However, lawyers and legal advisors affiliated with NGOs stood out as exceptions, demonstrating expertise in child protection legislation and services.

Noteworthy is that lawyers in the focus group underscored the pressing need for training, particularly in child psychology and child-friendly communication. Their comments illustrate the challenges they face:

"No matter how good intentions the lawyer has and no matter how much they want to protect they child, they lack key points for communicating with a child and especially with a child in this vulnerable situation, they cannot create a relationship that is not traumatic for the child..."

"... The training that we have as a profession is not at all child friendly... As lawyers we are trained to seek the truth, to seek how our case will result in vindication... My opinion is that in the area of child protection that is not what is important. The important thing here is not re-traumatising the child... Many times, this conflicts with the training that we have received, where we ask interrogative questions, we try in various ways to identify the gaps in our case so that it doesn't fall apart later..."

The following areas were identified as critical for training:

1. **Practical application of the legal framework**

Training should cover children's rights and the rights of crime victims under national laws, EU directives, and relevant case law.

2. **Child psychology and communication**

Lawyers need training on child psychology and communication, ensuring interactions with children do not cause secondary trauma. Training should also address managing personal biases, handling conflicts of interest between children and their guardians, as well as supporting their family as



a whole in the cases that this is the best benefit of the child, and adopting child-friendly communication techniques.

3. **Confidentiality and Data Protection**

Addressing confidentiality challenges and data protection is essential to uphold the child's rights and privacy.

4. **Interdisciplinary Collaboration**

Effective collaboration with other professionals, such as judicial authorities, healthcare providers, psychologists, social workers, and cultural mediators, is crucial. Training should focus on fostering interdisciplinary approaches to support children with traumatic experiences and utilising child and victim support services, as priorities for improving the capacity of lawyers in this field.

4. Conclusions

The research reveals significant inefficiencies in the system in Greece concerning support for child victims of crime. Despite a comprehensive legal framework on children's rights and victims' rights, implementation remains weak due to gaps in specialised services and coordination.

The “Children's House,” modeled on the Barnahus approach, has been established for forensic interviews with child victims of crime, but these facilities are not operational and lack exclusive authority, resulting in repeated and potentially traumatic examinations of children.

Understaffing emerges as a critical challenge, severely limiting the system's ability to prioritise a child's best interests and provide effective support. Delays in court proceedings, stemming from systemic issues and resource shortages, contribute to the re-traumatisation of children involved in these processes.

Furthermore, the absence of uniform protocols or standardised policies for managing cases involving child victims of crime leads to fragmented approaches among professionals, exacerbating uncertainty and inefficiency.

The role of the family was consistently identified as a complex and challenging factor, with the child's legal representation often contingent on the family's financial means or intentions. This dependency frequently leaves children unrepresented, unable to exercise their rights, and exposed to adversarial tactics from defence attorneys during criminal hearings. Professionals also pointed out that child victims often lack access to information about their rights and the



judicial process, with the exercise of their right to be heard depending heavily on the knowledge and perceptions of the professionals involved.

Cultural awareness is an important skill for professionals working with children on the move. It is important to understand the child's cultural context and background, particularly for child refugees or migrants, and for professionals supporting child victims of abuse.

Interpretation services for children are insufficient, with significant challenges in providing quality interpretation in judicial proceedings. Similarly, there is a lack of specialised services tailored to the needs of children with disabilities or developmental disorders.

Participants highlighted the importance of effective communication with child victims to build trust and avoid retraumatisation. However, such skills are typically acquired through field experience or collaboration with other professionals rather than formal training. The findings emphasise a widespread lack of education and training for professionals in addressing cases of abuse and violence against children. Specific gaps include knowledge of children's rights, trauma-informed approaches, child-friendly communication, and interdisciplinary collaboration. The research particularly identified that lawyers lack basic knowledge and skills child psychology and child-friendly communication. Training initiatives should prioritise the development of skills that align with the child's age, developmental stage, cognitive abilities, and emotional state. Professionals also require training to clarify the roles of involved actors and improve intersectoral collaboration.

In closing, the research highlights the critical importance of the human element in overcoming systemic shortcomings:

"It's people that make the difference... We should try to make the most of what we have; it can be decisive for a child's life" (Public Prosecutor).



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