

Guide for Trainers Delivering Capacity-Building Programmes for Lawyers on Child-Friendly Justice

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Designing Transformative Training on Child-Friendly Justice: A guide for Trainers Delivering Capacity-Building Programmes for Lawyers on Child-Friendly Justice

Introduction

The FOSTER project addresses a critical gap between the formal recognition of victims' rights within the European Union and their consistent implementation in criminal justice practice, particularly in cases involving child victims. Although Directive 2012/29/EU establishes minimum standards on victims' rights, support and protection, effective implementation depends heavily on the professional competence of those applying the law. The project seeks to embed child-friendly justice principles into professional culture through multi-skills curriculum development, interdisciplinary cooperation and large-scale capacity-building for legal professionals. The development of sustainable training methodologies and guidance tools is central to this objective, ensuring that knowledge transfer translates into long-term systemic change.

Within the architecture of the project, trainers occupy a pivotal position. They function as multipliers: the quality of their pedagogical and substantive choices determines whether EU standards remain abstract principles or become operational practices. This Guide consolidates lessons emerging from the Training Needs Assessment and national training evaluations and provides a structured analytical framework for shaping future programmes. It addresses both content and methodology, recognising that effective implementation of victims' rights depends as much on how training is delivered as on what it contains. It has the ambition to build on the strengths and challenges observed to support future training providers targeting lawyers in contact with child victims.

Contribution to the Implementation of Directive 2012/29/EU and the EU Judicial Training Strategy

Directive 2012/29/EU explicitly requires Member States to ensure that officials likely to come into contact with victims receive appropriate training to guarantee respectful,



sensitive and professional treatment.¹ Article 25 recognises training as a structural component of victims' rights protection.

The EU Judicial Training Strategy further underscores the need for systematic, practice-oriented and competence-based training to ensure uniform application of EU law across Member States.² It emphasises that judicial training must equip professionals not merely with knowledge of legislation but with the ability to apply EU standards effectively in real cases.

This Guide contributes directly to those objectives by articulating a model for training that integrates normative knowledge, empirical research and experiential learning, thereby strengthening the implementation of EU victims' rights obligations.

Reconceptualizing Training: From Information Provision to Professional Transformation

Training on child-friendly justice cannot be reduced to the mere dissemination of legal norms. At the same time, it would be misleading to assume that all participants enter the training space with a solid and up-to-date understanding of the relevant international and EU frameworks. While the FOSTER team observed that many lawyers were generally aware of key instruments such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, this familiarity was often not perceived as deep as needed. In particular, practitioners who completed their legal education some years ago frequently reported limited or outdated knowledge of these instruments and their practical implications. For trainers, this highlights a dual responsibility: to move beyond purely lecture-based delivery, while still ensuring that foundational legal standards are clearly explained, contextualised, and translated into everyday practice. Lecture input, therefore, retains a meaningful—though carefully framed—role as a scaffold for deeper, skills-oriented and reflective learning.

The deeper challenge, however, lies in influencing how professionals interpret procedural discretion, evaluate risk and conceptualise their own responsibility within the justice system.

¹ [Directive 2012/29/EU](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA.

² Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic And Social Committee And the Committee Of the Regions. European Judicial Training Strategy 2025 – 2030: [Creating a supportive environment for DigitalJustice@2030](#), COM(2025) 801 final, 20 November 2025; and Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Ensuring justice in the EU – a [European judicial training strategy for 2021-2024](#), COM/2020/713 final



“A significant challenge in any such training is the potential connection and utilisation of theoretical data in everyday practice.” (FOSTER trainer, Greece)

Effective training should therefore be designed as a process of professional transformation. It should reshape analytical reflexes and cultivate structural vigilance.

As an example, rather than merely explaining Article 22 of the Directive on individual assessment,³ a trainer might present a scenario in which a child victim has undergone multiple interviews without documented assessment. Participants can then analyse the consequences of this omission: increased stress, evidentiary contamination, and potential breach of EU obligations. Through this exercise, participants internalise the Directive as a living standard guiding procedural scrutiny.

Transformation, therefore, occurs when participants begin to ask different questions in their daily practice. It is visible not simply in what they know, but in how they think, frame problems, and define their professional responsibilities. Practitioners who once focused primarily on procedural efficiency may start asking: How will this hearing be experienced by the child? Or begin to consider: What information does this child actually understand at this stage? Others may reflect: Have I created conditions in which the child feels safe enough to speak? These shifts in questioning signal a deeper internalisation of child-friendly justice principles. Rather than mechanically applying legal provisions, practitioners start integrating children’s rights, developmental considerations, and trauma awareness into their routine decision-making. In this sense, transformation is not measured by the ability to recite standards, but by the emergence of a reflexive mindset in which the child’s perspective becomes an integral part of professional reasoning.

Substantive Foundations for Future Training Programmes

Communication and Developmental Literacy as Core Axes

Training evaluations, within the FOSTER project but also in other judicial training initiatives,⁴ consistently highlight communication with children and developmental

³ [Directive 2012/29/EU](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA.

⁴ See for example: CECL. [Reforming Youth Corrections: Comparative report assessing the training needs of prison and probation staff working with convicted children](#), ARISA Child, 6 March 2024; and Kasapi Zoi Anna, Economou Natassa, Karantzali Angelliki. [ChildFront: Training Needs Assessment Report](#), 30 September 2022.



awareness as central learning needs. Communication is not a peripheral skill – it is the mechanism through which rights materialise.

The right of the child to be heard under Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child requires conditions enabling meaningful participation.⁵ General Comment No. 12 clarifies that children must receive information in an accessible manner and be supported in expressing their views.⁶

Training should therefore integrate developmental psychology into legal analysis. For instance, a trainer might illustrate how abstract legal terminology can inadvertently silence a child. Participants can reflect on how the phrase “You are obliged to testify truthfully under penalty of law” may intimidate a 10-year-old, whereas a developmentally adapted explanation preserves legal integrity while reducing fear.

Communication training should not be treated as a single, separate session. Instead, it should run throughout the whole training programme, especially in modules dealing with hearings, questioning, and interaction with clients. Skills such as adjusting language to a child’s age and understanding, responding to emotions, and avoiding actions that may re-traumatise the child need to be practiced repeatedly in different situations. These abilities develop through practice, feedback and reflection over time, rather than through one lecture or a purely theoretical explanation.

This need for sustained and practice-oriented communication training was consistently highlighted by participants across all FOSTER countries. Practitioners openly acknowledged that their initial legal education and subsequent continuous professional training had rarely equipped them with concrete, child-sensitive communication techniques. While many had developed coping strategies through experience, they recognised significant gaps in structured guidance and supervised practice. The strong consensus among participants underscores that communication competence is not an optional soft skill, but a core professional capacity essential to the effective implementation of child-friendly justice standards.

Trauma-Informed Legal Practice as an Analytical Lens

Without appropriate training, lawyers may wrongly interpret fragmented or evolving memories in a child’s testimony as signs of unreliability or lack of credibility. Scientific research demonstrates that trauma affects memory consolidation, emotional expression and behavioural responses.⁷ Children exposed to abuse may present fragmented recall

⁵ United Nations, [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), adopted 20 November 1989

⁶ Committee on the Rights of the Child. [General Comment No. 12 \(2009\) The right of the child to be heard](#), CRC/C/GC/12, 20 July 2009

⁷ Van der Kolk, B. A. (2014). [The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma](#). New York: Viking.



or delayed disclosure.⁸ This was one of the most often discussed matters at the FOSTER trainings which learners recognised as particularly difficult to respond to.

Training should systematically integrate these findings into discussions of credibility and questioning. For example, trainers may present a transcript where a child hesitates when describing an event. Participants can analyse whether hesitation indicates fabrication or trauma-related avoidance.

Trauma-informed training strengthens procedural fairness by aligning legal reasoning with empirical knowledge. It prevents misinterpretation of normal trauma responses as inconsistencies. Importantly, trainers should clarify that trauma-informed reasoning does not reduce evidentiary rigor – it refines it.

Procedural Safeguards as Operational Mechanisms

Directive 2012/29/EU requires authorities to carry out an individual assessment of victims in order to identify whether they need special protection during criminal proceedings.⁹ These safeguards include measures to prevent visual contact with the accused and limit repeated questioning.

Training programmes should therefore focus not only on explaining these rights, but on helping lawyers understand how to activate them in practice. Instead of simply listing legal provisions, training can analyse concrete procedural situations. For example, participants may be asked to consider what a lawyer should do if a child is scheduled to testify in open court without protective arrangements, how a request for protective measures should be formulated, or how arguments based on EU law can be presented effectively before national courts.

One practical exercise used in Bulgaria during the training involved presenting participants with a scenario in which no individual assessment of the child victim had been carried out. Participants were then invited to identify the legal steps a lawyer could take to challenge this omission and request appropriate safeguards. Working through real-life procedural dilemmas in this way helps lawyers see protective measures not as abstract legal provisions, but as practical tools that can be used strategically to protect the child's rights during proceedings.

⁸ London, K., Bruck, M., Ceci, S. J., & Shuman, D. W. (2005). Disclosure of child sexual abuse: What does the research tell us about the ways that children tell? *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 11(1), 194–226. and Dimitriou K, Efthymiou V, Fragkou K, Peyron P-A, Martrille L, Baccino E, Bacopoulou F, Papadodima S. Forensic Perspectives on Child Sexual Abuse Disclosure in Greece: A Retrospective Study. *Pediatric Reports*. 2026; 18(1):12. <https://doi.org/10.3390/pediatric18010012>

⁹ [Directive 2012/29/EU](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA, para 53.



Interdisciplinary Coordination as Structural Safeguard

The Council of Europe's Guidelines on Child-Friendly Justice¹⁰ emphasise coordinated, multidisciplinary systems. Fragmentation between institutions frequently undermines protective intentions.

Training should include analytical discussion of institutional roles and cooperation pathways. For instance, a trainer might describe a case where a child appears in court without psychological support because police and social services failed to coordinate. Participants can explore how earlier communication might have mitigated harm. Thus, lawyers learn to identify coordination gaps in advance, understand when to involve other professionals, and take practical steps, such as contacting support services or raising the issue before the hearing, to ensure that the child receives appropriate preparation and support.

The EU Agency for Fundamental Rights has consistently documented disparities affecting minority and migrant children within European justice systems, highlighting how structural inequalities can undermine equal access to protection and participation.¹¹ Against this background, training must address intersectionality not as an abstract theoretical construct, but as a practical variable that directly shapes how children experience proceedings. Factors such as language barriers, cultural perceptions of authority, disability, care status, or socio-economic marginalisation may significantly influence a child's ability to understand, communicate, and engage effectively with legal processes.

This need was clearly reflected in feedback from FOSTER participants. Many practitioners acknowledged that, while they were familiar with general child-friendly justice principles, they required more specialised guidance on working with particularly vulnerable groups. They referred, for example, to children from ethnic minority or migrant backgrounds who face combined linguistic and cultural barriers; children with disabilities who may require adapted communication techniques and multi-layered support structures; children in institutional or foster care whose legal and life circumstances are often complex; and children experiencing multiple, overlapping vulnerabilities. Participants emphasised that without concrete tools and contextual understanding, the principle of equality risks remaining formal rather than substantive.

One established approach to strengthening professional competence in this area is the development of supplementary or modular training components. Such modules allow participants to deepen their knowledge according to the types of cases they most frequently encounter in practice. By combining a common foundational curriculum with

¹⁰ Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. [Guidelines on Child-Friendly Justice](#), 17 November 2010.

¹¹ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), [Child-Friendly Justice: Perspectives and Experiences of Professionals on Children's Participation in Civil and Criminal Judicial Proceedings in 10 EU Member States](#), 10 June 2015.



specialised add-on modules addressing specific vulnerabilities, training programmes can better reconcile consistency in standards with sensitivity to diverse realities.

Pedagogical Design for Competence Development

Adult learning theory emphasises experiential engagement and reflection as drivers of competence.¹² Training should therefore adopt a case-first approach, beginning with realistic scenarios and deriving legal analysis from them. This structure enhances retention and promotes analytical reasoning grounded in practice.

Multi-Sectoral Training and the “Common Case” Approach

Feedback collected during the FOSTER trainings consistently highlighted one structural challenge: child-friendly justice is expected to function as a coordinated system, yet professionals are typically trained within institutional silos. Lawyers, judges, prosecutors, police officers, psychologists and child protection professionals rarely had structured opportunities to examine how their respective roles intersect in practice. Several participants explicitly noted that misunderstandings about mandates, confidentiality rules or therapeutic objectives often lead to fragmentation — and, at times, to avoidable stress for the child.

This finding reinforces the importance of multi-sectoral training formats in which legal and non-legal professionals work together around a shared case. Rather than focusing exclusively on role-specific skills, such training allows participants to analyse the child’s procedural journey holistically — from disclosure to post-trial support. In the FOSTER sessions where mixed professional groups engaged in case-based exercises, discussions shifted noticeably from individual procedural tasks (“What is my role?”) to systemic reflection (“How does my decision affect the child and other professionals?”). Participants frequently described this as one of the most valuable components of the training experience.

The “common case” methodology proved particularly effective. By working step-by-step through a realistic child victim case, participants identified risks of repeated interviewing, gaps in information-sharing, timing conflicts between therapeutic and evidentiary needs, and practical obstacles to implementing protective measures. Importantly, this method did not aim to erase professional differences. Instead, it made institutional constraints visible and fostered mutual understanding. FOSTER participants repeatedly emphasised

¹² Kolb, D. A. [Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development](#). Prentice-Hall, 1984; and European Judicial Training Network. [EJTN Handbook on Judicial Training Methodology in Europe](#). 2016.



that hearing directly from professionals in other sectors clarified expectations and reduced assumptions about “non-cooperation”.

The relevance of such multi-sectoral formats is strongly supported by the EU standards. Directive 2012/29/EU requires coordinated responses, individual assessment of victims’ protection needs (Article 22), and appropriate training for practitioners (Article 25).¹³ The EU Strategy on Victims’ Rights (2020–2025)¹⁴ further stresses the need for integrated and multidisciplinary support systems. Additionally, the Commission Recommendation (EU) 2024/1238 emphasises the need for national child protection systems to facilitate cross-sectoral cooperation and coordination among authorities and services as a means of putting the best interests of the child at the centre of protection systems, laying a foundation for multisectoral professional development.¹⁵ FOSTER training feedback demonstrates that these policy objectives cannot be fully realised through profession-specific training alone.

For trainers, this implies that at least part of the programme should deliberately bring together different professional groups in structured, case-based dialogue. The pedagogical focus should be on mapping the child’s experience across institutions, identifying systemic friction points, and jointly reflecting on practical coordination mechanisms. Where feasible, co-facilitation by trainers from different professional backgrounds can model the collaborative approach that the training seeks to promote.

“The joint thinking and practical examples during the trainings helped us approach children's situations more sensitively and consciously, and better understand their perspectives. I consider such trainings particularly important because they do not only transfer legal knowledge, but also foster empathy, mindset development, and self-reflection. It was a very inspiring experience to deliver the training for colleagues, exchange experiences, and jointly search for solutions to everyday challenges, which strengthened both team cohesion and our professional confidence. I was pleased to see that participants were open to new approaches and actively contributed to the discussions.” (FOSTER trainer, Hungary)

Learning formats

Beyond structural considerations regarding cooperation across sectors, FOSTER participants also reflected more broadly on the pedagogical approaches that they found most conducive to meaningful professional learning.:

¹³ [Directive 2012/29/EU](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA

¹⁴ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions [EU Strategy on victims' rights \(2020-2025\)](#), COM/2020/258 final.

¹⁵ Commission Recommendation (EU) 2024/1238 of 23 April 2024 [on developing and strengthening integrated child protection systems in the best interests of the child](#), C/2024/2680.



Simulation and Reflective Debriefing

Simulations provide experiential insight, but their transformative potential lies in reflective debriefing. After a mock hearing or client interaction, trainers should facilitate a structured discussion linking observed practices to EU standards and child-friendly principles. The objective is not performance critique but collective refinement of reasoning.

Small-Group Engagement and Psychological Safety

Small-group discussions foster openness and deeper reflection. Particularly when addressing sensitive topics such as sexual abuse, trainers must cultivate an atmosphere of trust and respect. Establishing clear discussion norms, acknowledging emotional responses and allowing space for reflection are essential components of trauma-sensitive facilitation.

Trainer Credibility and Reflexive Leadership

Participants consistently value trainers who combine doctrinal expertise with practical experience. Trainers should share real-world examples illustrating how EU standards operate within institutional constraints. At the same time, trainers must model reflexivity by acknowledging complexity, encouraging dialogue and avoiding dogmatic presentation of solutions.

Evaluation, Sustainability and Systemic Impact

Training impact should be evaluated not solely through participant satisfaction but through demonstrated improvement in competence: ability to identify safeguard gaps, apply trauma-informed reasoning and engage in interdisciplinary coordination. Sustainability may involve follow-up materials, online learning modules and professional networks facilitating continued exchange.

Equal and Regular Access to Specialised Training: Structural Gaps and the Role of Technology

Feedback collected throughout the FOSTER project revealed a structural concern that extends beyond the content of child-friendly justice training: unequal access. Participants across partner countries consistently reported that specialised training opportunities are often project-based, sporadic, and geographically concentrated in major urban centres. Lawyers practicing in smaller cities or rural areas described limited access to continuous professional development in this field, despite regularly representing child victims, witnesses, or defendants. In some cases, participation depended on personal initiative, institutional support, or the ability to travel — factors that may inadvertently create disparities in competence development.

This uneven availability is particularly problematic in light of Article 25 of Directive 2012/29/EU, which calls for appropriate training of practitioners likely to come into contact with victims. The effectiveness of child-friendly justice cannot depend on geographic location or access to externally funded projects. If specialised knowledge



and skills remain confined to professionals who are already well-positioned within larger urban systems, structural inequalities risk being reproduced at the level of service delivery to children.

FOSTER participants repeatedly emphasised the need for regular, institutionalised training opportunities embedded within national professional training frameworks rather than dependent solely on time-limited initiatives. Child-friendly justice standards evolve, jurisprudence develops, and interdisciplinary practices advance. Consequently, training should not be conceived as a one-off exposure, but as an ongoing professional requirement accessible to all lawyers, regardless of region or institutional affiliation.

Information technologies play a crucial role in addressing this gap. Properly designed online training formats can mitigate geographic disparities, reduce cost barriers, and allow flexible participation compatible with professional schedules. Digital platforms also enable repeated engagement with materials, integration of multimedia case simulations, and exposure to comparative perspectives across jurisdictions. Importantly, online learning does not need to replace in-person interactive training; rather, it can function as a foundational layer ensuring that all practitioners have access to core knowledge before engaging in more advanced, practice-oriented modules.

At the same time, FOSTER feedback suggests that digital solutions must be pedagogically robust. Effective online training should incorporate scenario-based exercises, reflective prompts, and practical examples that mirror real-life procedural dilemmas. Where possible, blended models combining online modules with facilitated discussion — either virtual or in-person — may appear particularly promising.

In this context, the online course developed within the FOSTER project represents a potential structural response to the accessibility challenge identified by participants. Offering a standardised, practice-oriented and EU-aligned training resource available beyond the lifespan of project-based activities, it may serve as a foundation upon which national bar associations, judicial training institutions and other professional bodies can build sustainable and equitable training frameworks in child-friendly justice.

Conclusion

Designing transformative training on child-friendly justice requires aligning substantive EU legal obligations with pedagogical approaches that cultivate professional transformation. By centring communication, trauma-informed reasoning, procedural safeguards, interdisciplinary coordination and intersectional awareness—and by delivering content through case-based, reflective methodologies—trainers directly contribute to effective implementation of Directive 2012/29/EU and the objectives of the EU Judicial Training Strategy.



Training, when thoughtfully designed, becomes a structural mechanism for strengthening justice systems and safeguarding the dignity and rights of child victims across the European Union.