# Concept Note
# ENSURE International Conference

## FROM RIGHTS TO REALITY:
## ENSURING MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF CHILD VICTIMS WITH DISABILITIES IN CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS

**3-4 November 2026**

**Brussels, Belgium**

*The ENSURE International Conference will bring together justice professionals, project partners, child rights experts, academics, policymakers, disability rights advocates, and organizations working in the field of disability rights, including persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, to examine how the rights of child victims with disabilities can be translated into meaningful participation in criminal proceedings. Through expert presentations, comparative discussions, interactive exercises, and exchanges of practice, the conference will explore the barriers that continue to prevent children with disabilities from effectively exercising their rights within justice systems and identify practical measures to address them.*

*The conference will examine the international and EU legal standards governing access to justice for children with disabilities, with particular attention to the rights to effective participation, legal representation, individual assessment, procedural accommodations and communication support. It will further present the findings of the ENSURE project in Austria, Romania and Serbia, highlighting existing frameworks, promising practices and challenges faced by children with disabilities in criminal proceedings, as well as opportunities for reform.*

*Particular focus will be placed on communication support mechanisms, including the role of intermediaries and other support persons, in enabling children with disabilities to understand proceedings and express their views effectively. Drawing on comparative experiences and practical examples from different jurisdictions, the conference will provide opportunities for peer learning, multidisciplinary dialogue and the exchange of experiences among stakeholders from different legal systems. The conference will conclude with the development of recommendations aimed at advancing child-friendly, disability-inclusive justice systems across Europe.*

The **Ensuring Access to Intermediaries for Children with Disabilities in Legal Proceedings (ENSURE)** project aims to enhance access to justice for child victims with disabilities by improving communication and coordination among professionals involved in criminal proceedings. Implemented between March 2025 and February 2027, the project focuses on developing and strengthening the role of intermediaries and other support mechanisms in Austria, Romania and Serbia, while drawing on best practices from across Europe.

**Funded by the European Union**

# AGENDA
# ENSURE International Conference

## 3-4 November 2026

**TOPOS Louise, Avenue Louise 367, Brussels, Belgium**

## Day 1

**9:00 – 9.30** **REGISTRATION**

**9:30 – 9.45** **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT**
Karolína Babická, Senior Legal Adviser, Europe and Central Asia Programme, International Commission of Jurists

**9:45 – 10:00** **LIVED EXPERIENCE PERSPECTIVE: WHAT MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION MEANS IN PRACTICE**
Video message by Tanya Petkova, Member of the Disability Advisory Board of the ENSURE project

**10.00 – 10:45** **FROM PROTECTION TO PARTICIPATION: MOVING FROM A MEDICAL TO A HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH IN JUSTICE RESPONSES TO CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**

Speaker: Dainius Pūras, Former CRC Committee member & UN Special Rapporteur on the right to health

**Discussion**

**10:45 – 11:15** **COFFEE BREAK**

**11:15 – 12:15** **INTERNATIONAL AND EU STANDARDS: WHAT SHOULD JUSTICE SYSTEMS PROVIDE FOR CHILD VICTIMS WITH DISABILITIES?**

- **International standards on access to justice for children with disabilities**

Speaker: Wilson Macharia, Legal Adviser & Regional Lead on Disability Rights, Africa Programme, International Commission of Jurists

- **EU legal and policy framework on access to justice for children with disabilities**

Speaker: Viktoryia Konashava, Legal Researcher, Europe and Central Asia Programme, International Commission of Jurists

- **Victims' rights and child victims with disabilities: Key developments at the EU level**

Speaker: Marieta Tosheva, Legal and Policy Officer, Criminal Procedural Law Unit, European Commission

**12:15 – 13:00** **PANEL DISCUSSION – FROM STANDARDS TO REALITY: FINDINGS FROM AUSTRIA, ROMANIA AND SERBIA**

- **What works well?**
- **What are the biggest gaps?**
- **What is one reform that could make the biggest difference?**

Speakers: Ines Cerovic, CRC Serbia; Helmut Sax, LBI-GMR, Austria; Mihai Enache, TdH Romania
Moderator: Karolína Babická, Senior Legal Adviser, Europe and Central Asia Programme, International Commission of Jurists

**13:00 – 14:00** **LUNCH**

**14:00 – 15:30** **UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONDING TO CHILDREN'S NEEDS: INDIVIDUAL ASSESSMENT AND PROCEDURAL ACCOMMODATIONS IN PRACTICE**

Speaker: Suzanne Doyle Guilloud, Policy Specialist, Validity Foundation

**INTERACTIVE EXERCISE**

**15:30 – 16:00** **COFFEE BREAK**

**16:00 – 16:30** **ENSURING EFFECTIVE LEGAL REPRESENTATION FOR CHILD VICTIMS WITH DISABILITIES**

- **International and EU standards on legal assistance and legal aid**

Speaker: Karolína Babická, Senior Legal Adviser, Europe and Central Asia Programme, International Commission of Jurists

**16:30 – 17:30** **INTERACTIVE WORKSHOP:**
***MAP THE CHILD'S JUSTICE JOURNEY***

**18:00** **NETWORKING DINNER**

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# Day 2

**09:00 – 10:30** **COMMUNICATION SUPPORT IN CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS**

- **Communication support and the right to be understood**

Speaker: Viktoryia Konashava, Legal Researcher, Europe and Central Asia Programme, International Commission of Jurists

- **Different support mechanisms: Presentation of the ENSURE Model Rules Based-Process for Special Representatives, Intermediaries, and Support Persons**

Speaker: Axel Le Hô, Project Officer, Validity Foundation

**Group discussion: Adapting Support Models to Different Justice Systems**

**10:30 – 11:15** **INTERMEDIARIES IN PRACTICE: FROM COMMUNICATION BARRIERS TO MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION**

- **Understanding the intermediary model in England and Wales**
- **Identifying and responding to diverse communication needs**
- **Supporting effective participation in police interviews and court proceedings**

Speakers:
- Dr Catherine O'Neill, Speech and Language Therapist, Registered Intermediary; Intermediaries for Justice
- Dr Kimberly Collins, Chartered Psychologist, Registered Intermediary; Building Blocks of Communication Ltd
- Heather Carroll, Registered Intermediary; Intermediaries for Justice

**11:15 – 11:30** **COFFEE BREAK**

**11:30 – 13:00** **INTERACTIVE WORKSHOP:**
***SAME CHILD, SAME EVIDENCE, DIFFERENT JUSTICE EXPERIENCE***

**13:00 – 13:25** **FROM FINDINGS TO ACTION: WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?**
Moderator: International Commission of Jurists

**13:25 - 13:30** **CLOSING**

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