



CHILD

Towards a child-friendly justice

Policy Recommendations

ESTONIA



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Women's Support and
Information Center
There is a way out of violence!

Executive Summary

Estonia has a generally solid legal and institutional framework for supporting child victims and witnesses. Victim support is available regardless of whether criminal proceedings are initiated, the Children's House (Barnahus) provides specialised multidisciplinary support for sexually abused children and children displaying harmful sexual behaviour, and specialised child protection police units operate in all four police prefectures.

The main challenge is not the absence of a framework, but uneven implementation. The CHILD national report and focus group discussions point to gaps in professional competence, practical application of child-friendly procedures, preparation of children for proceedings, inter-agency coordination, access to psychological and trauma-informed support, and disaggregated data on violence against children.

These recommendations therefore focus on practical implementation: clearer roles, stronger multidisciplinary cooperation, consistent training, wider use of video-recorded interviews, better regional access to support services, and improved monitoring of how children's rights are applied in practice.

Recommendations.

National level

1.1. Ensure Consistent Child-Friendly Justice Across Estonia

Justice procedures involving child victims and witnesses should apply child-friendly and trauma-informed principles consistently in all regions and for all forms of violence. Children should receive clear, age-appropriate information about their rights, the role of different professionals, available support and the next procedural steps. Preparation for interviews and court processes should not depend on the individual official, and children should be protected from unnecessary repetition of testimony and secondary victimisation.

1.2. Expand the Use of Video-Recorded Interviews for All Children Under 18

The use of video-recorded interviews should be extended beyond specific crime categories and applied to all child victims and witnesses under 18 whenever this is in the child's best interests. This would reduce repeated questioning and avoid unnecessary court appearances, including in cases where children turn 14 during proceedings. The application of video interviews should be supported by clear protocols, sufficient technical capacity and professionals trained to conduct child-sensitive interviews in complex cases.

1.3. Strengthen Professional Training and Competency Standards

Specialised, practical and continuous training should be required for police officers, prosecutors, judges, victim support specialists, child protection workers, social workers and other professionals who interact with children in legal or protective settings. Training should not be limited to specialised units: non-specialised officials, patrol officers and professionals who only occasionally work with

children also need a basic, practical level of competence. Training should cover child-friendly justice, trauma-informed practice, forensic interviewing, children's rights, communication with children, family dynamics and prevention of secondary victimisation.

1.4. Clarify Roles and Strengthen Case Coordination

A clearer national framework should define the responsibilities of police, prosecution, courts, child protection services, victim support, healthcare, schools and local governments in cases involving child victims. Estonia should strengthen case coordination so that one responsible professional or structure ensures continuity, timely information sharing and follow-up. Cooperation should move from ad hoc professional relationships to agreed referral pathways, communication protocols and clear rules for lawful information sharing between institutions.

1.5. Improve Data Collection and Monitoring

National data collection on violence against children should be strengthened through more systematic disaggregation by age, sex, type of violence, relationship to the perpetrator, procedural stage, use of protective measures, access to support services, number of interviews and duration of proceedings. Data should make it possible to analyse how children move through the justice, child protection and support systems, including whether they receive timely help and whether practices differ between regions. Better data is needed to assess whether children's rights are implemented in practice.

Regional / county level

Estonia does not have regional governments comparable to federal or autonomous systems. In this document, the regional level refers mainly to counties, police prefectures, service regions and regional cooperation networks.

2.1. Ensure Equal Access to Specialised Support Across Regions

Specialised psychological, legal, victim support and child protection services should be accessible in all regions, including smaller towns and rural areas. Particular attention should be given to reducing waiting times for mental health and trauma-informed support, and to ensuring that children and families are referred to the right service without unnecessary delay. Access should not depend on the child's place of residence or the availability of a specialist in one specific municipality.

2.2. Strengthen Regional Multidisciplinary Cooperation

Regional cooperation between police prefectures, the Children's House (Barnahus), child protection services, victim support, schools, healthcare providers and prosecutors should be strengthened through regular case coordination, joint training and clear referral pathways. Cooperation should include both high-risk cases and cases that do not meet MARAC-type thresholds but still require coordinated support. The aim should be a shared understanding of roles, responsibilities and the child's pathway through the system.

2.3. Support Specialist Practice in Smaller Regions

Professionals in smaller regions may handle fewer child-related cases and therefore have fewer opportunities to apply specialised skills. Regional systems should support peer consultation,

supervision and access to national expert guidance. This is especially important for professionals who are expected to work in a child-friendly way but do not have a regular caseload that allows them to maintain practical interviewing or support skills.

Local level

3.1. Strengthen Early Identification and Referral

Schools, youth services, local child protection workers, healthcare services and community services should have clear procedures for identifying children affected by violence and referring them quickly to appropriate support services, including the Children's House where relevant. Local professionals should know when to contact the local government, the child helpline or emergency services, and how to involve victim support or child protection without delaying assistance.

3.2. Prepare Children Better for Proceedings

Frontline professionals should ensure that children and families receive simple, age-appropriate explanations of what will happen during interviews, court hearings and other procedural steps. Children should know who they can turn to, what their rights are, what support is available before, during and after proceedings, and whether they may participate through child-friendly alternatives such as video link where appropriate. Preparation should be practical and repeated when needed, not limited to written information.

3.3. Support Local Professionals and Prevent Burnout

Local child protection workers and other frontline professionals should have access to regular supervision, peer support and practical training. This is necessary to reduce burnout and improve the quality of support for children and families. Supervision and support should also help professionals manage complex family dynamics, parental resistance and the emotional burden of cases involving violence against children.