

Stigma dismantled, dignity upheld

Child rights standards for children affected by parental imprisonment

Children of Prisoners Europe Conference 2025,
hosted by Mid-Dlam Ghad-Awl

*"People paint you with the same brush as your parent.
I used to feel like I was the prisoner. I just wanted help."*

— [Young person](#) affected by a parent's imprisonment

*"Stigma is not naturally occurring but is socially produced and reproduced.
It breeds in the shadows but it also breeds on the front pages of newspapers,
in political speeches and through everyday interactions at the individual and group
level."*

— [\(Tyler & Campbell, May 2024\)](#)

Dismantling the stigma which children often experience when a parent is in prison requires us to go beyond recounting children's and young people's experiences to analyse how stigma operates and sustains itself within societal structures. Stigma actively reinforces any existing inequalities, fosters isolation and often discourages children and families from seeking support. It can endure throughout a lifetime.

"The action required is that which pivots not on identities (as children with imprisoned parents), but on children's rights and needs."

— Wise Persons Group (COPE)

The 2025 annual COPE conference, hosted by member organisation Mid-Dlam Ghad-Awl in Malta, will explore such questions as:

- How does stigma function at both micro and macro levels; how does/can it impact children affected by a parent's imprisonment?
- How do children experience stigma directly in communities?
- What is the long-term impact of children internalising stigma, specifically relating to the perceived 'inevitability' of "intergenerational offending"?
- How is it embedded in political rhetoric, media representation and institutional practices?
- How can we work to help eliminate stigma in ways which champion children and families, and support them to overcome this experience?

Addressing structural discrimination requires a re-evaluation of how children's rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) are applied inconsistently. It requires collective action which champions the participation of children and families affected by parental imprisonment.

The **EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child**, adopted by the European Commission in 2021, incorporates a broad commitment to **eliminate stigma and bias** in all policy areas, including justice, education and social services.

This conference aims to further the EU Strategy — highlighting pathways for reframing narratives, moving beyond stigma as an individual burden and addressing its systemic roots. It will promote concrete actions from the COPE network and beyond which boost children's well-being and their access to supports and respect their dignity and fundamental rights.