PENAL REFORM INTERNATIONAL

Protecting Procedural Rights of Children in the Digital Age



DELIVERABLE D4.3

Protecting Children's Procedural Rights in Digitalised Justice Systems

A guide to the pilot solutions tested in Ireland, Romania, Spain and Ukraine

PPRO-Child project

Project 101160525 • JUST-2023-JACC-EJUSTICE

October 2026

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Contents

1. Introduction and purpose 4

2. Shared methodology 5

2.1 The problem 5

2.2 Building blocks of the agreement 5

2.3 Description of the pilot 5

2.4 Monitoring and evaluation of the pilot 5

2.4.1 Enabling factors and barriers encountered 5

2.4.2 What another country needs to keep in mind 6

2.5 Future-looking: what happens next 6

2.5.1 Sustaining the pilot nationally 6

2.6 How this guide is documented 6

3. Ireland 7

3.1 The problem 7

3.2 Building blocks of the agreement 7

3.3 Description of the pilot 8

3.4 Monitoring and evaluation of the pilot 9

3.4.1 Enabling factors and barriers encountered 10

3.4.2 What another country needs to keep in mind 11

3.5 Future-looking: what happens next 11

3.5.1 Sustaining the pilot nationally 12

4. Romania 14

4.1 The problem 14

4.2 Building blocks of the agreement 15

4.3 Description of the pilot 16

4.4 Monitoring and evaluation of the pilot 17

4.4.1 Enabling factors and barriers encountered 17

4.4.2 What another country needs to keep in mind 18

4.5 Future-looking: what happens next 18

4.5.1 Sustaining the pilot nationally 18

5. Spain 19

5.1 The problem 19

5.2 Building blocks of the agreement 19

5.3 Description of the pilot 19

5.4 Monitoring and evaluation of the pilot 20

5.4.1 Enabling factors and barriers encountered 20

5.4.2 What another country needs to keep in mind 21

5.5 Future-looking: what happens next 21

5.5.1 Sustaining the pilot nationally 21

6. Ukraine 22

6.1 The problem 22

6.2 Building blocks of the agreement 23

6.3 Description of the pilot 24
6.4 Monitoring and evaluation of the pilot 25
6.4.1 Enabling factors and barriers encountered 26
6.4.2 What another country needs to keep in mind 26
6.5 Future-looking: what happens next 27
6.5.1 Sustaining the pilot nationally 28
7. Final chapter — recommendations 29
7.1 Compare our learnings 29
7.2 Key recommendations from partners 30
8. Closing note, glossary and where to find more 32
Glossary 32

1. Introduction and purpose

This guide explains how four criminal justice systems — Ireland, Romania, Spain and Ukraine — developed and tested practical solutions to protect children's procedural rights as digital tools, and remote hearings in particular, became part of everyday criminal proceedings. It is written for the people who will decide whether to adopt a similar solution elsewhere: ministries of justice and digital-transformation authorities, court administrators, detention and child-protection institutions, and the legal and child-rights professionals who work directly with children in the justice system.

This guide sits alongside two earlier outputs of the PPRO-Child project: a cross-country research report on children's experience of remote hearings in the four countries[1], and a ten-point plan[2] setting out the principles a digitalising justice system should respect. It is also accompanied by the project's policy briefing[3] for the European Union and the Council of Europe, which sets out the standards these pilots aim to put into practice, as well as a set of guidelines on remote hearings for children[4].

[1] Upholding children's rights in remote hearings in child justice systems: Lessons from four jurisdictions (Ireland, Romania, Spain, Ukraine) - Penal Reform International

[2] PRI_10-point-plan_-PPRO-Child-Protecting-the-procedural-rights-of-children-in-the-digitalisation-of-justice_EN.pdf

[3] Penal Reform International, Foussard, C. & Pérez Cruz, M. (2026). *Children in Digital and Digitalised Justice: Protecting Procedural Rights from Digital Offences to Remote Hearings. A Policy Briefing for the European Union and the Council of Europe.*

[4] A set of guidelines on remote hearings for children_PPROCHILD_PRI_EN

2. Shared methodology

The four pilot solutions presented in this guide did not emerge in isolation. Each one followed the same path: a national needs assessment and stakeholder roundtable identified where children's procedural rights were most at risk from digitalisation; the project's ten-point plan set out the principles a solution would need to respect; and a co-design process — involving national authorities, justice professionals and children themselves, through the project's Child Advisory Boards — turned those principles into something a specific institution could implement, train its staff on, and test.

To make the four country chapters comparable, each one is organised around the same five elements, described below.

2.1 The problem

Each pilot began with a specific, evidenced problem rather than a general ambition to "digitalise". This sub-section names the precise risk to children's procedural rights that the pilot was designed to reduce — for example, a lack of confidential legal consultation during a remote hearing, or a hearing setting that does not allow a child to see and be seen properly — and explains how that risk was identified, drawing on the national needs assessment and the national roundtable held earlier in the project.

2.2 Building blocks of the agreement

A pilot is only as strong as the institution hosting it. This sub-section explains why a particular court, detention facility or authority was chosen as the site for the pilot, what made it well placed to test the solution — an existing digitalisation programme, a champion inside the institution, or its representativeness of wider national practice — and what formal agreement or understanding was put in place before the pilot began.

2.3 Description of the pilot

This is the core of each chapter: a step-by-step account of what the pilot solution actually is. It describes the process, tool or protocol that was introduced, how it changes what happens before, during or after a remote hearing (or other digitalised step) involving a child, and how children themselves — through the national Child Advisory Board — helped shape the solution during co-design.

2.4 Monitoring and evaluation of the pilot

Every pilot is monitored and evaluated against a common set of questions: did children's procedural rights come under less risk once the solution was in place; what did children and professionals who experienced it say; and where did the evidence remain thin or inconclusive. This guide reports those findings honestly, including where a pilot's impact was partial or where the evaluation could not yet answer a question fully.

2.4.1 Enabling factors and barriers encountered

Alongside the outcome itself, each chapter names what made the pilot possible to run at all — political will, an existing piece of digital infrastructure, a specific person who championed it inside the institution — and what got in the way, whether that was budget, legal ambiguity, staff turnover or data-protection concerns. Both are as useful to a country considering the same solution as the headline result.

2.4.2 What another country needs to keep in mind

Because every country's laws, institutions and resources differ, this sub-section sets out, plainly, what a team elsewhere should check or adapt before attempting the same solution — not a general disclaimer, but the specific conditions that made this pilot work where it was tested.

2.5 Future-looking: what happens next

A pilot that ends when the project ends has limited value. This sub-section sets out what happens to the solution now that it has been tested: how it should be used going forward, and — where the pilot's own evidence pointed to a different or improved approach — what the team would recommend changing next time.

2.5.1 Sustaining the pilot nationally

Because this guide is written for national audiences, each chapter ends by asking what needs to happen inside that country for the solution to outlast the project: is it already connected to an ongoing national reform, and if not, what decision or investment would be needed to keep it running.

2.6 How this guide is documented

This guide describes and evaluates each pilot solution in narrative form; it does not append the full pilot files — workshop records, training curricula, memoranda of understanding — as annexes. This is partly a question of length, and partly because at least one pilot (Ukraine) exists as a set of separate documents that cannot practically be attached as a single annex.

The evaluation of each pilot, described in section 4 of every country chapter, is read against a shared yardstick across all four countries: whether the risk of a breach of procedural safeguards was reduced, whether children were able to participate meaningfully, whether the solution avoided introducing new discrimination or inequality of access, and whether it is realistic for the institution to sustain, in terms of cost and staff capacity.

3. Ireland

Ireland at a glance	
Problem addressed	Children's rights in remote hearings depended on individual goodwill: no defined steps, roles or responsibilities; children rarely spoke to their solicitor before or during the hearing and could not always see or hear the courtroom.
Solution piloted	The Remote Court Hearings (Videolink) Procedure at Oberstown Children Detention Campus, setting out what staff do before, during and after a hearing, with a judicial checklist on child-friendly communication.
Headline finding	The procedure was formally adopted into Oberstown's governance and approved twice; the President of the District Court committed to the judicial checklist; effects on children in live hearings will be shown by Oberstown's own monitoring.

3.1 The problem

The Irish Rapid Needs Assessment (RNA), carried out at Oberstown Children Detention Campus and including consultation with young people with direct experience of remote hearings, identified several risks in how remote hearings were being used with children in Ireland. These findings were presented to and discussed with national stakeholders at the national roundtable on 20–21 October 2025, and with young people during one of their Child Advisory Board meetings.

Findings indicated that children's procedural rights in remote hearings in Ireland depended largely on chance. The RNA found that positive experiences relied on individual judges or solicitors who chose to communicate clearly and involve the child. Where that did not happen, nothing in the system made up for it. With no defined steps, roles or responsibilities, the safeguards that should frame a hearing were applied unevenly or not at all. For example, the RNA found that children rarely spoke to their solicitor before or during a remote hearing, which seriously limited their understanding and decision-making and raised due process concerns. During the hearing, children described feeling disconnected and confused, not knowing who was in the courtroom, when to speak or what was happening.

This lack of any consistent standard is what the pilot was designed to address. The Children's Advisory Group confirmed this picture. Young people wanted to see who was in the courtroom, to speak to their solicitor in private, and to have an adult advocate. Above all, they wanted judges to speak in language they understand and to check that they had understood.

A Standard Operating Procedure responds directly to this gap. It turns safeguards that currently depend on individual goodwill into defined, routine steps with named responsibilities across the before, during and after stages, focusing on the roles Oberstown can control, and how they can encourage other practitioners when possible.

3.2 Building blocks of the agreement

The pilot was hosted by Oberstown Children Detention Campus in Lusk, Co. Dublin, Ireland's national detention facility for children. Penal Reform International (PRI) has worked with Oberstown on previous EU-funded projects, so this partnership has been years in the making. Because all remote hearings involving

children suspected or accused of a crime in Ireland take place from Oberstown's campus, working with Oberstown offered the greatest potential for national impact. The partnership was formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between PRI and Oberstown. At Oberstown, PRI worked in close cooperation with the Visits team, who organises all remote hearings at Oberstown, as well as the Advocacy Officer and Care Staff who helped ensure the procedure reflected the needs of the young people, as well as the staff. The procedure was reviewed by Oberstown's Procedures Oversight Committee, and signed by Director, Damien Hernon.

The pilot was also built on engagement with a wide range of stakeholders across the Irish child justice system. Through the RNA, national roundtable and co-design workshops, actors from the Probation Service, the Department of Children, Disability, Equality, Integration and Youth (DCDE), the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, the District Court, the Bar of Ireland, Irish Penal Reform Trust and others were brought together to help shape this pilot.

3.3 Description of the pilot

The pilot introduced the Remote Court Hearings (Videolink) Procedure (Ref. YP-038-PR), a formal Oberstown procedure. The Board of Management oversees its implementation, and the Director is responsible for ensuring compliance. The procedure responds to evidence that remote hearings can undermine a child's effective participation and fair trial rights where safeguards are absent or applied inconsistently. It puts into practice Rule 7 of Oberstown's Children's Rights Policy Framework on participation, and the campus's CEHOP approach to care (Care, Education, Health, Offending behaviour, and Preparation for leaving). It is grounded in Articles 3, 12 and 40 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 24, and the Children Act 2001.

The procedure was developed over two co-design workshops and sets out what should happen before, during and after a remote hearing. For the pilot phase, Oberstown's senior management asked that responsibilities be assigned broadly to the Visits Team and to unit staff, not to specific staff grades. Roles will be assigned to specific grades after an initial internal review, once it is clear how the procedure works in practice.

Before the hearing. Unit staff prepare the child between seven and two days before the hearing. They explain the date and purpose of the hearing, what will happen, and the child's rights in child-friendly language: the right to speak, to ask questions, to consult their solicitor at any time, to choose to appear in person, and to interpretation. Preparation must explicitly give the child space to raise concerns or say that they do not want to proceed remotely. Child-friendly supports include a glossary of legal terms and verbal explanations of the process and possible outcomes. Where an interpreter is needed, the court arranges one, and they are present in the physical courtroom. The child is encouraged to consult their solicitor privately in the seven days before the hearing. If this has not happened two days before, the Site or Unit Manager encourages the child again, and the child is told they can speak to their solicitor privately immediately before the hearing. The Visits Team notifies the court of the hearing and booth details, flags any information that may affect how the hearing runs (for example, if a child is neurodivergent and finds it hard to stay seated), and gives the court the completed judicial brief at the morning test dial. The court must dial in first and be live for at least five minutes before the child enters the booth, so that waiting and anxiety are kept to a minimum.

During the hearing. The child must be able to hear the proceedings clearly, including the interpreter where one is provided, and to see the judge and, where technically possible, the whole courtroom. The Visits Team reports any technical problems to the Courts Service. Where feasible, a member of staff is present in the courtroom to advocate for the child. For the member of staff that is in the remote hearing room with the

young person, they should tell the court if the child cannot hear or is having other difficulties, and ask for a brief summary of the outcome, such as next dates, if the judge or solicitor has not given one. A judicial checklist, set out in an annex because the SOP is an Oberstown procedure, describes how the judge greets the child, introduces everyone in the courtroom, explains the hearing in child-friendly language, and checks the child's understanding throughout. The President of the District Court helped deisgn the judicial checklist, and approval was obtained for the checklist to be included as an annex.

After the hearing. When the screen goes blank, the child is offered time in a calming space before leaving the booth. Staff who have completed the court familiarisation workshop should debrief the child if possible. They explain the outcome, what it means and what happens next, and ask the child to explain it back in their own words. Visual tools such as emotion scales can be used to support children with communication needs, and staff consider whether a complaint should be raised based on any of the events that occurred during the hearing. The child is helped to speak privately with their solicitor, and if the solicitor has not made contact within 24 hours, staff encourage it. Outcomes and legal consultations are recorded on the case management system. The Advocacy Officer regularly reviews children's understanding, procedural fairness, technical adequacy, and whether the remote format was suitable. A feedback loop runs at three levels: individual (Unit Manager), institutional (Manager of Services and Integration) and national (Director and Board of Management). The judiciary has committed to receiving feedback from Oberstown.

Young people's input shaped the procedure throughout, and several sections cite their testimony directly. The judicial checklist reflects the two changes the Children's Advisory Group all agreed on: that judges speak in language children understand, and check that they have understood. Their emphasis on hearing and seeing the whole courtroom, private access to a solicitor, an adult advocate, and a structured debrief is built into each stage of the procedure. Some solicitor-related elements, such as legal follow-up, cannot be enforced because the pilot runs within Oberstown and not with legal practitioners, so they are framed as actions Oberstown staff take to encourage and facilitate contact.

3.4 Monitoring and evaluation of the pilot

The pilot was monitored and evaluated in line with the shared framework in Chapter 2. In Ireland, the most significant result is not short-term data from live hearings but the fact that the procedure is now formally part of Oberstown's governance. This shaped both what the monitoring and evaluation could measure within the project's lifetime and how the procedure will continue to be monitored after the project ends.

The project chose from the start to build the procedure into Oberstown's own governance structures instead of running it as a standalone project tool. Every new or revised procedure at Oberstown must go through internal review and formal approval before it can be adopted, and this process took longer than expected. The project originally planned a three-month piloting period, and a two-month extension was approved to allow more time. Even so, there was little time between final approval by all relevant authorities and the end of the project. As a result, monitoring and evaluation during the project focused mainly on implementation readiness: making sure staff and management knew the procedure, understood their responsibilities, and were prepared to apply it.

The implementation training with Oberstown's senior managers on 10 September 2026 was central to this. The training was designed to work through how the procedure would operate in practice and to anticipate problems. Managers responded positively to the background and purpose of the procedure. The training also brought several practical issues to light:

- Managers found that assigning responsibilities to specific grades would make the procedure hard to run, because it moved between roles in ways that did not match how work is organised on the units,

and it left out a relevant supervisory grade. They asked that responsibilities be assigned to unit staff or the Visits Team for the pilot phase, with specific grades assigned after an initial internal review.

- The draft made the Visits Team responsible for making sure interpreters were present. This was not workable, because interpreters are only ever in the physical courtroom. The procedure was amended to make clear that interpreters are arranged by and provided in the court.
- Managers agreed that all staff, including managers, needed court familiarisation training before the procedure could be implemented. A staff glossary of legal terms was compiled for this purpose, and two online half-day sessions were proposed so that as many staff as possible could attend. While these additional trainings will likely be finalised after the project ends, it was excellent that subsequent training needs were identified and that steps are being taken to address this need.

These issues would otherwise have emerged during piloting. Resolving them beforehand means implementation will be smoother and more realistic. Because of the changes, the procedure had to go back through Oberstown's internal approval process and was approved for a second time in late October 2026.

Although these revision and approval rounds shortened the piloting window, they are also what make the procedure durable. It is not a project document that ends when the funding ends. It is an official Oberstown procedure, with an owner, a Board of Management responsible for overseeing its implementation, a Director accountable for compliance, and a scheduled review date as updated.

Its monitoring mechanisms are written into the procedure itself. Outcomes and legal consultations are recorded on the case management system. The Advocacy Officer regularly reviews children's understanding, procedural fairness, technical adequacy and whether the remote format was suitable. And feedback runs at individual, institutional and national levels, with the judiciary committed to receiving Oberstown's findings. The agreed internal review of roles after the initial phase also builds further revision into the procedure's design. The evaluation of children's experience of remote hearings will therefore continue, and the procedure can be adjusted in response, well after the project has closed.

Within the project's lifetime, the strongest evidence comes from the design and pre-implementation stages: agreement among stakeholders, formal adoption into Oberstown's governance, and the practical problems identified and resolved through staff training. Evidence on whether the procedure improves children's understanding, participation and access to legal advice in practice remains inconclusive for now. It will be generated through Oberstown's own monitoring and review processes once the procedure is in routine use.

3.4.1 Enabling factors and barriers encountered

Several factors made the pilot possible. The project had a strong existing relationship with Oberstown, built through previous EU-funded work and formalised through an MoU, which gave the procedure a direct route into the campus's governance structures. Because all remote hearings involving detained children in Ireland take place from Oberstown, a single procedure can reach every child in that situation. Oberstown staff across the Visits Team, care and advocacy roles took part in the co-design process, and senior management engaged constructively with the procedure during implementation training. The President of the District Court championed the work within the judiciary, committing to implement the judicial checklist when the District Court sits as the Children Court, to support judicial training on communicating with children, and to receive feedback from Oberstown. The co-design process also brought in outside expertise at no cost to the project. DLR Group joined the workshop and provided pro bono support, and its team produced a design plan and information pack for redesigning the remote hearing rooms, which is now with the Office of Public Works. The Children's Advisory Group gave clear, concrete guidance, including a good-practice example from within the Irish system, which showed that the safeguards being proposed were achievable. HIQA's participation in the co-design process connected the procedure to the national inspection framework.

The main barrier was time. Oberstown's internal review and approval process is what makes the procedure lasting, but it took much longer than the project timeline allowed, and the second approval round after staff training shortened the piloting window further. Staff readiness was a second barrier. Managers stressed that their teams needed court familiarisation training before taking on new responsibilities, but there was no internal lead to organise it before the discussion took place. Assigning roles also proved difficult for an external project to get right, because the original role designations did not match how work is organised on the units.

Participants also identified barriers outside the pilot's control. Notice periods for hearings are very short and variable. Judges have discretion over hearing format. Few solicitors specialise in child justice, and solicitors do not always meet with young people before their hearing or after. Post-hearing consultation is not part of current practice. Because the procedure governs Oberstown's own practice, it cannot require action from solicitors, interpreters or the Courts Service, so several safeguards depend on goodwill and cooperation from outside the institution.

3.4.2 What another country needs to keep in mind

Another country should first check how centralised its detention system is. Much of this pilot's reach comes from Ireland having a single national detention facility from which all remote hearings involving suspected or accused children take place. Where children are held across several facilities or regions, the procedure would need to be adopted at each site or through a national authority.

Second, a country should identify an institution with the formal authority to adopt the procedure as part of its own governance, and plan for the time that takes. In Ireland, embedding the procedure in Oberstown's governance made it sustainable, but it also took up most of the time set aside for piloting. Projects should map the approval process at the outset and allow for more than one round of revision.

Third, responsibilities should be designed with the host institution's management, not for them. Roles that look logical on paper may not match how staff actually work. Assigning broad responsibilities first, and refining them after an initial review, proved more workable in Ireland.

Fourth, staff need training before implementation. Staff who explain proceedings and outcomes to children must themselves understand court processes, so court familiarisation training, with a clear internal lead responsible for it, should come before the procedure is rolled out.

Finally, a country should check the practical infrastructure: whether there is a dedicated, private hearing room; whether the technology lets the child see and hear the whole courtroom; where interpreters sit and who arranges them; whether staff can take on the advocacy and debrief roles; and how children can reach legal aid lawyers for private consultation before and after hearings.

If we were designing this again, we would plan around the institutional approval process from the beginning. That means mapping Oberstown's review stages at the outset and allowing for more than one round of approval. We would share drafts and supporting documents with senior management earlier and involve them in assigning roles, since managers had not seen the procedure before the implementation training. We would also encourage court familiarisation training for staff before implementation training, and agree an internal lead for it. Finally, we would try to involve legal practitioners and the Courts Service formally, so that the safeguards that depend on them could be built into the pilot and not only encouraged.

3.5 Future-looking: what happens next

The procedure has been formally adopted at Oberstown and should continue as standard practice. Because the project's piloting window was too short to show its full effect on children's experience, it should also

continue to be tested. Oberstown's own monitoring should be used to gather evidence from live hearings and to adjust the procedure, starting with the agreed internal review of roles. The two solutions developed alongside the procedure have also progressed, and both should continue to be taken forward, since they tackle problems the procedure cannot solve alone: the physical environment children are heard in, and how judges communicate with them. For the room redesign, DLR Group provided pro bono support and produced a design plan and information pack for Oberstown, which is now with the Office of Public Works. For judicial training, the President of the District Court has committed to supporting a Lunchtime Learning session on communicating with children in remote hearings.

3.5.1 Sustaining the pilot nationally

The Irish pilot is built to outlive the project. The Remote Court Hearings (Videolink) Procedure is not a project tool that ends when funding ends. It is an official Oberstown procedure, adopted through the campus's formal governance process and approved twice by its internal boards. It will stay in force after the PPRO-Child project closes, and it will continue to shape how every child detained at Oberstown is prepared for, supported through and debriefed after a remote hearing.

Its place in Oberstown's governance gives it the same standing and accountability as any other campus procedure. Staff are expected to follow it as part of their everyday work, not as an optional project activity. Because Oberstown's implementation of its procedures is monitored by HIQA, the procedure also falls within the national inspection framework for children's detention in Ireland.

The procedure's own monitoring mechanisms mean that learning will continue after the project ends. Outcomes and legal consultations are recorded on the case management system. The Advocacy Officer regularly reviews children's understanding, procedural fairness, technical adequacy and whether the remote format was suitable. Feedback flows at individual, institutional and national levels, through the Unit Manager, the Manager of Services and Integration, and the Director and Board of Management. The agreed internal review of roles after the initial phase, together with the scheduled formal review, means the procedure is designed to be improved over time. The evidence that the project's short piloting window could not produce will therefore be gathered through Oberstown's own systems, and used to strengthen the procedure as it beds in.

Beyond Oberstown, the work has created lasting commitments within the wider justice system. The President of the District Court committed to using the judicial checklist when the District Court sits as the Children Court, to receiving feedback from Oberstown on implementation, and to supporting a Lunchtime Learning session on communicating with children in remote hearings. This creates an ongoing channel through which children's experience at Oberstown can inform judicial practice.

The redesign of the remote hearing room has also moved well beyond the project's original scope. DLR Group provided pro bono support, joining the co-design workshop online, and its team then produced a design plan and information pack for Oberstown on redesigning the remote hearing rooms. This reflects the priorities children and stakeholders identified: a less sterile and constricted space, better sight lines to the courtroom, improved acoustics and sensory considerations, and a calming space nearby. The plan is now with the Office of Public Works for consideration. Because it has been handed over to the body responsible for the works, the redesign can go ahead independently of project funding and after the project has closed.

Several steps would build on this foundation. Within Oberstown, court familiarisation training should be delivered to all relevant staff using the staff glossary already compiled. At national level, the Courts Service would need to address the technical problems children raised, particularly audio quality and being able to see the whole courtroom. DCDE and the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration could also draw on the procedure as a model for national guidance on remote hearings involving children.

Taken together, this means the project leaves behind a working, accountable procedure inside the institution where every remote hearing for a detained child in Ireland takes place, with built-in ways to keep learning and improving long after the project has ended.

4. Romania

Between 600 and 650 children go through Romania's criminal justice system each year, around 45% of them under police arrest or in pre-trial detention, and 90% of children convicted are boys. Romanian authorities have identified a lack of child-friendly hearing rooms, limited specific training for criminal justice professionals, and inconsistent legal representation as recurring barriers to procedural safeguards; only one in five children believes their rights are respected during proceedings. Romania moved quickly to online courts during the pandemic, which surfaced confidentiality problems when lawyers used virtual hearings with child clients, and in June 2023 the Ministry of Justice and the World Bank agreed a seven-year programme to digitalise the courts — a programme that, at the time the project began, did not yet include a child-rights-based approach.

Romania at a glance	
Problem addressed	No common procedure for hearing children remotely: children are often uninformed and unprepared, cannot speak to their lawyer in private, have no trusted adult beside them and face poor technical conditions.
Solution piloted	A Standard Operating Procedure for remote hearings of minors (before, during and after the hearing), co-designed with judges, prosecutors, police, child protection and NGOs, reviewed by the Child Advisory Board, and supported by a training curriculum and a checklist for judges and prosecutors; 20 professionals trained.
Headline finding	Strong professional and institutional buy-in, with a route into magistrates' training through the INM; the effect on children in real hearings remains to be evaluated.

4.1 The problem

Remote hearings have become a routine part of Romanian criminal proceedings involving children, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and now by the national digitalisation of justice. To understand what this means for children, Terre des hommes Romania commissioned a Rapid Needs Assessment (RNA) in spring 2025. A lawyer spoke with four young people who had faced trial as minors — two still in a detention and educational centre and two who had completed their measure — and with ten professionals, and ran a focus group with ten minors and young people in detention. The results were tested at the national roundtable "Towards a Digitalised Justice" in Bucharest on 16–17 June 2025, where 49 participants from the courts, prosecution, police, child protection, education, health and civil society, including UNICEF, endorsed them.

For the young people, the screen took something away from the hearing. They called it cold, hurried and frightening. They often could not hear properly or saw only their lawyer, they rarely had a moment alone with their lawyer, and other people were frequently in the room with them. What they were told about their rights depended on who happened to be dealing with them. In their own words:

"In the online I heard absolutely nothing."

"No one tells you what the procedure is in court."

"Let the lawyer privately talk to the people."

"They won't let me express everything that's in my heart."

They did not reject remote hearings outright. Some found it easier to stay calm and speak openly from a familiar place, without the journey to court, and several asked simply to be allowed to choose: “I think it would be somewhat of a plus for the young people concerned if they had a choice.”

The professionals explained why experiences varied so much. Equipment differs from one court, prosecutor's office, detention centre or child protection service to another; many places have no quiet, safe room for a child to connect from; few professionals have been trained to question a child through a screen; and, above all, there is no national rule on when and how a child should be heard remotely. Videoconferencing is sometimes chosen for administrative convenience rather than in the child's interest. This was the precise risk the Romanian pilot targeted: in the absence of a common procedure, the safeguards a child is entitled to in the courtroom do not reliably follow the child onto the screen. The roundtable called for national standards for children's participation, tools and checklists for professionals, protocols for confidential legal assistance and continuous training. The pilot answered these calls with a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for remote hearings of minors.

4.2 Building blocks of the agreement

Rather than working with a single host institution, the Romanian team built the pilot on a network of the professionals who meet a child at each step of the criminal process, held together by the institutions that train the judiciary. Its driving force was a judge of the Bucharest Court of Appeal who also trains magistrates at the National Institute of Magistracy (INM) and who facilitated the whole co-design process. Alongside her were INM trainers, police officers from the General Inspectorate of the Romanian Police (IGPR), prosecutors, lawyers, psychologists and social workers from the child protection directorates (DGASPC) of Dolj and Olt counties, the National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption (ANPDCA) and NGOs.

This network was a good fit for four reasons:

- It spans the full path a child may take — police station, prosecutor's office, court, child protection and defence — so one procedure can serve every setting where a child is heard remotely, whether as a victim, a witness or a suspect.
- The INM gives it a direct channel into the initial and continuing training of judges and prosecutors, the most practical lever for changing behaviour while no specific law exists.
- It meets an agenda the State is already pursuing: the Ministry of Justice's digitalisation programme (including ECRIS V and the “Digitizing the judicial system” investment under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan) and the 51 child-friendly hearing rooms already operating in prosecutor's offices, courts and DIICOT units.
- It builds on fresh legal ground. Laws 51/2023 and 217/2023 made audio-video recording compulsory when minor victims are heard, required a psychologist for victims under 14, closed hearings to the public in cases of violence, trafficking and sexual abuse, and allowed victims with special protection needs to be heard by videoconference from where they are.

Children were part of the agreement from the start through the Child Advisory Board (CAB) established in March 2025 at the Craiova Detention Centre. Terre des hommes Romania has run advisory boards in detention settings for around seven years. Out of some 26 young people who applied, ten were chosen — four girls and six boys aged 16 to 20 — and they met regularly throughout the project.

4.3 Description of the pilot

The SOP sets out, step by step, how a child should be heard remotely in criminal proceedings, whether the child is a victim, a witness or a suspect, and whether the hearing is run by the police, a prosecutor or a judge. Its starting point is that a remote hearing is not a single moment of connection but a process that begins with the decision on the format and ends only when the child has been supported afterwards. It was built in stages:

- 12 March 2026, Bucharest: 23 judges, prosecutors, social workers, psychologists and NGO staff heard the RNA findings, explored the communication barriers children face, and worked in rotating groups on seven themes — principles, preparation, technology, roles, conduct, digital protection and aftercare.
- 9 April 2026, online: 12 specialists merged the group proposals into a single draft.
- Review by the Child Advisory Board: the young people examined the draft SOP and their comments were reflected in the final version.
- 26 June 2026, Bucharest: 20 specialists from the INM, the IGPR, the DGASPC of Dolj and Olt, ANPDCA, the bar and Terre des hommes were trained on the finished procedure.

Before any remote hearing, the SOP asks professionals to decide deliberately whether the format suits this particular child. They weigh eight questions: how serious the hearing is (pleas, sentencing, contested facts and detention decisions should, as a rule, take place in person); whether the child can genuinely follow, speak, ask questions and talk to a lawyer privately; the child's age and development; any neurodivergence or communication needs; whether the place the child connects from could re-traumatise or reassure them; whether a proper device, a stable connection and a private room are available; how confident the child is with the technology; and whether a remote hearing would deepen existing disadvantage, for instance for children in rural areas or who need an interpreter. The reasons for the decision, including the child's own view, are written down so that they can be challenged.

The procedure also names warning signs that should stop or change a remote hearing: a child who is afraid of the format or prefers to attend in person and is overruled for convenience; a child who does not understand what will happen; someone in the room who could pressure the child; a connection too poor for a confidential conversation with the lawyer; unassessed communication needs; or signs that the setting is increasing the child's distress. A professional who sees one of these is expected to record it, raise it with the court or the child's representative, propose an alternative and, if necessary, escalate.

Once the decision is made, the SOP follows the child through three phases:

- Preparation: the child's consent to a remote hearing and to its recording is obtained and recorded; where possible the child is told the date and purpose at least five days ahead and receives a plain-language glossary of legal terms; the child meets the psychologist and, if they wish, a trusted person; the judge or prosecutor receives a short note on the child's needs; and every connection point is tested in advance, with the child given a chance to try the platform.
- The hearing: the court or office is online and visible at least five minutes before the child joins; everyone present, including those off-screen, is introduced; questions are open, the child's account is not interrupted and breaks are offered regularly; a child victim does not see or get seen by the alleged offender; and at the end the judge explains what happens next and stays on screen until the child has left.
- Aftercare: a support professional stays with the child for a first debrief; the child receives a simple explanation of the outcome; the legal representative contacts the child within 48 hours; and the recording is stored securely and entered in a single register.

Underneath these steps sit three commitments that the co-design groups considered non-negotiable: the child is told that remote participation is an option and gives consent; a psychologist or legal specialist

supports the child throughout; and a single, secure platform lets the lawyer, the psychologist and a trusted person connect at the same time as the child.

To help professionals apply the SOP, the team produced two companion tools. The first is a multidisciplinary training curriculum (June 2026), designed for judges, prosecutors, police, lawyers, psychologists, social workers, interpreters, IT staff and detention personnel to learn together. It runs over 14 modules and 44–52 hours, from the legal framework and child development to technical standards, trauma-informed and gender-sensitive practice, and data protection. Participants practise on realistic scenarios — including a planned technical failure — with a trainer always playing the child. The second is a two-page checklist for judges and prosecutors (September 2026) that condenses the procedure for use on the day, including what to do if the connection breaks.

Children's voices shaped the SOP twice: first through the RNA and the CAB discussions that defined the problem, and then through the CAB's review of the draft. What they asked for — a real choice of format, a private conversation with their lawyer, a trusted adult beside them and clear explanations of what is happening — is now written into the procedure as consent, confidential legal consultation, continuous support and information duties.

4.4 Monitoring and evaluation of the pilot

Monitoring covered the co-design, the children's review and the training. Across three main events, 55 places were taken by professionals from the judiciary, the police, child protection and the bar, and participants rated each event through the project's standard surveys. The institutions involved — the INM, the police, the DGASPC and ANPDCA — committed to carrying the procedure into their own practice, and the CAB's review gave a first check that the SOP responds to what children had asked for.

The SOP's effect on children's experience of real hearings cannot yet be judged, and the evidence on this remains inconclusive. The curriculum therefore builds in its own evaluation. It assesses training at four levels — how participants rated it, what they learnt (tested before and after), whether they apply it (observed at work and through a review of case files three to six months later) and what changes for children (fewer repeat hearings, fewer technical incidents, feedback from children and families). It also asks institutions to collect feedback at three levels: the child's reflections immediately after each hearing, recurring issues discussed within each court or prosecutor's office, and periodic national summaries to inform policy. Courts and prosecutor's offices are encouraged to record how many hearings take place remotely, for which children and with what technical problems, and to revise the SOP each year in the light of children's experience.

4.4.1 Enabling factors and barriers encountered

What made the pilot possible:

- A respected judge and INM trainer leading the process gave the SOP credibility among magistrates and a natural home in judicial training.
- Professionals from every link of the chain worked on one text, so the procedure fits the police station as well as the courtroom.
- The national digitalisation drive, the 2023 legal reforms and the existing child-friendly hearing rooms made the subject urgent and concrete.
- Terre des hommes Romania's long experience with children in detention allowed young people to take part meaningfully, from describing the problem to reviewing the draft.

What made it harder:

- Technical conditions vary widely, and the SOP's demand for a single secure platform depends on decisions taken outside the project.
- The SOP is not yet backed by a binding legal act, so its use rests on the goodwill of institutions and individual magistrates.
- Attendance fell from 23 at the in-person workshop to 12 online, a reminder of how difficult it is to keep busy professionals engaged over several sessions.
- The procedure was finalised late in the project, leaving little time to observe it in use.

4.4.2 What another country needs to keep in mind

Before adapting the Romanian SOP, another country should ask:

- Does national law already permit remote hearings of children, and with which safeguards? Where would the SOP sit in relation to it?
- Is there a judicial training body, or a similar institution, able to turn a written procedure into everyday practice?
- Should the procedure cover every setting and every role a child may have, as in Romania, or begin with one?
- Is the technology in place — or planned — for the lawyer, a psychologist and a trusted adult to join the child at the same time?
- How will children be involved in shaping the procedure, reviewing it and, later, telling professionals how it worked for them?

4.5 Future-looking: what happens next

The SOP, the curriculum and the checklist form a complete package ready for use. The priority now is to apply them in courts and prosecutor's offices that regularly hear children, to gather children's and professionals' feedback through the mechanisms the curriculum describes, and to adjust the procedure accordingly. If starting again, the team would line up specific courts or offices to apply the procedure earlier, so that its effect on children could be observed within the life of the project.

4.5.1 Sustaining the pilot nationally

Lasting change depends on judicial training and on the digitalisation of justice. The partners have agreed that:

- INM trainers will present the SOP to judges and prosecutors who specialise in cases involving children;
- the procedure will be taught to trainee magistrates and included in continuing training for sitting judges and prosecutors, using the curriculum and the checklist;
- proposals for a secure remote-hearing platform for minors and for a specialised support, accompaniment and mediation service will be submitted to the Superior Council of Magistracy (CSM) and the Ministry of Justice.

Building the SOP's technical requirements into the systems the Ministry of Justice is now rolling out would avoid having to retrofit them later. The INM, the CSM, ANPDCA, the police, the DGASPC and the bar are the natural owners of the next steps, with Terre des hommes Romania continuing to make sure that children are heard in the process.

5. Spain

Spain at a glance	
Problem addressed	Children taking part in remote hearings without genuinely understanding them, including accepting plea agreements (conformidades) without comprehension.
Solution piloted	A rights-based Checklist for child justice professionals, with a pre-hearing comprehension-verification protocol, covering the phases before, during and after a remote hearing.
Headline finding	Children's own priorities are communicative and emotional safety, being understood and free to speak; and the online modality itself reduced their participation compared with in-person sessions.

5.1 The problem

Spain's Rapid Needs Assessment, carried out in early 2025, identified three priority challenges for upholding children's rights in a digitalising justice system: safeguarding procedural rights in the context of digitalisation; closing the gaps that limit children's access to justice and their effective participation; and addressing the emotional and communicative impact of digital proceedings on children. The precise risk the Spanish pilot set out to reduce is that children take part in remote hearings without genuinely understanding them. The clearest evidence came directly from children: in the first Child Advisory Board session, children deprived of liberty at the Bahia de Cadiz facility reported that they had not understood the virtual hearings in which they had participated, and that some had accepted plea agreements (conformidades) without understanding what they were agreeing to, leaving them with a sense of regret and of having been deceived. This points to concrete gaps in the child's right to information, to be heard, and to a fair trial once the hearing moves online, where the affective and communicative conditions for real comprehension are easily lost.

5.2 Building blocks of the agreement

The pilot was hosted at the Bahia de Cadiz juvenile facility (CIMI), managed by AFANAS under the Junta de Andalucia, working with children within the child justice system who are deprived of liberty. The co-design of the tool was carried out with defence lawyers from the Cadiz and Malaga bar associations, and the wider process built on the National Roundtable convened in November 2025 with the Consejo General de la Abogacia Espanola (CGAE), juvenile prosecutors, universities, UNICEF Spain and other national stakeholders. This combination, a regional detention facility together with the practising defence bar, was a good fit for Spain's decentralised system, where child justice is administered differently in each Autonomous Community: piloting through the Andalusian facility and the Cadiz and Malaga bars kept the work close to how proceedings are actually run at territorial level, while the national bar and roundtable network anchored it to a common set of guarantees.

5.3 Description of the pilot

The pilot solution is a rights-based Checklist, the "Checklist for the Protection of the Guarantees and Rights of Children in Remote Hearings in the Child Justice System", together with a user guide. It helps defence lawyers detect evident and non-evident risks to a child's procedural rights before, during and after a remote hearing. The tool is organised around ten dimensions spread across the three phases of a hearing (before, during and after), reflecting the principle that a child's rights must be protected throughout the whole process, not only while the

hearing is in session. It is completed case by case by the responsible defence lawyer, one questionnaire per hearing and per child.

The tool took shape through two co-design workshops with lawyers (17 March and 28 April 2026) and validation with children. The first workshop produced a preliminary checklist; the second, with more than ten lawyers from Cadiz and Malaga, shortened it (the original was felt too long for high-volume juvenile courts), sharpened the indicators that distinguish a child's real comprehension from mere formal compliance, and recognised territorial variation while insisting that children are entitled to the same protections everywhere.

The Spanish Child Advisory Board shaped the tool directly. In a validation session on 20 May 2026, six children tested the checklist through a structured "justice traffic-light" exercise. Their priorities differed from the institutional framing: they centred on communicative and emotional safety, being understood, and feeling free and safe to speak, rather than on procedural formalism. This insight, grounded in the children's own experience, drove the redesign of the tool and led to a systematic pre-hearing comprehension-verification protocol, which requires the lawyer to document that the child understands the charges or allegations, the possible consequences, their right to participate, and the limits of confidentiality. On the child justice practictioners' advice the tool was cut from fifteen pages to seven and moved to a simple 1-5 scale.

5.4 Monitoring and evaluation of the pilot

Monitoring and evaluation drew on the children's own assessment of the process and on professional feedback. In the CAB validation, the children rated the checklist statements through a traffic-light exercise: the most critical results were that they felt neither "free to speak without pressure" nor able to "understand the judge" (four red cards each). A trust barometer captured how safe and respected they felt: the children rated the judge 6 out of 10, their own lawyer 4.5 out of 10, and the prosecutor 1 out of 10. A training session for professionals on 16 June 2026 used a case simulation, "Mateo" (a sixteen-year-old under a residential measure facing cognitive disadvantage), which surfaced risks that are easy to overlook: environmental coercion, as the child sought the educator's approving gaze before answering; legal language that produced an automatic "yes, understood" masking a lack of real comprehension; and a 1.5-second audio lag that heightened the child's stress.

The single most telling finding concerned the digital modality itself: in the third CAB session, held online on 17 June 2026, the children were markedly less participative than they had been in person, a live illustration of the project's central concern that digital tools can themselves erode children's voice.

Part of the evidence remains open. Pilot implementation of the checklist is ongoing (the tool has been finalised and sent to forty professionals, with questionnaires being collected case by case), and the design of the pilot-level evaluation was still being settled at the time of reporting: because the tool is itself a checklist, the team also considered to run pilot M&E through focus groups, with general project M&E gathered via a short questionnaire.

5.4.1 Enabling factors and barriers encountered

What made the pilot possible was, above all, the participatory relationship built with the Bahia de Cadiz facility and with the Cadiz and Malaga bars, which allowed both children and lawyers to engage honestly in co-design; the existence of a practising defence bar willing to test and refine the tool; and the momentum of the earlier National Roundtable, which had already produced a set of national guiding principles for remote hearings.

Several barriers were encountered and are worth naming for anyone attempting the same excercise. Access to children in detention had to be negotiated: the Child Advisory Board ran with six children rather than the ten originally planned, because of facility access restrictions and management concerns about children taking part in "sensitive" discussions. Participatory work with child justice institutions in Spain requires prior relationship-building and cannot be rushed. Professional fatigue also told: lawyer attendance dropped at the second workshop owing to judicial-calendar conflicts and caseload pressure, which the team addressed by adding

written feedback, one-to-one conversations and informal meetings. The academic language of the first checklist was rejected by lawyers as "too theoretical", requiring the tool to be rewritten in judicial-workflow language. And coordination across Spain's decentralised administrations meant the tool had to meet a fragmented reality in which each territory applies child justice differently.

5.4.2 What another country needs to keep in mind

A country considering this solution should check several conditions that made it work in Spain. First, the pilot assumes a decentralised system in which child justice is delivered differently across regions; the team treated "same standards, different contexts" as a strength, standardising the children's-rights safeguards while adapting implementation to each territory, and set up regional working groups in Malaga and Cadiz to document those differences. A country with a single national system, or with no territorial variation, would adapt this differently. Second, the solution depends on being able to reach and build trust with children deprived of liberty and with the defence bar; that relationship-building takes time and cannot be compressed into a short project window. Third, co-design means translating between two ways of knowing: academic rigour and practitioners' hands-on knowledge are not opposites but need to be rendered into each other's language, so the tool must be written in the working language of the professionals who will use it, not in research terms.

5.5 Future-looking: what happens next

The solution has moved from design into implementation. The *checklist* and its user guide are finalised and in use case by case, and the work now focuses on pilot implementation and on consolidating the guide that explains how to apply the tool. Going forward, the checklist is best used as a standard, lightweight support that organises good practice defence lawyers already carry out, deliberately kept short (seven pages, a 1-5 scale) so it is usable in high-volume juvenile courts, rather than as additional paperwork.

If designing it again, the team would build in more time for relationship-building with facilities and professionals from the outset, plan feedback mechanisms that fit practitioners' limited time from the start rather than adding them once fatigue appeared, and involve children in setting the tool's priorities even earlier, given how decisively their focus on comprehension and on feeling free to speak reshaped it.

5.5.1 Sustaining the pilot nationally

For the solution to outlast the project across Spain's decentralised administrations, the children's-rights safeguards it embeds need to be recognised as a common standard while implementation is adapted region by region. The regional working groups established in Malaga and Cadiz are the first step: they are documenting how child justice is applied differently in each territory and co-designing implementation guides suited to each context, so that scale-up can be evidence-based. The multi-method evaluation is designed to show which elements of the tool transfer across contexts and which are locally specific. Sustaining it further would require buy-in from the bar associations and juvenile-justice authorities in each Autonomous Community, and ideally its connection to the national partners named in the project so that a tool proven in Andalusia can be taken up elsewhere; the regional working groups and the engagement of the Cadiz and Malaga bars are already under way.

6. Ukraine

Ukraine at a glance	
Problem addressed	Children in conflict with the law are insufficiently informed and prepared for remote hearings (process, procedural rights, technical problems, roles of participants); technical problems; attorneys often not physically present with the child.
Solution piloted	Five Memos (checklists) on preparing children for remote hearings and acting during and after them – for children, legal representatives, attorneys, psychologists and mediators – co-designed and piloted with the Coordination Center for Legal Aid Provision (March–June 2026).
Headline finding	Professionals rated the Memos mostly "good" or "excellent" and found them useful to systematise knowledge and for self-assessment; children and professionals both suggested a more child-friendly format, leading to the development of an animated video.

6.1 The problem

In Ukraine, remote hearings involving children in conflict with the law remain a relatively rare practice, although their use has increased since the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022.

In the spring of 2025, as part of the PPRO-Child's implementation, a rapid needs assessment (RNA) on the participation of children in conflict with the law in online court proceedings was conducted. The results of this study identified both legislative issues and problems related to the implementation of legal provisions on criminal proceedings involving children in conflict with the law.

Later, some of these issues were discussed during a national roundtable held in June 2025 and at meetings of the Children's Advisory Board (CAB), at the Kremenchuk detention center from September 2025 to March 2026. These meetings were attended by adolescents who had experience with remote court hearings in criminal proceedings.

Based on the findings of the study, the national roundtable, and the CAB meetings, the following problems were identified:

- insufficient information provided to children suspected or accused of committing a crime regarding:
  - the remote hearing process;
  - the child's procedural rights;
  - problems, particularly of a technical nature, that may arise during remote hearings, and how the child should act;
  - the roles of the attorney, psychologist, the child's legal representatives, and other participants in the court hearing.
- As a result, children in conflict with the law are inadequately prepared – particularly psychologically – for remote hearings.
- Technical problems: poor sound and video quality, and connection interruptions, which often prevented children from understanding the meaning of questions asked, from hearing what witnesses were saying, and from even asking for a question to be repeated or rephrased. For this reason, the children often experienced stress, anxiety, and emotional strain in addition to what was already caused by the very fact of the legal proceedings against them.

- Frequent cases where the attorney was not physically present with the child (the attorney was in a different location and joined the court hearing online), which could affect, in particular, the confidentiality of the attorney's communication with the child.
- A lack of adequate interaction between the attorney or psychologist and the child before, during, and after remote hearings.

Since some challenges of remote hearings – such as technical difficulties or the need for legislative changes to ensure the procedural rights of children – require more time and resources than the project allows for, the project team decided to focus on creating a clear and practical tool that would help properly inform and prepare a child for online court hearings and would be useful for lawyers, psychologists, or children in conflict with the law.

"Well, it was very brief and generally unclear. … They just said: 'You have to stand there and say something.' And that was it." (RNA, interview with a child; regarding how her rights were explained to her before the hearing)

"What I would improve most is the option for a mandatory preliminary preparation phase with the child alone before the hearing begins... where it's possible to calmly explain what's going to happen. This would significantly improve the quality of the child's participation and better ensure their rights." (From a survey conducted during registration for a co-design workshop, January 2026)

6.2 Building blocks of the agreement

Based on the results of the RNA and CAB meetings, it was found that in many cases, the representation of children in conflict with the law, as well as their psychological support, is provided by:

- attorneys who collaborate with free legal aid centers (hereinafter "FLACs");
- psychologists who collaborate with the FLACs and are involved as part of a pilot project to engage psychologists in criminal proceedings involving minors.

In addition, FLACs facilitate mediation between the victim and the child suspected or accused as part of the pilot project "Restorative Justice Program Involving Minors Who Are Suspects or Accused of Committing a Criminal Offense". Mediation is used as one of the forms of restorative justice; compensation for harm caused to the victim, the reintegration of the victim and the child in conflict with the law, and means of the child's resocialization are discussed during the mediation sessions. Currently, given the martial law introduced in Ukraine, mediation sessions are conducted online in most cases.

FLACs are part of the legal aid system in Ukraine, which was established in accordance with the Law of Ukraine "On Free Legal Aid" and in compliance with Article 59 of the Constitution of Ukraine. The activities of the entire legal aid system in Ukraine are coordinated by a separate institution, which in turn reports to the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine – the Coordination Center for Legal Aid Provision (hereinafter referred to as the Coordination Center). The main tasks of this state body include compiling and maintaining registries of attorneys who provide free secondary legal aid; psychologists who are involved in criminal proceedings involving children; and mediators who provide mediation services as part of a pilot project on restorative justice. In addition, the Coordination Center (Regulations on the Coordination Center for the Provision of Legal Aid, approved by Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 504 of 16 June 2012, §§ 12 and 13):

- manages the system for providing free secondary legal aid;
- provides the possibilities for professional growth for attorneys and mediators who provide free secondary legal aid and mediation services, respectively;

- promotes the improvement of existing standards and procedures and the implementation of new ones in the field of free legal aid, considering international best practices;
- monitors the quality of the provision of free secondary legal aid and mediation services.

Given the above and the fact that the Coordination Center is responsible for the free legal aid (primary and secondary) system and mediation services as part of the restorative justice pilot project, and possesses a broad network of lawyers and psychologists, the PPRO-Child project team decided to approach the Coordination Center's leadership with a request to become a partner authority for developing a solution and subsequently piloting it as part of the project. During negotiations with the Coordination Center's leadership, the project team identified the main problem – inadequate information and preparation of children for remote hearings – which requires the development of an appropriate solution (tool). In mid-December 2025, a positive decision on cooperation was received.

6.3 Description of the pilot

In collaboration with the Coordination Center, the PPRO-Child project team held workshops on co-designing a pilot solution, attended by lawyers, mediators, and psychologists who responded to the Coordination Center leadership's invitation to participate in the development of a pilot solution and its subsequent testing. As a result of the discussions, the group focused on developing a set of clear recommendations (checklists in the Memo format) on preparing children in conflict with the law for remote hearings, as well as specific actions to take during and after. These Memos were developed for:

- children in conflict with the law;
- legal representatives of children in conflict with the law (parents, guardians, child affair services, etc.);
- attorneys representing children in conflict with the law;
- psychologists who support children in conflict with the law during criminal proceedings;
- mediators who provide mediation services in restorative justice.

The purpose of piloting these Memos was:

- To provide children in conflict with the law and their legal representatives with information on how remote hearings are conducted, as well as practical advice on how to prepare for online court hearings, the child's procedural rights, possible actions to take in the event of certain (technical) problems, and possible actions after the remote hearing concludes.
- To provide professionals not with mere recommendations on how to act, but with a tool for self-assessment of their actions – a checklist that they could use as a guide whenever a case involving a child in conflict with the law in remote hearings arises.

Between two co-design workshops on developing the solution, a CAB meeting took place. During the meeting, the project team presented a draft version of Memos for children in conflict with the law to gather their feedback. Following the presentation and discussions, several important clarifications were added to the Memo for children. Overall, the CAB members responded positively to the usefulness of this guidance. One participant noted that if he had had such a Memo at the time, it would have been easier for him to navigate a remote court hearing.

These Memos were piloted from March through June 2026 by attorneys, mediators, and psychologists who participated in co-design workshops on the pilot solution and in a training session on its implementation. As for the Memos for children in conflict with the law and their legal representatives, under the terms of the pilot program, they were provided to the children and their legal representatives by the professionals who participated in designing and developing this tool.

6.4 Monitoring and evaluation of the pilot

In June 2026 (last month of piloting), the PPRO-Child project team conducted a final survey among pilot participants to evaluate the Memos as a tool based on the following criteria:

- Relevance of the content (the issues it covers and the advice it provides);
- Structure (logical flow);
- Sufficiency of information (whether there is enough material to prepare a child for a remote hearing);
- Accessibility of information (clarity of language and phrasing);
- Convenience of the format.

Most respondents rated the Memos primarily as "good" or "excellent" across all criteria, though there were also some less positive evaluations.

In addition, for most participants, the Memos for professionals proved useful to systematize existing knowledge, as well as a tool for self-assessment. According to most respondents, this tool can be equally useful for both experienced professionals and beginners.

The following recommendations were considered the most useful:

For psychologists:

- Establish preliminary contact with a child to prepare for the hearing and support his/her emotional well-being.
- Ensure the child's psychological safety and providing opportunities for a child to express themselves without fear or pressure.
- Discuss with the attorney or legal representative the conditions under which the child will be during the remote hearing.
- Monitor the child's psychological and emotional state in real time and the psychologist's right to call for a break if the child becomes overwhelmed.

For attorneys:

- Suggest how to prepare a child for a remote hearing.
- Agree on alternative ways to communicate with a child during remote hearings, especially if the attorney is not physically present with the child at that time.

For mediators:

- Remind or establish rules for online communication (for example, in case of a connection interruption).
- Ensure that the child is visible on camera so that the condition can be observed (including nonverbal cues indicating that the child is "disengaging" from the process).
- Respond promptly to changes in circumstances (connection issues, the general condition of the parties).
- Agree on alternative communication methods.
- Discuss plans for the post-mediation period.

As noted in section 6.3, the opinions of the children participating in the CAB meetings were taken into account when finalizing the Memos. However, the final version of the Memos was not provided to the children for their feedback.

6.4.1 Enabling factors and barriers encountered

The National Strategy on child-friendly justice and state-led pilot projects in this area (involving psychologists in criminal proceedings with children, the restorative justice state pilot) created a favorable context for implementing the pilot. Although these initiatives do not specifically focus on remote hearings, the project's aim to ensure children's procedural rights in accordance with Directive (EU) 2016/800 – particularly in the context of European integration and the implementation of national policies – facilitated the pilot's implementation.

Enabling factors:

- Cooperation with the Coordination Center, whose leadership had a direct interest in improving the provision of legal aid and psychological support to children in conflict with the law in the context of remote court hearings. It was the Coordination Center that convened a group of experts who participated in co-design workshops and provided every possible support to the project team in disseminating information about the pilot and conducting the final survey.
- CAB meetings at the Kremenchuk detention center provided an opportunity to speak with children about their experiences of remote court hearings. It was the children's experiences (mostly negative) that prompted the idea to develop relevant Memos with recommendations.
- The solution was co-developed by lawyers, psychologists, and mediators who work with children in conflict with the law and who share the values of child-friendly justice. Their practical experience helped enrich the pilot solution with realistic recommendations suitable for use in daily work with children in conflict with the law.

Barriers encountered:

- Participants' expectations extended beyond the scope of the project. At the first workshop, participants devoted significant attention to the need for changes to laws and regulations and to resolving technical issues related to remote hearings – matters that fell outside the scope of the project's activities.
- While recognizing the importance of preparing children, some professionals viewed the standalone tool as duplicating what they already do in their practice.
- Limitations of the Memos being in electronic format. The lack of printed versions that could be directly distributed to children, parents, or fellow professionals reduced the tool's usability.
- Risks associated with the possible absence of criminal cases involving children in conflict with the law during the pilot period and instances of remote hearings for children in conflict with the law in existing criminal proceedings.
- Lack of feedback from participants during interim monitoring. The project team found that, after the first month of the pilot, participants did not provide feedback on the interim monitoring questions. As a result, it was impossible to determine whether the tool had been tested during the first month of the pilot.
- Development of an additional pilot solution format (a "question-and-answer" format) in response to the lack of feedback from pilot participants. In this case, specific recommendations from the Memos were converted into questions for self-assessment and self-evaluation by the pilot participants and redistributed for the pilot.
- Participants were less enthusiastic about the pilot process being managed by a nongovernmental organization than they would have been if the development and testing of the pilot solution had been carried out entirely by a government agency.

6.4.2 What another country needs to keep in mind

What to consider before adapting the Ukrainian experience:

- The connection between the pilot solution and the problem it addresses (the solution's objective) must be clear and understandable, and the solution's format must align with the possibilities for its implementation.

- Special attention should be paid to the communication of the tool (solution) to ensure that all target audiences understand why the solution exists, what improvements it will bring, and how to use it.
- The institutional capacity of the national partner authority to develop, pilot, and potentially implement the solution, including a broad network of contacts and channels for disseminating information.
- The nature of the collaboration between nongovernmental organizations and government institutions, which can directly influence the development and implementation of the solution.
- The alignment of the pilot solution with the needs and interests of children in conflict with the law.
- The opinion of children who have participated in remote court hearings regarding the content and format of the solution. It is also necessary to provide children with a draft version of the solution so that it can be improved based on their comments and suggestions.
- Integration of best practices into the daily work of professionals: the solution should aim to ensure the accessibility and visibility of best practices that professionals can apply in their daily work.

In addition, it is important to:

- Verify whether the professional roles for which the Ukrainian Memos are designed align with those in other systems. The pilot solution in the Ukrainian context was developed separately for children, legal representatives, attorneys, psychologists, and mediators. In other systems, they may have different scopes of rights, powers, and functions.
- Identify a functional counterpart to the Ukrainian legal aid system / Coordination Center or a non-governmental institution – such as a professional bar association – that can engage the relevant group of professionals to adapt the content and further disseminate the tool. The model of cooperation may differ from the Ukrainian one – especially if the necessary functions are distributed among several government agencies and/or independent institutions.
- Confirm that the problem addressed by the pilot solution in the Ukrainian context exists in the other national context and to what extent. The Ukrainian pilot arose from the problems identified in section 6.1.
- Adapt the recommendations to the national remote hearing procedure. It is necessary to verify exactly which rights, participant roles, opportunities for recesses, confidential communication with an attorney, involvement of a psychologist, etc., are provided for in the specific country. This also applies to terminology – the translation must be context-based.
- Reproduce not only the solution but also the process by which it was developed. The Ukrainian Memos were co-developed by practitioners and discussed with children who had experience with remote hearings. Therefore, reproducing the Ukrainian experience is not simply a matter of translating ready-made texts, but of replicating – at least in a simplified form – the process of having the recommendations reviewed by local experts and children with relevant experience.
- Determine the format and channels for using the tool right away. It's important to decide in advance the format of the solution that will be used by its target audience: printed or electronic format, videos for children, integration into professional development training, professional protocols, etc.

6.5 Future-looking: what happens next

The future of the pilot in Ukraine depends on how the broader justice system reform under the National Strategy unfolds.

Although the pilot solution is a set of recommendations outlined in five Memos, they can also exist independently of one another and be improved separately. The format of the Memos for professionals and legal representatives might be revised, for example, in the form of a brochure or leaflet to be disseminated in electronic format or to be printed. As for the Memo for children in conflict with the law, one of the biggest challenges was its format. Even during the solution's development phase – which involved a group of experts and discussions with the children at the detention center – children at the CAB meetings suggested videos on children's procedural rights, and professionals at the co-design workshops likewise suggested an

information video on remote hearings and children's rights in criminal proceedings. The animated video format was chosen because children respond better to vivid visuals and voice-over narration. Therefore, after the pilot phase concluded, the project team decided to create an animated video specifically for children, explaining how to prepare for, and what to do during and after online court hearings.

6.5.1 Sustaining the pilot nationally

Regarding the Memos with recommendations for professionals, children in conflict with the law and their legal representatives, the following options are possible:

- To be included in professional development programs for lawyers, psychologists, and mediators who are just starting to collaborate with FLACs.
- To be improved as a self-assessment tool for professionals already collaborating with FLACs.
- To change the format and to create a different tool that would help lawyers, psychologists, or legal representatives effectively prepare a child for remote hearings, and mediators for online mediation.
- To incorporate recommendations from the Memos into protocols for lawyers providing secondary legal aid, psychologists supporting children in criminal proceedings, and mediators providing mediation services in restorative justice.
- To use the checklists for monitoring the quality of legal aid and psychological support. Recommendations from the Memos may be fully or selectively incorporated into the criteria for monitoring the quality of work by lawyers, psychologists, and mediators in cases involving children, as carried out by the Coordination Center.

7. Final chapter — recommendations

The four pilots were designed independently, by four different national teams, against the same shared methodology. Read side by side, they should tell the consortium — and any other country reading this guide — more than any single pilot could on its own.

7.1 Compare our learnings

Country	Problem addressed	Solution piloted	Headline finding
Ireland	Children's rights in remote hearings depended on individual goodwill: no defined steps, roles or responsibilities; children rarely spoke to their solicitor before or during the hearing and could not always see or hear the courtroom.	The Remote Court Hearings (Videolink) Procedure at Oberstown Children Detention Campus, setting out what staff do before, during and after a hearing, with a judicial checklist that includes child-friendly communication.	The procedure was formally adopted into Oberstown's governance and approved twice; the President of the District Court committed to the judicial checklist; effects on children in live hearings will be shown by Oberstown's own monitoring.
Romania	No common procedure for hearing children remotely: children are often uninformed and unprepared, cannot speak to their lawyer in private, have no trusted adult beside them and face poor technical conditions.	A Standard Operating Procedure for remote hearings of minors (before, during and after the hearing), co-designed with judges, prosecutors, police, child protection and NGOs, reviewed by the Child Advisory Board, and supported by a training curriculum and a checklist for judges and prosecutors; 20 professionals trained.	Strong professional and institutional buy-in, with a route into magistrates' training through the INM; the effect on children in real hearings remains to be evaluated.
Spain	Children taking part in remote hearings without genuinely understanding them, including accepting plea agreements (conformidades) without comprehension.	A rights-based Checklist for child justice professionals, with a pre-hearing comprehension-verification protocol, covering the phases before, during and after a remote hearing.	Children's own priorities are communicative and emotional safety, being understood and free to speak; and the online modality itself reduced their participation compared with in-person sessions.

Country	Problem addressed	Solution piloted	Headline finding
Ukraine	Children in conflict with the law are insufficiently informed and prepared for remote hearings (process, procedural rights, technical problems, roles of participants); technical problems; attorneys often not physically present with the child.	Five Memos (checklists) on preparing children for remote hearings and acting during and after them – for children, legal representatives, attorneys, psychologists and mediators – co-designed and piloted with the Coordination Center for Legal Aid Provision (March–June 2026).	Professionals rated the Memos mostly "good" or "excellent" and found them useful to systematise knowledge and for self-assessment; children and professionals both suggested a more child-friendly format, leading to the development of an animated video.

7.2 Key recommendations from partners

The standards these pilots set out to deliver (remote hearings limited to procedural and administrative matters, the child's informed consent, a prior individual assessment, confidential access to a lawyer and checks on the child's understanding) are set out in the PPRO-Child 10-point plan[5] and policy briefing[6]. The recommendations below draw on what the four pilots taught us about how to design, run and adapt a pilot of this kind, and through that, how to turn those standards into everyday practice.

1. **Anchor each solution in an institution that can adopt it, and plan around its approval process.** Tools last when they become part of an institution's own governance, as at Oberstown, in the INM's training in Romania or through Ukraine's Coordination Center. That process takes time, so map the approval stages at the start and allow for more than one round of revision. Plan staff training into the same timeline, before roll-out: staff who prepare children for hearings need to understand court processes themselves, and in Ireland managers asked for court familiarisation training, with a named internal lead, before taking on new roles.

2. **Bring in every actor the safeguards depend on as a formal partner.** A procedure owned by one institution cannot require action from others. In Ireland, contact with solicitors and the technical quality of hearings depended on bodies outside Oberstown; in Romania, the secure platform depends on the Ministry of Justice. These actors should be part of the pilot from the start, not just encouraged to cooperate.

3. **Involve children early enough to shape the tool and give them formats designed for them.** In Spain, children's focus on being understood and feeling free to speak reshaped the checklist. In Ukraine, children's comments on the draft Memo led to several clarifications, and their suggestion of a video, echoed by the professionals in the co-design workshops, led to an animated video for children.

4. **Write tools in practitioners' working language and keep them short enough for real caseloads.** Spanish lawyers rejected the first, academic version of the checklist as "too theoretical"; the final version was rewritten in their working language and kept to seven pages so it could be used in busy juvenile courts.

5. **Build monitoring into the tool from day one, covering both the professionals who use it and the children it is meant to protect.** For professionals, monitoring should track whether and how they use the tool and how useful they find it, as Ukraine's survey of Memo users and Spain's case-by-case questionnaires on the checklist do, through feedback channels that fit their time (written, one-to-one, informal). For children, it should go

[5] PRI_10-point-plan_-PPRO-Child-Protecting-the-procedural-rights-of-children-in-the-digitalisation-of-justice_EN.pdf

[6] Penal Reform International, Foussard, C. & Pérez Cruz, M. (2026). *Children in Digital and Digitalised Justice: Protecting Procedural Rights from Online Offences to Remote Hearings. A Policy Briefing for the European Union and the Council of Europe.*

beyond compliance and record whether the child understood, including a documented comprehension check before any important step, and whether they felt free to speak.

6. **Give pilots enough time to show their effect on children.** None of the four pilots could yet show its effect on children's experience of remote hearings: in Ireland and Romania, institutional approval and finalising the tool left little time for piloting, and in Spain and Ukraine evaluation was still under way or limited to professionals. Funders and authorities should allow longer piloting periods, line up participating courts and sites early, and fund evaluation after the project ends.

7. **When transferring a solution, keep the safeguards the same, adapt how they are implemented, and repeat the process rather than just translating the tool.** The four pilots followed the same methodology, yet each country's needs assessment and Child Advisory Board framed the problem differently, and each arrived at a different solution. A tool that works in one system may miss the main risk in another. Repeating the process, at least in simplified form, lets local practitioners and children bring to light problems the original pilot never faced and change the tool to fit. Before adapting a solution, check that the problem it addresses exists locally, how centralised the system is, which professional roles exist and what national law allows.

This guide, and the recommendations above, complement the project's guidelines on remote hearings for children and its policy briefing for the European Union and the Council of Europe. Readers should treat it as a foundation for further work, not as the final word on how to protect children's procedural rights in a digitalising justice system.

8. Closing note, glossary and where to find more

Readers who need more detail than this guide provides — full workshop records, training curricula, monitoring and evaluation instruments — can request them from the project coordinator, Penal Reform International. Readers arriving at this guide without having seen the project's earlier outputs may also wish to consult the cross-country research report on children's experience of remote hearings in the four countries, and the project's ten-point plan, both of which this guide builds on directly.

Glossary

- CAB — Child Advisory Board: the group of children and young people with lived experience of the justice system who advise each national team throughout the project, including on the design of the pilot solutions.
- RNA — Rapid Needs Assessment: the national research exercise that identified, in each country, where children's procedural rights were most at risk from digitalisation.
- Remote hearing: a criminal-justice hearing conducted wholly or partly through videoconferencing rather than in person.
- Procedural safeguards: the set of protections — including the right to legal assistance, to information, and to participate meaningfully — that Directive (EU) 2016/800 requires for children who are suspected or accused in criminal proceedings.