



FOCUS Roadmap for strengthening individual assessment processes the gateway to child-centered criminal justice proceedings

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Focus
Working together
for children in criminal
proceedings



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Table of Content

Table of Content	3
Introduction	5
Acknowledgments	5
I. Achieving child-centred justice	6
II. FOCUS project at a glance	7
FOCUS Key Objectives	7
FOCUS Target Countries	7
FOCUS Activities	7
FOCUS Outputs	7
FOCUS Participants	8
FOCUS Child Participation	8
FOCUS Technical Expert Group	8
FOCUS at the 2021 World Congress for Justice with Children	9
FOCUS Partners	9
III. Individual assessments - what's at stake?	10
Key Elements	10
Multidisciplinary, Inter-Agency Approach	11
The system	11
IV. Where are we today?	12
The experience of practitioners and children	12
Some typical challenges in the individual assessment processes today	13
Lessons learned during Covid-19	13
FOCUS project response to challenges and opportunities	13
V. At a glance: FOCUS Project Tools & Resources	14
VI. At a Glance: the FOCUS Standards	15
VII. FOCUS Roadmap for Progress - Using the FOCUS Resources	16
1. Promoting awareness	16

2. Improving the system	17
Step 1: Identifying challenges and opportunities	17
Step 2: Planning progress together	18
Step 3: Taking action to improve the system.....	19
Step 4 Monitoring and Review.....	19
3. Building specialised knowledge	19
4. Empowering children	20
VIII. What did the Partner Countries learn from their journeys? How to plan for sustainable progress?.....	21
1. Promoting awareness	21
2. Achieving system change.....	22
3. Building specialised knowledge.....	23
4. Child participation.....	24
IX. Looking Ahead: Broader Regional Policy Recommendations for Improving Individual Assessment Processes for Children in Criminal Proceedings in Europe	26
1. Promoting awareness	26
2. Strengthening the system	26
3. Building specialised knowledge.....	27
4. Empowering children	27

Introduction

The Focus Roadmap for strengthening individual assessment processes – the gateway to child-centred criminal justice proceedings has been developed as part of the FOCUS project and is a component of a set of **FOCUS tools and resources**. The Roadmap summarizes the main aspects of the FOCUS project, highlights the FOCUS standards on individual assessments, provides information how the FOCUS resources can become a sustainable asset and how progress can be promoted and measured.

Acknowledgments

Rebecca O' Donnell (Child Circle) took a lead role in the development of the FOCUS Roadmap, while receiving valuable input from the FOCUS experts Silvia Randazzo, Child Justice Expert, Annemieke Wolthuis, Child Justice Consultant affiliated with Restorative Justice Nederland Mariama Diallo, Regional Programme Manager Access to Justice, Regional Office of Terre des hommes for Europe and Orinda Gjoni, FOCUS Regional Project Coordinator and our partners – Child Rights Centre (Serbia), Defence for Children (The Netherlands), SAPI (Bulgaria), Terre des hommes Hellas and Terre des hommes Romania.

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I. Achieving child-centred justice

When children are involved in criminal justice proceedings, whether as victims, suspects or accused of crime, they typically need specific safeguards and access to assistance and protection.



International, European and national laws include provisions to adapt the criminal justice proceedings and to put in place social, health, educational, or other measures which are in the best interests of the child, in light of the specific circumstances and needs of each child.

The obligation to carry out an individual assessment of the child’s situation from the outset of the proceedings provides a gateway to a child-centred procedure. When properly carried out, individual assessments help fulfil the range of State responsibilities towards the child and can transform the experience of both children and professionals in these cases and their longer-term outcomes.

Many actors have a role to play either in carrying out and conducting out the individual assessments to fulfil the rights of children or supporting the process for doing so. They include policymakers, government authorities and services, justice and law enforcement actors, youth care and social services, health professionals and educators, NGOs supporting children, as well as guardians and lawyers.

The fact that many actors and responsibilities are involved provides both a challenge and an opportunity. Consequently, this Roadmap aims to provide a path for actors to work together and individually strengthen the individual assessments, either through improving the system underpinning these assessments or by improving individual practice. Based on the research and exchange of experience of partners in the FOCUS project and sharing our mutual learning, the Roadmap directs you to tools and resources which will help you strengthen the system, improve professional practice, and engage children in the process.

“[Child-friendly justice is] a judicial system where a child is an active participant and not just a passive subject, a judicial system which is not about a child, but with a child.”

(Serbia, 17-year-old boy and 18-year-old female)

II. FOCUS project at a glance

FOCUS Key Objectives

- ◆ Make systematic individual assessment practices a more common application for children involved in criminal proceedings.
- ◆ Build the knowledge, capacities, and skills of youth justice professionals about standards, tools, procedures, and processes in the use of multidisciplinary individual assessments.
- ◆ Build the knowledge and capacities of children about their rights in the criminal justice system and empower children to be agents of change and advocates for child-centred justice.

Individual assessment obligations are set out in three EU Directives concerning the combating of sexual abuse and exploitation of children, victims' rights, and procedural safeguards. They are transposed into, and sometimes complemented by, national law and international law, such as Council of Europe Conventions.

FOCUS Target Countries

Bulgaria, Greece, the Netherlands, Romania, Serbia

FOCUS Activities

- ◆ promoting awareness of individual assessment obligations;
- ◆ mapping gaps and opportunities for progress and exchange between stakeholders on making progress;
- ◆ providing professionals with new knowledge and practical resources to strengthen individual assessment process and practice;
- ◆ through our Child Advisory Boards, empowering children to be agents of change

FOCUS Outputs

- ◆ **One European review** of existing tools, practices, and procedures for the individual assessment of the circumstances & needs of children in criminal proceedings, in particular in partner countries
- ◆ **One regional trainers' workshop** and **ten national face to face and/or online workshops** for multidisciplinary professionals to address knowledge, attitudes, skills, and habits in relation to individual assessment of children in criminal proceedings

- ◆ **One Child Advisory Board** meeting on a monthly basis in each partner country, and **five child-led awareness raising campaigns** through the use of media and the arts, on the right to an individual assessment in particular and on the procedural rights of children in criminal proceedings and child friendly justice in general
- ◆ **One practitioner's e-learning course**, accessible and open to professionals across Europe
- ◆ **Piloting individual assessment resources in 5 countries in Europe** to support the proper development and/or use of individual assessments with child victims and child offenders
- ◆ **A Roadmap for strengthening individual assessment processes**, including **Quality Standards**, and a **range of other resources**, outlined on pg 14.
- ◆ **A website providing a technical interface** of resources to support the process of developing and/or conducting systematic multidisciplinary individual assessments with children
- ◆ **Five national advocacy meetings with key stakeholders** to promote the use of better processes and to build ownership of assessment tools
- ◆ **Five sustainability plans** developed to further roll out the assessment tools
- ◆ **Five regional advocacy events and one final conference** to present the results of the project and share the sustainability plans

FOCUS Participants

A wide range of actors participated in the FOCUS activities, such as justice professionals (including juvenile probation officers, public prosecutors, and lawyers), child protection professionals (including social workers and psychologists), and law enforcement professionals (including professionals from juvenile units, police specialists, and staff from detention centres).

FOCUS Child Participation

Child Advisory Boards (CABs) were established in the 5 partner countries and were composed of 42 children and young people: 23 boys and 19 girls, aged 16 – 22 years old. The majority (2/3) of the CAB members reported having had experience with the justice system as victims or offenders.

FOCUS Technical Expert Group

FOCUS was generously supported by advice on its activities and outputs during three meetings and communications with the Technical Expert Group. The Group was composed of experts from the partner countries, ranging from lawyers, judges, probation officers, judicial staff, education department professionals, child protection specialists, justice experts, and academics.

FOCUS at the 2021 World Congress for Justice with Children

FOCUS partners took the opportunity to take part in the 2021 [World Congress for Justice with Children](#) to discuss individual assessment processes with a number of panellists and to share FOCUS resources with a broader worldwide audience who viewed the (recorded) session.

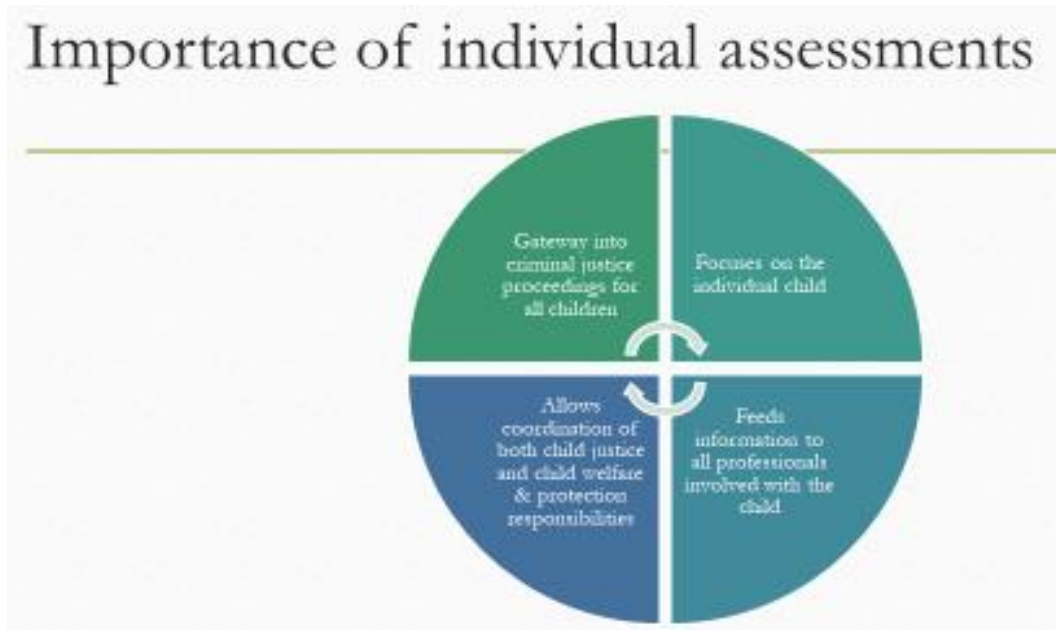
FOCUS Partners

FOCUS is coordinated by the Terre des Hommes Regional Office in Hungary and carried out in partnership with [Child Circle](#), [Child Rights Centre \(Serbia\)](#), [Defence for Children The Netherlands](#), the [Institute of Social Activities and Practices](#) (Bulgaria), [Terre des hommes Hellas](#), and [Terre des hommes Romania](#).



The project is co-funded by the Rights, Equality, and Citizenship Programme of the European Union (2014-2020).

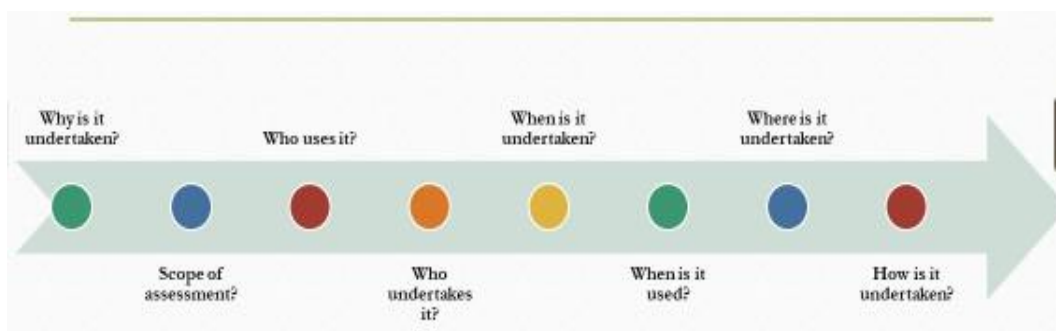
III. Individual assessments - what's at stake?



The best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning the child, as is required by the European Union (EU), the Council of Europe, assessment and international law. Individual processes are a key means to ensure this condition, when children are involved in criminal justice proceedings, whether as victims, suspects, or accused.

Key Elements

At the heart of all individual assessments is the need to focus on the circumstances of each child, empower the child to access their procedural rights, and equip the various agencies and professionals involved in the process with the information they need to help them decide and implement the specific measures that are called for. Individual assessment is a process with a number of key practical elements to be addressed, including:



Multidisciplinary, Inter-Agency Approach

International guidance and good practice underscore the importance of a multidisciplinary and inter-agency case management approach in the field of child justice. This approach supports the coordination of the two responsibilities which the State should simultaneously fulfil when they are addressing a child, namely the criminal justice responsibility arising out of the case in which the child is involved and the child welfare/protection responsibility that arises from the child's situation. Individual assessments should draw from and contribute to such child-centred, multidisciplinary, and inter-agency case management.

The system

The system underpinning the individual assessment process should include:

1. **Law** (clear obligation to undertake the individual assessment)
2. **Procedures** (definition of who, when, how, what, where, and for what purpose an individual assessment is undertaken)
3. **Coordination protocols** (as individual assessment processes typically rely on different actors working together to undertake, contribute to, use, and follow up with individual assessments)
4. **Tools and practices** (such as case management tools or checklists)
5. **Skilled professionals** (training)
6. **Specific resources** (e.g. for special cases and needs)
7. **Accountability** mechanisms, monitoring, and review

IV. Where are we today?

The experience of practitioners and children

Police officers, lawyers, social workers, prosecutors, judges, forensic interviewers, probation workers, health professionals (including doctors and psychologists), persons working in pre-trial detention centres, persons working in institutions to which children are sent, and persons involved in providing (legal, social, protection, health, and other) services to children – all of them face questions in their day-to-day practice:

Do I have a full picture of the child's situation?

How can I share information with other professionals?

With whom can I connect to get information about a child's needs, and when?

How do I hear what the child has to say about what they need and want?

Children ask themselves:

Am I informed about my rights?
 Are my views being heard? Is anyone really listening?

Who is supporting me and for what reason?

How does the assessment ensure that I can access my rights throughout the court case?

Are there any practical solutions for my special needs?

Some typical challenges in the individual assessment processes today

A number of challenges in both the system and daily practice emerged during the FOCUS mapping and exchanges with professionals and children. These include the fact that individual assessments may be:

- ◆ Limited in scope & purpose
- ◆ Not undertaken properly for certain children, e.g. children with disabilities
- ◆ About children, but not properly engaging children
- ◆ Often undertaken in intimidating/hostile settings
- ◆ One-off step, not updated
- ◆ Often performed by one professional
- ◆ Lack of knowledge & skills
- ◆ Missing key resources
- ◆ Tick the box exercise: not contributing to outcomes
- ◆ Ad hoc, varied practices across different profession

Lessons learned during Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic, which coincided with the FOCUS project, had a massive impact on children involved in criminal proceedings. Problems for children ranged from no access to a lawyer, to inaccessibility of penitentiary institutions to lawyers, delays in criminal proceedings, and lack of access to safe places for child victims of domestic violence or other crimes. Pressure on private and state resources also presented serious challenges for professionals and services engaged with children. Enhancing the process for working together to identify and address the needs of children became all the more urgent. FOCUS partners organised two online [regional roundtables](#) to exchange experiences, explore challenges, and discuss ways forward.

FOCUS project response to challenges and opportunities

The FOCUS Project worked to introduce tools and resources to help the target countries pilot new practices. All of these resources were designed in a way that they can be used across Europe after the project and provide a standing resource. We worked to connect with and complement other EU funded projects in the field, including E-PROTECT 2, PRACTICE (Procedural Rights for All Children in Justice) Project Child-Friendly Justice project (CFJ-DCPSC), PROMISE: Formalising the European Barnahus Movement through establishing training in Europe and a formal network.

V. At a glance: FOCUS Project Tools & Resources



FOCUS Standards

provide guiding principles for undertaking individual assessments for children involved in criminal proceedings, including respect for the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child



FOCUS Standards Self-Reflection Tool

accompanies the FOCUS Standards and supports stakeholders and professionals in reflecting on how the Standards are fulfilled or can be better fulfilled in their practice or in their national systems



FOCUS Mapping Tool

helps stakeholders review the state of the development of individual assessment processes



FOCUS Reference Table for Progress

helps stakeholders identify actions to achieve improvements



FOCUS Pilot Planning Tool

helps stakeholders plan pilot activities to improve individual assessment processes



FOCUS capacity building resources

includes the FOCUS Training Handbook and FOCUS e-learning module



FOCUS research summary on individual assessment with children in Europe

provides an overview of research outcomes on individual assessment processes



International human rights standards applicable on individual assessment practices

lists and explains the relevant human rights standards and articles



Key concepts and frequently asked questions

helps professionals to grasp the main points, challenges and questions



FOCUS technical interface

provides open access to all the FOCUS resources

VI. At a Glance: the FOCUS Standards

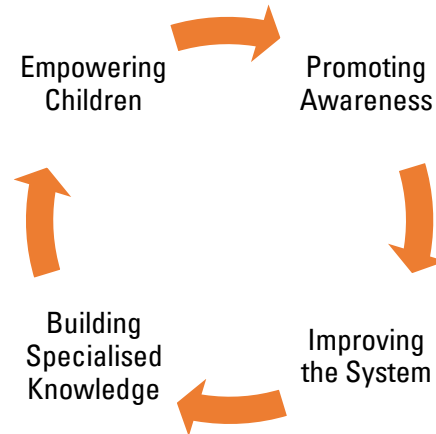
The **FOCUS Standards** represent the foundational building blocks for improving the development and implementation of national individual assessment processes and practices. They are general standard to be met by national individual assessment processes regardless of the differences in models used and approaches taken in different countries. The standards were designed to work in the context of different national models, to be flexible, and to assist in practical progress, rather than to provide abstract guidance. They set out guiding principles and indicators of good practice. Their use is supported by the FOCUS Self Reflection Tool, which helps actors assess and improve their systems and practices in line with these standards.

<p>1</p>  <p>HOLISTIC AND COMPREHENSIVE</p> <p>Assessment of all circumstances to meet all child's needs and fulfil his/her rights.</p>	<p>2</p>  <p>INCLUSIVE</p> <p>Adapted to consider the needs of all children, regardless of nationality, age, characteristics etc.</p>	<p>3</p>  <p>PARTICIPATORY</p> <p>Engaging children, taking their views into account to empower them to access their rights.</p>	<p>4</p>  <p>CHILD-CENTERED, CHILD SENSITIVE</p> <p>The best interests of the child should be a primary consideration throughout.</p>	<p>5</p>  <p>CONTINUOUS AND TIMELY</p> <p>Conducted promptly, contributing to actions throughout the criminal proceedings and beyond.</p>
<p>6</p>  <p>MULTIDISCIPLINARY & COLLABORATIVE</p> <p>Multidisciplinary and collaborative approach by the professionals involved.</p>	<p>7</p>  <p>QUALITY</p> <p>The individual assessment is undertaken by qualified, trained personnel.</p>	<p>8</p>  <p>PROPERLY RESOURCED, SUSTAINABLE</p> <p>Properly allocated resources (capacity building, inter-agency cooperation).</p>	<p>9</p>  <p>IMPACT ORIENTED</p> <p>Aimed at concrete outcomes to meet the needs and fulfil the rights of children.</p>	<p>10</p>  <p>PROGRESS ORIENTED</p> <p>Aimed at systemic changes in responding to the needs of children in criminal proceedings.</p>

VII. FOCUS Roadmap for Progress - Using the FOCUS Resources

The FOCUS Roadmap helps you explore how to make improvements to the process of undertaking and using individual assessments and explains how you can use FOCUS resources to help you.

It helps stakeholders initiate a cycle of action which can help improve the experience and outcomes for children in criminal proceedings in an ongoing way.



1. Promoting awareness

The starting point to strengthening individual assessment processes and practices is to promote awareness of the obligation to focus on the circumstances and needs of each child, by conducting and using individual assessments. In fact this should remain a constant activity, and regularly engaging with a broad range of actors is helpful. You can use a wide range of resources from authoritative sources to help you, including General Comments of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, legislative and policy documents from the European Union and the Council of Europe, and studies of the EU Fundamental Rights' Agency in the field. The **FOCUS Standards** were also designed to help you build a common understanding with other actors on the importance and nature of the individual assessment process.



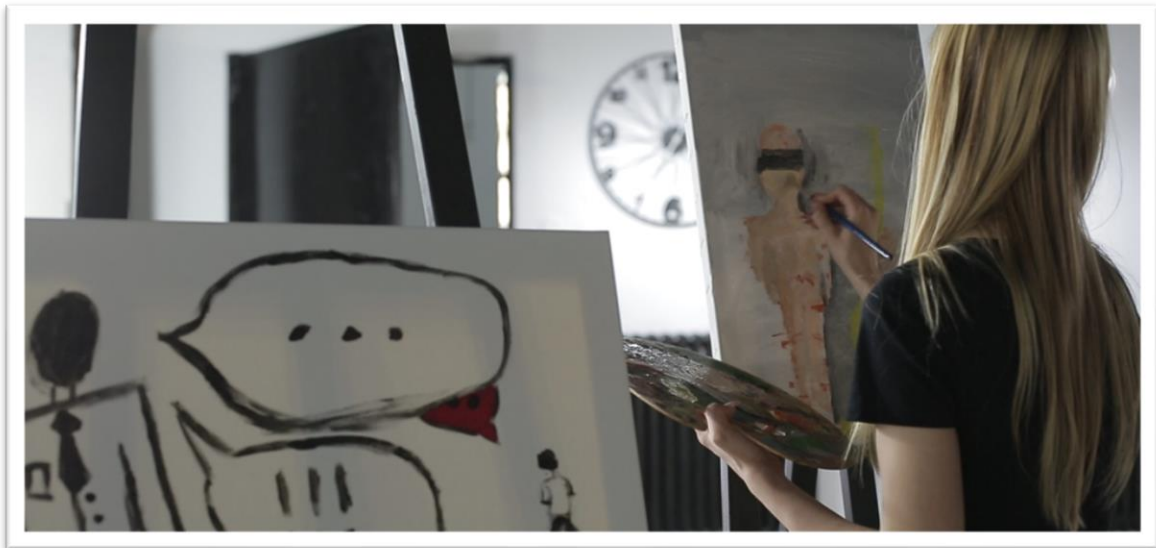
2. Improving the system

Actors should seize all opportunities to work together to strengthen the system which underpins the individual assessment process in your country. You can shape the system to be more effective and child-centred, step by step.

Step 1: Identifying challenges and opportunities

Where are you now? The FOCUS Mapping Tool helps stakeholders review and understand the state of development of individual assessment processes in their country, for child victims, child suspects, and accused children.

It is also crucial to learn directly from the experience of children - and getting their recommendations for change is of vital importance. The [2021-2024 EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child](#) prioritises activities which promote child participation (Thematic Area 1).



Serbian Child Advisory Board (CAB) members during a workshop on art and media to encourage their creative expression and improve their public speaking.

Step 2: Planning progress together

The **FOCUS Reference Table for Progress** allows you to chart where your country is and identify the short and longer term needs for improvement.

State of play and general goals for progress needed	Examples of realistic objectives of pilot & potential activities
<p>STATE OF PLAY:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No law or Law but no other elements of the system to fulfil it <p>GOAL:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New law and system development needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve understanding of requirements and need to introduce law and system change and to create champions for change. Training of professionals and stakeholders Workshops (which actors should be involved in) can potentially create recommendations for change or propose a roadmap for change Improve individual case practice. (E.g. through the training of professionals and by providing them with the means and support enabling them to better carry out their role in relation to individual assessments (based on the standards).

Figure 1. Snapshot of the Reference Table for Progress

The **FOCUS Pilot Planning Tool** was used to plan FOCUS training and workshops and provides inspiration on how to identify and engage in activities to improve individual assessment processes, depending on the opportunities and resources that are at your disposal.

Short- and long-term impact (Expected and measurable results)	What are realistic objectives for the pilot, given the system currently in place and the actors that can be engaged through the pilot project?
	<p>What outputs would you expect? Progress in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness of the obligation Understanding of what it requires The system put in place by the public authorities The collaboration taking place between actors to improve the system Promoting the development or use of particular tools The practices of individual professionals towards ensuring the fulfilment of the obligations Other (resources etc.)
Target (quantitative and narrative description)	<p>Target Professionals</p> <p>What actors would be involved? Who can make change happen (judge led? Lawyer led? Prosecution? Social workers?)</p> <p>How will actors be involved?</p>
	<p>Target Children</p> <p>How will individual cases involving child victims be affected by pilot activities?</p> <p>How will individual cases involving child suspects and accused be affected by pilot activities?</p>
Overall description/presentation of the pilot activity	What could your activities towards the progress be aimed at and identified under the objectives?
	With what types of resources (standards, training, technical interface)?

Figure 2. Snapshot of the FOCUS pilot planning tool

The **FOCUS Standards** are designed to help you promote progress through:

- Raising awareness of individual assessment obligations
- Supporting assessments of the state of development of individual assessment systems, and where improvements might be needed
- Supporting professionals in working together to build individual assessment processes
- Supporting professionals in developing or using individual assessment tools
- Supporting professionals in working together
- Supporting individuals in playing an improved role in conducting, contributing to or using individual assessments
- Training for professionals
- Supporting the monitoring of individual assessment processes
- Supporting stakeholders in sharing knowledge and information between countries

Step 3: Taking action to improve the system

There are many different actions that can help strengthen the system of undertaking individual assessments, the important first step in solid case management systems.

The [FOCUS Standards](#) set out the guiding principles for improving the system and provide illustrative indicators of the ways in which the principles can be fulfilled.

The [FOCUS Standard Self-Reflection Tool](#) accompanies the FOCUS Standards and supports stakeholders and professionals in reflecting on how the Standards are fulfilled or can be better fulfilled in their practice or in their national systems.

This tool is designed to be used flexibly and in line with the different ways in which the standards can be applied, depending on the state of play in each country on the one hand, and the activities and actors involved in realising progress on the other.

It can be used in a variety of different ways, including:

- ◆ To assess individual practices or to assess the individual assessment process in a given country
- ◆ To benchmark knowledge (individually or collectively) before and after individual assessment practice reviews
- ◆ To help identify national indicators for good practice
- ◆ To identify key challenges
- ◆ To identify good practices
- ◆ To identify opportunities for progress
- ◆ To consider/assess improvements in the practice of an individual practitioner

Step 4 Monitoring and Review

The [FOCUS Self-Reflection Tool](#) can be used periodically to monitor developments. In relation to any of the above, the tool can be used to focus on better fulfilling a particular standard, rather than all of them. For example: strengthening inclusivity (e.g. addressing the special needs of certain groups of children) or introducing multidisciplinary practices.

3. Building specialised knowledge

Enhancing the capacity of all professionals involved properly to conduct or use an individual assessment process is a standing requirement to making progress. Ideally, capacity-building should be embedded in the regular training curricula of professional organisations, as well as actions ensuring joint multidisciplinary training amongst the range of stakeholders involved. The FOCUS Capacity Building Resources are available on the [FOCUS Technical Interface](#), including an e-learning

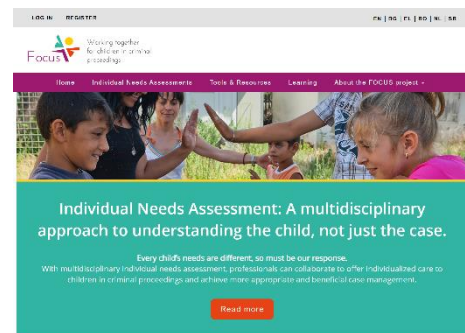


Figure 3. Website snapshot

module for practitioners. The FOCUS Technical Interface also contains clips of different professionals providing insights into their experience or good practices.

4. Empowering children

The FOCUS project established Child Advisory Boards in five countries to empower children and enable them to become agents of change. These Boards are composed of 12- to 24-year-old children and young people with and without experience in the justice system.

To strengthen the system, it is necessary to develop structures to work together with children and youngsters to make better information and support available for child victims and suspects.

There are a range of international resources available to help you further explore and set up child participation mechanisms, all of which point at ‘meaningful participation’, starting with:

- ◆ **General Comment No 12** of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on the Right of the child to be heard.
- ◆ The **Lundy Model of Child Participation**. This model is a rights-based model which provides a pathway to help conceptualise Article 12 of the CRC. It focuses on four distinct, albeit interrelated, elements. The four elements have a rational chronological order:
 - Space:** provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views
 - Voice:** provide information and support the expression of views
 - Audience:** ensure that children’s views are communicated to someone who has the responsibility to listen
 - Influence:** Due weight and children should receive feedback
- ◆ The **2021-2024 European Union Strategy on the Rights of the Child**, Thematic area 1 on ‘Participation in political and democratic life’ and Thematic area 4 on ‘Child-friendly justice’



Figure 4 Members of Serbian Child Advisory Boards during a workshop

VIII. What did the Partner Countries learn from their journeys? How to plan for sustainable progress?

During the FOCUS project, the partners undertook pilots of capacity-building and system-strengthening activities in Bulgaria, Greece, the Netherlands, Romania, and Serbia. Here are some tips and insights from their reports on the pilot experience and how FOCUS resources could be used in a sustainable way, focusing on awareness-raising, system change, building knowledge, and involving children.

1. Promoting awareness

“Even though the legislation is in place, there is still the need for awareness-raising even among the professionals who work with children in order to emphasise the importance of an individual assessment for each case and how it should be conducted.”
 (Greece)

“FOCUS has inspired professionals and stakeholders, such as Victim Support, the police and the prosecution’s office, to discuss what is needed for a child-friendly approach of child victims and child suspects. They are more aware that the individual assessment of children is broader than the assessment that has been developed and used until now.”
 (The Netherlands)

What matters:

- ◆ Work with and continue cooperation with all stakeholders and involve professionals in awareness-raising activities, multidisciplinary exchange, and debates
- ◆ Disseminate the FOCUS standards and tools among professionals, citizens, parents, and children, and explain their use
- ◆ Include discussion of real cases and support in identifying gaps when raising awareness
- ◆ Share and promote FOCUS publications and recommendations in different ways: via institutions, online, in multiple languages, and in a user-friendly layout
- ◆ Evaluate the impact of the Standards both on improving the system and day to day practice

2. Achieving system change

“The lack of effective multi-sectoral cooperation is one of the biggest issues in implementing child-friendly justice principles and effective individual assessment.”
(Serbia)

“In Romania, for many specialists, deviance is not the expression of individual causes, but can be explained by predominantly social causes representing a natural response to situations of vulnerability in which the individual is placed. [...] As long as it is accepted that the environment is largely responsible for juvenile delinquency, specialists can also identify the mechanisms for preventing or combating this type of behavioural manifestation. [...]”
(Romania)

“During the FOCUS project, stakeholders and professionals realised that assessments do not yet take place at every stage of the proceedings. They’ve added that the individual assessment can focus more on the specific needs of children.”
(the Netherlands)

What matters:

- ◆ Check if laws and regulations are in accordance with the EU Directives and keep advocating for any necessary legislative changes
- ◆ Work towards an integrated child protection and justice system that could support the protection of all children and guarantee the respect of their rights when they become involved in criminal proceedings
- ◆ Continue to promote a participatory and child-friendly assessment of the needs of child suspects and child victims
- ◆ Advocate for more expertise and effective methods to carry out individual assessment in an inclusive, continuous & child-centred way
- ◆ Make sure enough resources are provided to realise a proper implementation
- ◆ Involve more lawyers to request an assessment – if they insist, more children will have access to individual assessment
- ◆ Advocate and share the experience of Barnahus or similar formats whereby all professionals give their support in one place/under one roof

3. Building specialised knowledge

“Professionals tend to undervalue and stigmatise accused children by taking a superficial approach to the assessment process based on the prejudice that the perpetrator must ‘pay’.” (Romania)

“The individual assessment is not seen as a useful process/tool, but rather as a source of additional workload and stress. Speaking about the individual assessment, where it comes from, what its purpose is, etc. started to reduce the tension and reluctance among professionals.” (Bulgaria)

“Through participating in the project activities, they became aware that the individual assessment of children is broader and more complex than they thought. ... The FOCUS progress reference table and the tool for identifying the stage of development of individual assessment processes gave the specialists the opportunity to benchmark what was discussed during the training sessions at the stage of development of individual assessment processes” (Romania)

What matters:

- ◆ Organise continuous trainings on individual child assessments for multidisciplinary groups of professionals working with children
- ◆ Use different methods of exchanging knowledge in a multi-disciplinary approach
- ◆ Make sure the tools and materials are finalised and translated
- ◆ Diversify the way stakeholders and professionals are involved: in-person, online, blended
- ◆ Organise a Meeting Platform for exchanging knowledge with a multi-disciplinary group of professionals working with both child victims and suspects, involving experts in specific topics and the discussions of case studies
- ◆ Provide mentoring and support for participants after the training in their daily work on individual cases
- ◆ Promote the use of technical interface, e-learning, and child-friendly digital platforms
- ◆ Bring those involved in assessments of child victims and child suspects/accused children together in training or discussions for the purposes of exchanging information and common learning.
- ◆ Transfer the information gained during training sessions and the materials received to other specialists

4. Child participation

“The CAB team specifically addressed the needs of victims who are ashamed or scared. For those victims it can be difficult to talk about what has happened to them.”
(The Netherlands)

“The members of the first CAB mentioned that they have learned many things which are important but not included in the school’s curriculum ,and they are more familiar with the justice system, its strengths and gaps, as well as the needs of the children involved in it. A couple of them mentioned that in the future they would like to pursue a career in which they will be able to help other children. The members of the second CAB mentioned how important it was to them that all their ideas, suggestions, and objections were taken into consideration. Additionally, their probation officers mentioned that they have seen changes, as children have become more outspoken and confident.”
(Greece)

“Through participating in the project activities, they became aware that the individual assessment of children is broader and more complex than they thought. ... The FOCUS progress reference table and the tool for identifying the stage of development of individual assessment processes gave the specialists the opportunity to benchmark what was discussed during the training sessions at the stage of development of individual assessment processes”
(Romania)

“The CAB members developed a timeline that led to a social media campaign and online questionnaire for child victims. They have learned how to formulate a relevant topic and questions, how to communicate with professionals, and how to conduct a social media campaign.” (The Netherlands)

What matters:

- ◆ Make child participation effective and meaningful, using the CABs and other consolidated methodologies, that are key to bring children together to discuss and consult with them on matters that affect them and to offer them the space to exchange information with professionals from different categories
- ◆ Make child participation tools and channels, e.g. the CABs, accessible and available in the long term for all children, to inform them about their rights when involved as victims and as suspects/accused in a criminal proceeding
- ◆ Make sure that their views and suggestions are integrated into all the tools that will be produced and the activities that will be organised
- ◆ Invest in projects that encourage children to become advocates and agents of change themselves by providing them with the possibility to decide themselves for important activities and deliverables
- ◆ Make sure early contacts are made with organisations or schools who can identify or select young people to take part: it takes time and effort to create well-functioning CABs
- ◆ Use blended ways of meeting, via online methods such as Zoom or Teams (also to meet international contacts) and live sessions to facilitate working locally and to get to know each other better
- ◆ Use creative strategies in order to attract children from different backgrounds, schools, and experiences to join CABs
- ◆ Use surveys and tailored activities to suit everyone in order to reconcile various schedules and times of the youngsters and to get them involved. Send invitations for sessions, but also a kind reminder one day before the session start
- ◆ Provide the CABs with the safe space and opportunities to advocate for the most vulnerable categories, including child victims of crime
- ◆ Make sure that the CABs can also meet and find the guidance of specialists, and engage with creative tools and methodologies, such as media and art.

IX. Looking Ahead: Broader Regional Policy

Recommendations for Improving Individual Assessment

Processes for Children in Criminal Proceedings in Europe

1. Promoting awareness

The EU, the Council of Europe, and regional and national stakeholders should maintain a spotlight on strengthening individual assessment processes, as a gateway to child-centred justice proceedings.

It is welcome that at the European level the needs of children involved in criminal justice proceedings are prioritised on the policy agenda. In particular, through activities under policy strategies and activities around the rights of the child, child sexual abuse and victims' rights, as well as through past and upcoming studies undertaken in the field by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency and others. European stakeholders should look widely to promote awareness of the benefits and ways of strengthening individual assessments, with local agencies, professionals, the public, and children.

2. Strengthening the system

The EU, the Council of Europe, and regional and national stakeholders should continue the important work of fostering the proper application of the legislative obligations concerning individual assessments and ensuring enhanced procedural safeguards, and enhanced provisions for support and assistance for children, in any future revisions of relevant law and regulations.

One of the key areas to explore potential for achieving progress is through the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child commitment to present "*an initiative aimed at supporting the development and strengthening of integrated child protection systems, which will encourage all relevant authorities and services to better work together in a system that puts the children at the centre.*" We also welcome the commitment in the EU Strategy "*to strengthen the implementation of the 2010 Guidelines on Child-friendly Justice with the Council of Europe.*"

3. Building specialised knowledge

The EU, the Council of Europe, and regional and national stakeholders should continue to prioritise making resources available to build specialised knowledge in this field, through capacity-building both at the national and the regional level.

A number of European policy instruments provide funding for capacity-building for professionals, and we encourage funders and projects to promote a multidisciplinary approach to capacity building, with regular inter-agency training and professional networking opportunities, as well as support and supervision services for professionals engaged in often difficult work with children.

4. Empowering children

The EU, the Council of Europe, and regional and national stakeholders should continue to promote recognition of the importance of child participation and to provide resources to equip professionals to work with children to this end and to create fora for children to participate in, in a meaningful way.

Stakeholders should actively seek to contribute to and benefit from the activities of the EU and the Council of Europe as regards child participation. We welcome the commitment of the European Commission to “*establish, jointly with the European Parliament and child rights organisations, an EU Children’s Participation Platform, to connect existing child participation mechanism at local, national and EU level, and involve children in the decision-making processes at EU level.*”



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