



FOCUS Sustainability Lessons

**Individual assessment – a gateway
to a child centered justice**

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Working together
for children in criminal
proceedings



Terre des hommes
Helping children worldwide.



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Introduction

The FOCUS partners from the five participating countries made sustainability reports on their national work in relation to individual assessments with children in criminal proceedings. This summary collected 10 common or useful recommendations on three relevant themes: system change, child participation and professional's support, supported by some quotes:



System change

“Even though the legislation is in place, there is still the need for awareness raising even among the professionals who work with children in order to emphasize the importance of an individual assessment for each case and how it should be conducted.” (Greece)

“The lack of effective multisectoral cooperation is one of the biggest issues in implementing child friendly justice principles and effective individual assessment.” (Serbia)

“In Romania, for many specialists, deviance is not the expression of individual causes, but can be explained by predominantly social causes representing a natural response to situations of vulnerability in which the individual is placed. [...] As long as it is accepted that the environment is largely responsible for juvenile delinquency, specialists can also identify the mechanisms for preventing or combating this type of behavioural manifestation. [...]” (Romania)

“During the FOCUS project, stakeholders and professionals realised that assessments do not take place at every stage of the proceedings yet. They’ve added that the individual assessment can focus more on the specific needs of children.” (the Netherlands)

What matters:

- ◆ Check if laws and regulations are in accordance with the European Directives and keep advocating for necessary legislation changes
- ◆ Work towards a unified child protection and justice system that could support the protection of all children and guarantee the respect of their rights when they get involved in criminal proceedings
- ◆ Continue to promote a participatory and child friendly assessment of the needs of child suspects and child victims
- ◆ Invest in awareness raising concerning the standards and impact of the standards on the daily practise
- ◆ Work with and continue cooperation with all stakeholders and involve professionals in raising awareness activities, multidisciplinary exchange and debates (Victim Support Services, Ministry of Justice, Social Services, Police and Law Enforcement agencies, Prosecution Office, Judiciary etc)



- ◆ Advocate for more expertise and effective methods to carry out individual assessment in an inclusive, continuous & child-centred way
- ◆ Share and promote the FOCUS publications and recommendations in different ways; via institutions, online, in multiple languages and in a user-friendly layout
- ◆ Involve more lawyers to request the assessment – if they do insist, more children will have access to individual assessment
- ◆ Advocate and share the experience of Barnahus or similar formats whereby all professionals give their support in one place/under one roof



Child participation

“The CAB team specifically addressed the needs of victims who are ashamed or scared. For those victims it can be difficult to talk about what has happened to them.” (The Netherlands)

“The members of the first CAB mentioned that they have learned many things which are important yet not included in the school’s curriculum and they are more familiar with the justice system, its strengths and gaps, as well as the needs of the children involved in it. A couple of them mentioned that they would like in the future to pursue a career in which they will be able to help other children. The members of the second CAB mentioned how important was to them the fact that all their ideas, suggestions and objections were taken into consideration. Additionally, their probation officers mentioned that they have seen changes as the children have become more outspoken and confident.” (Greece)

“The CAB members developed a customer journey that led to a social media campaign and online questionnaire for child victims. They have learned how to formulate a relevant topic and questions, how to communicate with professionals and how to conduct a social media campaign.” (The Netherlands)

What to do:

- ◆ Use the CAB (Child Advisory Board) method: it is key to bring together children to discuss about matters that affect them and to offer them the space to exchange with professionals from different categories
- ◆ Arrange multiple, long-term running CABs for children in contact with the law
- ◆ Make sure to have their views and suggestions integrated into all the tools that will be produced and the activities that will be organized
- ◆ Invest in projects that help children to become advocates themselves by providing them with the possibility to decide themselves for important activities and deliverables
- ◆ Make sure early contacts are made with organisations or schools who can identify or select young people to take part: it takes time and effort to create good functioning CABs
- ◆ Use blended ways of meeting, via online methods such as zoom or Teams (also to meet international contacts) and live sessions to be able to work locally and get to know each other better



- ◆ Use creative strategies in order to attract children from different back grounds and schools and experiences to join CABs
- ◆ In order to reconcile various schedules and times of the youngsters and to get enough involvement, use surveys and tailored activities to suit everyone. Send invitations for sessions, but also a kind reminder one day before session started
- ◆ Provide the CABs with the safe space and opportunities to advocate for the most vulnerable categories, including child victims of crime
- ◆ Make sure that the CABs can also meet and find the guidance of specialists, and engage with creative tools and methodologies, such as media and art



Professional's support

*"Professionals tend to undervalue and stigmatise accused children by taking a superficial approach to the assessment process based on the prejudice that the perpetrator must 'pay'."
(Romania)*

*"The individual assessment is not seen as a useful process/tool, but rather as a source of additional workload and stress. Speaking about the individual assessment, where it comes from, what its purpose is, etc... started to reduce the tension and reluctance among professionals."
(Bulgaria)*

"Through participating in the project activities, they became aware that the individual assessment of children is broader and more complex than they thought." ... The FOCUS progress reference table and the tool for identifying the stage of development of individual assessment processes, gave the specialists the opportunity to benchmark what was discussed during the training sessions on the stage of development of individual assessment processes (Romania)

What to initiate:

- ◆ Organise continuous trainings on individual child assessments for multidisciplinary groups of professionals working with children
- ◆ Use different methods of exchanging knowledge in a multi-disciplinary approach
- ◆ Disseminate the FOCUS tools among professionals, citizens, parents and children and explain the use and include discussion of real cases and support in identifying gaps
- ◆ Make sure the tools and materials finalized and translated
- ◆ Diversify the way stakeholders and professionals are involved: in-person, online, blended
- ◆ Organise a Meeting Platform for exchanging knowledge with a multi-disciplinary group of professionals working with both child victims and suspects, with involvement of experts on specific topics and discussions of case studies
- ◆ Provide mentoring and support for participants after the training in their daily work on individual cases.
- ◆ Promote the use of technical interface, e-learning and child-friendly digital platform
- ◆ Bring those involved in assessments of child victims and child suspects/accused together in training or discussion for exchange and common learning
- ◆ Transfer the information gained during training sessions and the materials received to other specialists



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