

ANNUAL SEMINAR



CFJ-EN
Child Friendly Justice
European Network

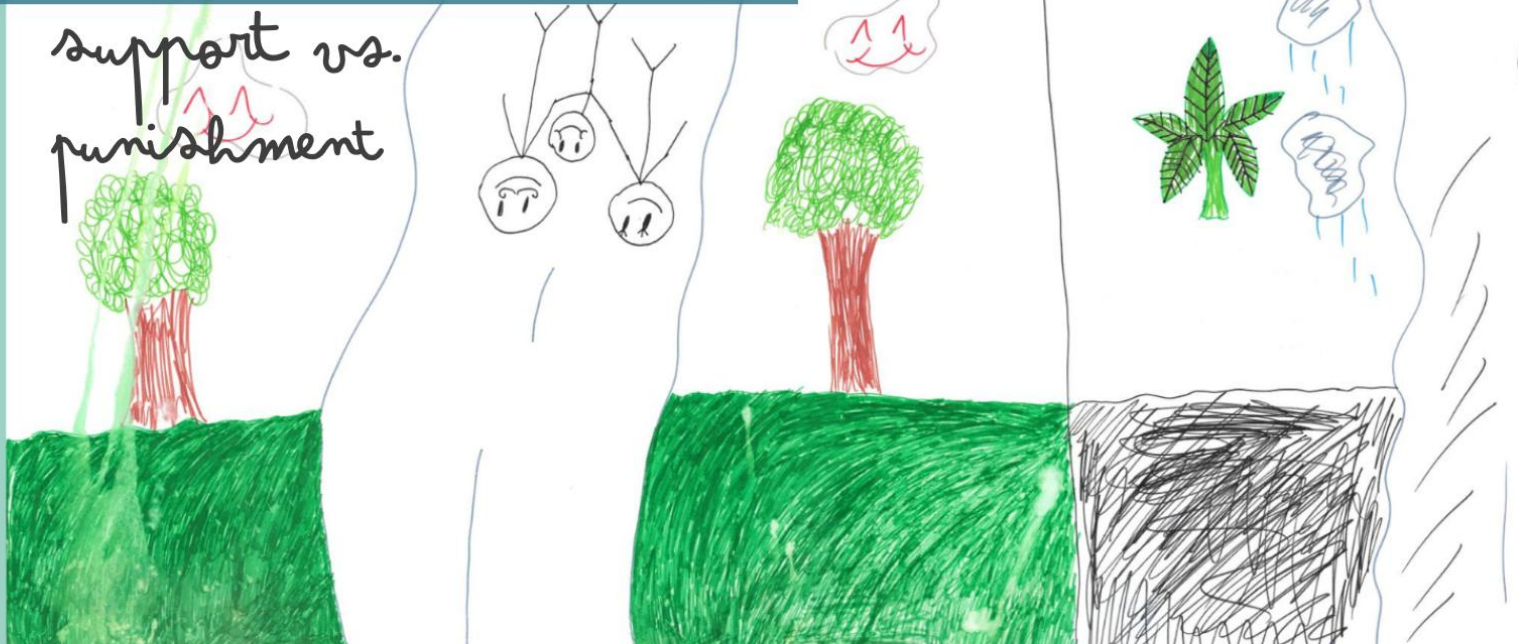
CONCEPT NOTE

22 - 24

OCTOBER 2025

ATHENS, GREECE | IN-PERSON

support vs.
punishment



**BRIDGING CHILD PROTECTION AND
CHILD JUSTICE:**
Enhancing collaborations for child-centred justice systems



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CFJ-EN Annual Seminar 2025

Bridging Child Protection and Child Justice – Enhancing collaborations for child-centred justice systems

CONCEPT NOTE

Practical details

When?	Wednesday 22 – Friday 24 October 2025
Where?	Athens, Greece
Language of the seminar:	English
Seminar format:	In-person event
Expected participants:	Approx. 120 people

General Context

Protecting Children from Violence in Europe: The Urgent Need for Integrated Systems

Across Europe, significant gaps persist in safeguarding children from violence. Globally, half of all children experience violence annually¹, with nearly 75% of those aged 2 to 4 subjected to physical punishment or psychological abuse by caregivers². Approximately one billion children aged 2-17 have endured emotional, physical, or sexual violence in the past year³.

Children deprived of liberty, particularly in criminal justice settings, face heightened risks. In closed institutions, violence can become normalised, often used to manage conflicts or enforce discipline⁴. Over seven million children are deprived of liberty each year worldwide, with 1.3 to 1.5 million detained through judicial or administrative decisions⁵. In the EU, all Member States permit custodial measures for children, and only four prohibit solitary confinement. Elsewhere, the minimum age for solitary confinement ranges from 10 to 16 years⁶.

As **children transition to adulthood**, they often lose access to protection services at 18, increasing vulnerability to exploitation, homelessness, and re-entry into the justice system. Marginalised groups, such as LGBT+⁷ and migrant children⁸, are particularly at risk of criminalisation without integrated, child-rights-focused approaches⁹.

Neuroscientific research¹⁰ indicates that early trauma and neglect adversely affect brain development, impacting decision-making and emotional regulation. However, many child protection systems fail to consider these developmental factors, leading to inappropriate justice responses. This issue is exacerbated when children lose protection services upon reaching adulthood, despite ongoing vulnerabilities.

The **digital environment**, while offering educational and social opportunities, also exposes children to risks like grooming, sexual exploitation, cyberbullying, and non-consensual sharing of intimate content¹¹. Without

¹ See [EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child](#) (2021)

² See [Global status report on preventing violence against children, UNICEF/WHO](#) (2020)

³ See [WHO factsheet on violence against children](#) (2022)

⁴ See [PRI Data Mosaic research](#) (2024)

⁵ See [UN Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty](#) (2019)

⁶ Ibid

⁷ See [CFJ-EN Towards LGBTI+ Sensitive Justice System for Children in Europe: Challenge Paper](#) (2022)

⁸ See [CFJ-EN Transforming Justice Systems for Children in Migration](#) (2023)

⁹ See [UN Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty](#) (2019)

¹⁰ See Frances Sheahan & Professor Huw Williams, "Breaking down barriers: children, neuro-disability and access to justice", [Penal Reform International](#) (2019)

¹¹ See [Council of Europe webpage on children's rights and the digital environment](#)

coordinated frameworks distinguishing between children needing protection and those inadvertently drawn into the justice system, vulnerable youths may be criminalised instead of supported.

A disconnect between **child protection** and **justice systems** often results in children, even those below the **minimum age of criminal responsibility**, facing **punitive measures** rather than **protective interventions**. This misalignment can have long-term detrimental effects on their development and societal integration.

Debates on lowering the age of criminal responsibility, criminalising migrant children, and misusing psychiatric institutions highlight the urgency for **integrated approaches**. An effective child protection system requires coordinated efforts across social services, education, health, justice, and communities to prevent and address violence, abuse, and neglect.

The **Council of Europe's Guidelines on Child-Friendly Justice**¹² set early standards for minimising harm and maximising protection in legal proceedings involving children. Building on this, **the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2021–2024)**¹³ advocates for strengthening protection systems and ensuring equitable access to justice for all children. In 2024, the **European Commission's Recommendation for Integrated Child Protection Systems**¹⁴ emphasised cross-sectoral cooperation, child-centred justice, and early intervention to prevent unnecessary criminalisation. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) supports these initiatives through research and reports identifying gaps and promoting integration between protection and justice mechanisms¹⁵.

Internationally, the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**¹⁶ underscores the interconnection of children's rights, emphasising protection, development, and justice. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child urges states to adopt child-rights-based approaches, focusing on non-punitive responses and raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility.

An upcoming seminar aims to integrate these frameworks and the existing resources available¹⁷ into discussions, fostering comprehensive strategies that reinforce child-centred, multidisciplinary responses to rights violations within justice systems.

Objectives & Lead Questions the Seminar aim to address

The General Objective of the Annual Seminar is to promote a shared understanding of the critical links between child protection and child justice systems. The seminar should raise awareness about the systemic nature of such violence, highlight vulnerabilities of children in the justice system, including in detention, and emphasise the urgent need for integrated, child rights-based approaches that strengthen both protection and justice responses.

By fostering dialogue and sharing promising practices, the seminar can support the development of coordinated strategies that ensure that children receive the care and protection they need and are entitled to when they enter in contact with the justice system – whether as victims, suspects and/or accused, witnesses in criminal proceedings, as well as in the context of civil and administrative proceedings.

The **Specific Objectives** of the Annual Seminar are to:

1. **Explore ways to strengthen the capacities and the roles of child protection systems in Europe.** This includes inter-agency cooperation with the justice system, examining support systems such as education, therapeutic care, family and social interventions, and strategies to build the capacities of child protection systems and advocating for adequate resources' allocation.

¹² See [Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on child-friendly justice](#) (2010)

¹³ See [EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child](#) (2021)

¹⁴ See [European Commission Recommendations on developing and strengthening integrated child protection systems in the best interests of the child](#) (2024)

¹⁵ See [FRA Mapping Child Protection Systems in the EU – Update 2023 & FRA Towards Integrated Child Protection Systems - Challenges, promising practices and ways forward](#) (2025)

¹⁶ See [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (1989)

¹⁷ See [Pinheiro, S., World report on violence against children](#) (2006); [Goldson, B., \(ed\), Juvenile Justice in Europe](#) (2018); [UNICEF Hidden in plain sight: a statistical analysis of violence against children](#) (2014); [UN Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children, Prevention of and responses to violence against children within the juvenile justice system](#) (2012)



- *What are the roles of the child protection systems in safeguarding the rights, care and protection of all children in contact with the justice system, without discrimination? How can/should these roles be supported?*
 - *Which resources can be optimised to strengthen the capacities of child protection systems?*
 - *How can integrated child protection systems improve outcomes for children in need of care and protection when in contact with the justice system?*
 - *What policy recommendations can ensure justice systems function alongside child protection frameworks, and vice versa?*
2. **Promote child rights-based responses and gatekeeping mechanisms to protect children in contact with the justice system.** This includes addressing the impact of protection vs punitive responses on children's psychological, neurological, emotional and social development, as well as avoiding harmful placements of children in prisons, psychiatric institutions, care institutions, segregation of children with disabilities, detention facilities for migrant children, among others. Such responses typically encompass integrated multidisciplinary models, such as the Barnahus model, rehabilitation, and reintegration strategies that prioritise care and support, and involve shared responsibilities among a variety of protection/care stakeholders/actors.
- *What challenges within child protection systems may increase the likelihood of children coming into contact with the justice system?*
 - *How can pedagogical or social work-based interventions be prioritised to prevent such outcomes? What mechanisms are needed to ensure supportive, child-centred approaches take precedence over punitive ones?*
 - *How can early interventions, non-custodial and restorative practices, tailored support programs, and interagency cooperation prevent unnecessary institutionalisation, whether in justice, psychiatric, or care systems, while reducing the risks of children entering in contact with the justice system?*
 - *How can neuroscience findings on trauma and brain development inform child protection and justice responses?*
3. **Explore ways to ensure continuity of care in protection systems for children in contact with the law without shifting them into punitive or exclusionary frameworks.** This includes challenges faced by children moving toward adulthood and children below the minimum age of criminal responsibility.
- *How can child protection and child justice systems better cooperate to support children in their transition to adulthood, ensuring continuity of care and preventing their shift into punitive or exclusionary systems during this vulnerable phase?*
 - *What is the role of long-term caregivers in ensuring effective child protection, and how can their relationships be supported?*
4. **Spotlight complex cases, where children face specific risks and child rights violations: digital space, domestic violence, transnational cases, family law cases, and cases of children with imprisoned parents.** This includes exploring ways to strengthen child protection and justice systems to respond effectively to such cases.
- *How can child protection and justice systems be adapted and what resources exist to address:*
 - *the growing risks children face in the **digital environment** and their protection needs?*
 - *the risks children face in a **domestic violence** context and their protection needs?*
 - *the stigmatisation of **children with imprisoned parents**, and their protection needs?*
 - *the protection needs of children who are victims, suspects and/or accused, in **transnational child protection cases**?*
 - *the protection needs of children involved in **family law cases**?*

Format of the event

The Annual Seminar will provide several opportunities for participants to engage in interactive sessions throughout the event, structured around keynote speeches and plenary sessions.

- Addresses from young justice transformers
- Keynote addresses
- Live podcasts
- Interactive Spaces



- Circles of Inspiration
- Human Libraries
- Thematic Workshops

Workshops & Interactive Sessions

Following on the model used during previous CFJ-EN Annual Seminars, the purpose of the thematic workshops and interactive sessions is to explore several topics linked to the Seminar's main theme. They will be held in line with the following four seminar themes which should address the lead questions mentioned above:

1. **Strengthening the capacities of child protection and justice systems**
2. **Promoting child-rights-based approaches**
3. **Ensuring continuity of care**
4. **Spotlighting complex cases: Challenges and Opportunities**

Expected participants

- Legal experts and human rights advocates, NGOs, civil society organisations working in child justice and child protection.
- Practitioners and academia working in the field of Law, social work, sociology, child protection and neuroscience.
- Representatives of European and Regional institutions and national public institutions
- European Networks working in the field of child justice and/or child protection.
- Members of the Child Friendly Justice European Network (NGOs, individual experts, academic institutions).
- Young Justice Transformers - Children and Young people with lived experience of the justice system and/or child protection system.

Indicative Agenda

Wednesday, 22 October 2025 (7:00 pm – 10:00 pm)

- Opening speeches
- Networking Dinner (*optional*)

Thursday, 23 October 2025 (9:30 am – 5:30 pm)

- Opening plenary
- Inspirations from young justice transformers
- Keynote addresses
- Thematic live podcast
- Workshops and Interactive sessions

Thursday, 23 October 2025 (8:00 pm – 10:00 pm)

- Cultural event (*optional*)

Friday, 24 October 2025 (9:30 am – 1:00 pm)

- Thematic live podcast
- Interactive sessions
- Closing Plenary

Friday, 24 October 2025 (14:30 am – 17:30 pm)

- Academic Seminar on children below the minimum age of criminal responsibility (*optional*)

Participation of children and young people

The participation of children and young people with lived experience of the justice system, in an appropriate and inclusive way, is at the heart of our events. During the CFJ-EN 2025 Annual Seminar, various parts of the agenda will include their participation, notably via keynote inspirations of young justice transformers, intervening as youth discussants in plenary sessions, as well as ensuring their views are included in the human libraries and the circles of inspiration.

About the Organisers

The **Child Friendly Justice European Network (CFJ-EN)** was launched in April 2019 by Defence for Children International Belgium (DCI-Belgium) as an informal network. Initially, it brought together the seven European sections of Defence for Children International and later expanded to include additional non-DCI organisations. In 2022, the CFJ-EN formalised its status through a Framework Partnership Agreement with the European Commission, solidifying its role as a fully operational network. Legally hosted and coordinated by DCI-Belgium, an organisation founded in 1991 under Belgian law, the Network operates with the mission of advancing children's rights in alignment with the UNCRC. CFJ-EN focuses specifically on child-friendly justice, advocating for justice systems that are adapted to address the unique needs, vulnerabilities, situations and rights of children. By fostering collaboration among its members, the CFJ-EN seeks to harmonise practices and amplify its collective impact across Europe, ensuring that children's rights are a central consideration in all justice processes.

Defence for Children International – Greece is the Greek national section of Defence for Children International (DCI), an international child-rights movement and non-governmental organisation established in 1979 in Geneva and represented in more than 47 countries. Defence for Children International – Greece is committed to securing a just and viable future for all children present in the Greek territory. It aims to ensure through its actions that children's voice is heard, and their rights are fully respected in practice. Since its inception in 2016, it is one of the few human rights organisations specifically focused on children's rights in Greece. Its highest value is the pursuit of each child's best interests and the enjoyment of their childhood with dignity. To this end, its work is guided by the UNCRC, as well as other international, regional and local standards. As a national section of Defence for Children International, it pledges to follow DCI's mandate to 'promote and protect children's rights in accordance with international standards.' At the same time, DCI Greece autonomously develops its own programs in response to contextual needs of Greece.

This event benefits from the support of the Ministry of Justice of Greece.

Rationale of the CFJ-EN Annual Seminars

The CFJ-EN is funded under a Framework Partnership Agreement with the European Commission. To ensure that the Network's mission is achieved, the CFJ-EN committed in its multi-annual action plan to the organisation of annual seminars with a view to strengthen and further develop the Network. The purpose of the annual seminars is to create a space for exchange, mutual learning, resources sharing and capacity building among practitioners and policy makers in Europe working towards respecting the rights of children in contact with justice systems.

Annual Seminars are therefore dynamic and interactive spaces, which contribute to build bridges with other Networks and Alliances, enhance collaborations with key regional institutions, namely the European Union and the Council of Europe, and promote the dissemination of promising practices and innovative ways of working with children who are in contact with justice systems, whether in criminal, civil or administrative proceedings.

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The CFJ-EN is part of the legal entity of



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