



# children of prisoners europe

**Building protection now and "future proofing"  
the rights of children with imprisoned parents in Greece**

**Roundtable II**

**Friday 10 November 2023 9.30-3.30**

Myrtillo Café — Park for Children & Culture

**Chair: Theoni Koufonikolakou**, Deputy Ombudswoman for Children's Rights Greece

## **Participants**

Theoni Koufonikolakou, Deputy Children's Ombudswoman

Eleni Chalkia, Ministry of Citizens' Protection

Dimitra Nikou, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Head of Directorate for the Protection of Families and Children

Justina Dzienko, Deputy Director [EuroPris](#)

Mariella Michailidou, UNICEF Child Protection Specialist

Evdokia Kouvara, UNICEF

Christine Maerkl, Clinical Psychologist, Special Health Centre for Prisoners, Korydallos Prison

Anastasio Valvis, Center for Security Studies (KEMEA)- NESTOR project

Christiana Aposkiti, Research Associate KEMEA- NESTOR project

Kate Philbrick, COPE WPG, former COPE Chair

Liz Ayre, Executive Director [COPE](#)

Fotini Milioni, Director of [Epanados](#)

Julie Alata, Epanados

Iren Kontou, Defense for Children International

Katerina Loukopoulou, Executive Director, Freedom Gate Greece

Ellie Tsiouri, Freedom Gate Greece

Dimitra Avanitaki, Coordinator of the Unaccompanied Minors Shelter, ARSIS

Eva Chiladaki, Programme Coordinator at Thiva Prison

Nikolaos Koulouris, Department of Social Policy, Democritus University of Thrace

Absent due to unforeseen circumstances: Olga Themeli, Lecturer in Criminological Psychology, University of Crete

## **Introduction**

In collaboration with the Deputy Children's Ombudswoman of Greece, COPE is currently working to better protect the rights and best interests of the estimated 2.1 million children who have a parent in prison in Europe. COPE works to ensure that children are better supported and that their capacity to claim their rights is developed, bolstered by our joint work with the Council of Europe on [Recommendations](#) that protect children's welfare throughout criminal justice processes—including sentencing, parental imprisonment with emphasis on child-parent contact and prison visits for children, and support for the child and family within the community. We promote ways to implement child-friendly measures when children visit their parent in prison, child-parent contact being a demonstrated protective factor. In doing this, COPE takes a holistic child-

rights approach, engaging with all those concerned to "future proof" children's rights regardless of external circumstances and to meet their needs. One way COPE does this is by bringing cross-agency stakeholders together under one roof, to coordinate policies and interventions, provide a more harmonised support response for children and help eliminate any gaps in support systems.

Building on an international roundtable in Athens organised by COPE in October 2022, COPE organised a follow-up roundtable on **10 November**. Its aim was to bring together interested prison and other criminal justice, child rights, child welfare and NGO personnel, the children's ombudsperson of Greece, members of the judiciary, academics, as well as children, parents and caregivers affected by parental imprisonment, with the following objectives to support children with imprisoned parents:

- Continue the frank exchange of ideas and the laying down of some overall guidelines for the respect of the specific rights and unique needs of children with imprisoned parents and ringfencing contact with imprisoned parents irrespective of external events and circumstances (e.g., public health crises) (Future proofing)
- Update current information and data on the number of children affected by parental imprisonment in Greece, as well as geographical considerations
- Build on existing partnerships and the cohesiveness established since October 2022 to better coordinate action of those involved in support and protection of the rights of these children in Greece
- Identify potential gaps or opportunities for further protection and support to explore how to best fill these system gaps
- Share possibilities what can be done realistically, to develop a viable practical approach, and draw on current and good practice.

It is central to COPE's work that the views of children, their parents — including parents in prison or previously in prison — and caregivers are heard. COPE expertise can offer support in the Greek context and COPE would benefit from Greek membership in the network to ensure broader European representation.<sup>i</sup> The participation of EuroPris, which brings together prison services across Europe, provided great opportunities for strengthening prison partnerships.

## ***Background***

In addition to building on the October 2022 Roundtable II, the 10 November 2023 Roundtable also built on a series of meetings held with the Ministry of Citizens Protection, the Deputy Ombudswoman of Greece and

COPE over the course of 2022, following the initial Roundtable. Meetings were held in December 2022 and in February, April, September and October 2023. The overall aim of the meetings was to keep momentum going, to continue discussions on how to implement progress with respect to mapping indicators for information-gathering in prisons, and to lay the groundwork for and plan the 10 November Roundtable II. In addition to the number of children estimated to be impacted by the incarceration of a parent in Greece, other indicators agreed during meetings included, *inter alia*:

- The number of parents in prison
- Whether a register exists for record-keeping
- Frequency and length of visits
- The number of children visiting prison and the number of visits
- Availability of child friendly space for visits
- Whether physical contact between children and parents is authorised
- Number of pending requests from prisoners to see children
- Number of pending requests from families to see prisoner

The Ministry of Citizen Protection, although familiar with prison legislation and the rights of prisoners, has highlighted the need for clarity on legislation protecting the rights of children with a parent in prison, for both the ministry and prison staff, and has requested the development of a handbook to accompany Council of Europe Recommendations concerning children with imprisoned parents—collating relevant legislation and guidance to facilitate implementation of the recommendations. The Office of the Ombudsman for Children's Rights has expressed concern about data on children with imprisoned parents as indicated by the Ministry<sup>1</sup> and about the lack of tracking of children whose parents are arrested, in pre-trial detention or in detention. The Ministry of Citizen Protection is only responsible for collecting data from the moment of arrival in prison. At the time of arrest, it is the Ministry of Justice that is responsible. Child-friendly spaces and more social worker and psychological staffing have been recommended by the Ministry, but the 2023 elections make action reports the current priority. Staffing shortages have presented challenges in monitoring progress. It was concluded that the Office of the Children's Ombudsman was needed as an impetus for advancing these issues, as was an awareness-raising event.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ministry data indicates 4,003 children with a parent in prison in Greece, while the appendix of the Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)5 concerning children with imprisoned parents indicates *indicates 13,940 children have a parent in prison in Greece, using a total prison population of 10,723 at 16.11.2022 (World Prison Brief).*

## ***Roundtable proceedings***

### **Child rights perspectives**

Theoni Koufonikolakou, deputy ombudswoman, introduced the ombudsman's office in Greece with its team of eight staff, which intervenes in the public and private sector. Children can report, but also inspections are carried out — in institutions, camps as well as in correctional facilities. They also supervise NGO networks, contributing to committees on national rights. Child-friendly materials are created and published working with established youth advisory groups. A holistic development of respect for child's rights is key, as is the importance of the Council of Europe's (CoE) Recommendation CM/Rec (2018)5 concerning children with imprisoned parents.

#### **Challenges:**

- Children of Prisoners are not seen as a priority for policy makers
- Often a prison visit is allowed only once a month
- Staff are not appropriately trained so they can often be harsh or brusque
- Insufficient promotion of reintegration involving families when prisoners are released.

### **European perspectives for prisons: implementing Council of Europe Recommendation on children with imprisoned parents (CM/Rec(2018)5)**

Justina Dzienko, Deputy Director of EuroPris, presented the organisation: 36 CoE-member jurisdictions uniting prison services in Europe and promoting professional prison practice. Two relevant expert groups, Family Relations (2016-2019) and Children of Prisoners (2019-2022) were organised to support members of the prison service. COPE representatives participated in both expert groups. Tools on the EuroPris website were presented to stimulate the implementation of CM/Rec(2018)5 by participants. Europris has analysed the responsibilities for ministries (beyond the prison service) set out in the Recommendations. Please see graphic that follows:

## Other responsible authorities

- Public prosecutors / Departments of Criminal Law (No. 2, 4, 9, 10, 12, 17)
- Courts / Department for judicial administration (No. 2, 9, 10, 17)
- Interior Ministry / Police (No. 8, 12, 49, 50)
- Children Youth Family Ministry (No. 19, 27, 36, 38, 39, 40, 44, 49, 50, 54)
- Social Ministry (No. 16, 19, 27, 36, 38, 39, 40, 44, 49, 50, 54)
- Ministry of Health (No. 34, 37)
- Ministry of Finance (No. 6, 46, 53)
- Other civil society organizations (No. 6, 19, 27, 44, 49)

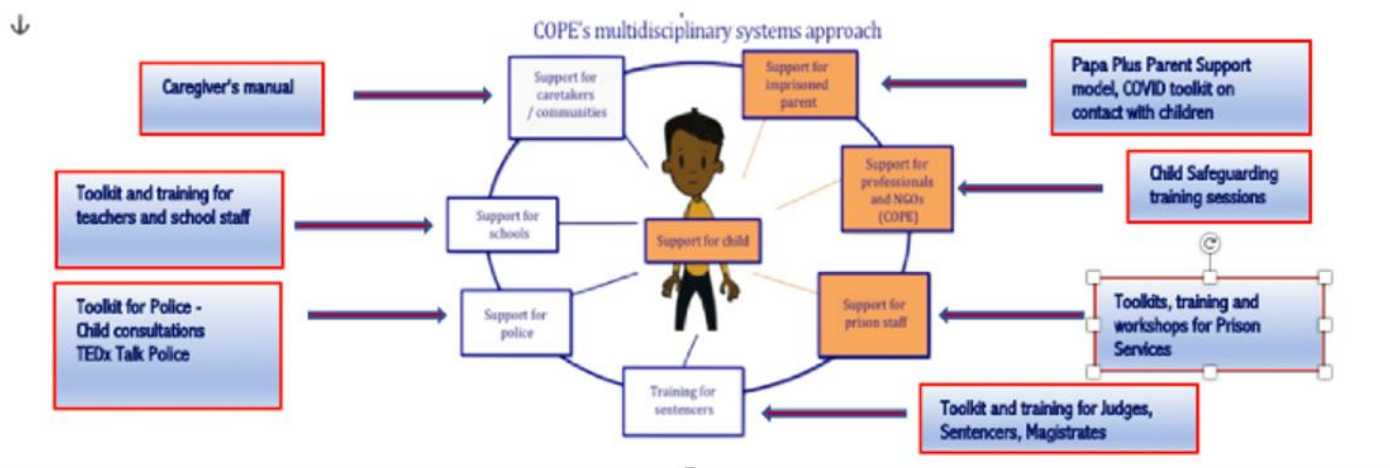
European Organisation of Prison and Correctional Service

[www.euopris.org](http://www.euopris.org)

A table recording the implementation of the Recommendations country by country is available here:  
<https://www.euopris.org/recommendations/>

### Breaking down silos and bringing together child rights and prisons across Europe

COPE presented itself and its work. With the participation of thirty members from the Council of Europe region, COPE strengthens constant meaningful contacts between incarcerated parents and their children, also encourages organisations to create a child-friendly environment in Europe. COPE is doing raising awareness campaigns among child-related agencies, prison services and policymakers to the specific needs of children who have a parent in prison and is promoting initiatives in this field. COPE stresses the importance of a multidisciplinary systems approach:



### Data, conditions and current initiatives and activities for children in Greece

Eleni Chalkia of the Ministry of Citizen Protection updated data on children and parents in prison. In Greece, there are currently 10,454 prisoners. Although the average birth rate per person in Greece is ~1.3, the following figures were noted: From a total of 10,454 prisoners only 4,000 reported they were parents of children under the age of 18. Around 160 of these are women/mothers. In total 6,700 children were reported. In addition, 34 young people are in prison.

The Integrated Information System does not contain all the fields needed to record data requested by Cof E recommendation, such as minor or adult children, and the fields that do exist are not mandatory. The upgrade of the OPS is being completed and from 2024 it will be possible to collect and extract more, and more accurate data due to the combination of what the prisoners declare on different forms for example for leave or visits for family reasons.

By Greek law, (Art.52 of penitentiary code) visiting times for prisoners are half an hour once a week and "Children visits" are understood as applying to children under the age of 11. Often in practice these visits are longer. At all visits children may touch and cuddle their parents. On the other hand, some prisons do not follow the law and carry out visits only once a month.

Factors which may influence the frequency of visits are whether prisoners had substantial involvement with the child before imprisonment, and in some cases, psychologists support the parental role and play with the child. The caregiving parent may encourage or discourage contact with the prisoner, and costs of visiting may prevent visits too.

In theory, the law states that visits by spouses and children shall take place in a special suitable area of the prison. In practice, there are child visiting spaces in Korydallos I and II, Grevena and Eleonas Thiva prisons. At Korydallos, a theatre project has included animators who attend visits and support play.

Since the start of 2023, the national strategy for children's rights has been included as a horizontal strategic objective of the Ministry of Citizen Protection and the GSAP plans, in cooperation with the competent bodies such as the Ombudsman for Children, to include in this objective all actions related to minors and the protection of children's rights.

It is a challenge for the Greek prison system to find suitable premises for the conduct of the children's visits given the age of many prison buildings. In the new correctional facilities that are being built to replace the old ones (not to increase capacity), there is provision for the creation of spaces that ensure accessibility, contact, privacy. The new prison, Drama, due to open by the end of 2023, will have such spaces.

— Anastasios Valvis & Christina Aposkiti (Centre for Security Studies) updated on parent support in prison and the methodology and design of the Erasmus+-funded NESTOR project.

NESTOR is a national network of schools for parents in prison. Objectives include:

- Enhancing prisoners' parenting skills with a focus on the father role
- Creating a national network of 30 parent schools in 20 Greek prisons with the participation of 300 father prisoners

Primary components include:

- Developing of a tailor-made methodology, enhancing parenting skills' development within the prison context.
- Building a critical mass, composed of social workers and psychologists working in prisons, providing skills and tools for the development of schools of parents in prison.
- Establishment and pilot implementation of the National Network of schools of parents in prison, and impact assessment.

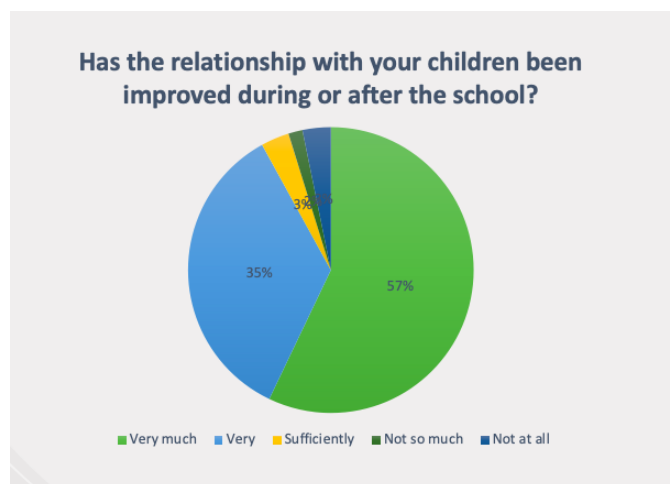


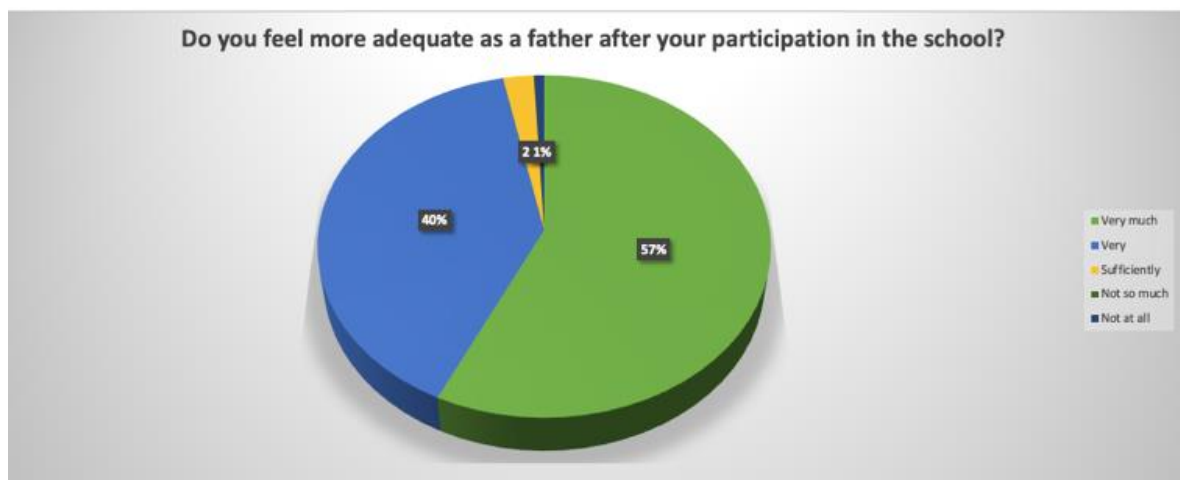
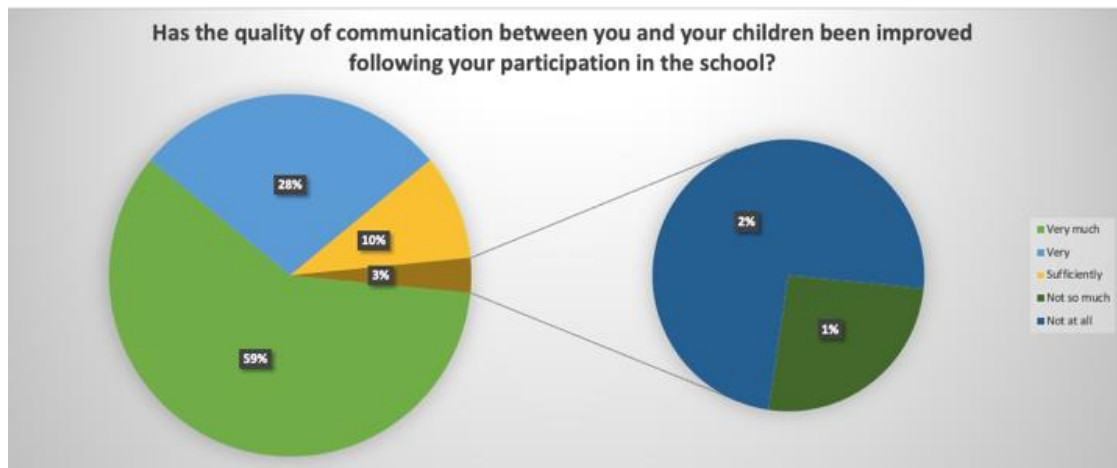
### ***Process of creating the 30 teams in the 20 prisons***

**33** expressed their interest  
**16** covered the first criterion  
**4** the second  
**8** substitutions  
**5** ineligible.

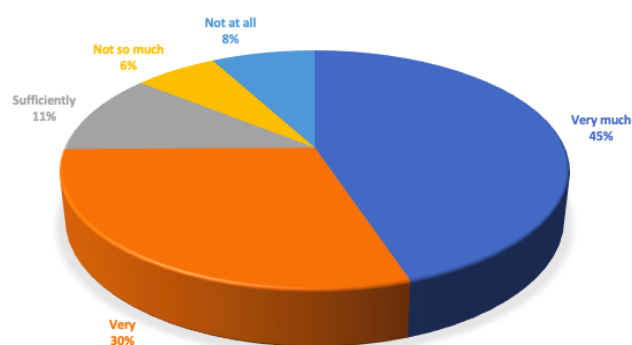
A Transformational Learning approach was implemented and offered to all prisons. The project required that one psychologist and one social worker per prison signed up to implement the course in their prison. A proactive approach subsequently was used to train a group of 40 psychologists and social workers over a three-day period.

A handbook for trainers and trainees is available on the NESTOR homepage, as is a Toolkit for parents. The goal of the pilot operation was to engage 300 prisoner parents to participate; in the event 230 completed the course and 120 participants responded to the evaluation questionnaire. The analysis of the evaluation indicated a positive impact on participants who experienced Improved communication, feeling more adequate in their parental role, increased knowledge and a sense of belonging in the group.





DO YOU FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE TO TALK ABOUT YOUR IMPRISONMENT WITH YOUR CHILDREN NOW?



PILOT OPERATION  
12/2022 – present

- 300 parents – creation of 30 groups – 12 sessions per group = 360 Parent School Sessions
- Continuous consultation of the trainers = 60 meetings of the trainers to check and discuss each groups' progress
- Ensure transfer of knowledge through the UNESCO's global network of "Learning Cities"

— **Korydallos Prison initiative** - *Christine Maerkl, clinical psychologist, presented her experience in rolling out NESTOR at Korydallos Prison with a male parent group.*

*Christine took the initiative to develop resources for the pilot — translating a children's book for them as well as COPE's 800.000 Voices recording based on Families Outside, Scotland, so that prisoners could be more aware of the multitude of responses that children can have to their parents' imprisonment.*

Positive elements and results from the NESTOR project were evident in the prisoners:

Solidarity developed within the groups. Differences in activity levels among participants, and in levels of education. Authority as a father was deemed different from masculinity. Challenges included drop-outs, communication difficulties, inadequate supplies, dominant representation of masculinity, lack of empathy for mothers, and poverty in families given that bread earners are in prison. Below is an overview:

### What positive elements did the prisoners get from the program of NESTOR?



### What positive elements did the prisoners get from the program of NESTOR?

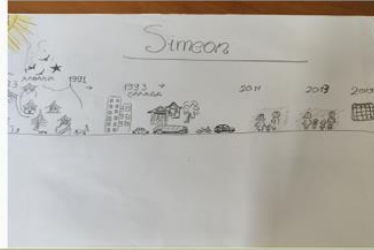
- ❖ They understood the importance of the father's authority physical force and punishment **BUT** **Proper communication and care**
- The feeling of nostalgia of their children
- The thought that their children are growing up away from them

#### IN ACTION

The creation of a Children's Visiting Space

## The importance of activities within the group

The life line



Helping them to understand the impact of imprisonment for their child



## Ideas for perspective and development of the parenting program in prisons

Adaptation of the program to the day-to-day operation of the work and not only out of hours

Tools from Play-therapy

Opportunity to play interactive video games

Supporting the other parent and the child (cancellation, interconnection, financial funds so that they can come regardless of distance to visitation)

## Final thoughts and conclusions

- A fairly organized and guiding program
- Significant contribution of the program in helping prisoners and share their concerns and feelings about their children
- The creation of a children's visiting space in the outdoor area excited the team and prison staff



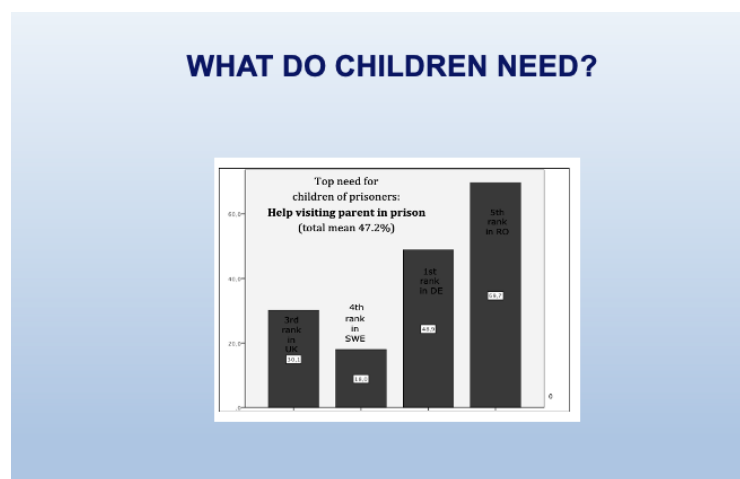
### A look at the needs of children

*Kate Philbrick and Liz Ayre of COPE highlighted ways to help make prisons more child friendly and to help support parents in prison. They gave an overview of the the needs of children visiting prisons.*

Last year's Roundtable strengthened awareness-raising in Greece. The focus this year is much more concretely promoting systematic change.

A ruling by the European Court of Human Rights in March 2023 in a case enshrining the child's right to ongoing physical contact with a parent in prison, including in pre-trial detention: *Deltuva v Lithuania*, was a milestone.

The EU-funded COPING study used concrete data in 2012. The need for financial help for prison visits was identified, importance of phone contact and of more frequent visits and quality contacts. The top need for children identified by COPING involved helping children to visit their parent in prison.



## WHAT ELSE DO CHILDREN NEED?: COPE SURVEY WITH CHILDREN

### PRISON VISITS & CONTACT

- Early, continuous contact with imprisoned parents
- Phone contact vital — initially and ongoing
- Prison contact options: face-to-face, shorter more frequent visits for young children, virtual contact
- Opportunities for visits that don't coincide with school time
- Prison visit settings that offer quality contact
- Prison staff to understand what children are going through, how they can support
- Greater child protection within prison settings
- Alternative possibilities to prison-based contact



## WHAT ELSE DO CHILDREN NEED?

### PARENT SUPPORT

Support for parent in prison — sustainability NESTOR Concept

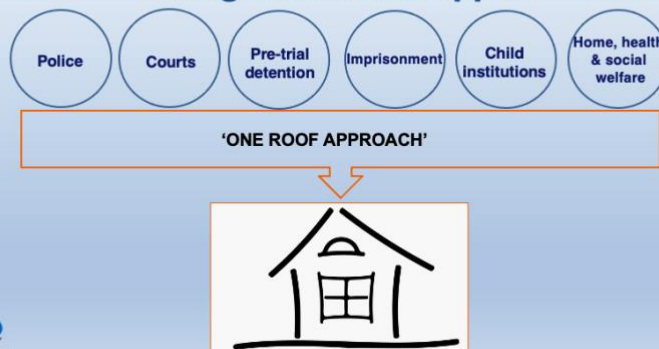


-Support for parents to develop quality contact could be helpful. Football matches on prison grounds with children and their parents in prison, Caregivers guides etc.

-Cross sectional and multi-disciplinary areas under one roof/One-Roof-Approach: Ministries, Ombudsperson, child's-rights-defenders, police officers, judges and magistrates, schools, NGOs.

Idea: Once a year bring all these sectors together nationally e.g., invited by the Greek Ombudsman office to promote sustainable future actions in Greece.

## EU Framework Partnership 2022-2025 integrated child support



-Needs in Greece: National Action plan, topical events to raise awareness, Nestor promotion activities, changing the narrative.

## Some ideas for future cooperation: what are the needs in Greece?



COPE experience in Estonia and Lithuania was highlighted as examples, involving COPE training of prison and probation staff at the Estonian Chancellor of Justice Ministry; and a conference at a women's prison in Lithuania, followed by a COPE workshop with prison staff, and a cross-sectoral roundtable the following day in Vilnius. Could this be something that COPE could organise in Greece in 2024?

### Taking progress forward, defining next steps and embedding initiatives

Participants co-created this list of possible actions to be carried out:

- More multi-disciplinary roundtables
- Involving more stakeholders
- Clarify competencies within responsible groups
- More fieldwork is needed
- Training for community workers
- The issue affects people's rights in general and all society so we need: Public/media awareness for independent authorities, professionals, civil society and media -should this be a conference or a news launch or both?

- Find a national local point of reference to coordinate all national actions; the Children's Ombudspersons Office is currently playing this role
- Work with both prison and probation staff
- Reaching out to Director Generals, Prison service managers, Prison Governors: organise a Zoom meeting
- Prison Training Academies should be made aware of CoE Recommendation:
- Implement some sessions about children with imprisoned parents in the initial training programme for new prison staff recruits- offering experiential learning in how to be more child-friendly and respond to the needs of children and their parents
- Offer some training courses for existing current staff as well: In the annual training program for staff
- Ministry responsible for prisons could recommend or make it mandatory for at least some officers working in the visiting areas to get training on family-sensitive approaches
- Within prisons identify possible suitable spaces accessible to visitors which can simply and cost effectively be made child -friendly and use there for visits for children. The caregiver retains responsibility for the child
- Possible ways of addressing issue of people being imprisoned far from home
- Request information on allocation to specific prisons for family reasons
- Raise awareness of cost to families to visit prisons
- Online sessions for family contact for prisons that are far away; an approach has already been made to phone companies asking for support with phone cards although no results so far
- Request prison authorities consider the frequency and length of visits -in many jurisdictions, families living further away are given the possibility of taking multiple visits either on the same day or on successive days to reduce travel and travel costs
- Update the regulation of penitentiary code to include reference to UNCRC
- Use CPT report and CoE Rec. for political pressure, advocacy work, involve decision-making-authorities --> Top-Down-Approach
- Ombudsman and NGOs should write to different authorities, agencies and specific policy makers and ask for an appointment asking to discuss the specifics of the C of E recommendations
- One data base created for Greece

Cooperation between social, family ministries and justice ministries/ministry for citizen protection and social services

### ***Conclusion***

The progress within one year between the first and second roundtables has been significant. Greece is now ready for an awareness-raising campaign, and to build a national network to enable Greek groups and authorities to strengthen commitment to this group of children.

---

Children of Prisoners Europe  
9 rue des Colonnes  
75002 Paris, France  
[www.childrenofprisoners.eu](http://www.childrenofprisoners.eu) |  
Tel: +33 (0)6 48 23 55 73 |  
Email: [contact@networkcope.eu](mailto:contact@networkcope.eu) | Twitter: [@networkcope](https://twitter.com/networkcope)



Funded by  
the European Union