



**Missing
Children
Europe**



INCLUDE COUNTRY REPORT CYPRUS

Hope for Children CRC Policy Center

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Introduction

Definition of the problem

International parental child abduction (ICA) is the removal or retention of a child outside their country of habitual residence in breach of another parent or guardian's custody rights. The 1980 Hague Child Abduction Convention seeks to protect children from the harmful effects of wrongful removal and retention across international boundaries by assuring their prompt return. According to recent research, the effects of abduction on the wellbeing of children are severe and, in many cases, have long-term consequences¹. Furthermore, it has been shown that children often feel frustrated about the lack of clear communication and they believe their opinions are not properly taken into account.

Previous research projects have helped define the different challenges that need to be addressed in order to guarantee the safety of abducted children. First, it must be considered the extremely vulnerable situation children find themselves in – they are in an unfamiliar environment and are rarely informed of what is going on around them, they don't feel like they are taken seriously and their trust in one of their parents, and sometimes both, is compromised². Second, legal professionals also find themselves in a challenging situation as they try to balance the need to resolve the case and not compromise the best interest of the child. They often fear not being able to meaningfully support the children and take into account their views due to legal regulations or the lack of time, personal and professional capacities.

Finally, research has also shown the importance of improving the communication system between professionals and children, regarding both the content of the decision and the way it is communicated. By doing so, considerable changes might be achieved, and it could help to minimize the negative effects on the children's wellbeing.

About the project INCLUDE

The project INCLUDE aims to offer a set of good practices to legal and other professionals to improve children's wellbeing when dealing with cases of international child abduction by a parent. Following the set of recommendations of former projects (EWELL, VOICE) conducted by the University of Antwerp and Missing Children Europe, INCLUDE aims at enhancing the participation and improving the situation of abducted children from the start of the civil proceedings until the enforcement of the decision and immediately after a return. Moreover, this project intends to contribute to a better and more child-friendly and child focussed enforcement of judicial decisions.

¹ Marilyn FREEMAN, "*The Child Perspective in the context of the 1980 Hague Convention*", Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs Directorate-General for Internal Policies, (October 2020).

² Marilyn FREEMAN, "*International Child Abduction: Research on the Effects of Abduction and Reunification*", Ito International Research Center, Japan, (10 June 2019).

The innovative aspect of the project INCLUDE lays in its commitment to bring the involvement of children to a deeper and more engaging level. Throughout the project, children become a fundamental part of the research team as they are recognised as experts of their own life and it is given the appropriate weight to their views and opinions. Starting from the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, children will be given the opportunity to reflect on the problems their peers -victims of an international child abduction- are facing, working toward concrete recommendations and ideas for good practices. This active role of youngsters is the core step to achieve genuine child participation.

Thanks to the input given by children, two good practice guides will be developed:

1. to improve the daily life of children who are abducted by one parent during the abduction (WP2)
2. to guarantee a more child-friendly enforcement of return decisions (WP3)

Since both good practice guides cover a different stage of the abduction, they might be of use to different professionals. Furthermore, the data used to start this project are provided by a case law analysis that was conducted in 12 member states. This will allow the recommendations and good practices that will be developed to be transferred to all EU member states.

The INCLUDE project is coordinated by Missing Children Europe, and it is implemented together with other project partners: University of Antwerp (Belgium), “Hope for Children” CRC Policy Center (Cyprus), and Hıntalovon Child Rights Foundation (Hungary).

1 Research questions

In order to conduct the activities with the children, we focused on the guidelines proposed by the Methodological guidelines for child participation for the INCLUDE project. Therefore, after analysing the conclusions of previous research (VOICE focus groups) and the relevant literature (Freeman, 2014, Lembrechts et al, 2019, Lowe and Stephens, 2018), we selected those issues that could have been addressed with the children. The complicated issue of international child abduction has been approached using a child-centred point-of-view. The elements we tried to highlight concerned the effects on the children’s wellbeing throughout the various stages of ICA: while children are confronted with their situation, during the civil procedure, at the announcement of the court decision, during the enforcement and immediately after a return. During this first process, some topics have emerged with greater frequency and reflect the main psychological issues surfacing during the ICA. In the framework of the INCLUDE project, these topics have been called “underlying themes” and they have revealed the emotional, interpersonal and situational risks behind ICA.

Underlying themes of ICA:

- Something unexpected happens to children
- Children have no say in something

- Children feel betrayed, trust is damaged
- Children are hesitant about speaking up
- Children are in a vulnerable situation and know that their future depends on others
- Children do not understand what is happening, remain alone with questions
- Children are informed about significant decisions
- Children are getting separated, they need to accommodate

The themes were finalized after the revision of the literature and consultation with the project partners. As a result, the following research questions were developed:

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?
 - Who / where would children turn to with their questions?
 - What would help children to find out about important decisions?
 - What do children need to feel safe and feel better?
2. What would make you feel more comfortable in court hearings?

2 Methodology

2.1 Research design

The collection of data and analysis has been structured on the basis of participatory sessions that involved a number of children of different ages from two different countries, Cyprus and Hungary, (tab. 4). Children’s participation in the project has been arranged in two forms:

- as part of the focus groups in order to address the research questions;
- as representatives to help adults better understand children’s perspective and step up for the rights of their vulnerable peers.

Table 4: Research design in Cyprus

Aim	Activity	Session	Cyprus	
			Group 3 (10-14y)	Group 4 (14-18y)
Introduction		session 1	x	x

Research (focus group)	meaningful participation (RQ1)	session 2	x	x
		session 3		x
	child-friendly hearing (RQ2)	session 4	x	x
	discussion (RQ1, RQ2)	session 5		x
Representation	Steering Committee	session 6		x
		session 7		x

2.2 Participants

The research has been carried out with children who have not been directly affected by international child abduction. The children that have participated in the sessions in Cyprus have been selected according to the Methodological guidelines for child participation for the INCLUDE project.

During the sessions, Ms. Rafaella Georgiou (lawyer) and Ms. Marian Angelidou (psychologist) from “Hope for Children” CRC Policy Centre participated as facilitators of the activities. Ms. Angelidou performed as mediator for the sessions and was responsible for the carrying out of the activities and discussion with the children. Ms. Georgiou assumed the role of observer, her duty was to take notes of the reactions and responses, verbal and non-verbal, of the children throughout the sessions.

According to the different phases of the project, a number of different children were involved (tab. 2). For the drama sessions, 6 children aged between 10-13 years old were involved on a consultation level to seek the children’s views on the topic of International Child Abduction in order to build knowledge and understanding of their lives and experiences. At the same time, 1 child aged between 14-18 years old participated in the drama sessions as observers of the activities and discussion. At the 1st session we had 3 children participating from the younger group and none from the oldest group, as some children cancelled their participation for the day at the last moment and 2 of them for all the sessions. At the other 2 sessions, one children from the youngest group who participated at the 1st session, didn’t attend. The Child Ambassador, was later part of a session with facilitator Ms. Georgiou that aimed at gathering the impressions and opinions of the child on the

drama sessions and her input on best practices to adopt when dealing with cases of International Child Abduction.

Table 2: Child participants

	Drama group	Child Ambassadors
Age	10 to 13 years old	14 to 17 years old
Involvement	consultation level	consultation + collaboration level
Number of children	6	1
Anonymity	yes	no
Addressing ICA	indirectly	directly

Drama group

The children involved in the drama sessions were selected from the contacts our organization already had, as having an open call, calling children we don't know, during the pandemic and the relevant public measures for the protection of pandemic, was not considered as a good strategy. Children and their parents learnt about the research through an information kit provided by Hope for Children. As a result, we had 7 participants overall for most of the duration, 1 boy and 6 girls, average aged of 11 years old.

Child Ambassadors

The children that participated as co-researchers during the drama sessions were supposed to be from the group of Child Ambassadors already established by "Hope For Children". However, due to the pandemic, our Child Ambassadors were not willing to participate in such interactive activities. As a result, we had only one ambassador participating, despite the fact that we had interest of 2 more children prior to the implementation of the activities, who cancelled unexpectedly.

Drama sessions

The focus groups followed a composed methodology that combined research and drama techniques. The drama sessions were based on the methods of *theatre in education (TIE)*. This technique is generally used for educational purposes, in which an experienced professional (i.e.

drama teachers or actors) prepares a performance that involves its audience, in this case children, through work in role and debate³. The involvement of young children in the activities prompt the facilitators to pay special attention to the needs and emotional wellbeing of the participants. As children easily get involved emotionally and tend to identify themselves with the characters and many aspects of international child abduction can be traumatizing, the activities proposed during the drama sessions have been carefully planned and executed. Therefore, the drama technique has been used with simplified scenarios that have a resemblance in nature to international child abduction, but they are less unsettling. Analogue situations mobilize relevant feelings and needs, but at the same time, they create distance from emotionally draining family matters. The different situations will cover different aspects of these complex cases, allowing children to reckon on specific elements of their wellbeing, and letting us narrow the focus that is necessary to formulate examples of good practices.

The drama sessions in Cyprus were divided in three days, the first one was held on the 17/12/21, the second on the 18/12/20 and the third one on 19/12/20. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions put in place in Cyprus during this period, the expected activities for the drama sessions needed to undergo a long process of re-adaptation that delayed their actual implementation. Despite the difficulties encountered, “Hope for Children” was able to carry out the sessions face-to-face by always prioritizing the health and safety of the children and staff involved, therefore, all the necessary measures of social distancing and personal protection were put in place.

The sessions presented a story of an adolescent, called Nicolas, and his family. Nicolas was a 14-year-old boy in his first year of secondary school. Nicolas moved with the family from a smaller village to a big city (Ayia Napa) a few months ago, after her/his mom got a new job in the city. It made it easier to meet Dad who worked in a village near this city. He had an older brother, Markos, who was 17. They started their new life, which was slightly easier for Nic, Mark struggled more. The story put children in analogous situations to those that abducted children face – for instance Dad’s late reveal about moving abroad, settling down in a new place, confronting a tram driver and police officer, summons to the headmaster’s office, dilemma about taking a side or position.

The first drama session focused on forming the group and learning about the background story of the characters. Later, the group was asked to act out a number of different situations in order to help them better understand the implications of the choices made by each character in the story and try to reflect on them. The second and third drama sessions saw the unfolding of the story and the children were able to develop their opinions on the presented situation by analysing it from different angles and at different levels. The techniques used to implement the activities comprehended different drama pedagogical conventions: narration, calendar writing, introduction of objects, acting out scenes, still image, group act, individual improvisation, etc.

³ Krishna PRAVEEN, V.Anitha DEVI, “*Theatre: A Quintessential Medium in the Education of Children*”, VIT University, Vol.5, No.19, (2015).

Before the implementation of the sessions, the facilitators were provided with detailed instructions, aims and possible risks of each activity, as well as references to the underlying themes and research questions. During the sessions, child and adult observers made sure to keep notes about their objective and subjective observations for all the activities. The sessions were not recorded, as the children participating were not feeling comfortable, something that needed more time and effort to make them feel more comfortable, using some ice-breaker activities.

2.3 Analysis of the drama sessions

A second phase of the research process interested only the Child Ambassador (age 14-18) that was asked to participate in a session to discuss about the findings of the previous activities. The meeting took place on the 25/01/21 and was held online on the platform Google Meet due to the lockdown measures that were in place in Cyprus. 1 child participated in the session, female, 16 years old. During this session, Ms. Rafaella Georgiou, performing as facilitator, conducted a discussion with the participant.

The facilitator prepared a detailed sessions plan, with the possible timeframe, the aim of each activity, any risk could occur at any stage, notes and instructions relevant to the implementation.

2.4 Ethical considerations

Child participation in the research has been conducted with due regard for ethical and safeguarding principles, as set out in the project partners' Child Safeguarding Policies. In line with the principles outlined in General Comment No. 12 (2009) of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child⁴, they aim to ensure the well-being and safety of participating children, to avoid doing harm and also to promote their meaningful and safe participation.

According to Sim and Waterfield (2019)⁵ consent is a central ethical concern in research, that have four essential elements: disclosure (the adequacy of the information given by the researcher); comprehension (the extent to which this information is understood by the participant); competence (the participant's cognitive or emotional capacity to give or withhold agreement); and voluntariness (the absence of inducement of coercion). These principles are also reflected in the Child Safeguarding Policies and have been guaranteed for the implementation of the different sessions of the INCLUDE project by the acquisition of the signature of the consent form by the child and the parents or legal guardians.

As previously mentioned, the use of drama technique can be unsettling for children as it foresees a high level of involvement. In order to mitigate the negative effects a thoroughly process of

⁴ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), "*General comment No. 12 (2009): The right of the child to be heard*", CRC/C/GC/12, (20 July 2009).

⁵ Julius SIM, Jackie WATERFIELD, "*Focus group methodology: some ethical challenges*", *Qual Quant* 53, 3003–3022 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-019-00914-5>

preparation for the facilitators was put in place, that helped to create a safe environment for all the children involved.

Despite the scrupulous attention paid to the preparation and implementation of the activities according to the Child Safeguarding Policies, it should be taken into account the unprecedented situation posed by the COVID-19 pandemic that limited the access to children and forced us to readapt the sessions to guarantee everyone’s safety. This enabled the involvement of only one drama group in Cyprus, however, examining the findings together with those in Hungary can provide more solid evidence about children’s views for the good practice guides.

3 Results

Hereafter, we will present the main findings of the sessions held with the two group of children according to the underlying themes and research questions identified in the Methodology.

3.1 Something unexpected happens to the children/Children are informed about significant decisions

ICA	Research questions	Analogous situations in drama sessions
Children learn about the leaving, need to face the separation from the parent, or they are informed about the decision of return or no-return	What would help children to find out about important decisions?	The brothers learn from their parents that their father undertakes a job abroad from the next day.
		The family is going to move to the capital city and the mother thinks about how to discuss it with the children

The decision taken from the parents was seen as unsettling and difficult to be accepted at the beginning because the children felt like the parents did not value their input. At this phase, children mentioned that the parents were wrong in making a last-minute announcement. They indicate a period of ‘a couple days’ prior to be informed so they could have the chance to absorb the new situation and to “pack their favourite stuff to bring them with them”. Another element that was perceived as important for the children was the language used to deliver the information and the place where this would happen. For the children, it is crucial that the parents would make sure to be extra clear when explaining why the situation is changing, and for example not use words or phrases that would be difficult for them to understand, in order for them not to speculate or make wrong assumptions that would make the situation worse than it actually is. Furthermore, the

children thought important to be in a familiar setting when receiving the news, so that they would not feel even more disoriented, and to be informed together with their sibling, as it would feel like they could rely on each other.

3.2 Children have no say in something

ICA	Research questions	Analogous situations in drama sessions
Children have no say in the leaving, need to face the separation from the parent.	What do children need to be able to speak up?	The brothers learn from their parents that their father undertakes a job abroad from the next day.
	Who / where would children turn to with their questions?	The mom decides to move to the capital city with their sons and thinks about how to discuss it with them.
	What would help children to find out about important decisions?	
	What do children need to feel safe and feel better?	

Having no say in such an important situation was perceived from the children as a lack of trust from the parents that generated a feeling of frustration and disappointment. Moreover, not being able to express their say on the situation made them think that the relationship between the parents was not going well and perhaps they were hiding something from their children. They mentioned that the feeling they are getting is that the parents are getting divorced, and they would like the mother to actually involve the children in the conversation as they could be able to help and solve this situation. From this particular point, we can see how children believe to be able to influence positively the behaviour of the parents and their decisions.

3.3 Children feel betrayed, trust is damaged

ICA	Research questions	Analogous situations in drama sessions
The conflict behind ICA and the circumstances of the abduction can	What do children need to feel safe or feel better?	The brothers learn from their parents that their father undertakes a job abroad from the next day.

<p>damage children’s trust in parents/ adults. Developing trust toward professionals/ authority figures is also challenging.</p>	<p>What do children need to feel respected and taken seriously?</p>	<p>The brothers are confronted with the tram driver and the police, after the drunk brother was making a scene.</p>
		<p>The main character gets a stolen smart watch from his brother for his birthday. The next day he gets involved in a fight with the owner of the watch. For this reason, they are summoned to the headmaster's office.</p>

As mentioned before, the decision made by the Dad to leave for work was distressing for the children as they were not prepared to be separated from their parent and being excluded from this life-changing decision could generate a significant drift in the relationship between child and parent that could be difficult to restore in the short-time period. The children feel like their parent is no longer trustworthy, however, if he was willing to explain why he had to come to this decision and hear what the children’s feelings are, perhaps this could help to build the trust back.

During the scene with the tram driver, the main feelings children described were shame, fear, stress and the sense of helplessness. They mentioned that the driver should have been more polite and explain to the children in a more friendly and understandable way, after all “only if they could understand his point of view, they would follow the rules”. They mentioned that the behaviour of the older brother, described as ‘bad’ and ‘exaggerated’, was the reason the younger brother found himself in this bad situation. However, they could understand that the older brother had a lot to deal with and his reaction/attitude was understandable. Some of the children, agreed with the behaviour of the bus driver, as the ‘drunk passenger’ should have followed the rules and respected others.

About the ‘smart watch’ situation, the best option according to children is to talk to their mother who loves them, and no matter how angry she could get, she will help them. They stressed the importance of the good relationship between a child and his/her parents and the openness to discuss things between them. They believe that children should feel free to talk with adults without fear, as this is the only way to be really protected. Another important thing they mentioned, was that “the teacher should show more empathy, as the child could experience a situation which he might not be willing to share with him, as this concern his personal life”.

3.4 Children are hesitant about speaking up

ICA	Research questions	Analogous situations in drama sessions

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.	What do children need to be able to speak up?	The brothers learn from their parents that their father undertakes a job abroad from the next day.
	What do children need to feel safe or feel better?	Confrontation with the police officer
		The main character gets a stolen smart watch from his brother for his birthday. The next day he gets involved in a fight with the owner of the watch. For this reason, they are summoned to the headmaster's office.

When confronted with the first scenario of the two brothers learning of the father leaving, the children shared that they would be hesitant to speak up because it feels like the decision has already been made and their input on it would not make any difference, in particular they thought that if the parents were not willing to consult with them before taking the decision it is quite impossible, they would change their mind about it. The children highlighted that they would like to feel part of the decision-making process and, no matter the outcome of the decision itself, that the parents actually listened to their opinion.

Referring to the other two scenarios, participants mentioned the importance of having their mother with them, in order to be able to open up. They said that “sometimes, when it comes about our family life, there are things we are not supposed to share with third persons. So, we don’t know if we should speak or not”. This particular behaviour shows how children need some form of familiar support when confronted with formal settings (headmaster’s office) or authorities (police officer) in order to feel more comfortable when speaking. However, this answer also shows how children are afraid to say something they shouldn’t because it could endanger their relationship with the family (i.e., in the scene with the police officer the children thought that the main character defended his brother because it was “the right thing to do” even though he did not agree with his actions).

Moreover, in reference to how adults behave with children, they stressed the importance – again – of a more friendly and understandable way of communication. In fact, in the scene with police officer, the children highlighted how they felt like the main character was afraid of him and didn’t feel comfortable in talking about what happened because it could have bad repercussions on him and his brother. Also, when looking at the scene with the principal, the children said that “his reaction could have been friendlier because a lot of children would feel embarrassed and would not go back to school for this reason”. To avoid this type of situation, the children said that, if someone explained to them the reasons behind their questions/behaviour it would be easier for them to understand and would be more willing to open up.

3.5 Children are in a vulnerable situation and know that their future depends on others

ICA	Research questions	Analogous situations in drama sessions
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.	What do children need to feel respected and taken seriously?	Confrontation with the police officer
	What do children need to feel safe or feel better?	The main character gets a stolen smart watch from his brother for his birthday. The next day he gets involved in a fight with the owner of the watch. For this reason, they are summoned to the headmaster's office.

The scene in the headmaster’s office was perceived as particularly tense from the children that listed feelings such as ‘anger’, ‘fear’ and ‘nervousness’. Similar reactions were described for the scenario with the police officer, in addition here the children felt like they could not really trust him because he was completely unknown to the main character. What was mainly highlighted is that the authorities made them feel particularly vulnerable and the position of power of the authority figures, clearly stated by their attitude, made the children feel like they have no control over the situation around them because they are in an inferior position.

In order to reduce the risk of alienating the children, it was suggested that authorities should not impose themselves as unapproachable superiors but rather be open to answer to the questions of the children in an affable way. Moreover, it was stressed that, even if the children are not the ones taking the decisions, they should be informed in a clear and comprehensible way of what is happening around them so that the feeling of losing control is not too strong.

3.6 Children do not understand what is happening, remain alone with questions

ICA	Research questions	Analogous situations in drama sessions
Lack of information makes it very difficult	Who/ where would children	The brothers learn from their parents that their father undertakes a job abroad from the next day.

for children to cope with their situation	turn to with their questions?	Confrontation with the police officer
		The main character gets a stolen smart watch from his brother for his birthday. The next day he gets involved in a fight with the owner of the watch. For this reason, they are summoned to the headmaster's office.

Throughout the drama sessions, the characters of the story were often confronted with situations in which the children were oblivious to what was happening. From the very start when the father leaves, we have seen how the children started doubting everything and assume the worse from the situation (as mentioned before the children thought the parents were going to get a divorce). This lack of communication between the members of the family resulted in the disappointment of the children that tried to get some sort of explanation from the parents but felt like no truthful answer was given to them. The children discussed about the importance of being able to rely on their parents when they have questions that affect their lives, however, they also emphasized how having an older sibling to talk to could be good for them as, perhaps, he/she would be able to better understand their point of view.

The children underlined the state of confusion in which the main character finds himself in the following scenarios (with the police officer and headmaster) due to the actions of his brother. They said they felt a bit disoriented because the person they were supposed to trust and rely on (the older brother) was putting them in a difficult situation. This feeling was stronger highlighted when the children saw that the information was delivered from someone who was unfamiliar to them (as for the case of the stolen watch) and the subsequent reaction was the fear to be “punished” for something they were not responsible for.

3.7 Children are getting separated, they need to accommodate

ICA	Research questions	Analogous situations in drama sessions
Children adapt to the absence of a parent, which affects their well-being differently both 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
		The birthday week of the child character should be planned, including family celebration and a video chat with the separated parent

		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
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During the sessions, it was clear how the separation from the parent was sensed as particularly hard for the children, especially in the aftermath of receiving the news. In the short term, the children felt like the bond with the parent that was leaving could be damaged due to the distance and possible miscommunication. Moreover, the children emphasized how they could lose a role model and someone they would confide in. In the long term, the children realised it could be possible to get adjusted to the situation and perhaps the dynamics within the family would not change too much. In order to achieve this, however, the children stated that the parent that left should work really hard not to lose the communication with his/her children and should try to be present in all major events in their lives. An important role is also played by the parent that stays with them, in fact the children think that is fundamental that he/she is able to make them feel safe, is able to reassure them that the parent who is away still plays an important and supportive role, even if the methods are now different, and is available to answer to their questions and doubts.

The session also showed how each child reacts and adapts differently to the changes in his/her life. Something every child agreed on while discussing about the moving situation was that it is not easy to uproot your life from one day to the other and it takes time to adjust, however, it is fundamental that the parent pays special attention to the needs of each child, especially in the first period. The children noticed how the main character was able to adapt quickly because he could build his routine back. The feeling of being able to do something familiar was really important for the children to better adjust to the new situation. The children also agreed that the age of the two brothers somewhat influenced the way they adapted to the new environment. They thought it was understandable that when you are older having to leave all your friends and what you are used to can be harder. As a matter of fact, in the scene where the older brother shares his feelings about the whole situation, some of the children “felt sympathy because it is hard to cope with moving to a new environment”. Children, therefore, considered the bond between the two brothers to be a fundamental point because they are both going through the same thing and could be able to support each other.

4 Conclusion

The research conducted for the project INCLUDE used a comprehensive and two-tier methodology to learn about children’s perspective when faced with the situation of International Child Abduction by a parent. Drama sessions with younger children (age 10-14) focused on addressing the situation

of ICA and the feelings it evokes in an indirect way, while the Child Ambassador (age 14-18) was involved as researcher to observe the sessions and discuss on the main results in correlation with ICA. Based on these findings and discussions, the following conclusions can be drawn.

Guaranteeing a major involvement of children throughout the whole process of ICA has been emphasized as focal point of the entire research process. In fact, by being able to ensure a responsible and informed participation of the children in the different phases of ICA, it can be safeguarded their psychological and physical wellbeing and the children would feel more in control of the changes happening in his/her life. Understanding the need of the children to be informed of the motives behind the decisions taken from the parents or the authorities is crucial in its goal to reduce the risk of the children to be upset or fearful of the consequences these might imply. Explaining the reasons that led to these events and the next steps to be taken, in particular by talking about the challenges they might face, contributes to make the children feel safer.

This process of keeping the children informed is essential also in regard to his/her relationship with the parents. As it has been highlighted by the questions posed by the underlying themes here defined, the children rely completely on the guidance of their parents, they trust their decisions and are ready to follow them. However, if the trust between children and parents is broken due to the lack of clear communication, the children tend to feel more confused and uncertain of the process they are undergoing. Parents, therefore, should be able to retain control of the situation and appear confident for the emotional wellbeing and stability of the children greatly depends on it.

When talking about the participation of children in the process of ICA, for example during the procedure, children should be able to feel comfortable when expressing their views and opinions and should be assured that what they are saying is taken into dutiful consideration, even if the outcome is not what they might expect. This implies that the professionals working during the process of ICA ought not to impose their authority in a detached way and should try to build trust with the children. Even though we are conscious that this is not a process that happens overnight, it is important that the professionals pay particular attention to the way they act around the children, for example by not using a linguistic registry that is difficult to understand for them.

The way decisions are communicated has been underlined in various occasions when discussing the research questions. Paying attention to the how, when and where is critical as it will influence the perception of the children of the whole situation. Even if the outcomes are not seen as favourable from the children's perspective, the professionals and parents need to make sure that these are told in a child-friendly way and should try to concentrate on the positive aspects the decision will have, even if not in the short term. Being understood by the children is imperative in order to minimize the risk of disappointment and to preserve his/her general wellbeing.

In conclusion, the research here presented has been able to dive into the implications of the process of ICA for the children in an innovative and more participative way. The use of the drama technique has given us the opportunity to actually see things from the children's point of view. It revealed the children's way of thinking, reactions and their main fears regarding ICA or when being confronted with similar experiences with parents and authority figures. The unique perspective offered by the

drama sessions linked with the thorough academic research conducted previously has allowed us to cover a wider range of issues raising from the involvement of children in process of ICA. All of this, however, would have not been possible if children did not become a fundamental part of the research team. They were not just consultants but active collaborators in all the different phases of the research and were able to fill the gaps that researchers could not. Ensuring this type of active participation of children in future research is therefore a core element learned from the INCLUDE project.

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