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## Ground breaking recommendation for children of imprisoned parents



On 4 April 2018 in Strasbourg the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted a groundbreaking [recommendation](#) concerning children of imprisoned parents.

The impact of a parents' incarceration on a child's life may take effect whenever a child is in contact with representatives of the criminal justice system. In the recommendation a systematic and holistic approach has been developed for these children in order to safeguard a child's healthy development and to promote the child-parent bond, while also benefitting the prison system and society in general. The recommendation provides a logical extension and continuation of the Council of Europe's work on child-friendly justice to guarantee respect for and effective implementation of all children's rights. It is meant to send a strong political message to the national authorities – of 47 member states - with regard to their policy and practice in the field. To be most effective the recommendation considers the rights and needs of children from the point of the parents' arrest, through the criminal justice process, detention and after their parents' release from prison. Their rights and needs must be considered and protected at each stage of the criminal justice process. Thus this recommendation also involves police, the judiciary and other criminal justice agents as well as imprisoned parents themselves. The Council of Europe intends to repeat regular benchmarking among member states to see to what extent the recommendation has helped to bring positive changes to existing practices.

The purpose of the recommendation is to draw attention, raise concern and promote appropriate action by the state and other bodies and foster shifts in the way children with imprisoned parents are seen and treated by individuals and systems, like (social) media. The nongovernmental network [Children of Prisoners Europe \(COPE\)](#) will develop comprehensive illustrated user-friendly guidance for the implementation of the recommendation, providing examples and options in different settings. Together with groups of children the recommendations will be made better understandable for children themselves.

Scientific experts drafting the text of the recommendation and the explanatory report were Kate Philbrick (COPE, Kids VIP, United Kingdom) and Ria Wolleswinkel (Maastricht University, Maastricht Centre for Human Rights). They worked in close cooperation with Liz Ayre, Director of COPE in Paris, and Aisling Parkes, Consultant of the Children's Rights Division of the Council of Europe (Cork University Ireland).