

# Considerations for Media

Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member States concerning children with imprisoned parents



2 boys, aged 9 and 12; one girl, aged 6, Italy

# Introduction

Children who have a parent in prison are a largely invisible group, both in the eyes of the wider public and the judicial, social and political systems designed to protect them. When not provided with individualised and adequate support, they can be vulnerable to social isolation, stigmatisation and negative stereotyping not to mention the impact of separation from a primary caregiver. The media can play a positive role in increasing the visibility of this group of children and sensitising wider audiences to the nuances of a complex subject.

Story telling can be a powerful and humanising advocacy tool. However, sharing the narrative of children comes with an ethical obligation to respect their dignity and privacy throughout. Children who have a parent in prison are not a homogenous group, nor are they defined by the fact of their parent's imprisonment. Media professionals can sensationalise the depiction of crime rather than empowering children or honouring their agency as individuals.

There is much work to be done to ensure the ethical representation of children by the media. This document offers a brief overview of key points, with links to further resources and pertinent articles of the Council of Europe's Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)5.



**GABRIEL, aged 15, Norway**

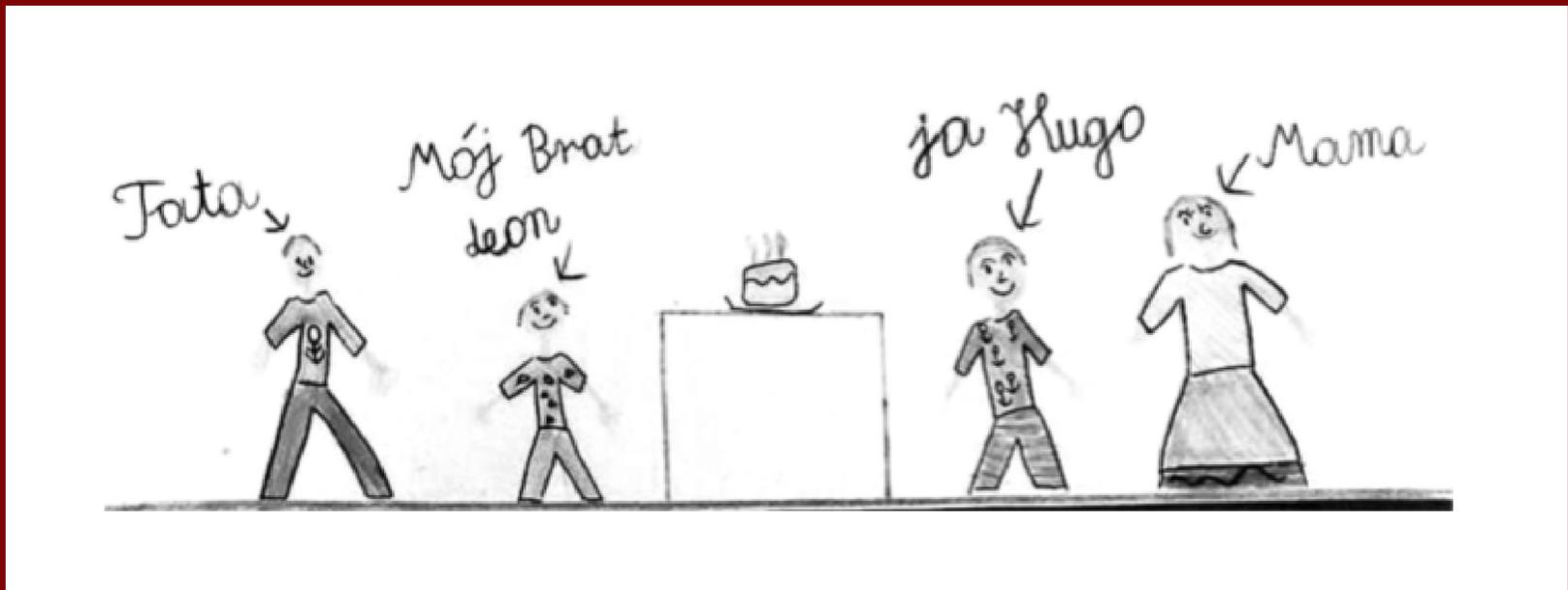
# Examples of Good Practice

- Media professionals should always gain the **written consent of children** and families before reporting on their experience of parental imprisonment. All identifiable features including names and images of houses or neighbourhoods should be omitted to protect children's **inviolable right to privacy**. Consent is evolving: a child's decision to publicise the story of their parent's imprisonment may change as they grow up. This should be considered.
- Media professionals should report on this topic from a **child-rights perspective**. This means children should be treated as full, rights-bearing individuals, with identities and futures of their own. There can be a tendency for media professionals to use deterministic language, framing children as 'destined' to follow a 'path' into crime. Recognising children's agency, resilience and individualism is key.
- Using, and responsibly interpreting, **accurate data** is key to avoiding fatalistic framing of children with a parent in prison. Media professionals may jump to inaccurate conclusions about the causality between a parent's imprisonment and children's involvement with the law. This only increases stigma and negative stereotyping. Promoting children's resilience and the many measures to support their well-being should be prioritised over perpetuating false assumptions of 'inter-generational crime'.



**HELI, aged 12, Finland**

# Key Links and Resources



HUGO, aged 7, Poland

- Toolkit: working with the media on behalf of children with imprisoned parents.
- It's Time to Act: CoE Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)5
- Implementation Guidance Document: Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)5
- European Journal of Parental Imprisonment: Child impact assessments and sentencing

# Relevant Articles from Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)5



The Council of Europe's Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member States concerning children with imprisoned parents is a landmark instrument which both recognises parental imprisonment as having long-lasting effects on the well-being of millions of children, and addresses the needs of those children with a parent in prison through 56 guidelines for good practice.

Below you will find a selection of these guidelines geared towards the media.

**55.**

Information provided to, and by, the media should not violate the right to privacy and protection of children and their families, including data protection rules, and any media reporting should be carried out in a child-friendly manner.

**56.**

The media, professionals and the general public should be provided with reliable and up-to-date data and good practice examples to increase their awareness regarding the numbers of children affected and the impact of parental imprisonment, and to avoid negative stereotyping and stigmatisation of children with imprisoned parents.



Children of Prisoners Europe (COPE) is a pan-European network of non-profit organisations working on behalf of children separated from an imprisoned parent. The network encourages innovative perspectives and practices to ensure that children with an imprisoned parent fully enjoy their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and that action is taken to enable their well-being and development.

Children of Prisoners Europe (COPE)  
contact@networkcope.eu  
<http://childrenofprisoners.eu/>

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