

A faint, light blue background illustration depicting a group of children playing. In the center, a child is jumping or running. To the right, another child is on a tricycle. On the left, there are some leafy plants. The overall style is simple and sketchy.

Challenges for preventive strategies in schools and local communities against child abuse and neglect

**George Moschos
Deputy Ombudsman
Head of Department of Children's Rights
Greece**

Competence of Ombudspersons in the field of child abuse and neglect

- Listening to children and interacting with them on problems or violations they are encountered with
- Examining children's complaints or complaints submitted on behalf of them and mediating to make sure that all appropriate measures are taken for their protection
- Visiting schools, services and institutions for children and observing how children's rights are safeguarded in them
- Communicating with professionals working with and for children and persons in charge of policy planning for children
- Investigating specific issues connected with children's rights
- Monitoring national policies and strategies in implementing CRC
- Identifying legislative and policy gaps, as well as good practices
- Addressing proposals and recommendations to decision makers
- Sensitising children and adults on the right of all children to be protected from all forms of violence (CRC ar.19 etc)

Ombudspersons deal with many forms of violence and neglect against children....

- (*Physical, verbal, sentimental*) abuse or neglect in the family
- "Legitimized" violence (*esp. corporal punishment*)
- Sexual abuse, by persons of trust or others
- Exploitation
- Peer violence (*esp. bullying*)
- Violence in the internet
- Violence by professionals (*teachers, policemen, etc*)
- Violence in institutions
- Violence by mass media
- Other forms of systemic violence – secondary abuse

The Children's Ombudsman in Greece

- In 2003, the mission of the Children's Ombudsman was assigned by special Law amendment to the Independent Authority "The Greek Ombudsman". A Deputy Ombudsman for Children was appointed and a Department for Children's Rights was created, staffed by a multidisciplinary team of investigators.
- Within the first 8,5 years of operation, the Department examined 3.248 cases of violations of children's rights, met with 382 groups of students and made 112 visits to child care and young offenders' institutions.
- In 2012 the Ombudsman produced and sent to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child a Parallel Report on the implementation of the UN CRC.

Some observations regarding the protection of children from violence and abuse in Greece in recent years

- Legislation has been improved but still it is not sufficiently implemented
- A national system of reporting and recording child abuse and neglect is missing
- Professionals are not well trained and supported to report and record cases of abuse
- Social and mental health services are inadequate
- The judicial system does not sufficiently guarantee the protection of children's rights
- The care system is old-fashioned, placements in foster care are very rare and the review of all placements is very weak.

Positive steps have been made in legislation...

With the contribution of the Ombudsman, a new law was adopted on tackling domestic violence, corporal punishment in the family was clearly prohibited, CRC OPSC and Council of Europe Convention on the protection of children from sexual abuse and exploitation were ratified, the legal framework of child abuse assessment and trial was improved, providing for the involvement of mental health specialists and the possibility to use audiovisual means to record children's testimonies, special legislation was adopted for the protection of victims of trafficking, publication of personal data in child abuse cases was clearly prohibited, etc.

...however, there are serious gaps in implementing child protection

- Children victims fear or feel unsafe to report incidents of domestic or school violence to their teachers. They often claim that they do not have a trusted person outside their family to talk to about their painful experiences and that their opinion is not taken seriously into account
- Educators feel unsure how to handle information on incidents of domestic violence against their pupils or of various forms of bullying
- Schools are not well connected with social and mental health services
- Social services are very weak and as a result the investigation of reports of child abuse may be timely and inadequate
- Children victims may have to give testimonies many times, to different professionals and trials (video recording has not been used yet).
- Different services or agencies dealing with the same cases, often do not collaborate effectively.
- There are not enough foster families or temporary shelters for child victims and as a result children often have to stay in their problematic families or in hospitals.

Violence is increasing, but very few cases are reported to judicial authorities

Many pieces of research show that in recent years incidents of domestic violence and peer bullying have risen.

However, very few cases are reported to judicial authorities.

There is no official data base on violence against children.

The Ombudsman has pointed out the need for the establishment of a **system of reporting and monitoring** of child abuse, along with the adoption of **professionals' protocols** regarding reporting and reference procedures.

The (public) Institute of Child Health has presented a relevant study with specific proposals, which has not been yet adopted by the government.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child included in its concluding observations to Greece (2012) the recommendation that *"the State Party strengthens its mechanism for data collection by establishing a national central database on children and developing indicators consistent with the Convention"*

Requirements for effective prevention and combating of violence against children

- Sufficient legislation
- Awareness of the general public (children and adults)
- Training of professional who are in contact with children to recognise and systematically record and report incidents
- Strengthening the preventive role of schools and their ability to effectively deal with violence at an early stage
- Adequate social and mental health services in local communities, supporting and counselling families at risk or in conflict
- Effective assessment and investigation procedures
- Appropriate placement of the child, if there is a need for removal from home, with consistent rehabilitation and follow up
- Child sensitive judicial proceedings and protection from media exposure
- Networking and interconnection of all protective agencies
- Child abuse register, data collection and monitoring, using proper indicators consistent with the Convention

Two most crucial challenges for child abuse prevention in the modern era of economic crisis

- to empower children participation and consolidate democratic values in the school environment**
- to secure the availability and sustainability of social and mental health services in local communities**



The empowerment of children participation and consolidation of democratic values in the school environment

- Negotiating, adopting and implementing democratic school rules, with the participation of students, teachers and parents
- Building trust relations and a sense of mutual **respect**, mostly needed by children and adolescents
- Involving children in decision making and in activities promoting awareness on children's rights and reporting violations
- Establishing complaints mechanisms
- Improving school climate and promoting attractive group activities and discussions on issues affecting children, according to their age needs
- Training and assisting teachers by specialised professionals
- Establishing conflict resolution procedures and peer mediation activities
- Strengthening the role of local social services in supporting schools to cope with specific violations of children's rights
- Promoting constant collaboration with parents combined with counselling and referrals to community services

Availability and sustainability of social and mental health services in local communities

- Establishment of local networks among all child protection agencies and adoption of protocols for recording and reporting child abuse
- Strengthening social and mental health services of local authorities, supporting or counseling families at risk or in conflict
- Allowing juveniles to contact social and mental health services even without the consent of their parents
- Special assistance to non native speakers and children with disabilities
- Training of all involved professionals in child sensitive procedures
- Linking social services with attractive activities for children and adolescents at local level (on sport, leisure, arts and culture)
- Wider and supervised implementation of foster care, for children that need to be removed from their families
- Regular review of placements in care institutions or foster families

We need to increase focus on prevention!

The UN SRSG on Violence against Children should be emphatically supported to use existing scientific knowledge in order to spread the message for early interventions and the establishment of effective violence prevention strategies and mechanisms in schools and local communities....

Thank you!