



# INCLUDE COUNTRY REPORT

Research on children's views  
for the INCLUDE project in Hungary

Hintalovon Child Rights Foundation

2021



This report was funded by the European Union's Justice Programme (2014-2020). The content of this report represents the views of the authors only and is their sole responsibility. The European Commission does not accept any responsibility for use that may be made of the information it contains.

*“Practically, Vic is just a supporting actor in this story.”*  
(child participant)

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# 1. Introduction

International child abduction is a complex legal, practical and emotional issue, affecting approximately 1300 children every year in the European Union. From a child's perspective this includes the distress deriving from divorce and separation, getting in contact with the justice system and (re)integration to a new environment. Children are in an extremely vulnerable situation. Typically, they do not know the truth about moving abroad and find themselves in a position when once again, their life is in the hands of adults. Lack of attention, information, transparency, feedback and trust are recurring problems they need to face (Freeman, 2014, Lembrechts et al, 2019, Lowe and Stephens, 2018). However, legal professionals are also in a difficult situation when they are about to assess the best interest of the abducted child. International regulations require his or her hearing, but it is hard to find the right balance in the timely resolving of the case and showing a genuine interest in the child at a hearing and beyond. There is a tension about how to make these hearings meaningful within the limits of the legal, procedural and organizational conditions. The lack of time, information, personal and professional capacities, and the limited space for non-return decisions also hinder professionals to act accordingly.

However, research has also shown that better *communication* with children – such as the content of the decision and the way it is communicated – might lead to considerable changes in restoring trust and improving children's wellbeing, no matter what the decision would be. Clearly, there is a need to provide guidance to legal professionals on what safe and meaningful participation means for children in legal settings and how exactly they can facilitate it within their own capacities.

In 2019, the INCLUDE project was launched by Missing Children Europe to offer a set of good practices to legal professionals to improve children's wellbeing when dealing with cases of international child abduction by a parent. Previous research under their coordination has led to a series of recommendations on this topic, therefore the aim of this project was to put into practice a number of these recommendations, which could help to enhance the participation of abducted children and improve their situation from the beginning of the civil proceedings until the enforcement of the decision and immediately after a return. The project has been implemented in partnership with University of Antwerp, Hope for Children Cyprus, and Hintalovon Child Rights Foundation and will result in two good practice guides. One about how to improve the daily life of children abducted by one parent during the abduction, and the other about how to guarantee a more child-friendly enforcement of return decisions.

Learning more about children's views in this regard is crucial. Children are recognized as experts of their own life, capable of forming and expressing opinions about their own well-being. Listening to them is not just their right but can also lead to more sustainable solutions to protect them (UNCRC, 2009). In 2017, children who had been abducted by one of their parents were interviewed to better understand how the ICA event is perceived by an affected child/youngster in Belgium, the Netherlands and France ([EWELL project](#)). In 2019, focus group discussions were held in Antwerp and Ghent on a fictional child abduction scenario with 15-17 years old non-affected children to learn more about their thoughts and feelings (VOICE project). In 2020, we wanted to involve children in ICA research at a new level.

First, we wanted to reach the youngest children possible within the scope of the project. The mean/average age of a child abducted by a parent is 6 years (Kruger, 2011), so we were looking for a research design that would be appropriate for children of different ages. We used/adopted a gradual approach and included primary and secondary school children.

Secondly, we have aimed to work in collaboration with children both in the research and in other parts of the project. Thinking with children can lead to deeper understandings, a more comprehensive approach, and it is usually very inspiring for professionals (Shaw et al, 2011; Laws and Mann, 2004). Therefore, we wanted not only to consult, but also to collaborate with children. This means that besides “seeking their views to gain knowledge and understanding of their lives and experiences” (Lansdown, 2001:147), we gave children the opportunity to influence both the processes and the outcomes. Children were enabled to identify the relevant questions, encouraged and supported to take on the role of researchers, and involved in discussions about the findings, their interpretation, and implications for the best practice guides.

Thirdly, children were involved to better understand their needs in certain interpersonal and situational issues that are central to their well-being in case of ICA.

Previous research has identified many of these issues before, during and after ICA (Freeman, 2014, Lambrechts et al, 2019, Lowe and Stephens, 2018). To name just a few: interaction with the necessary attention, genuine interest to make children feel respected and taken seriously, interaction in a manner and at a place that is comfortable and reassuring for children, making judgements accessible to the child, taking into account the personality differences between children and the child’s fears, choosing the right words, addressing/ managing the distrust between legal professionals and children, mitigating the loyalty conflict, and being wary of embarrassment/ shame, discomfort, and the possibility of trauma. But what makes children feel more comfortable and respected in each context? We wanted to dig deeper and learn more about their mindset, attitudes, preconceptions, concerns and needs.

## 2. Research questions

The research questions were formulated following a thorough analysis of the literature, and the identification of what we refer to here as ‘underlying themes’ of ICA. Based on previous findings, a comprehensive list of the needs and challenges of legal professionals and children has been prepared/developed/drawn up. Issues of greater concern (e.g. lack of trust, separation from parents, breaking bad news) to children were then selected, separated from those where they lack competence (e.g. access to training, or better cooperation between legal professionals). In the analysis of this shortlist, a few topics emerged that encompass the main influences on children’s wellbeing in case of ICA. These are referred to here as ‘underlying themes’ and reflect the main psychological events during the ICA. These underlying themes reveal the emotional, interpersonal and situational risks behind ICA, hence divide its complexity to smaller, more relatable issues. They enable certain abstraction from the emotionally sensitive and upsetting topic of ICA which can be more safely addressed with children. The themes were finalized after a literature review and consultation with the project partners. Finally, questions were linked to each theme which led to the research questions and

sub-questions. Both the underlying themes and the research questions were examined on a timeline to make sure the research reflected all stages of the ICA: while children are confronted with their situation, during the civil proceedings, at the announcement of the court decision, during the enforcement and immediately after a return.

Underlying themes of ICA:

- Something unexpected happens to children
- Children have no say in something
- Children feel betrayed, trust is damaged
- Children are hesitant to speak up
- Children are in a vulnerable situation and know that their future depends on others
- Children do not understand what is happening, they are left alone with their questions
- Children are informed about significant decisions
- Children are getting separated, they need to adjust

Research questions:

1. What does safe and meaningful child participation mean in formal settings?
  - What do children need to feel respected and taken seriously?
  - What do children need to be able to speak up?
  - To whom/ where would children go with their questions?
  - What would help children to be informed about important decisions?
  - What do children need to feel safe and feel better?
2. What would make them feel more comfortable in court hearings?

### 3. Methodology

The methodology of child participation was developed by the interdisciplinary team of Hintalovon Child Rights Foundation, and it was implemented in two countries: in Hungary (by Hintalovon) and in Cyprus (by Hope for Children). The present report summarizes the research carried out in Hungary between September and November 2020.

The research used a non-conventional approach with mixed methods.

- Drama play was used to consult children aged 10-14 to better understand their needs in situations that reflect the 'underlying themes' of ICA. The activities addressed ICA in a decontextualized way to find out what children need in these difficult or vulnerable situations.
- Children aged 14-17 became part of the research team. They were observers in the drama sessions, whose lessons were analysed together and linked to ICA. They helped adults to understand younger children's perspectives better, and they also shared their views on children's needs in situations of ICA.

The research combined direct and indirect study of ICA. The in-depth analysis was carried out with analogous situations that are similar in nature, closer to average children without experiences of ICA and emotionally less upsetting. The story used in the drama covered different aspects of the complex

issue of ICA, allowing children to account for specific elements of their wellbeing, and /enabling us to narrow the focus necessary to formulate examples of good practices.

It is widely acknowledged that our psychological and behavioural patterns (working models, motivational and coping strategies, conflict resolution, etc.) are independent of the context. Schema therapy, trauma and abuse literature, Gestalt psychology teach us that our mental contents (cognition, emotion, desire, fear, intentions) are closely interrelated. A specific situation only provides the framework for our response, but they activate general psychological contents, patterns of thought and behaviour. Psychotherapy also holds that a change of focus enables meaningful progression and supports the use of symbolic content with children. Identifying specific underlying mechanisms and defining proximal events behind complex problems are also supported by research methodology literature.

Drama mobilizes children's emotions, genuine reactions and goes deeper than using only cognitive tasks. Younger children are primarily empirical persons and cognitive functions become dominant only in adolescence. Hence, art, plays and drama techniques are good tools to work with a younger age group and help to explore children's ideas. Theatrical activities, games, role plays offer a good opportunity to engage children in research. Creative methods are recommended to elicit the views of younger children for whom more formal, cognitive or language-based activities may be less appropriate.

Considering that ICA combines the sensitive issues of divorce, separation from parents, loyalty conflicts, formal proceedings, new language environment, etc., direct acting out of ICA situations could violate the principle of 'do no harm'. Thus, focusing on the underlying themes in abstract, relevant situations and the choice of using drama methods supported each other. Drama was only used with everyday situations or less complicated scenarios that were similar in nature to international child abduction, but less unsettling. The analogous situations mobilized relevant feelings and needs, while at the same time distancing them from emotionally charged family matters.

The involvement of children as researchers is encouraged by many academics and practitioners (Alderson, 2008, Shaw et al, 2011, Laws and Mann, 2004). Although it required time, human and financial capacities, their participation benefitted children themselves, the research and the society in general. Child researchers provided new insights, deeper understanding of their emotional health and mental well-being and enabled an analysis that is (more) free from adult interpretation.

### 3.1. Participants

Children participated in the research from two different age groups and at two levels of involvement (*Table 2*). Children aged 10-13 were consulted in drama sessions, and children aged 14-17 were co-researchers. They worked in a closed group, so the same members continued working together from the first session to the last one. None of the participants were directly affected by ICA.

*Table 1: Child participants*

	Drama group	Child Rights Ambassadors (CRA)
age	10 to 13 years old	14 to 17 years old
involvement	consultation level	consultation + collaboration level
number of children	10	3
anonymity	yes	no
addressing ICA	indirectly	directly

### ***Child Rights Ambassadors***

The child co-researchers were recruited from the Child Rights Ambassadors of Hintalovon. They are secondary school volunteers who as young, contracted staff participate in the advocacy, research and awareness-raising activities of the Foundation.<sup>1</sup> Child Rights Ambassadors aim to help adults (including Foundation staff, parents and other professionals working with children) to better understand children's perspectives and to help their peers to know their rights better. Hintalovon is working with 10 to 15 children weekly, of whom 3 girls signed up for this project voluntarily. Two of them were 17 years old, one was 15 years old. They joined the Foundation in February 2020 and did not have any specific experiences with ICA. The trusted relationship with them and their long-term commitment supported the idea to invite them to this research team.

### ***Drama group***

Participants of the drama sessions were members of a drama group in a suburban area of Budapest. They were selected by open call, targeting representatives of drama groups and other formations of children who hold regular meetings as part of their extracurricular or recreational activities. We felt that it would be easier to open up in a formed group and decrease drop-out rates. The children and their parents were informed about the research through their drama teacher, and a special introductory session was held before their enrolment. The three sessions were attended by 8 t-10 children, 3 boys and 7 girls, most of whom were 13 years old.

## 3.2. Research design

The research design is outlined in *Table 1*. After children gave their informed consent to participate, the Child Rights Ambassadors were introduced to the topic of ICA (Session 1), the methodology and the drama (Session 2). They gave feedback on their impressions and prepared for their role as

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<sup>1</sup> Child Rights Ambassadors—as young colleagues of Hintalovon—have gained experience in research, international human rights monitoring, awareness-raising materials and representing children's rights. Learn more: <https://hintalovon.hu/en/child-rights-ambassadors>



observers in the drama sessions. Drama sessions (Session 3 to 5) were then organized to seek the views of children aged 10 to 13 on what makes them feel safe and respected in situations of vulnerability by adults, reflecting the underlying themes of ICA. Child Rights Ambassadors observed these sessions, which were later analysed and interpreted with them in the context of ICA (Session 6-7). The research concluded with a review of the findings and an evaluation (Session 8), which also paved the way for the next phase of the project: representation of the results.

*Table 2: Research design*

Aim		Activity	Child Rights Ambassadors (14-17y)	Drama group (10-13y)	Date
<b>Recruitment</b>	Session 0	- Discussing the research and children's role to support an informed consent to participation	x	x	August 2020
<b>Introduction</b>	Session 1	- Introducing ICA, its legal background, human aspects and effects	x		
	Session 2	- Discussing the research questions and the methodology, - Preparation for the drama sessions: activities, focus of the observation	x		
<b>Drama sessions</b>	Session 3	- Developing a comfortable, trusted environment - Introduction of the story, character building	observers	x	September 2020
	Session 4	- Acting out and discussing vulnerable situations that reflect	observers	x	

	Session 5	the underlying themes of ICA	observers	x	
<b>Analysis</b>	Session 6	- Evaluate the findings - Seeking children's interpretation and conclusions	x		October 2020
	Session 7		x		
<b>Closing</b>	Session 8	- Reviewing the main findings - Evaluation	x		November 2020

Each session lasted between 90 and 120 minutes and were conducted by two facilitators and one observer. The adult research team (the authors of this report) came from a multidisciplinary background and were responsible for child participation throughout the whole project, from the selection of children to the writing of the research report. They were trained for facilitation of drama activities, group work, working with children, conducting qualitative research, and collaborated with a lawyer.

### 3.3. Drama sessions and analysis

#### ***Drama sessions***

The drama sessions were based on the methods of theatre in education (TIE). This type of applied theatre practice is usually used for educational purposes, where drama teachers or a theatre company performs for children and engage the audience in interactive, performative and reflective activities. In TIE, a single character 's story unfolds and is developed together with the audience. This approach helps children to build a closer connection with the characters and identify with their needs and feelings.

The sessions presented a story of an adolescent, called Vic, and his family. Vic was a 14-year-old boy in the first year of secondary school. Vic moved with the family from a small village to Budapest a few months ago after her/his mom got a new job in the capital. This made it easier to meet Dad who worked in Austria. He had an older brother, Mark, who was 17. They started their new life, which was slightly easier for Vic, Mark struggled more. The story put the children in analogous situations to those faced by abducted children – for instance the late revelation from about moving abroad, settling in a new place, confronting a tram driver and police officer, being summoned to the headmaster's office, the dilemma of which side or position to take.

A wide variety of techniques and exercises were used to seek out children's views. The first drama session focused on forming the group and building the characters. Later, the group acted out various situations that helped them connect to their deeper mental contents and then they reflected on these

activities. Storytelling, acting and verbal reflection varied throughout each session, using different drama pedagogical conventions: narration, calendar writing, presentation of objects, acting out scenes, still image, group acting, individual improvisation, forum theatre, hot seat, the mantle of the expert, rainbow of desires. These activities and discussions allowed the observation and analysis of children's situations from different perspectives and at different levels.

Detailed session plans were prepared for the facilitators<sup>2</sup>, including instructions, timeframes, objectives and potential risks of each activity, as well as references to the underlying themes and research questions. Although systematic observation methods are not available for this non-conventional methodology, child and adult observers took notes about their objective, subjective, situational, scenic observations, following a detailed preparation (Session 2). The sessions were also audio-recorded, and a full transcript was prepared following each session.

### **Analysis**

The lessons from the drama sessions were analysed by the whole research team. Data (which include the full transcripts of the sessions and observations) were interpreted and linked to the ICA during two meetings with the ambassadors. The findings were grouped according to the underlying themes and research questions. The results were later summarized by the authors of this report and referred back to the Ambassadors in a third meeting with them. The research conclusions are the result of this multi-stage process.

### 3.4. Ethical considerations

The research was designed and implemented with respect to the Child Safeguarding Policy of Hintalovon, which is in line with the International Convention on the Rights of the Child and Keeping Children's Safe standards. The methodology was reviewed and supported by Keeping Children Safe. The Child Safeguarding Policy was discussed and disseminated in a child-friendly format to children and shared in writing with parents as well. Participation in the research was voluntary with children and their parents giving prior, written consent. Children in the drama group remained anonymous, the identity of Child Rights Ambassadors was handled individually in consultation with the children and their parents.

We paid particular attention to ensuring the meaningful and safe child participation, as set out in the ethical standards of the UNCRC General Comment No. 12 (2009). In addition to adhering to the classical requirements of research ethics (such as informed consent, data protection and the principle of 'do no harm'), emphasis was placed on finding questions relevant to children's knowledge and asking them in a risk-sensitive, child-friendly manner. We also took into account inclusion, non-discrimination, transparency, accountability, support through trainings and fair return for participation. The detailed ethical and risk assessments are available in the methodology description<sup>3</sup>, together with the consent forms and information leaflets used for recruitment.

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<sup>2</sup> The session plans are available for individual requests from the corresponding author.

<sup>3</sup> Accessible at [www.hintalovon.hu/en/include](http://www.hintalovon.hu/en/include) or from the corresponding author.

However, some methodological considerations should be highlighted here. First, drama always involves more risk than cognitive tasks. Children can easily become emotionally involved and identify themselves with the characters, which can be traumatising and emotionally very demanding. On the one hand, steering away from ICA and breaking it down into smaller, analogous situations can minimise the risk of exposing children to harm and stressful situations, on the other hand, working in a multidisciplinary team and making efforts to train facilitators and prepare them for potential risks has helped to create a safe environment.

Secondly, the decontextualized approach to the underlying themes could raise the question of ecological validity. The ethical principle of relevance requires that children be involved in issues in which they can draw on their knowledge, skills, and abilities, build on their personal knowledge – information and insights about their own lives. As indicated above, the psychology literature confirms that mental content is independent of the context and reframing a problem can serve children’s safety while retaining the essence of the problem. Limitations to the transferability of the results were mitigated by the two-tier method of child participation – findings from the drama were linked to the ICA with Child Rights Ambassadors.

The results should be evaluated in the light of additional constraints. Qualitative research always carries greater risk of subjective interpretation by researchers. This applies here as well, especially that validated, systematic analytical or observational tools have not been prepared for drama-based research. The involvement of children as researchers served to reduce this risk. Moreover, the research was carried out during the coronavirus pandemic, and the lockdowns limited the access to children. This only allowed for the involvement of one drama group in Hungary but examining the findings together with those in Cyprus may provide more solid evidence on children’s views for the good practice guides. Lastly, the particular interest of primary school children in drama might have influenced their participation in certain activities. This was addressed both in the facilitators’ and observers’ preparation and in the introductory session with the drama group.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. When something unexpected happens /being informed about significant decisions<sup>4</sup>

ICA	Research questions	Analogous situations in drama sessions	Method
Children learn about the leaving, need to face the separation from the parent, or	What would help children to be informed	The brothers learn from their parents that their father undertakes a job abroad from the next day.	<i>Hot seat:</i> Children shared the roles of the siblings by passing on the jars representing these characters and could speak

<sup>4</sup> These two underlying themes were combined during the analysis, while two others (getting separated from the parents and the need to accommodate) were split into two categories.

they are informed about the decision of return or no-return	about important decisions?		to their parents on their behalf. <i>Making a mental map with jars:</i> At the end of each session, participants discuss how family relationships have changed.
		The family is going to move to the capital and the mother wonders how to talk to the children about it	<i>Mantle of the expert:</i> It was as if the children moved into the mom's head and were giving her advice on what a child would need in this situation.

Drama sessions presented two relevant scenarios: child participants were informed about a decision at the last minute and were put in a position where they could advise on how to prevent and mitigate these situations (see the Table). During these discussions, children stressed the importance of **knowing the background of decisions** and unexpected news. There was a discussion about how much a parent should reveal, but children were clearly interested in parents' perspective, feelings and arguments, and they wanted to receive answers for their questions. Deprived of information, they were likely to speculate, make assumptions or make false arguments that might have been even more frightening or extreme than reality (e.g., assuming that the reason behind the father's moving away is divorce or another woman).

They wanted to **understand their role in the decision** retrospectively and clarify what they could do about it in the future. They were mindful of their own responsibility and what they could or could have done to prevent it from happening. They were likely to look for reasons in their own behaviour, and they were uncertain whether a decision was final or not.

Children were also interested in how the decision would affect their everyday life and were equally interested in **detail** that could seem insignificant for adults at the time, such as who they would play basketball with. They were eager to understand the consequences not just for themselves but also (and dominantly) for their significant others.

**The circumstances** and the way in which children were informed proved to be crucial. Different scenarios were suggested and although participants did not come to a conclusion, their comments highlighted the importance of choosing 'the right place and the right time'. Big talks were found to be stressful and associated with problems; however, many similar ideas (including a dinner, a pleasant environment) were suggested to make these situations easier for them. The children's feedback emphasized the episodic nature of the /recollection, which is tied to social and physical contexts. Adults were asked to take into consideration children's situations and mental states, such as school and exams. Calm but confident communication were supported. Children wanted to feel that adults 'know what they do and why they do it', that they were taken care of, and were in good hands. Children preferred to be informed together with the siblings, but if age, maturity or other personal reasons made this necessary, they also found separate discussions helpful.

*“That’s ok. I thought I’d done something wrong again and that was why we gathered here.”*  
*“This is never a good sign.”*

Empathy, understanding and acknowledging children’s anger and hard feelings by the parents were found as positive behaviour in acted out situations. Highlighting the positive changes was also supported.

*“Start with good things. You’ll tell the bad ones later.”*

There was a disagreement regarding the **timing** of these discussions. The issue sparked a heated debate in the group. The children stressed that they needed time to process information, hence it was better if they were given some time to adjust to its consequences, and to come back to these topics and talked about them more. The children were concerned about the suddenness of the expected change, but it was not clear if the sooner the better. The discussions revealed that the time between making, sharing and implementing a decision can also be too long and can make life changes more complicated.

*“Why didn't you tell us this earlier?”*  
*“Give them some time to process it.”*  
*“In the right moment”*  
*“When everything is calm”*

Eventually, their main point was to find the time to discuss it properly, even subsequently. **Admitting a mistake** about not revealing information earlier or in an optimal way were also highlighted.

*“I think you can tell them that you made a mistake. Because everybody makes mistakes. But still, you will not compromise... Okay, I made a mistake, guys, I’m sorry, but it’s important to me and I would be happy if you could accept this and we would go because it’s good for me and you can learn a lot, you get more opportunity. You may be angry now, but we can be really happy to be there.”*

## 4.2. Having no say in something

ICA	Research questions	Analogous situations in drama sessions	Method
Children have no say in the leaving and need to face the separation from the parent.	What do children need to be able to speak up? To whom / where would children turn to/go with their questions? What would help children	The brothers learn from their parents that their father undertakes a job abroad from the next day.	<i>Hot seat:</i> Children shared the roles of the siblings by passing on the jars representing these characters and could speak to their parents on their behalf.
		The mom decides to move to the capital with their sons and wonders how to talk to the children about it	<i>Mantle of the expert:</i> It was as if the children moved into the mom’s head and were giving her advice

	<p>to be informed about important decisions?          What do children need to feel safe and feel better?</p>		<p>on what a child would need in this situation.</p>
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Children have expressed their need to be involved in decisions. They stressed that they are part of the family, so they are affected and should be heard. Having no say in important situations was paired with **frustration, powerlessness**, and associated with other experiences of social exclusion.

*“They will feel that you have left them out of this decision and I’m not sure that’s good if you tell them the facts, because if you are strict, it’s good, but on the other hand, if they feel that it’s a family matter... obviously, the lives of the three of you change... then you left them out of this decision.*

CRA noted down what children expressed during the discussions and in the play.

*“Mark was angry, Vic was disappointed. Mark wanted to take control of the situation.”  
 “Vic’s feelings: panic, disappointment, stress, tension, many questions, sensitivity, got hurt, anger that her father left so easily and didn’t give a chance to discuss it together.”  
 “Children were puzzled.”*

The roots of these feelings are of course more complex than being left out of a decision, and for example the unexpected news of separation played a role in them too. The underlying themes of ICA are closely interlinked and should be approached comprehensively.

There was a discussion about the reasons for their exclusion. Furthermore, children were confident in their **ability to alter or influence decisions** about moving. The missed opportunity was their main problem with their exclusion from decision-making. Children overestimated their influence, which shed light on the importance of realizing what is within and beyond their competence. During the drama activities, they tried to understand whether a decision was final, to assess the consequences, and discuss them immediately.

*“Probably the father didn’t tell them sooner that he was leaving because he didn’t want the boys to do something that would stop him and change his mind.”*

Child rights ambassadors suggested creating and accentuating examples where children can take **control of their life**, even in minor issues, such as the colour of the wall. In this way, children can realize that their exclusion is not absolute, and there are parts of their life where they are in decision-making positions. The scale between having no say at all and being in control of a decision was outlined. The difference between listening to children and giving them influence was discussed, and child rights ambassadors said that if they are heard, it can be better explained why they have no say in something.

### 4.3. Getting separated from the parent

ICA	Research questions	Analogous situations in drama sessions	Method
Children adjust to the absence of a parent, which affects their well-being differently, also in the short and in the long term.	What do children need to feel safe and feel better?	The brothers learn from their parents that their father undertakes a job abroad from the next day	<i>Hot seat:</i> Children shared the roles of the siblings by passing on the jars representing these characters and could speak to their parents on their behalf.
		The birthday week of the child character should be planned, including family celebration and a videochat with the separated parent	<i>Game:</i> children were asked to schedule invitations in the main character's week. Their discussion revealed their preferences and their attitudes towards parents.
		The siblings have a conversation at home, after it turned out that the older brother had some issues at school and got into trouble with a police officer	<i>Forum theatre:</i> The actual conversation was played by one child and the facilitator. Anyone could switch in the role of the child character or could give advice to the actual actor. More scenarios were seen, and they were followed by a group discussion. <i>Group reflection</i>
			<i>Making of mental map with jars:</i> at the end of each session participants discuss, how family relationships have changed.

The drama sessions showed that separation from parents has disrupted children's emotional well-being and created a new situation in their lives. This was reflected in the CRA's observations too.

*"Vic seemed lost."*

*"The atmosphere of the discussion is depressing."*

The impact of the separation changed over time. During the drama sessions, the children's initial reaction was harsh, questioning it, being concerned about the background and the consequences (as noted in relation to the first underlying theme). It should be noted that the drama initially depicted a



well-functioning, complete family, but when children learned that their father was moving abroad, they were also **worried** about what would happen, who would make decisions, how would this affect their role in the family, how they would communicate with the separated parent. There was also the question of who the head of the family would be.

The **change family structure and dynamics** appeared to be important for child participants, and access to information, predictability and clear communication seemed to ease children’s frustration. The ‘mental map’ of family ties (which were built from jars representing family members at the end of each session) changed very little after the news of the separation. It affected the relationship of the family members who stayed together.

*“A week or two after the father leaves, the three of them will become closer to each other.”  
 “Vic got closer to Mom. (...) Vic and Mark too.” (Observations)  
 “We are one family; we’ll go through it together.”*

Later, although the distance between the children and the separated parent grew a little during the second session, the drama also showed that increased **physical distance alone was not entirely responsible** for the change in family ties.

*„Distance always tears things apart”  
 „But their father loves him the same way. Passive relationships disrupt the ties.”*

The child researchers highlighted that previous experiences, the **frequency and quality of communication** play an important role in this. They stressed that the loss of a parent jeopardized children’s basic sense of security. The **parent’s stability, behaviour** could both help and hinder the situation. The way the mother talked about the separated parent, whether she was available and caring mattered, but gender also played a role: the child character lacked a father and son talk’.

#### 4.4. Need to adjust to a new situation

ICA	Research questions	Analogous situations in drama sessions	Method
Children adjust to the absence of a parent, which affects their well-being differently, also in the short and in the long term.	What do children need to feel safe and feel better?	The brothers learn from their parents that their father undertakes a job abroad from the next day	<i>Hot seat:</i> Children shared the roles of the siblings by passing on the jars representing these characters and could speak to their parents on their behalf.
		The birthday week of the child character should be planned, including family celebration and a videochat with the separated parent	<i>Game:</i> children were asked to schedule invitations in the main character’s week. Their discussion revealed their preferences and their attitudes towards parents.

		<p>The siblings have a conversation at home, after it turned out that the older brother had some issues at school and got into trouble with a police officer</p>	<p><i>Forum theatre:</i> The actual conversation was played by one child and the facilitator. Anyone could switch in the role of the child character or could give advice to the actual actor. More scenarios were seen, and they were followed by a group discussion. <i>Group reflection</i> about it</p> <hr/> <p><i>Making of mental map with jars:</i> at the end of each session, participants discuss how family relationships have changed</p>
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The drama play revealed how differently children adapt to new situations and that they need different support from their environment. This issue was mainly addressed/particularly relevant when the family was about to move to the capital. Small gifts or allowances to reassure or comfort children were discussed. The move was perceived as a burden, something **to be compensated for**.

There was a debate about whether a pet or room of one's own could help children adjust to their new environment. It was later concluded that it did not matter if these requests were 'real' needs, they were expressed as important and as increasing their well-being and sense of security in a new environment.

*"I think you can make peace if you tell them that they can pick the colour of their room or something like that... I think you can impress children this way too."*  
*"You can say that you don't have to sleep in the same room."*

The children needed some level of **continuity**, and objects or smaller arrangements could support this transition and mimic continuity with previous situations. Attention to their preferences in general was central to children, and age, school and friends were also issues.

*"- Let's say Vic has achieved being accepted and included or something like that, it can be pretty tough to do that again.*  
*- They are afraid of change.*  
*- Plus, going the capital after a small town is scary."*

Children considered **family ties** and peer relationships were important in this process. They realized that the move had changed everyone's life in the family, not just theirs. In discussions about their new family situation, they also empathized with their parents and tried to put themselves in their shoes, to understand their motives and their situation. The changes in all aspects of life challenged otherwise good family relationships, which affected how they themselves felt in the new environment. Children

outlined how these changes could bring siblings together or tear them apart, even if they were physically in the same place.

#### 4.5. Feeling betrayed, trust is damaged

ICA	Research questions	Analogous situations in drama sessions	Measure
The conflict behind ICA and the circumstances of the abduction can damage children's trust in parents/ adults. Developing trust toward professionals/ authority figures is also challenging.	What do you need to feel safe or feel better? What do children need to feel respected and taken seriously?	The brothers learn from their parents that their father undertakes a job abroad from the next day.	Group improvisation of the conversation with dad ( <i>Hot seat</i> ) Group reflection on what happened with the help of a <i>mental map</i>
		The brothers are confronted by the tram driver and the police, after the drunken brother makes a scene.	<i>Group improvisation</i> of the tram situation <i>Group reflection</i> on what happened
		The main character receives a stolen smartwatch from his brother for his birthday. The next day he gets into a fight with the owner of the watch. For this reason, they are summoned to the headmaster's office.	Group improvisation about what happened in the headmaster's office ( <i>forum theatre</i> ) Group reflection on what happened with the help of mental map ( <i>Rainbow of desires</i> ) Group reflection on what happened with the help of <i>mental map</i>

The drama confirmed that the unexpected or negative behaviour of a significant person is very stressful for children, resulting in the **breach of trust**. The father's moving away or Mark's (the older brother) embarrassing behaviour generated strong emotional reaction during the drama sessions. The second session focused on the brothers' relationship. Mark's character allowed the group to explore not only the situation of the siblings, but he also represented the close senior/ superior person who disappointed the main character. Their relationship became symbolic of the parent-child relationship during ICA: the situations were intended to stimulate similar inner conflicts in Vic to what a child could experience with a parent in ICA (but not with the professionals). He had to face the authorities and got into conflict with the law because of the behaviour of his older brother who was supposed to take care of him, misleading him and causing a loyalty conflict, etc. Regarding Mark's behaviour the children drew attention to the importance of damaged trust. After a disappointment such as the tram situation, they could not trust Mark, despite standing up for him against the headmaster.

*"It was because his trust in Mark was damaged by the tram thing, and that's why I think he has a little suspicion that he might have done it."*

Children discussed **how honest** a parent should be, but overall, they found it crucial for their trusting relationship.

- *If I were them, I'd expect my mom to be completely honest and play with open cards.*
- *If someone starts lying, it will grow into a big web of lies... and you'll lose their trust. I think you should tell the truth.*
- *You can tell the truth even if you withhold something. It is not a lie.*
- *Well, it depends."*

The reflection following an improvisation activity showed that children strongly **idealised their parents**. It did not even occur to them that the parent would do something that had a negative impact on them, which was also the reason why the children experienced these situations as a betrayal. At the same time, it also helped to restore the trust in their relationship.

- "The father may regret leaving his family and it may occur to him that he shouldn't have left."*
- "I think Vic has moved apart from his father because he didn't think that his father would come up with a plan like that."*

Children also recognized that Vic and children in general do not understand as many aspects of a decision as parents do, and even if they did not like it, they basically trusted parents' good intentions.

- „They do not understand this, because they are kids."*
- „/They'll figure it's better this way."*

Children stressed that these situations will inevitably cause stress and will upset them. Parents should know that *"they cannot avoid this"*, that they should expect temporary bad feelings, but they should also be aware that even if it stirs up their emotions and affects their behaviour (for example they get angry, quarrel, become more reserved or avoid contact), they will cope with it.

Research has shown that **time** can play an important role in restoring trust in the parent. The children's first reaction was to avoid interaction with the person who caused disappointment, but during the discussion, there was consensus that the relationship with their loved ones could and should be resolved. The children mentioned some of the conditions necessary for this. They felt it was important for parents to reach out to them and to begin repairing their relationship. They should first explain their decision and then encourage the child to share his or her feelings about what happened. During the sessions, the children also stressed the importance of rebuilding trust and not letting the loss of trust happen again.

- "If I were Vic I'd rather say I don't know him."*
- "He was disappointed in his brother in some way."*

This was discussed at the end of the second session in relation to the review of the mental map reflecting the changing family ties. This session addressed the brothers' adjustment to the new life situation and the conflict in the tram. Children put their characters very far apart on the mental map.

- "I don't think he is that far away, he is still his brother."*
- "Facilitator: How long do you think this change in their relationship will last? Will it stay like this in the long term?"*

Child 1: As long as Mark doesn't explain the situation and apologize.

Child 2: I think if he does that and it happens again, and then again and again after the apology and it becomes normal, then I think it stays that way, so it's about whether it was a one-time thing with Mark or a lasting change."

In evaluating the drama sessions, peer researchers have highlighted the **importance of parent-child relationship**. In their views, the idealisation of the parent and the trust in him or her should be considered in the legal processes. Any legal professionals (e.g., the judge) who comes into contact with the child should take this into account and should not deepen the conflict between the parent and the child. The judge should make objective statements about the parent, as failure to do so may undermine the credibility of the proceedings for the child. The evaluation of the drama sessions led the research team to conclude that there's a need to recognise and understand the potentially low level of trust children may have in authorities. Lack of trust was associated with uncertainty and lack of information, and the role of predictability of the proceedings, familiarity with professionals were seen as important in building trust. It was also emphasized that children's feelings should be respected, and that adults should not be expected to like everything or trust everyone at once. Patience and continued attention were also underlined.

#### 4.6. Not understanding what is happening, remaining alone with questions

ICA	Research questions	Analogous situations in drama sessions	Measure
Lack of information makes it very difficult for children to cope with their situation – both about the motives, the way and the consequences of the abduction, the procedure and the decision of return or non-return.	Who/ where would children turn to with their questions ?	The brothers learn from their parents that their father undertakes a job abroad from the next day.	Group improvisation of the conversation with dad ( <i>Hot seat</i> ) Group reflection on what happened with the help of <i>mental map</i>
		Confrontation with the policeman	<i>Group improvisation</i> of the situation with the police officer <i>Group reflection</i> on what happened
		The main character receives a stolen smartwatch from his brother for his birthday. The next day he gets into a fight with the owner of the watch. For this reason, they are summoned to the headmaster's office.	Group improvisation about what happened in the headmaster's office ( <i>forum theatre</i> ) <i>Group reflection</i> on what happened with the help of <i>mental map (Rainbow of desires)</i> <i>Group reflection</i> on what happened with the help of <i>mental map</i>

Several situations have shown that life changes, especially when perceived drastic by children, have led to children's **frustration and embarrassment**. The lack of information was identified as a major factor.

In the scene where the father moved abroad, the children unexpectedly faced a new situation and were not given an explanation. They immediately started looking for an explanation for what had happened, because they did not understand why such a drastic move was suddenly necessary. They suspected that a more negative life event must be behind the situation, such as a divorce or another woman.

The feeling that they didn't understand what was happening to them appeared even more sharply in the situation with the headmaster. After suspicions arose that his brother had stolen a watch, the main character, Vic was called to the headmaster's office. There was an activity called the Rainbow of desires where the children had to project Vic's feelings with their bodies. During this exercise one of the boys explicitly displayed this confusion which later led to a discussion. The children felt confused that in this case a trusted person had created a situation that made the child feel being in trouble, and that he had been informed of this by an official body.

The display of authority in each relevant scene caused lots of **uncertainty** for children. They were unaware and worried about the consequences for what was said in the presence of authority figures – partly for them but especially for the parents.

Lack of information and unexpected, unknown or high-stake situations destabilized children, and were **associated with their sense of insecurity**. In the discussions, children underlined the need for predictability, clear and understandable information about everyday and formal situations. They highlighted that honest attention from adults can help them cope with uncertainty.

The peer researchers highlighted that the research illustrated the tension caused by the general distrust in official bodies and the loss of trust in the family background. They concluded that in case of ICA, this causes confusion in children's minds and as a result they are left alone with their questions.

*“When the policeman arrived, I would have been happy to explain Mark's state of mind. And I think the policeman would have been more understanding of the situation because, like Vic, I'm sure that this whole change in his life has affected him.”*

Summarising these observations, the peer researchers made some **recommendations** regarding cases of ICA. It is very important that the child is given a proper explanation of the process. It is also essential that the information is explained in an understandable and clear way according to their level of cognitive skills. As far as possible, they should be informed in advance about the next steps of the process, avoiding unexpected situations as much as possible. It is vital that the parent is supported in this because the research findings suggest that for a child the parent is often more reliable and trustworthy than the authority, even if the latter was damaged or weakened. In addition, the child should be reassured that the court will try to act in his/her best interests during the proceedings and that there will not be any negative consequence for him/her. In connection with this, legal bodies may

want to consider providing general information about their work, as this can be useful in raising awareness and understanding of their rights and the specific procedures.

#### 4.7. Hesitance about speaking up

ICA	Research questions	Analogous situations in drama sessions	Measure
Even when children have the opportunity to express their views about the abduction, it is often difficult to open up, influenced by internal and external factors.  during (procedure)	What do you need to be able to speak up?	The brothers learn from their parents that their father undertakes a job abroad from the next day.	Group improvisation of the conversation with dad ( <i>Hot seat</i> ) Group reflection on what happened with the help of <i>mental map</i>
	What do you need to feel safe or feel better?	Confrontation with the policeman	Group improvisation of the situation with the police officer Group reflection on what happened
		The main character receives a stolen smartwatch from his brother for his birthday. The next day he gets into a fight with the owner of the watch. For this reason, they are summoned to the headmaster's office.	Group improvisation about what happened in the headmaster's office ( <i>forum theatre</i> ) Group reflection on what happened with the help of mental map ( <i>Rainbow of desires</i> ) Group reflection on what happened with the help of mental map

The hesitation to speak up was closely related to the feeling of not understanding what was happening to them. Hesitation was more common with authorities/ formal relationships than with the parents. In the plays, children dared to talk about their feelings with the parents, in these cases hesitation was not significant.

Doubts about authorities might be determined by the general distrust of official bodies and fear of consequences mentioned earlier. The first official person with whom the main character came into contact was the police officer. Her behaviour was rude and offensive, which was a very unpleasant experience for the children. They stressed that it was a humiliating situation for Vic when the police officer excluded him from the conversation, and it would have been better if he has been given the opportunity to explain what had happened.

The headmaster was the other official person, but his behaviour was supportive. Despite this, children thought that his care was not genuine. They highlighted that it is not enough for the adults just say 'I want to help' but they have to express it through their actions, for instance by paying attention to the

children's view. An important lesson from the research was that previous bad experiences can have a big impact on children's attitude, and these are very difficult to correct. The peer researchers suggested that the first step to overriding a bad experience is respect for the child, which can take the form of careful listening.

*"Vic was excluded from the conversation, he was blamed, and when Vic tried to help his brother, he simply dismissed Vic."*

*"I would have calmed down if I could talk to the policeman and I was only getting more nervous when the policeman, let's say, wasn't too friendly."*

*"Facilitator 1: The headmaster said several times that he just wanted to help and wanted to understand what was going on.*

*Child 1: They just say that.*

*Others: Yes.*

*Child 2: This comes up every time and I don't know... It's not too believable. To be honest it's not realistic.*

*Facilitator: But why?*

*Child 2: I don't know, somehow, just not.*

*Child 3: The headmaster may have said that honestly, but Vic didn't trust him because of the policeman. Because he didn't let Vic speak."*

The discussion of these findings with the peer researchers has led to some recommendations regarding ICA. The reluctance to speak up could be reduced if the child was informed of the steps at the beginning of a formal process and reassured that there would not be any negative consequences for him/her. The child researchers concluded that children would feel more safe and more able to express their feelings genuinely if they **spoke to a third, independent person** other than the parent or the judge. For them, the judge represents 'objectivity' in the proceedings, but it is difficult to develop trust in him or her. The judge should be patient with the child, listen to him/her carefully and show him/her respect. However, the **competences and limits of the professionals** should be clear. It was found/felt that a third, supportive person had a much better chance of establishing a confidential, trusting relationship with the child and of being able to support him/her (emotionally or practically) to speak up. The presence of someone they know and trust can alleviate hesitation and fear of consequences to express their views in the presence of official persons. Child Rights Ambassadors were also interested in the possibilities of independent representation. They suggested that this person could represent the best interests of the child in the proceedings. Mediation was also briefly discussed, which the Child Rights Ambassadors considered to be a safe, desirable and good alternative.

#### 4.8. Vulnerable situations where children's future depends on others

ICA	Research questions	Analogous situations in drama sessions	Measure
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Following the abduction, the legal procedure or the mediation puts children once again in the hands of adults. They have no control about what happens to them.  during (procedure)	What do children need to feel respected and taken seriously?	Confrontation with the police officer	<i>Group improvisation</i> of the situation with the police officer Group reflection on what happened
	What do you need to feel safe or feel better?	The main character receives a stolen smartwatch from his brother for his birthday. The next day he gets into a fight with the owner of the watch. For this reason, they are summoned to the headmaster's office.	Group improvisation about what happened in the headmaster's office ( <i>forum theatre</i> ) Group reflection on what happened with the help of mental map ( <i>Rainbow of desires</i> ) Group reflection on what happened with the help of mental map

Feelings of vulnerability were strongly associated with situations where children felt they were losing control over what was happening, and this was also linked to the presence of the representatives of official bodies. The drama confirmed that children feel less vulnerable in the family environment, even when trust is compromised, than in the presence of officials in general, as the family environment provides children with emotional security. They trust people in their close environment much more than official persons. In the drama, children agreed to stand by the brother in a conflict situation, despite their inner doubts.

*“Obviously a policeman wasn’t so friendly. He could have been friendly if he had listened to Vic and had not excluded him. Vic would have been happy to be part of this, because he wanted to explain the situation, hoping that the policeman would be more understanding and put himself in his position.”*

It was very striking that children viewed Vic **just as a supporting actor** in this story. Children were concerned about the consequences for his brother, but they were less preoccupied with the consequences for Vic (with whom they identified with).

*“Practically, Vic is just a supporting actor, if we can say so, in this story.”*

The child researchers debated whether children put the well-being of others before their own, but this can also imply that their well-being is also dependent on their significant others. They also stressed that children generally feel distrust towards the authorities which can be exacerbated by inappropriate behaviour of an official person, such as overemphasising his/her position of power. In their views, the feeling of vulnerability can be reduced by the guarantees as discussed earlier – showing that information, participation and trust are closely interlinked.

## 5. Discussion

The research used a nonconventional and two-tier methodology to learn about children's perspective in cases of ICA. Drama techniques with children aged 10-14 addressed some typical feelings and situations of ICA in an indirect way, and high school volunteers – Hintalovon's Child Rights Ambassadors– were involved as peer researchers to observe these drama sessions, link the results to ICA and discuss their implications. Based on the findings and discussions, the following conclusions can be drawn.

### **Emphasis should be made on the underlying themes of ICA**

ICA highlights very sharply the vulnerability of children. Even if parents are well-intentioned or consider the children's interests, children experience a range of stressful, sensitive and difficult situations. In order to support the well-being of abducted children, the needs and perspectives of children in these situations must be understood. Drawing on previous studies, the present research took a child-centred approach to explore the ICA process in more depth and identified typical problems and feelings experienced by children before, during and after the abduction and the proceedings that followed. Making 'underlying themes' central to the research served to underline its practical relevance. More emphasis should be placed on the analysis of these underlying themes also in practice, and children's situation should be considered by recognizing these processes.

### **Supporting child participation at the appropriate/right level is key**

The research confirmed that participation and empowerment in vulnerable situations is key in promoting children's well-being. As a result of ICA, children's lives change in parallel in many settings, transforming their social and physical environments. They become the object (and not the subject) of these changes and have very little influence over these changes or even understanding of the situation. Lack of control diminishes their sense of security and vice versa, but this interconnectedness can be turned to good, and intervention to this cycle can improve children's well-being. Understanding the possible meanings, levels or factors of participation and recognizing the value of each is paramount in supporting children. Access to information, understanding of what is happening, the opportunity to ask questions, share their concerns, express their views and feelings, and above all, the experience of being heard – all these are elements of child participation, contributing to children's sense of competence, respect and being taken seriously and hence reducing their vulnerability. Firstly, this implies that adults have a wide range of possibilities to empower children. Children stressed that even if they are left out from certain decisions or have limited opportunity to get to know or consider their viewpoints, they should be involved in understanding the background. Secondly, children's hearings should be accompanied by meaningful practices outside the court too. Child participation is not just about listening to children's views in court either, it should be promoted in the family and in informal and everyday settings alike. Irrespective of professionals' attitude or behaviour, children build on their previous experiences of being heard and understood by other authority figures (teachers, officers, any professionals, doctors, etc.), and whether or not their views were respected or speaking up had any negative consequences or not. Thirdly, the misconceptions about participation, such as the supremacy of children's views or their lack of competence should also be addressed.

### **Sharing information and discussing the situation with children should be fundamental**

Lack of information and failing to understand a situation can easily upset children and can lead to fears and fantasies. Children have a very strong need to understand what is happening, even retrospectively, and they are also interested in the underlying motives.

They find the mere existence of discussions helpful, even if it is hard to arrange their context perfectly or they start off awkwardly. Explaining past events, preparing for future ones, and talking about present challenges contribute to their sense of security.

### **Children's behaviour with authority figures is shaped by earlier experiences – but they can be overcome**

When professionals encounter children, children come with their prejudices, and prior knowledge of relevant situations or relationships. Even if professionals are very sensitive in their approach to children, children might be reluctant to believe or trust them, they might think that professionals are just acting as if they care, and no matter what children say, they know better, they decide according to their own judgement, while children's opinions are devalued and relativised. Previous experiences of expressing their views, speaking up in front of authority figures, trusting adults shape children's behaviour with professionals – this is one of the reasons why addressing the underlying issues of ICA cases are important. Rewriting these experiences and developing trust might take time and does not happen overnight, but children emphasised that every action of adults either reinforces or challenges their patterns. Time matters, so why not start to behave differently now? – children asked. The same applies to parents: they might have made mistakes, but they always have a chance to do things differently.

### **Professionals are seen differently**

Children have different mental images of different professionals, resulting in different expectations of their role and behaviour. The possibilities of developing trust with certain professionals (e.g. judges or those they meet only in formal settings) is normally limited. Involving other, supportive professionals, and enhancing cooperation can help children feel able to speak up, feel safe and comfortable. However, identifying and understanding their competences is essential to help prevent their disappointment. The development of tailor-made recommendations that are specific to professional's competences should be discussed.

### **Primary prevention should also be supported**

Children have many preconceptions about formal settings and proceedings. They have trust issues with institutions and their representatives and feel vulnerable in their presence. These attitudes are developed much before they get into contact with the authorities, which calls attention to the need for primary prevention. Providing child-friendly information about children's rights, civil proceedings, divorce, justice system, social services and awareness-raising campaigns in schools and in media can help debunk the myths and misconceptions about courts and empower children. Bearing in mind the exceptional role of parents in children's well-being, campaigns directed at adults are also supportive.

### **Children want parents to take control and responsibility**

Children's need to feel involved and being heard does not contradict their need for protection and guidance. In contrast, they rely heavily on parents and adults, they also idealize their parents despite any disappointments and feel less vulnerable in their presence. The desire to be taken care of is very

strong. Seeing their parents confident, informed and in control improves their emotional stability. The ambassadors stressed that the mental-emotional well-being of parents has utmost importance for their own well-being. Parents should also be supported and informed.

### **Details matter**

Children's comfort and well-being equally depend on the little things. ICA encompasses many cumulative risks that disrupt children's emotional well-being but breaking these complex issues down into smaller-scale problems can help adults find effective responses and develop hands-on practices that make small yet considerable difference for children. Underlying themes provide a good list to start with: if parents and professionals can influence any of them, it will have an impact on children's overall well-being.

Moreover, children highlighted the significance of small gestures, rewards, freedoms, physical arrangements and rituals in building trust or having sense of security or comfort. Minor or everyday things can play a crucial role in ensuring continuity and reinforcing stability. They have similar views on access to information. They are interested in learning about seemingly insignificant details of past or future events. Hence, the role of details should not be underestimated. While paying attention to all the details may seem like a burden for some, it can also be deliberating. Even if professionals or parents have to make harsh decisions that might upset children, focusing on the details or giving children more freedom on other levels can make them more child-friendly. Likewise, if understanding the big picture would not be age-appropriate for children, they should still receive answers for their detailed questions.

### **Implication for future research**

Firstly, the drama revealed children's way of thinking, reactions and their main concerns regarding ICA and similar experiences with parents or authority figures. As with most child-centred and not fully controlled methods, drama-based research runs the risk of not covering all aspects of the research questions equally, but researchers learn from children in so many ways. Drama is so informative and gives a unique, special perspective for analysing children's feelings and needs. Its application holds a great and untapped potential for future research into children's views, but to make it more credible in academic settings, more sophisticated observation and analysis techniques should be developed. The research has highlighted the merits of interdisciplinary cooperation but the need for specific training and preparation (both in terms of the research subject and methodology) should not be overlooked.

Secondly, involving peer researchers proved to be a great asset for research and an unparalleled inspiration to educate and empower both children and researchers. While it has become obvious that researchers or professionals cannot expect answers or solutions to every problem, involving children in the research team helps them to better understand the situation. Beyond consultations, they can collaborate in finding the right questions, observing, evaluating the results, and drawing conclusions. Thirdly, the relevant literature about the underlying themes (vulnerability, trust, expressing a view, etc) should be analysed and further research should be encouraged to delve deeper into these particular issues, even separately.



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Hintalovon Child Rights Foundation  
2021

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