



Improving Justice in Child Contact

Collaborative working report

December 2020

This report has been produced as part of the Improving Justice in Child Contact project. It sets out the findings and learning from the project in developing collaborative working practices across sectors. Such collaboration seeks to embed systemic change, in order to improve children's rights in child contact processes and to protect children and women impacted by domestic violence.

Collaborative Working Report

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Terminology

Domestic violence

As outlined under the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention),¹ domestic violence:

- means all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim;
- disproportionately impacts women and is a manifestation of historically unequal relationships between men and women; and
- affects children as victims and not only as witnesses.

Child contact

In cases of parental divorce or separation, child contact refers to the arrangements for the parent not living with the child (non-resident parent) to have contact with the child. These arrangements can be made informally by parents or through formal channels including court proceedings. This report focuses on the formal legal systems that decide if, when, and how a child has contact with their non-resident parent in the context of domestic violence.

Children and young people

'Children' are defined in this report as anyone under the age of 18, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. We also refer to 'young people' which, for the purposes of this report, means young adults between the ages of 18 and 25.

Systems change

Systems change is an approach to societal development that aims to bring about lasting change, by altering underlying structures and mechanisms that make a system operate in a particular way. Such structures and mechanisms include policies, relationships, resources, power structures, and values. Systems change can require radical shifts in people's attitudes as well as in the ways people work. A key principle of a systems

¹ Council of Europe (2014) *The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence*, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/rms/090000168008482e>

change approach is the engagement of multiple actors within a system. Systems-level interventions hold great potential for positive social change, with the ability to alter the structure and rules of a social system.²

² Abercrombie, A., Harries, E. and Wharton, R. (2015) *Systems change: a guide to what it is and how to do it*, <https://www.thinknpc.org/resource-hub/systems-change-a-guide-to-what-it-is-and-how-to-do-it/>



Key findings

- *Despite different systems, processes, and legal contexts across countries, the same systemic issues exist for children and women in relation to domestic violence and child contact, increasing their risk of harm. A systems change approach is needed to embed meaningful change.*
- *While systemic issues are similar, the systems change approach needs to be tailored to the opportunities and challenges in each particular context; processes and achievements therefore look different across countries.*
- *The process of collaborative working is key to systems change; it helps to increase awareness and understanding of domestic violence and child contact across stakeholders, change attitudes, and improve communication and co-ordination across different parts of the system.*
- *Bringing together children's rights and women's rights organisations and understandings provides productive and powerful alliances.*
- *It can be difficult to challenge pre-existing dynamics of a system and to engage stakeholders who often have diverse motivations for getting involved. Stakeholders are motivated through partnerships and by sharing international examples of improving child contact systems in the context of domestic violence.*
- *System mapping is a useful tool for identifying points of resistance and opportunity, prioritising, and action planning; care needs to be taken to balance identifying problems and identifying solutions, and keeping the experiences of children and women connected.*
- *Children and young people's participation is essential to influencing change.*

Introduction

Why do we need systems change in relation to domestic violence and child contact?

There have been long-standing concerns around domestic violence and child contact, with women and children experiencing harm from domestic violence perpetrators through child contact processes. In spite of increasing understanding about the dynamics of domestic violence, it is sometimes still assumed that once a woman has left an abusive partner, the abuse will stop. In reality, for many women and children, abuse continues or intensifies after separation.³ Murders of women and children where there is a history of domestic violence frequently take place at the point of separation.⁴ In addition to post-separation harassment, stalking, and violence, perpetrators often use the legal system to continue to exert power and control over women and children, particularly through child contact proceedings.⁵ In this context, child contact becomes a tool through which perpetrators continue their abuse.

This is exacerbated by a lack of understanding about how children experience domestic violence. The focus on children's experiences of domestic violence are often framed around the physical violence inflicted on their mother rather than the range of controlling tactics inflicted by the perpetrator. Children do not have to witness abuse directly to be affected by it negatively; as members of a household in which domestic violence takes place, they experience its effects in profound and multiple ways.⁶ Children experience domestic violence alongside their mothers rather than as passive witnesses. The separation of women's and children's experiences minimises the impact of domestic violence on children and can lead to inappropriate decisions being made about contact with a domestic violence perpetrator, who may still be seen by courts as a 'good enough' father.

The negative impacts for children and women are further compounded by stark differences in the treatment of domestic violence across agencies. Women are often held responsible by child protection agencies for not protecting their children from domestic violence; conversely in child contact proceedings, domestic violence and accompanying issues of safety and protection are persistently minimised and it is expected that

³ Thiara, R. and Harrison, C. (2016) 'Safe not sorry': supporting the campaign for safer child contact. Key issues raised by research on child contact and domestic violence, London: Women's Aid.

⁴ Wilson, M. and Daly, M. (2002) *Homicide*, New York: Aldine de Gruyter; Smith, K., Coleman, K., Eder, S. and Hall, P. (2011) *Homicides, Firearm Offences and Intimate Violence 2009/2010*, London: Home Office.

⁵ Bancroft, L., Silverman, J. and Ritchie, D. (2012) *Batterer as Parent: Addressing the Impact of Domestic Violence on Family Dynamics*, 2nd Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

⁶ Callaghan, J.E., Alexander, J.H., Sixsmith, J., and Fellin, L.C. (2018) 'Beyond "Witnessing": Children's Experiences of Coercive Control in Domestic Violence and Abuse', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 30(10): 1551-1581.



women should facilitate contact despite these issues.⁷ The interaction (or lack thereof) between criminal and civil law is an additional factor; proven domestic violence conviction rates are low, making it more difficult for women to raise domestic violence in contact proceedings.⁸

Finally, despite the right of children to express their views about matters affecting them and for those views to be given due weight in decision-making,⁹ this is often not implemented effectively in court systems for child contact. Children are often made to fit into an adult-centred system rather than the system working to fit around children's rights. Not meaningfully involving children in decision-making can lead to decisions being made that may not be in the child's best interests and inadvertently increase risk of harm.¹⁰

Without a common understanding of the interlinked experiences of women and children, children's rights, and the dynamics of domestic violence, the very systems designed to protect children and women end up enabling perpetrators to exert harm. Systemic change is required to address this, with justice agencies coming together with other actors -- such as police, social work, and domestic violence support services -- to work collaboratively for the effective protection of children and women.

International context

There is growing awareness at an international level of the problems around child contact and domestic violence. The Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) is the only legally binding instrument on violence against women that has an explicit provision on child custody. It thus highlights the critical relationship between women's and children's human rights: in the context of violence against women, ensuring that women are safe ultimately supports children.¹¹ Article 31 of the Istanbul Convention makes this clear by requiring States Parties to "take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that, in the determination of custody and visitation rights of children, incidents of violence covered by the scope of this Convention are taken into

⁷ Morrison, F., Callaghan, J. and Tisdall, E.K.M. (2020) 'Manipulation and Domestic Abuse in Contested Contact - Threats to Children's Participation Rights', *Family Court Review* 58(2): 403-416.

⁸ Hester, M. (2011) 'The Three Plant Model: Towards an Understanding of Contradictions in Approaches to Women and Children's Safety in Contexts of Domestic Violence', *The British Journal of Social Work* 41(5): 837-853.

⁹ Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/unicef-convention-rights-child-uncrc.pdf?_ga=2.258850190.545027101.1593081429-1790952204.1593081429

¹⁰ Tisdall, E.K.M. (2016) 'Subjects with agency? Children's participation in family law proceedings', *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law* 38(4): 362-379

¹¹ As recognised in Paragraph 454 of Scotland's National Child Protection Guidance 2014:
<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice-and-guidance/2014/05/national-guidance-child-protection-scotland/documents/00450733-pdf/00450733-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00450733.pdf>

account” and that “the exercise of any visitation or custody rights does not jeopardise the rights and safety of the [adult] victim or children.”¹²

An international conference hosted by the Council of Europe in May 2019 - “Women’s rights at the Crossroads: strengthening international cooperation to close the gap between legal frameworks and their implementation” - addressed the issue of child contact in the context of domestic violence. Speakers from the United Nations voiced concern at the global trend of ignoring domestic violence when determining child custody cases and the resulting risk of serious harm to children.¹³

How did the IJCC project support systems change?

[Improving Justice in Child Contact](#) (IJCC) aimed to address the issues around child contact and domestic violence by testing out models to better uphold children’s rights in child contact systems and enhance children’s participation in decision-making. In doing so, the ultimate aim was to improve child contact systems to better protect children and women who have experienced domestic violence.

The project - undertaken by partner organisations working on women’s and children’s rights in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Portugal, Romania, and Scotland - used approaches piloted in Scotland on system mapping and children’s participation as a ‘blueprint’ for the other partners to adapt to their own country contexts.

The project developed collaborative working practices through setting up multi-stakeholder engagement activities. Experts on domestic violence and children’s rights were brought together to identify key issues through systems mapping and to create an action plan in each country. System mapping is part of a systems change process; while mapping can be done in different ways, it can be helpful for identifying:

- the boundaries of the system in question;
- the main actors in a system and how they relate to each other;
- points of leverage and points of resistance;
- the beliefs or assumptions of different stakeholders; and
- the different points of view or ways of seeing the situation that are most commonly held.¹⁴

¹² Council of Europe (2011) *Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence*, <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168046031c>; https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/mhses-ijcc-webinarslides_0.pdf

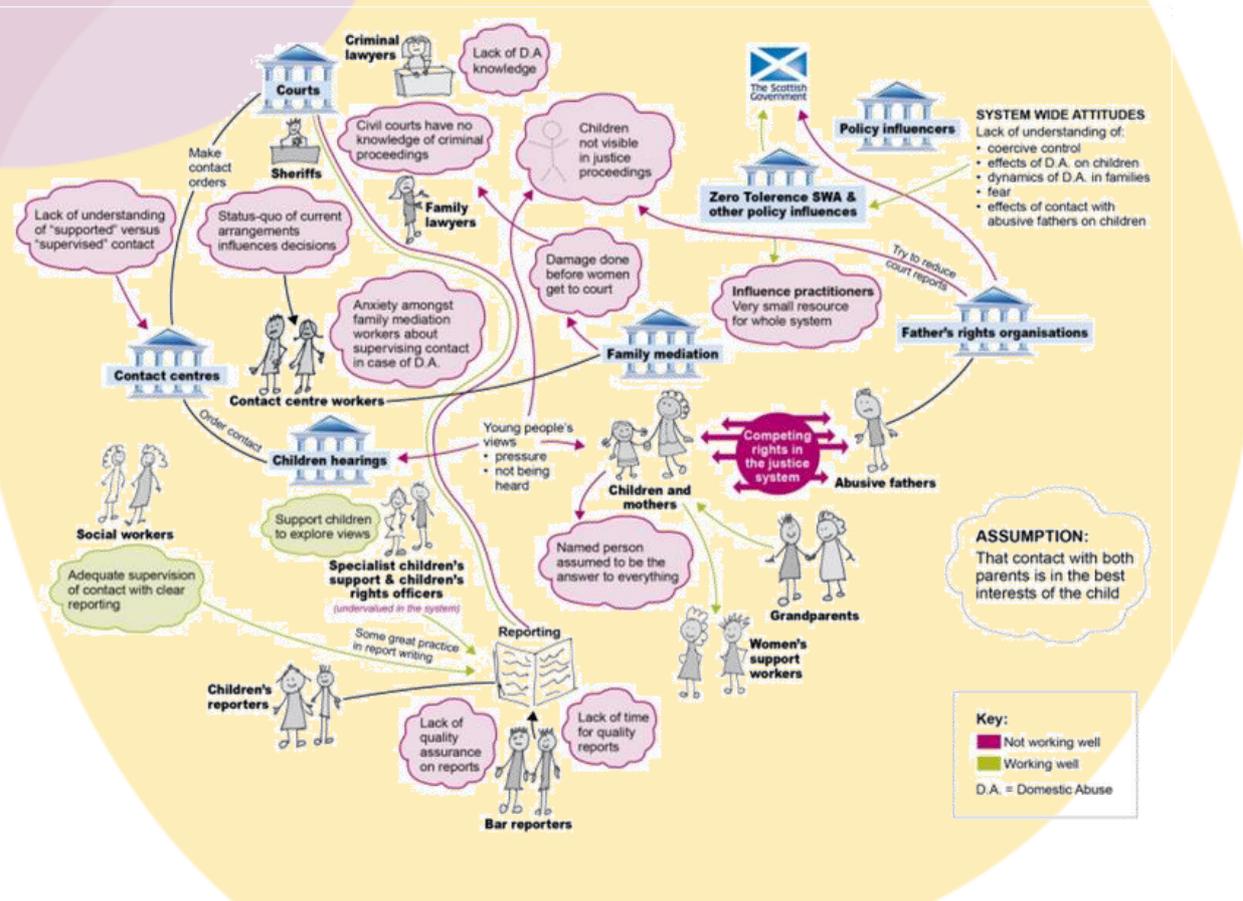
¹³ https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/SR/StatementVAW_Custody.pdf

¹⁴ Abercrombie, A., Harries, E. and Wharton, R. (2015) *Systems change: a guide to what it is and how to do it*, <https://www.thinknpc.org/resource-hub/systems-change-a-guide-to-what-it-is-and-how-to-do-it/>



Figure 1 shows a systems map for Scotland, collaboratively mapped out in 2015.

Figure 1: 'System Map: Child contact in cases of domestic abuse in Scotland' (2015): Sarah Morton (Matter of Focus)



This report sets out the key findings and learning from trying out the systems change approach across the project partners. More information on developing the children's participation models can be found in the [IJCC Participation Toolkit](#).

Adapting to country contexts

While the project partners shared similar issues around child contact and domestic violence as outlined above, each country operated within different legal processes, frameworks, and political climates. Engagement with stakeholders was therefore tailored according to each country's context. For example, in Portugal action planning was conducted through a series of multi-stakeholder meetings. Their final action plan was validated by professional stakeholders and a young expert group. In other countries, partners developed their action plans through smaller stakeholder meetings, individual meetings, and communications with stakeholders.

Accessing opportunities

Key to successful collaborative working was accessing existing opportunities to drive progress. This included making use of political opportunities, identifying how national policy developments aligned with the [IJCC project](#)'s aims, and developing key partnerships with ally agencies.

Political opportunities

In Portugal, engagement took the form of six multi-stakeholder forums, at which gaps in the system were identified and an action plan was developed and agreed by stakeholders. Despite this positive engagement, IJCC partners found it challenging to engage with the judiciary. Then, two key events created political pressure, which contributed to more willingness on behalf of judges and wider stakeholders to engage:

- Firstly, Grevio, the monitoring body for the Istanbul Convention, published its first report on Portugal's progress in implementing the Convention. Many of the gaps highlighted in the system by the [IJCC project](#) were included in the report, raising awareness of the key issues and reinforcing IJCC partners' messages at an international level.
- Secondly, a high profile femicide case involving the murder of a baby girl caused widespread media attention throughout Portugal and increased pressure to better protect the rights of children and women.

These events helped the project subsequently to engage with judges.

Aligning national policy developments with IJCC project

In Romania, legislation on domestic violence came into force shortly before the beginning of the [IJCC project](#). As well as defining domestic violence, the legislation brought in emergency protection orders that enable a domestic violence perpetrator to be removed from the home and barred from returning for a specified period of time and from contacting members of the household.¹⁵ This applies to children as well as women in the home, although there are issues with this working in practice. These orders were a new way to protect women and children; IJCC partners identified the implementation period of the legislation as an opportunity to raise awareness around child contact and domestic violence. Stakeholder meetings in Romania therefore took the form of three public hearings. These hearings included organisations with direct expertise in working with domestic violence cases and a range of other institutions were also invited in order to raise greater awareness. This process was accompanied by smaller planning meetings and written communications with targeted stakeholders, in order to develop

¹⁵ <https://rm.coe.int/state-report-on-romania/16809b9faf>

the action plan. Thus, the impetus caused by implementing legislation provided an opening for a wide range of stakeholders to engage.

In Bulgaria, the [IJCC project](#) coincided with and supported the drafting process of amendments to the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence. IJCC partners participated in these developments and made relevant suggestions in relation to the IJCC theme. The Draft law prepared in the Ministry of Justice in June 2020 contained amendments to the law providing for progressive measures related to child protection in situations of domestic violence, including:

- directing children to specialist services for protection of children victims or witnesses of violence;
- banning the use of mediation in cases of domestic violence; and
- better linkage between courts issuing protection orders and family courts.

In Cyprus, IJCC partners were involved in a technical working group to develop a 'Women's House', an integrated multi-agency one-stop-shop for survivors of violence against women and their children. Recognising the potential to align this development with IJCC initiatives, partners built discussion of the 'Women's House' into an IJCC multi-stakeholder meeting. This led to IJCC partners recommending the inclusion of a dedicated child advocacy post within the 'Women's House', based on one of the Scottish participation models and with commitment from the multi-stakeholder meetings. The Committee of Ministers adopted the proposal to integrate a child advocate into the core staff for the 'Women's House', creating a sustainable opportunity for children to express their views in child contact processes.

Developing key partnerships

In Cyprus, the national Commissioner for Children's Rights was highly supportive of the [IJCC project](#) and this led to a collaborative partnership: the Commissioner co-hosted the multi-stakeholder meeting, supported the development of the child advocacy officer role in the Women's House, and partnered on participation work with children. This partnership proved crucial to stakeholders' recognition of domestic violence as a children's rights issue and the impact of the project activities as a whole.

Other partners made use of existing partnerships to drive progress. For instance, in Bulgaria partners made use of links with a feminist lawyer network to engage with law professionals, opening doors that may otherwise have remained closed.

More widely, the cross-national partnership of the [IJCC project](#) proved to be a useful tool for driving change. Partners identified that the issues raised in the project received more focus in their own countries partially because stakeholders felt motivated due to international attention. Partners seized on this opportunity for influence through activities at an international level, including the development of [a joint seminar with the European Women's Lobby and Women Against Violence Europe network](#). IJCC partners



responded to a call for evidence from the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on domestic violence.¹⁶

Partners commented on the solidarity they felt in meeting other women who experienced and wanted to tackle the same issues as them, and the value of learning across countries:

“[A] big value of this partnership is to learn from each other about our political histories and the contextual advantages that were taken and what’s missing, what can be done about specific resources etc ... why is this happening here but missing from other countries? It helps to do this bigger picture thinking.” (Partner country interviewee)

Adapting to challenges

All partners faced challenges in collaborative working, including resistance from some stakeholders, changing political climates, and overcoming differences in agencies’ understanding of domestic violence and child contact. Partners had to adapt their engagement accordingly.

In Bulgaria for instance, the [IJCC project](#) began in an extremely challenging political climate: the Istanbul Convention’s ratification was strongly opposed by religious and political groups and subsequently blocked by the Constitutional Court.¹⁷ Public attitudes towards gender and gender-based violence, and specifically around women’s and children’s rights, presented significant difficulties in terms of engagement; public multi-stakeholder events were not considered possible due to safety and disruption concerns. Partners therefore held a smaller event with targeted stakeholders. They felt that having an external expert to present good practice and models from another country was helpful given the local context and utilised the experience of IJCC partners to provide this at their event. In addition, they conducted research into femicides and domestic violence court cases in Bulgaria to build a further evidence base for the need for IJCC work. This highlights the importance of knowing stakeholders’ priorities and tailoring approaches accordingly.

¹⁶ https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/SRWomen/Pages/call_covid19.aspx

¹⁷ <https://www.politico.eu/article/bulgaria-istanbul-convention-backs-away-from-treaty-opposing-violence-against-women/>



Bringing people together

The multi-sector forums held in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Portugal, and Romania engaged a total of 190 stakeholders across diverse sectors including:

- Non-Governmental Organisation, including women's organisations and children's organisations;
- Central and Regional Public Administration;
- Local and National Government;
- Police;
- Law (including lawyers, prosecutors, and judiciary);
- Social Services;
- Health;
- Education; and
- Academia

The forums engendered discussion, commitment, and enthusiasm from stakeholders and identified areas for action. While there were differences in the format of engagement across countries, as outlined above, some core components were the same:

- They brought together where possible all stakeholder agencies whose work has a bearing on domestic violence and child contact through the courts; and
- Each group worked towards an action plan that identified what needed to change and how this could be done.

Benefits of collaborative working

Stakeholders were surveyed after meetings. Across the 5 countries, they reported similar benefits of taking part in collaborative working:

Improved awareness and understanding of issues around child contact and domestic violence: Stakeholders reported better understanding of the needs of children and women in families where domestic violence is an issue. For some stakeholders, it was the first time they had considered the issues of child contact and domestic violence together. Many had been unaware of the systemic issues, including the difficulties children face in having their participation rights upheld in courts and the potential harm caused to children and women if a perpetrator of domestic violence were granted contact.

In Cyprus, five stakeholders referred to learning about children's rights or children's involvement, including that children and women's rights are connected.

In Bulgaria, representatives of the judiciary expressed their willingness to have more engagement with experts and NGOs on child contact and domestic violence.

Attitude change: Several stakeholders commented on a change in their attitudes about abusive parents having contact with children. The multi-stakeholder events were valuable for helping the message to 'get through' to participants. Partners found that being able to present a successful model from another country was helpful for changing attitudes. For instance, stakeholders in Portugal expressed concern about children's wellbeing and the possibility of re-victimising them if they were asked to give their views. Presenting

successful participation models from Scotland helped to increase understanding of safe, meaningful, and effective participation and change attitudes around including children affected by domestic violence in decision-making.

Improved communication and coordination across agencies: Many new connections were made within each country, resulting in better communication and coordination across agencies. Stakeholders valued the opportunity to get together with organisations that have different strengths and come from different perspectives. Meetings provided an opportunity to learn from one another and increase understanding of the specific context in which each agency worked.

Challenges of collaborative working

Addressing pre-existing dynamics: Bringing together agencies operating with differing understandings and processes around domestic violence was not without its challenges. Addressing systemic issues involved challenging pre-established dynamics across institutions and the roles played by stakeholders in protecting children and women experiencing domestic violence. The system mapping activity (see below) was a helpful way of navigating this issue as it enabled stakeholders to assess the gaps in the system as a whole rather than criticising one agency in particular.

Motivating stakeholders: While all countries had positive engagement from some stakeholders, they also experienced gaps in engagement with other key agencies. For instance, a few country partners reported struggling to engage with health and education stakeholders, while another struggled to engage with social services. Different stakeholders had different motivations for engaging, from political and international pressure, to the desire to hear from children and young people; this meant that partners had to assess the different motivations of several stakeholders and adapt their approach accordingly.

Continuity of stakeholders: Over the course of the engagement events, different people would sometimes attend from the same organisation, which could hamper the continuity of discussions.

System mapping and action planning

IJCC partners undertook a system mapping activity together as part of project planning. In addition, some countries undertook a system mapping activity as part of their national action planning; this emerged as a helpful tool for partners in identifying the enablers and barriers to children's views being heard in child contact decisions for families affected by domestic violence.

A system mapping approach looks at the wider 'ecosystem' by focusing on key stakeholder groups and key institutions and identifying what is working well and what is not working well for children and women across each. The resulting map is then used to identify solutions.

System mapping in action

Mapping process: Cyprus

Participants were grouped according to their sector in order to discuss and answer the following question:

"What happens to children and non-offending parents (mothers) in your sector in the context of domestic violence?"

Following this exercise, participants took post-its and rotated around tables, commenting on/editing/adding to other tables' work. Finally, participants returned to their original table, discussed, and documented on flip chart paper "What do you want children's experiences to be in your sector?"

Using mapping outcomes: In Portugal, stakeholders were put into small groups, mixing people from different organisations. Each group was then assigned a priority area: education, justice, health, police and child rights protection. For each priority area, using the outcomes of the system mapping, each group identified measures to address problems, organisations to be involved and the timetable for the implementation of those measures.

Undertaking the systems mapping helped to:

- Increase understanding and awareness amongst stakeholders of the key issues around child contact and domestic violence;
- Enable stakeholders to contribute to what could be improved across all institutions, not just their own, helping to develop a 'larger picture' of the issue;
- Make clearer the connections and interactions between key institutions, where these connections were working well and where they could be improved; and
- Identify 'bottlenecks' in the system and priorities for improvement.

It was challenging during the systems mapping to:

- Maintain the focus on children and women and their connected experiences of domestic violence, rather than focusing on one group or the other;
- Identify where one agency's responsibility 'ended' and another's responsibility 'began'; and
- Identify concrete measures to solve the problems.

Action plans

All partners developed action plans from their multi-stakeholder engagement. The plans aimed to include actions to embed long-term change: an example of this was Cyprus including the child advocacy role in the 'Women's House'. Other examples include:

- Developing and undertaking training for key stakeholders on domestic violence and children's and women's rights – this included specialised training focusing on children and young people victims of domestic violence;
- Amending or developing relevant national policy and legislation;
- Setting up specialised domestic violence teams across agencies; and
- Carrying forward participation initiatives with children and young people to inform system improvements.

Partners encountered some challenges in developing their action plan. For instance, those attending the multi-stakeholder events were often not decision-makers at the institutional level, making it more difficult to agree key actions. There were budget considerations for implementing action plans, which would have been helpful to consider more deeply from the outset. These offer learning for future action planning.

The importance of children and young people's participation in embedding/influencing change

As previously mentioned, alongside the development of collaborative working practices the IJCC project implemented children and young people's participation initiatives



adapted from Scottish models (see the [IJCC Participation Toolkit](#)). It was crucial that these two project elements went hand in hand, as improving children and young people's participation rights in child contact processes was at the heart of the project. Children and young people's views informed the development of action plans and engaging with stakeholders. Indeed, children and young people's participation proved to be essential in successfully influencing change.

Involving young experts

A Young Expert Group (YEG) was developed to ensure that children and young people with lived experience of domestic violence were included in decision-making throughout the project. Yello!, the Scottish YEG, met directly with IJCC partners to advise them on how to involve children and young people in the project safely, meaningfully, and ethically. They provided their expertise on key project activities, identified their own priorities for change, and helped to evaluate the project.

Countries developed their own YEGs, following Yello!'s advice on participation, to inform their work at a national level. YEG members contributed to the project in creative ways. For example, in Romania a young expert supported the project through sharing a poetry and blog of her personal experiences¹⁸ and transcribing from audio recordings of meetings with judges, lawyers, and therapists, to be made into podcasts.

Decision-makers in different countries found it a very powerful experience engaging with the YEGs. Meeting children and young people in person helped decision-makers to feel more responsibility to take account of their views. In Portugal, the participation of the YEG in multi-stakeholder forums made a hugely positive impression on stakeholders and helped to open doors for further engagement, with multiple invitations for the YEG to talk to other colleagues including judges. The YEG also co-produced briefings alongside adults on key issues around domestic violence and child contact.

In Scotland, Yello! met with the Government Minister in charge of developing legislation to reform the family law system, including proposals for better protection for children and women experiencing domestic violence and improving mechanisms for children giving their views to the court. The YEG shared what needed to be improved in the legislation for children affected by domestic violence. They also gave written and oral evidence to the Parliament Committee overseeing the legislation.¹⁹ The final legislation was greatly informed by Yello!'s views.

Conclusion

In spite of project partners' different contexts, the same systemic issues appeared for women and children affected by domestic violence. No matter the legal frameworks and

¹⁸ <https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/ijcc/2020/10/my-story-of-my-hearing-in-the-court/>

¹⁹ <https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/mh-ijcc-yello-evidence.pdf>

processes, each country encountered difficulties with domestic violence being adequately recognised in child contact proceedings, children's and women's safety and protection being considered together, and children's meaningful participation in contact proceedings.

As such, while the approaches to addressing these systemic issues differed across countries, there were common elements for success.

- First, one agency or sector alone cannot implement lasting change; it takes collaborative working across sectors to ensure a common understanding and approach. Across each country, the process of bringing multiple sectors together was crucial to engendering the understanding, awareness, and attitude change that enabled action plans to emerge.
- Second, children and young people's participation is an essential part of influencing change. Involving children and young people with lived experiences ensures that developments adequately reflect children and young people's realities and galvanises stakeholders to engage in processes of change and take children and young people's views into account.
- Third, it is important to make use of the opportunities specific to the particular context. Opportunities differed across IJCC partners; therefore processes and achievements looked different for each country. However, through using their knowledge of key stakeholders and processes, and identifying points of leverage specific to their context, partners were able to influence change.

About IJCC

Improving Justice in Child Contact (IJCC) aims to improve children and young people's participation in decision-making around child contact for families affected by domestic violence.

- By 'child contact' we mean communication (such as phone calls or spending time) between a child and a parent who are not regularly living together.
- By 'participation' we refer to children's human rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Children have a range of participation rights, including the right to express their views freely in matters that affect them and for those views to be considered seriously.

Improving Justice in Child Contact is a project across five European countries (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Portugal, Romania and Scotland) running from November 2018 to November 2020. Each country is exploring models for children and young people to participate and working with stakeholders to eliminate the barriers for, and enhance the mechanisms that support, children and young people's participation.

More information is available on our website.

www.ed.ac.uk/education/ijcc

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Our Young Advisers

Improving Justice in Child Contact is advised by a group of young experts, called Yello!, who have previous experience of participation work. The young people are aged between 12 and 18 and have experience of domestic violence.



SUPPORT

If you are looking for advice or information about domestic violence, help is available. Women Against Violence Europe have information on specialist services across Europe at www.wave-network.org/find-help

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