



Annual Report

2023



Who We Are

Children of Prisoners Europe (COPE) is a network of organisations and individuals working with and on behalf of the 2.1 million children in Europe with a parent in prison.

Children affected by a parent's imprisonment are not readily recognised as a particularly vulnerable group, despite their frequent exposure to discrimination, stigma, instability, absence of parental involvement in their upbringing and development. Despite clear provisions in international policy instruments and standards and ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child by all European states, they are a low priority for most governments and their needs slip through the cracks of even the most elaborate nets of social protection.

Our Mission

COPE's Network mission is clear: to prevent and respond to violations of the rights of children with imprisoned parents. For over twenty years, COPE and its members have been working to help ensure that children's individual needs are met and their best interests are continuously assessed, from the moment a parent is arrested through to reintegration after the end of a prison sentence.

How We Work

COPE takes a systems approach to improving the lives of children with imprisoned parents, working to ensure that the systems children encounter (welfare, social, justice, education,...) can respect their rights and meet their needs, rather than expecting children to adapt to inadequate systems and supports.

Children's rights are front and centre in all COPE work, as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

COPE remains committed to helping ensure that every child affected by parental imprisonment enjoys all their rights, without discrimination of any kind.



Five ways COPE helps to kickstart meaningful strategic action for children impacted by a parent's imprisonment:

01

COPE and its network members **consult children** on what needs to change—e.g., how prison visits to their parents can be improved or what police could do to better protect them during a parent's arrest at home.

02

COPE and its network members help to **build the capacity of duty-bearers (e.g., police, prison staff, judges and schools)**, taking into account what children say would help when a parent is in conflict with the law.

03

COPE helps to **snowball this good practice** to both external decision makers and network partners across Europe, thus benefiting a greater number of children.

04

COPE helps to **systematise this good practice** via international measures, policies and standards, and by producing toolkits that can be used at national level.

05

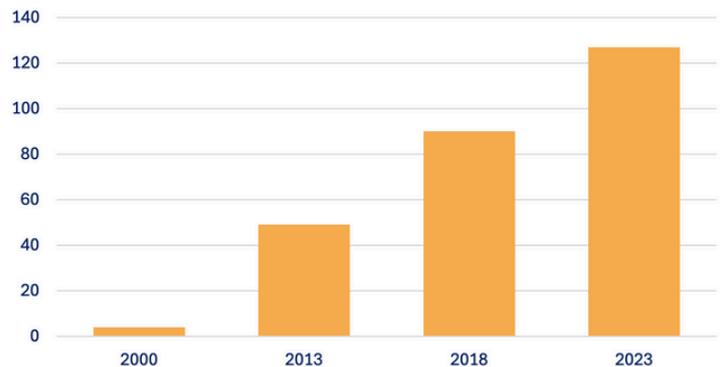
COPE helps to **shift attitudes** to help reduce stigma through advocacy campaigns and strategic messaging across all of its work.

COPE Members & Affiliates

Total as per December 2023

Full member organisations	33
Individual members	32
Applicant members	4
Affiliate organisations	20
Affiliate individuals	38

COPE Network Growth



127 members and affiliates in **38** countries worldwide

In 2023 COPE welcomed to the network:

4 new member organisations

- [Irish Penal Reform Trust](#) (Ireland)
- [Prison Fellowship](#) (Czech Republic)
- [Romodrom](#) (Czech Republic)
- [Status: M](#) (Croatia)

3 new individual members

- Andres Aru (Chancellor of Justice Office, Estonia)
- Ksenia Žurakovskaja-Aru (Chancellor of Justice Office, Estonia)
- Virginija Klumukienė (Prison Service, Lithuania)



Executive Director's Foreword

In 2023, COPE work focused on three key objectives: advocacy, capacity-building and network development, all aimed at strengthening its efforts to help the Network members and other stakeholders protect the rights of children affected by parental imprisonment.

Throughout the year, COPE hosted several events and fostered international cooperation to strengthen the European movement on behalf of children impacted by parental imprisonment. Notably, in December, COPE and Network member Alternative Sociale organised the [second edition of COPE's Judicial Roundtables](#), in Iasi, Romania. The event brought together 23 legal professionals, judges, magistrates and civil society representatives to address key issues in the protection of children's rights during a parent's criminal proceedings. These included how to ensure respect for children's right to be heard during decision-making processes affecting them and how to promote a cross-fertilisation of child-rights awareness and practices from family law to criminal law.

COPE helped to make headway in Greece with [a cross-sectoral event in Athens](#) in November, bringing together prison service representatives, civil society, government ministries, UNICEF, EuroPris and academics to galvanise action towards fulfilling the rights of children who have a parent in prison. The event helped to build stronger national partnerships to address systems gaps in Greece.

In 2023, COPE developed an [online child advisory consultation](#), asking children to voice their ideas about ways in which to improve prison visits to see a parent. The responses fed into COPE's advocacy efforts—both at the European level and with respect to national-level COPE Member initiatives with prison services (training sessions, the promotion of best practice among prison services).

The 2023 General Assembly adopted the [COPE Network Principles](#), articulating what COPE is and stands for, its mission and how we work within our network. COPE members have a wealth of expertise, working across Europe in very different contexts. Taking account of the scope and breadth of the network, these 27 Principles aim to foster network cohesion and to guide our work for children affected by parental imprisonment.

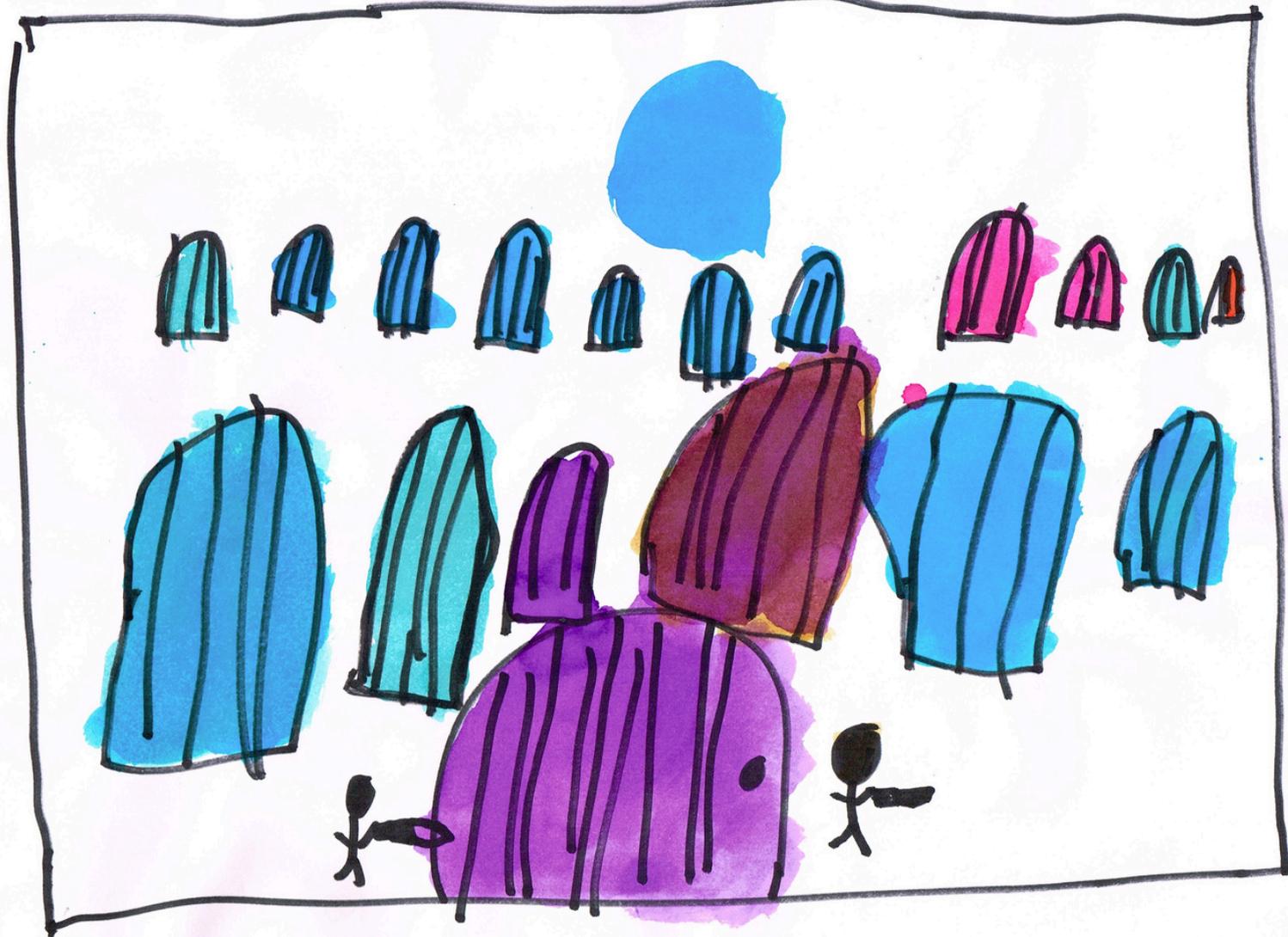
Conscious of our responsibility to help ensure the safety of the children with whom we interact, in 2023 we adopted a COPE Network [Child Safeguarding Policy](#). COPE supported its members in enhancing or developing their own policies, producing a [toolkit](#) and hosting several support workshops. Additionally, COPE enhanced its own Association [Child Safeguarding Policy](#).

The strength of COPE lies in the diversity of its network. The achievements listed in this report are made possible only with COPE members and affiliates, with their commitment to change, their openness to collaboration and their vision for a brighter world for all children impacted by a parent's imprisonment.



Margaret Tuite
COPE President





Eight ways COPE created positive impacts for children affected by a parent's imprisonment in 2023

1

PROTECTING CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO ONGOING CONTACT WITH A PARENT HELD IN PRE-TRIAL DETENTION THROUGH CONTRIBUTION TO LANDMARK RULING

In 2023, the European Court of Human Rights upheld COPE's third-party intervention in the [Deltuva v. Lithuania](#) case, stating that all decisions concerning children should take their best interests as a primary consideration and that children have a right when separated from a parent in prison to regular, ongoing contact with the parent, including during pre-trial detention.

COPE had filed an [amicus brief](#) jointly with the UK-based [AIRE Centre](#).



ADVOCATING ACROSS SECTORS TO CREATE SYSTEMIC CHANGE

2

A central pillar of COPE's work is advocacy. Raising the visibility and strengthening the rights of children impacted by a parent's imprisonment run through all of our work—whether this be on international, national or regional levels. Below are three examples of our advocacy work in 2023.

In June 2023, 106 attendees joined the annual COPE conference hosted by Bedford Row in Limerick, Ireland. Keynote speakers included Director General Caron McCaffrey and Assistant Governor Amanda Sutton of the Irish Prison Service, and Nuala Ward of the Irish Ombudsman for Children's Office.

The event saw calls to recognise the fundamental importance of respecting children's dignity when a parent is imprisoned, which includes avoiding stigmatising messaging and frames when speaking about this topic, and of addressing the needs of Irish Travellers and their families throughout criminal justice processes.

It showcased international and Irish practices such as the "National Families Connections Officer" role established within the Irish Prison Service and a filial-therapy support programme to support mothers in Limerick, while promoting action to elevate these issues higher up on Irish national policy agendas.

In October, COPE gave a keynote presentation at a conference hosted by the Latvian Prison Administration. COPE showcased EU-wide good practice to safeguard child rights during visits to imprisoned parents, emphasised the



◀ COPE former president Rachel Brett during COPE conference in Limerick

need for more rigorous and systematic data collection on children, and made suggestions for positive progress within the Latvian context to adapt prison spaces to better meet the needs of children and imprisoned parents.

In November, COPE coordinated a cross-sectoral meeting in Greece bolstering national cohesiveness and strengthening partnerships to advance recognition of children with imprisoned parents on policy agendas. Among participants were prison professionals, ministry representatives, child/social welfare, civil society and EuroPris. Key gaps in support provisions for children impacted by a parent's imprisonment were identified, as well as ideas for solutions.



Bringing different sectors together under one roof allowed for development of more horizontal, cross-cutting solutions involving welfare, education, social and justice sectors.

This event follows a similar roundtable held in 2022; identifying and bringing key 'champions' from the national context together with international actors, from various sectors, generates a cohesion and motivation to create change that COPE and partners in Greece continue to build on.



- ▲ Photo of the cross-sectoral meeting in Greece
- ▲ Participants at the COPE Conference in Limerick

3

FOSTERING CHILD PARTICIPATION AT EVERY STEP

Child participation is the first thematic area of the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child. In 2023, COPE strengthened and expanded its participatory actions:

In partnership with Time Matters Ltd. (UK), COPE produced an advocacy and training video for law enforcement professionals featuring discussions between a child-centred policing expert and children and young people with experience of a parent's arrest. Children and young people who have experienced the trauma of a parent's arrest know what could be done differently: they signalled the importance of removing children from arrest scenes, giving greater support information to families following an arrest, and speaking to children with compassion and respect. Their participation in this project is powerful—it reminds law enforcement of the necessity of expanding their professional horizons, speaking to children and families affected by their work and co-creating change.

“Even if there was just one police officer to sit down and talk to us about it [...] because I feel like once the incident's all over so to speak [you're] just like left to fend with yourselves.”

– young person who witnessed the arrest of a parent

In the last months of 2023, COPE developed an online consultation to hear directly from children across Europe about their ideas on how to make visits to a parent in prison a better, more child-friendly experience. Children were asked what adults should start, stop and keep doing within prison spaces to improve the quality of these visits and to make them feel safe and supported.

Their responses were compiled into this [report](#) and their words provide a gold standard for COPE's continued advocacy with national prison services (development of training) and international policy initiatives (European Commission, Council of Europe).

"Prisons should be less scary, you make me feel like I have done something wrong and you do not like my dad or trust my grandmother when she takes me to visit my dad."

— Boy, age 8, Ireland

In 2023, COPE attended the first General Assembly of the EU's Child Participation Platform, a mechanism established to ensure children's voices are heard and acted upon in EU-level decisions affecting them. Children affected by a parent's imprisonment should, like all children, be able to enjoy this right.

In 2023, COPE joined the steering committee of the Netherlands Helsinki Committee's CERV-funded ["Our Stories Matter" \(OSM\)](#) project in the Netherlands, aiming to structurally embed meaningful, inclusive and safe child participation in policy design and implementation processes at local and national level in prisons in the Netherlands.

COPE drafted and published a [2023 report](#) on promoting child participation for children with imprisoned parents. It offers information to service providers, child rights defenders and practitioners information about key challenges in establishing mechanisms for child participation and potential solutions to overcoming them.



PROMOTING AWARENESS & BEST PRACTICE AMONG THE JUDICIARY TO UPHOLD CHILDREN'S RIGHTS DURING A PARENT'S CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS

4

Awareness of how a parent's criminal sentence affects their children's rights remains low across European judicial systems. Such is the aim of COPE's Judicial Roundtables: to improve this awareness and establish practices that uphold children's rights—such as being heard, non-discrimination and family life—during a parent's trial and sentencing.

The 2023 Roundtable event was hosted in Romania by COPE member Alternative Sociale, with their recently published Guide for hearing children in judicial procedures serving as a framework for the event. Judge Daniel Mireuță of the Iasi Court of Appeal promoted compassionate sentencing as a concrete pathway forward to ensuring child rights-based justice systems. An international perspective was provided by Judge Chandra Gracias—a champion in the Portuguese context—who advocated for training for all justice professionals who come into contact with children, e.g., when conducting hearings.

Photo of the Roundtable event
in Romania



5

LAUNCHING EUROPEAN EDITION OF FOOTBALL CAMPAIGN — 'GAME WITH MUM & DAD'

In 2023, COPE expanded its Europe-wide campaign, 'Game with Mum & Dad', which organises football games within prison walls between an imprisoned mum or dad and their children. The football or other game helps to strengthen the child-parent bond and fosters inclusion and the protection of child rights within prison spaces. The concept and the model were pioneered and developed with great success by COPE's Italian member BambiniSenzaSbarre. In 2023, the campaign reached some 4,350 children across 5 countries: Italy, Poland, Spain, Switzerland and UK (England+Scotland) — and it continues to grow!

"It was short but beautiful. Dad and I haven't had fun together for 2 years. Being with him makes me happy. I thank you."

— boy, age 8, Italy

Game with Mum & Dad in Poland



BOLSTERING WORK WITH SCHOOLS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN WITH IMPRISONED PARENTS

6

Schools can play a fundamental role in systematising support to all children affected by a parent's imprisonment. For many children, their teachers or other school staff are the ones best positioned to act as the key "trusted adult" whom children want to confide in and seek support from. Schools can bring imprisoned parents into their children's education by sharing school reports and other information with parents in prison.

Prison and school staff can work together to support parent-child relationships through in-prison homework clubs and parent-teacher meetings. To promote these practices, COPE and member NGO organisation Aproximar hosted an in-prison training session in May 2023, bringing school staff to Tires Prison, outside Lisbon.

This project showcases a model developed by COPE member Families Outside, Scotland.

The in-prison location gave school staff concrete insight into visiting conditions and children's experiences during visits and opened the prison environment up to the possibility of working with schools.

In June 2023, as part of its Annual Network Meeting, COPE hosted a Forum event for members and affiliates to explore common barriers to working with schools and ways of bringing school staff into the picture of child support.

In-prison training in Portugal ▼



7

ENHANCING CHILD SAFEGUARDING POLICIES AND PRACTICE TO KEEP ALL CHILDREN SAFE

Throughout 2023, COPE continued to improve and solidify the network's culture and practice of child safeguarding. The COPE Association revised its child safeguarding policy and the 2023 General Assembly voted in a new Network child safeguarding policy, committing all COPE members and affiliates to upholding protective measures, ensuring the work they carry out always help to keep children safe. Adoption of a child safeguarding policy became a requirement of all COPE member and affiliate organisations, and COPE hosted capacity-building workshops supporting members to develop or enhance their policies. COPE also produced a [toolkit](#) on drafting and developing child safeguarding policies in 2023.



IMPROVING ETHICAL DATA COLLECTION ON THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN WITH A PARENT IN PRISON

8

COPE continued its Data with a Purpose initiative in 2023, to obtain robust data on children affected by parental imprisonment across Europe, with the purpose of determining how many children are impacted, who they are, where they are and what kind of supports they need. COPE published a [report in 2023](#), outlining progress on data collection in Latvia and Slovakia, building on a foundation laid in Lithuania during 2021 and 2022.



This report details various conferences, workshops and collaborative efforts aimed at enhancing knowledge and partnerships within these countries. It also offers a comprehensive look at data collection methodologies and statistics, providing valuable insights into the number, demographics and needs of children with imprisoned parents across Europe. The 2023 Data Report is not just a reflection of past achievements but also a roadmap for future initiatives aimed at ensuring robust and ethical data collection practices.

Spotlight on COPE Member Activities from 2023

Our members operate in various ways across different contexts. Many engage in awareness-raising and advocacy efforts to ensure these children are seen and heard in our societies. Some are individual academics and experts working on research and exploring new questions or perspectives relating to the topic. Some work on national level policy guidelines or on the implementation of innovative processes and systems to support children affected from arrest through to reintegration after the end of a prison sentence. Below is a snapshot of some members' activities from 2023:

A Knowledge Bank (Sweden)

In collaboration with the National Board of Social Affairs and Health, Swedish NGO Bufff created the "Knowledge Guide/Bank", a valuable resource designed to provide in-depth information, research and practical guidance on the unique challenges faced by children with imprisoned parents. This comprehensive guide serves as an essential tool for professionals, caregivers and anyone working to provide adequate support to children impacted by parental imprisonment.



A tool to support children during prison visits (Norway)

Together with the Kirkens Bymisjon, FFP has developed a tool called Fuelbox. It contains cards with different topics for conversation for both children and adults, and it can help stimulate discussions during visits. Every prison in Norway will have Fuelboxes available in visiting areas.

Care-experienced children and young people with a sibling in prison (UK)

Families Outside conducted [research](#) exploring the topic of care-experienced siblings separated by imprisonment or secure care and the gap in knowledge surrounding this.

The research outlined that:

- A large population of care-experienced children in Scotland have at some point been separated from their siblings (70%), and many had a sibling held in prison.
- There are many gaps in knowledge about sibling separation.
- Through care and custody—a great deal of work is needed to ensure sibling relationships are supported.

A [guide for social workers](#) supporting children with a sibling in prison/secure care was also developed as part of this initiative.

Child-friendly prison visiting spaces (Spain)

A closed male prison near Barcelona opened a new 'Visits Sea Route' adapted to foster a more child-friendly experience for children as they enter the prison to visit their parent.

Along the Sea Route, children can find cartoons with images of the sea, messages and clues as they make their way to see their father, who is the sought-after treasure. For this reason, the route is called A MAR = that means love and at the same time go to the sea.

The Sea Route was designed by arts monitors of Brians 2 prison, members of the Parental Group, technical staff and imprisoned parents. A video published in 2023 showcases this creative, child-friendly initiative [here](#).

General Directorate of Prison Affairs, Secretariat of Criminal Sanctions, Rehabilitation and Victim Support in Catalonia, Department of Justice, Rights and Memory, Government of Catalonia.



Raising Awareness

5,000 people were reached through COPE's social media channels in 2023.



3,689

Followers on Twitter



400

Followers on LinkedIn



1,455

Followers on Facebook



39

Subscribers on Youtube

Finances

Key Indicators for 2023

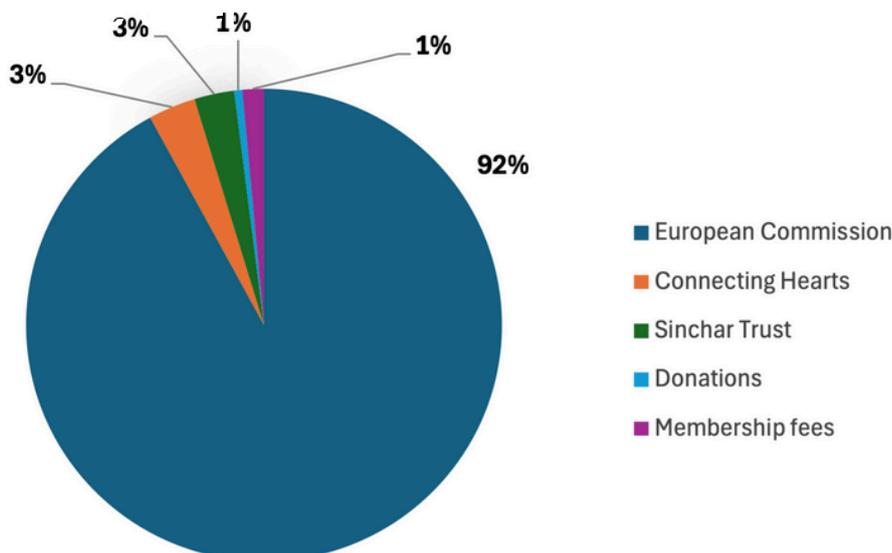
Income: € 312,049

Expenditure: € 316,106

Number of staff: 4

Number of members and affiliates: 127 in 38 countries

COPE Funding Sources 2023



Behind the scenes

The Board in 2023

Operating on a volunteer basis, the Board ensures that the COPE Association maintains a relevant, strategic and effective approach. It provides financial oversight and policy direction and supports management of the staff team. Thank you to the following individuals for their commitment to COPE through to June 2023, after which a new Board was approved by the General Assembly:

Rachel Brett, President (succeeded by Margaret Tuite)

Hannah Lynn, Vice President (succeeded by Alexandru Gulei in June 2023)

Maja Gabelica Šupljika, Secretary General (succeeded by Ewelina Startek in June 2023)

Winie Hanekamp, Treasurer

Alejandra Castaneda, Board Member (stepped down in June 2023)

Edoardo Fleischner, Board Member

Alexandru Gulei, Board Member

Ewelina Startek, Board Member

The Wise Persons Group

Made up of three experts in the field and long-term members of COPE, the Wise Persons Group reviews all COPE action from a holistic, macro perspective, providing recommendations to help ensure it is aligned with ethical and deontological imperatives and is child-sensitive to the fullest extent. In 2023, the group consisted of former COPE President **Kate Philbrick**; former child rights coordinator at the European Commission and child safeguarding expert **Margaret Tuite** and Director of the National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated (NRCCFI) at Rutgers University-Camden, **Ann Adalist-Estrin**.

COPE honours Ann Adalist-Estrin, who passed away on April 11, 2024. Ann was a visionary champion who shifted ways of seeing and working with children who have a parent in prison. She presented regularly at COPE conferences, roundtables and networking events. Her contributions to COPE stretched far and wide, and her vision and wisdom have left an indelible mark.

Staff

Liz Ayre, Executive Director
Carole Sautier, Office Manager
Paula Akyol, Project Manager
Martin du Bois, Director of Operations

Interns

COPE is grateful to its interns, whose hard work played a critical role in the smooth functioning of COPE's daily operations, key projects and initiatives. Thank you to:

- **Bruna Pillar**
- **Caroline Conforti**



Children of Prisoners Europe (COPE) is a pan-European network of non-profit organisations working with and 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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