

ENOC 25th Annual Conference COVID-19 & Children's Rights: Learning for the Future



**27-28 September 2021
Hybrid Event
Hosted by the Deputy Ombudswoman for
Children's Rights of Greece**



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Conference Summary

The ENOC 25th Annual Conference took place as a hybrid event on **27-28 of September 2021**. The 25th ENOC General Assembly consisting of the election of the new ENOC Bureau took place directly after the Conference on 29 September 2021.

The hybrid event brought together 168 participants, 123 online and 45 in-person in Athens, thus including 81 participants from ENOC member institutions, 37 young people and their coordinators involved in the European Network of Young Advisors (ENYA) project, observer Ombudspersons for children from Europe and worldwide, observer non-governmental organisations operating in the children's rights field, representatives of the UN, European Commission, European Parliament, Council of Europe, and international experts on children's rights.

This year, Young People from 17 countries (Albania, Andalusia/Spain, Basque country/Spain, Bulgaria, Catalonia/Spain, France, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Malta, Montenegro, Norway, Northern Ireland/UK, Slovakia, Scotland/UK, Wales/UK, Ukraine) joined ENOC and collaborated on recommendations on the ENOC annual theme of "COVID-19: learning for the future" during the ENYA 2021 project "Let's Talk About the Impact of COVID-19 on Children's Rights."

Later, two elected young people per country/region accompanied by their Coordinator, participated in the ENYA Forum which took place on Zoom on 1-2 July 2021. The ENYA Forum was hosted by the Office of the Commissioner for Children Malta, General Coordinator of ENYA 2021 project. Country/region teams presented their domestic work and recommendations and discussed various aspects of the impact of COVID-19 on children's rights: education, health, poverty, violence and abuse, participation, family, digital environment, information, leisure and play. A full report of the ENYA Forum is available [here](#).

Numerous young people who participated in the ENYA Forum attended ENOC's 25th Annual Conference where they presented their recommendations, as well as assisting in workshops. The ENYA recommendations on COVID-19 and Children's Rights have informed and are reflected in the ENOC position statement on [COVID-19 : Learning for the Future](#).

"Children and young people shouldn't be seen as scapegoats and seen as causing the pandemic – this causes great frustration. Children and young people can't make decisions about how things happen so the frustrations can boil over to anti-social behavior" (ENYA 2021)

"Not all children and young people are in the same situation, and we should focus on those who are in the worst ones" (ENOC Annual Conference 2021 -Young Advisor)



DAY 1: 27 September 2021

Conference Opening

Theoni Koufonikolakou, Conference Host and ENOC Chair-Elect, Deputy Ombudswoman for Children's Rights of Greece, opened the hybrid conference by welcoming everyone and thanking everyone for the flexibility to help conduct the conference in a hybrid format. She concluded her brief opening by introducing the first welcome addresses.

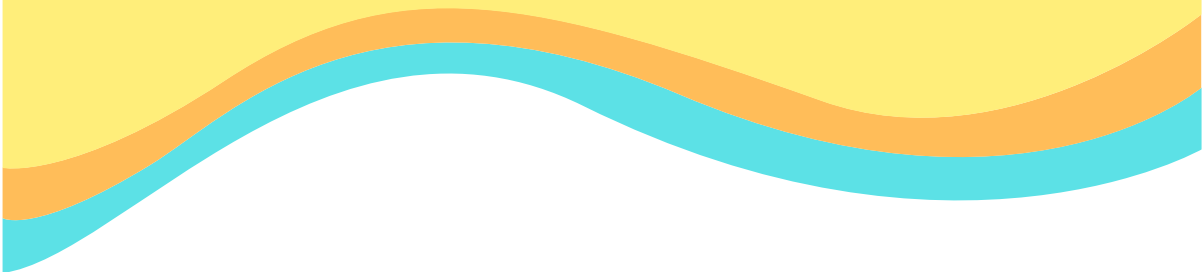
Andreas Pottakis, the Greek Ombudsman, thanked everyone for their attendance and their perseverance of the past year. He expressed his gratitude for the coordination of everyone to nonetheless conduct this important conference despite the challenges of the hybrid format. He focused on the issues of the past year from the continuing pandemic whose restrictions and policies continue to heavily affect children. He highlighted the overwhelming number of complaints and requests all Ombudspersons' offices have been receiving in past year and half. These issues of the pandemic, he explained, pertain to the long and short term, affecting children in many ways: a rise in school drop-out rates, increases in domestic violence, economic and social exclusion, just to name a few. He expressed hope that despite the ongoing pandemic, Conference attendees are now wiser, more sensitized, and prepared for the future challenges. Mr. Pottakis concluded by sharing his enthusiasm for all attendees to exchange ideas, discuss recommendations, and consider best practices during the coming days.

ENOC Chair, **Bruce Adamson**, Children & Young People's Commissioner Scotland, expressed many thanks to the Greek Ombudsman Children's Rights Department for successfully coordinating and conducting this hybrid event for ENOC members, key partners and other distinguished delegates from Europe and outside of Europe to come together for this important dialogue. He emphasised how significant the work of ENOC has become as the pandemic has created an overall human rights emergency, as stated by the Committee on the Rights of the Child. He noted how these effects disproportionately affect marginalized children who are living in poverty, with disabilities, young carers, and those who belong to minority groups. He thanked ENYA for their amazing virtual work on their recommendations and underlined how much the Young Advisor's proposals, coordinated by incredible leadership of ENYA, are powerful and must continue to be at the heart of ENOC's work.

Theoni Koufonikolakou, Conference Host and ENOC Chair-Elect, Deputy Ombudswoman for Children's Rights of Greece, delivered [her address](#) which included expressing how difficulties of the past year have continued to make everyone, including children, feel disconnected from their normal lives and revealed the importance of personal relationships. As difficult as the challenges have been, she mentioned that there is no certainty a pandemic may not occur again. Therefore, she noted how using the UNCRC as a guide, the conference will be imperative to address current issues but also develop strategies for the future. She also noted that ENOC must carefully listen to the Young Advisor's recommendations as part of these solutions. She made an important connection of how the pandemic, mental health, climate change, and overall economic factors make the work of ENOC more important than ever. She concluded by explaining the necessity for all attendees to share their unique experiences and ask questions to achieve these developments.



Ewa Kopacz, Vice President of the European Parliament and Coordinator on children's rights, sent a [video message](#) acknowledging how the pandemic has created difficult challenges in various aspects of life. She mentioned that although we are becoming experienced with the challenges of the pandemic, we are now facing the long-term consequences of these issues such as economic and social costs. Even with new technologies, she recognized that online schooling failed many children and that distance learning has created development gaps that will be difficult, if not impossible, to fully counteract. She concluded by thanking everyone for their diligence to continue to uphold the rights of children and congratulated ENYA for having the courage to share their recommendations which will be vital to the future work for all delegates.



Colin Scicluna, Head of Cabinet of the European Commission Vice-President for Democracy and Demography, spoke on behalf of Vice President Dubravka Šuica. He conveyed her well wishes, including emphasizing their commitment to 'legislate and educate' regarding children's rights. He defined the ENOC members as indispensable allies of the European Commission to develop future policies to protect children's rights in relation to COVID-19 and the long-term consequences of public health policies. He mentioned the recent EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the European Child Guarantee which produced policy initiatives constructed with perspectives of more than 10,000 children. He further stressed the importance of children's participation in policy making by mentioning the initiatives taken at the Conference on the Future of Europe to include young people as part of the citizens' panel. He concluded by stating that the EU aims to work on children's rights at a multilateral scale and that the global network is imperative to achieve these goals.

ENYA's [opening video](#) was shared for in-person and Zoom attendees to view. The video introduced this year's Young Advisors' names, home countries, hobbies, and project involvement. Next, the Advisors discussed their experiences working with ENYA. Finally, the video summarized the Young Advisors' recommendations, group discussions, and individual perspectives for what ENOC members should prioritise regarding children's rights during COVID-19. Some of these recommendations included improving access to and destigmatizing mental health services for young people, reducing violence against children, protecting vulnerable groups of children, supporting in-person education, improving online education, making information about COVID-19 more accessible to children and written in appropriate language for them to understand and advocating for school staff to be better trained to address mental health issues and to identify domestic violence.

Presentation of ENOC's Report "COVID-19-learning for the Future": Findings and Challenges

After the opening statements, Prof. **Simon Hoffman**¹ and Dr. **Rhian Croke**², independent expert advisors to ENOC on the 2021 priority theme, presented the findings and challenges that came out from the ENOC survey mapping the impact of COVID-19 related emergency measures on children's rights across ENOC member states. The survey findings, to which 32 ENOC members responded, informed the subsequent ENOC 2021 position policy statement on COVID-19: learning for the future.

¹ Professor of International Human Rights and Joint Coordinator of the Observatory on Human Rights of Children at Swansea University

² Independent Children's Rights Adviser/Researcher

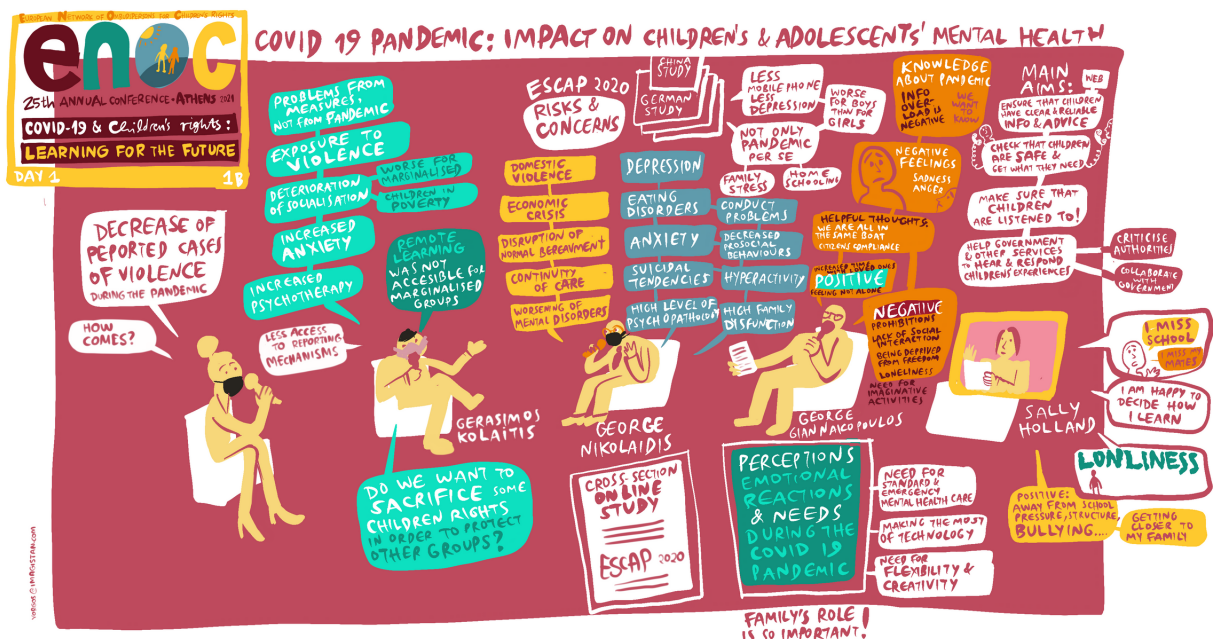
Summary of Key Findings

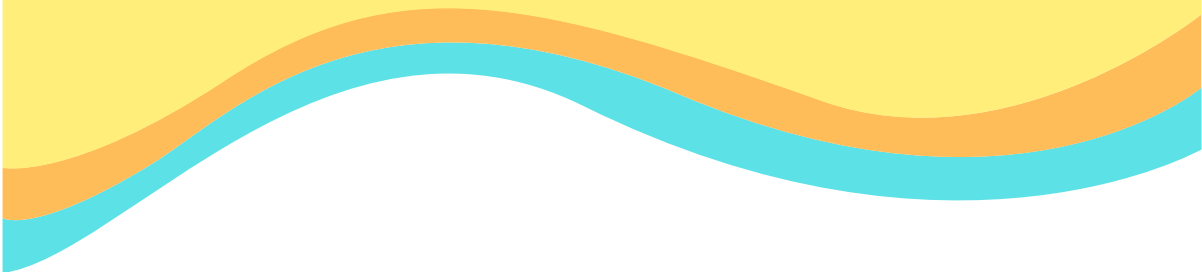
- Emergency measures negatively affected children's rights, mental health, access to services, and freedoms
- Many groups of vulnerable children were disproportionately affected: children with disabilities, those with unique family arrangements, children living in poverty, children with mental illness, children with additional learning needs, children in the juvenile justice system, children with health problems, and children in care
- Children's and child experts' opinions were not sufficiently considered in the policy making of the emergency measures

Other integral themes were to consider that children should be deprived of these liberties only as a last resort due to the numerous effects emergency measures have had on children. Solutions to these issues were presented as putting pressure on legislators, allocating more funding to aid vulnerable children, and develop better online and phone services. These findings, combined with other pillars of ENOC, were used to draft the position statement.

Panel Discussion on Child Mental Health During the Pandemic Crisis

This session was moderated by **Theoni Koufonikolakou** to discuss the mental health of children during the pandemic. Three experts joined on stage and one on Zoom to share their findings on this important topic and exchange ideas for solutions to these complicated issues.

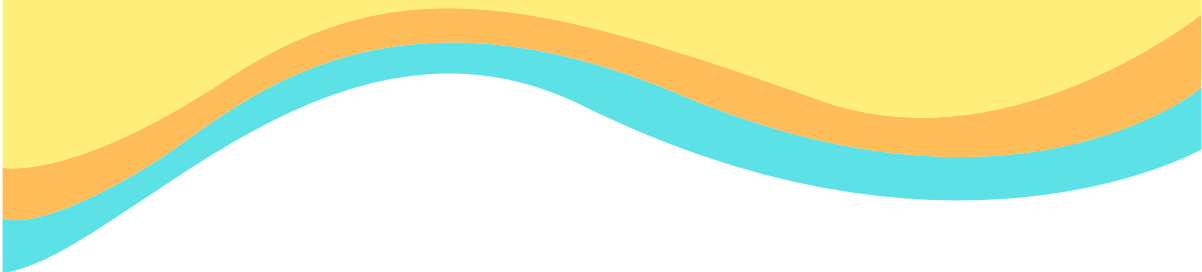




Gerasimos A. Kolaitis, Professor of Child Psychiatry, Head of Department of Child Psychiatry, Athens University Medical School began his [presentation](#) by sharing findings from various studies which expose the negative effects of the pandemic on children's mental health. Among the many important topics Professor Kolaitis discussed, he mentioned that the effects included increases in domestic violence due to longer periods of isolation with family and the absence of schools and peers to support students who may be facing abuse at home. Next, he revealed that economic hardship caused by the pandemic can have long-term negative consequences such as increased stress, family conflict, and substance abuse. Finally, a main issue he highlighted was that mental health concerns and lack of access to support services could seriously disrupt the well-being of children's lives seen in the forms of suicide, depression, anxiety, or eating disorders. Furthermore, another study showed that females and high school aged children are most likely to experience higher risk for these issues. He concluded with statistics which found that addiction to the internet, online schooling and over exposure to COVID-19 news can increase depression and anxiety for children.

George Nikolaidis, Psychiatrist, former Chair of CoE's Lanzarote Committee, Director of Department of Mental health and Social Welfare, Institute for Child Health discussed the complexity of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on children. He began by mentioning that ample evidence indicates that the negative experiences of children's wellbeing during the pandemic stemmed from the emergency measures implemented, not the pandemic itself. Additionally, he stated that the areas in which children suffered were not adequately realized even before the pandemic, and therefore, these issues were exacerbated for children during the pandemic since they were not considered to be priorities. He mentioned that children, especially vulnerable groups who were disproportionately affected, will suffer numerous long-term consequences. Finally, for all children, he underlined how children growing up during this difficult time could be affected in the way they view socialization and health crises in ways we are unable predict.

George Giannakopoulos, Child Psychiatrist, Assistant Professor of Child Psychiatry, Athens University Medical School, discussed solutions to these complicated mental health issues in his [presentation](#) based on research he has conducted. His research consisted of in-depth interviews with nine psychiatric inpatients aged 12-17. The interviews were constructed of open-ended questions revolving around five themes: knowledge of the pandemic, everyday routine, feelings, positive thoughts and behaviors and social environments. Overall, Professor Giannakopoulos stated that solutions should include health services continuing to provide the best standard and emergency mental health care services possible, approaches to mental health should be individualized, health services should utilize more modern technology to efficiently serve the most children and mental health services should be flexible and encompass creative solutions to maintain relatability and effectiveness for children.



Sally Holland, Children's Commissioner for Wales focused her [presentation](#) on how her role as a Children's Commissioner changed during the pandemic. She recounted the transition of the pandemic drastically changing the daily lives of the Commissioner's office to deciding how they would respond to these changes. She mentioned numerous new initiatives that the office undertook such as ensuring children had access to clear and reliable information regarding COVID-19. This was available on their website in both languages related to her region. Her office conducted surveys with their government and Youth Parliament to analyse the effects of the pandemic on children in her region. These surveys produced important data exposing the various experiences of children: isolation, loneliness, or less-stressful school. Overall, they found that mental health services must become more inclusive so that no child feels obstructed from support. She concluded by stating how these were some of the ways her office listened and responded, and she invited colleagues from across the membership and beyond to share their experience on how they responded to the pandemic and adapted to the new challenges.

The panel closed with a question to George Nikolaidis about the difficulties in the indicators reflecting the worsening domestic violence against children. He responded that children being confined at home, they have more difficulties reporting the violence when isolated at home with their family members and that many cases will never be reported.

Presentation of the ENOC-UNICEF Project

Afshan Khan, UNICEF Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia congratulated the incoming Chair and Conference host, Theoni Koufonikolakou, but also wanted to commend the outgoing Chair, **Bruce Adamson**, for his leadership and for expanding collaboration between ENOC and UNICEF during the past year over the joint ENOC/UNICEF project on multi-country impact assessment of COVID-19 related States measures on children's rights implemented in ten ENOC member countries and three Central Asia countries. Next, she made the important connection that the pandemic has reminded everyone how fragile and unequal our world is as well as how quickly the services to support children during this time reached capacity. She continued by presenting the data which UNICEF gathered regarding children's experiences during the pandemic across Europe and Central Asia. Many findings echoed the narrative from the panel discussion. Some key findings include that in-person schools are now understood to be integral to children's education, socialization and mental health needs. Additionally, she made an important note that government protection and support services must improve to meet the needs of children during a pandemic. Educationally, she noted that children living in poverty without access to adequate technology disproportionately suffered in their education progress during the pandemic.



Regarding institutional care, she mentioned that Europe and Central Asia have the highest rate of children in institutional care in the world most of which with disabilities, and that this issue should be a priority to address by promoting alternatives and progressive navigation to family type care. Regarding gender, the lives of girls and women were dramatically affected as support systems were shut down. She highlighted that women and girls were disproportionately affected by the pandemic as women make up the majority of frontline health care workers and that women and girls were more likely to face violence during this time. She concluded by sharing a few optimistic words of a 15 year old Eva from the region: *"This situation has shown us that we are all the same, regardless of our religion, culture, customs, whether we are poor or rich. The virus simply does not choose. It showed us that we should all stick together. Maybe the world will finally change. We do not live without relationships, and we should never forget that. Sometimes we need to remember how important kindness is. We need to remember that we have been given a gift called life and that we should appreciate it. Everything can end tomorrow. The question is, whether by then we will all have learned our lesson. Let us be mindful of our Earth and it will be kind to us. There is no rainbow without rain. Remember that"*.

Vanessa Sedletzki, Expert of the ENOC-UNICEF Project [presented](#) the background of CRIA, the methodology and a summary of the project. CRIA was conducted in 10 ENOC Member States and in 3 Central Asia countries, assessing the impact of various emergency measures of COVID-19 from February to October 2021. She also noted that CRIA will assess the negative, but also positive and neutral impacts. She explained that the objective of the project is to produce useful tools for policy makers and specifically create recommendations for future decision making of Covid-19 related emergency measures. For example, Georgia's goal was to use this project to promote accountability of state agencies toward children and advance monitoring of the UNCRC. Some countries chose to analyse specific measures affecting a specific group of children. For example, Moldova focused on children in detention. Furthermore, some countries chose to analyze the whole country while others analyzed certain regions. For example, Uzbekistan chose 1 out of their 14 regions due to time and logistic constraints. All countries used a mixed methodology from consulting stakeholders and children themselves to desktop research. Only two countries did not consult children directly.

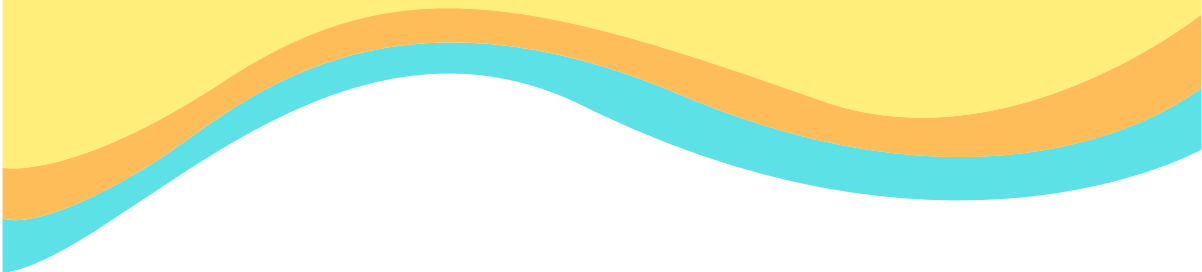
Véronique Lerch, Expert of the ENOC-UNICEF Project continued by introducing the range of measures that were assessed, the most affected groups of children, and the rights that were mostly affected. She concluded by discussing how these assessments could be used and prove that CRIAs are able to make an impact on policy making in the future without undermining the challenges of the process. Cyprus, Moldova and Bulgaria assessed the movement of children in detention, psychiatric institutions and childcare institutions.

France and the Netherlands focused on the Right to Play and the measures which closed indoor sports facilities and outdoor recreational spaces. Most countries also assessed the closing of schools and children's mental health. She concluded with a quote from a child from Cyprus "With so many restrictions we feel like a goldfish in the bowl. We live the best age in the worst season".



Initiatives of the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF) – Council of Europe

Maria-Andriani Kostopoulou, Chair of the Council of Europe Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF), shared on stage about the initiatives of the CDENF through her presentation. She confirmed that children across Europe have been impacted by the pandemic in terms of access to services, financial instability, inequality, exploitation, education and safety. Similar to sentiments previously discussed, she mentioned that governments implemented many measures without considering the consequences for children. Therefore, she recommended actions to reduce these consequences in the future: organise frequent exchanges, establish bodies to assess and encourage services to address how measures have affected children's rights. She detailed the next five years and how the Council of Europe will be implementing the upcoming Strategy for the Rights of the Child and reminding that 220 children from 10 different member states were consulted. She summarized the five priority areas of the new Strategy: freedom from violence, equal opportunities and social inclusion, improving access to technology,



child-friendly justice and participation. A new sixth area 'crisis and emergency situations' is now added to address the needs of children during situations such as the pandemic. She concluded with a powerful statement mentioning that children may be the less infected by COVID-19, but they are certainly not the least affected by the pandemic.

Workshops Session on the Impact of COVID-19 Measures

Next, all attendees, in-person and Zoom, were divided evenly among five different key areas and able to discuss in live-time these important topics: Right to Education, Health, Protection from Violence, Adequate Standard of Living and Participation.

Plenary Session: Feedback from Workshop rapporteurs and discussion

After the workshops, the groups shared the takeaways from each topic from the Young Advisors on Zoom, moderated by **Koulla Yiasouma**, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People. She began by passing the floor to **Holly**, a Young Advisor, who spoke about the Education group. Holly discussed the children's experiences of education during the pandemic by mentioning the difficulties of the past year during online education, the lack of engaging lessons, insufficient technology and vulnerable groups' education suffering most. Then, another Young Advisor, Ina, explained a recommendation that teachers should realise children have lost a lot of education since the pandemic, so that teachers help students master the content they learned online before moving onto more advanced subjects. Ina also said that vaccination for children is a complicated issue but all children should be encouraged to be able to attend in-person activities again.

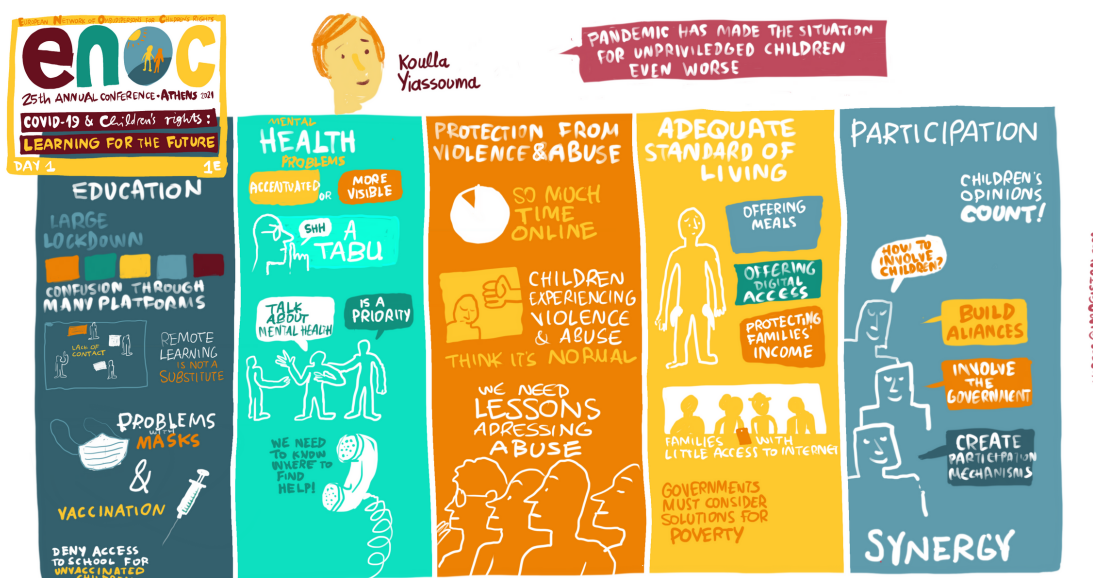
Then, Young Advisor **Elizabeth** reported on behalf of the Right to Health group. She discussed that the pandemic illustrated that mental health is an incredibly important issue. However, she mentioned that access to mental health services is still seen as shameful and stigmatized in society. She suggested that there should be increased discussions about mental health with teachers, friends and on social media. Additionally, she suggested improving access to mental health services by providing clear, easy and shame free phone hotlines or other platforms to seek mental health services.

Next, Koulla turned the floor over to Young Advisor **Nikola** to discuss the Right to Protection from Violence. Nikola mentioned many similar themes on this topic already raised during the conference such as recognizing the increase of violence against children during lockdown.

She also mentioned that social distancing during the pandemic lead many children to spend long hours online and led to increased cyberbullying. Nikola pointed out that domestic violence against children remains a taboo topic in many societies, and therefore, many children face obstacles reporting the abuse and being taken seriously. Her recommendations included improving training for teachers to be able to identify abuse, even in remote learning.

Regarding the Right to an Adequate Standard of Living, **Ally** spoke about numerous important themes: poverty affecting access to technology for education and larger families struggle to provide adequate support for all of their children. Recommendations included encouraging policy makers assess these issues and find solutions, increasing opportunities for emergency funding for children living in poverty in Europe and guaranteeing children's right to all social security benefits is safeguarded.

Young Advisor **Marcos** discussed the Right to Participation. He began by restating the importance of children's opinions being considered in policy making and highlighting the fact that children were not considered during the implementation of the emergency measures. His recommendations included fighting to create a place for children in policymaking and building alliances with organisations to assess how measures have affected children.



The first day of the conference concluded with a group dinner for those attendees able to be physically in Athens. The event took place at sunset at Orizantes Restaurant on Lycabettus Hill. The hill is the highest point in the city at 277 meters above sea level and overlooks Athens historical sites including the Acropolis, the Temple of Olympian Zeus and the Panathenaic Stadium.



DAY 2: 28 September 2021

This session was an opportunity for the conference to hear from ENYA, who all participated virtually. The Young Advisors from across Europe presented their recommendations from their hard work from the year and their suggestions for ENOC's next steps.

Theoni Koufonikolakou, opened Day 2 of the Conference and presented, **Suzanne Garcia Imbernon**, Task Manager, Office of the Commissioner for Children-Malta, and this year's General ENYA Coordinator. Suzanne proceeded on Zoom to introduce the ENYA session.

The Young Advisors began with **Madeleine** hosting a Kahoot game. The questions consisted of trivia facts to learn about the diversity of European countries in an interactive and lighthearted way. All attendees, Zoom and in-person, were able to play. Next, ENYA Coordinator-Suzanne shared a [video](#) which summarized the two-day virtual 2021 ENYA Forum. The footage captured the collaboration of the Young Advisors, the important discussions of the impact of COVID-19 on children's rights, and their opinions on addressing the issues. Next, she showed a video created by the French ENYA team which showcased children's rights and perspectives during COVID-19 through an incredible [rap song](#).

ENYA Recommendations

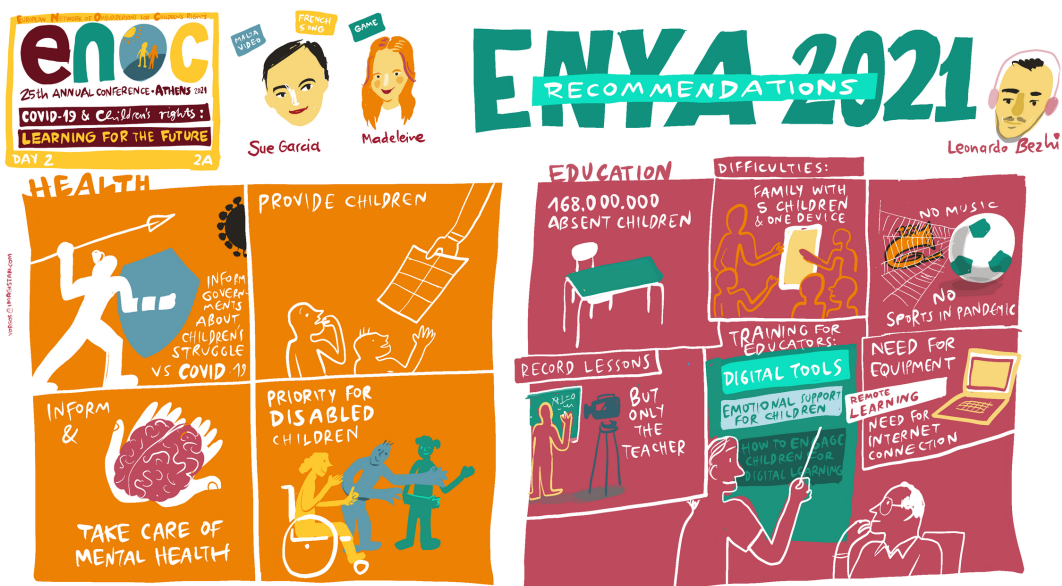
After these introductions, the Young Advisors presented a summary from their [full report of recommendations](#) they collaborated on during their participation in the ENYA 2021 project.

Health: Young Advisors **Madeleine** and **Leonardo** started with a "would you rather game" which cleverly taught about various issues relating to children's health rights while engaging attendees in the Athens auditorium. Their recommendations are summarized as follows:

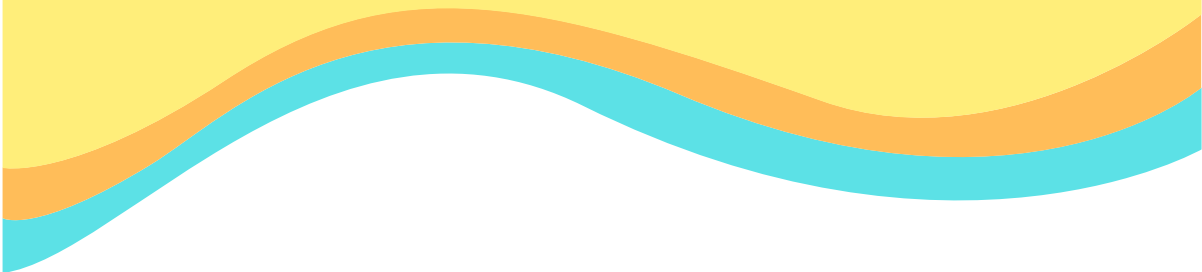
- Ensure authorities provide frequent and clear information during the pandemic discussing the issues experienced by young people
- More investment directed towards mental health for young people with unique approaches specialized for children
- Provide better information regarding the virus to all children, especially vulnerable groups

Education: Young Advisors **Aurore** and **Fériel** shared a [video](#) from UNICEF as an introduction to the issues regarding education. The video explored the gravity of the education gaps created from the pandemic and it highlighted the urgency for schools to confront these extensive consequences. The Young Advisors explained the issues facing children: larger families' struggle to meet the technological needs to sufficiently support all of their children, COVID-19 banned more than educational activities for children such as music and sports which are also important for development and classes at home were difficult for children to adapt to. Their recommendations are summarized as:

- Children require sufficient devices and internet connection for remote learning to be effective
- Children's classes should always be recorded for review for those unable to attend
- Teachers should be better equipped to handle digital learning tools, be given training to be able to connect with children to emotionally support their students even in remote learning and provide more engaging online lessons



Before moving onto to the next topic, **Theoni Koufonikolakou** asked a question regarding recording lessons if that would discourage in-class participation. Young Advisor **Elisa** agreed, for her it helps motivate students to join class and not procrastinate the lesson. Young Advisor **Leonardo** countered that recorded lessons are beneficial for students to revisit the work several times to account for the lack of in-person education which allows for students to receive better instruction in the classroom. Young Advisor **Isidora** and **Angela** expressed their agreement with Leonardo. **Bruce Adamson** asked the Young Advisors what recommendations they have for the commissioners and ombudspersons to which Leonardo and Isidora replied that their role should be to use the legal framework and amplify the young people's voices to transform their needs into actions.



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After a short break, Young Advisor Madeleine hosted another Kahoot game for all attendees to learn more about trivia of the diversity of European countries.

Poverty: Young Advisors **Elizabeth** and **Isidora** continued the presentations by sharing a UNICEF [video](#) which highlighted the obstacles faced by children living with financial hardship and discussed recent trends and statistics. Elizabeth discussed the various additional obstacles children living in poverty had to cope with during the pandemic: access to clean water, affording protective face coverings and lacking an adequate home during quarantine. They also recognized that the economic situation of the parents should not hold a child back from their potential. Their recommendations included:

- Families in difficult socio-economic situations should be identified to be provided with proper support regarding food, disinfectant supplies and medicine
- Families with parents suffering from unemployment, exploitation or discrimination due to the pandemic should be thoroughly supported
- Vulnerable populations (large families, children in care, children with disabilities, Roma children) should be granted increased social benefits to counteract the effectives of the pandemic
- Childcare centers should increase services during these times since the burden to care for youngest children was often on the shoulders of the older children in the family
- Education must remain a highest priority in that free, consistent, quality education must be provided to all, especially those living in poverty
- Recognize that certain children need extra support

After, a few people discussed their topics, including **Daniel Toda** and **Koulla Yiasouma** who discussed the role of Commissioners and Ombudspersons in economic policy.

Koulla acknowledged that their role should be to be involved in the economic policy which clearly affects the rights of the most disadvantaged children, those living in poverty. **Theoni Koufonikolakou** added to this complex issue by accepting the fact that poverty leads to violations of many rights for children. **Bruce Adamson** joined the discourse by asking the Young Advisors what specific requests they have for Commissioners and Ombudspersons to which Elizabeth replied that they should work to protect the most disadvantaged groups of children.

Next, the Young Advisors chose other topics they wanted to address.

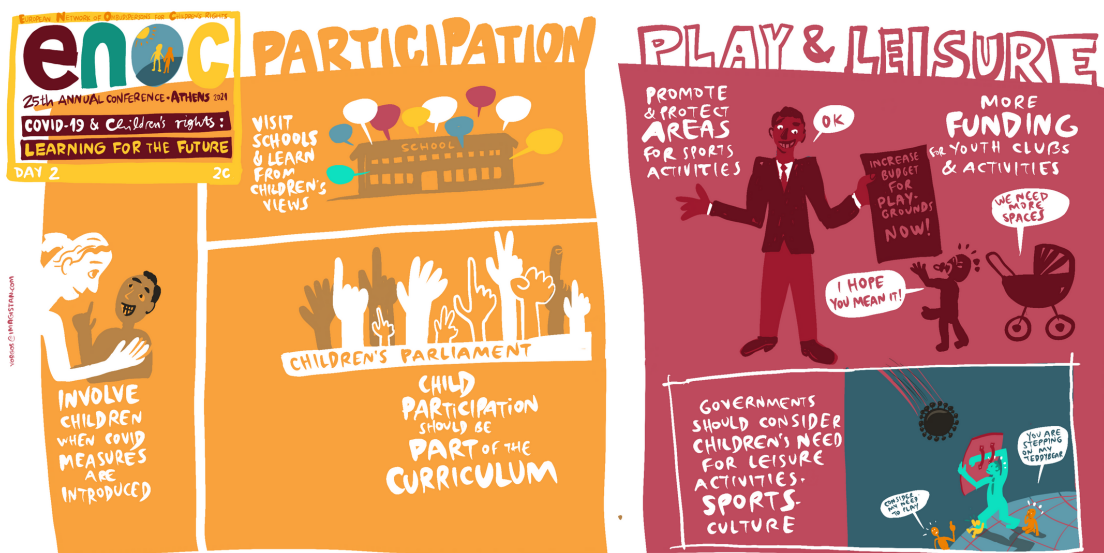
Violence: Young Advisors **Lorella** and **Angela** discussed their recommendations for protecting children from violence:

- Schools should be an essential pillar to identify and prevent violence against children by training teachers
- Other public professionals, such as police, should also be equipped with training to manage children's mental health situations
- The government should make sure to provide emergency housing and emotional support for children who need to escape domestic violence
- Online platforms should be active in spreading awareness of all forms of abuse against children
- Support services to help children who commit violence should be holistic and address the child's emotional needs



Participation: Young Advisors **Ally** and **Rozina** outlined the importance of children's participation through their recommendations:

- The Ministry of Education should create a designated committee to visit schools and hear children's perspectives and needs
- Young people must be consulted when the next pandemic measures are decided, especially regarding in-person schooling, online exams, keeping leisure areas open and mental health services
- Child participation should be included in educational curriculum including in the schools' protocols themselves



Information: **Rozina** and **Ally** continued after transitioning to the last topic's recommendations:

- COVID-19 information should be more accessible to children as well as more carefully choose language about how children relate to the issues

Digital Environment: Young Advisor **Elisa** covered the benefits and consequences of the online world through an original acting sketch. A benefit she mentioned was easily connecting with friends while a consequence was cyberbullying.

ENYA ended their presentations with a jeopardy game hosted by Young Advisor Eliza. The game was interactive for attendees in the conference in Athens to discuss the four theme areas: Education, Health, Poverty and Violence.

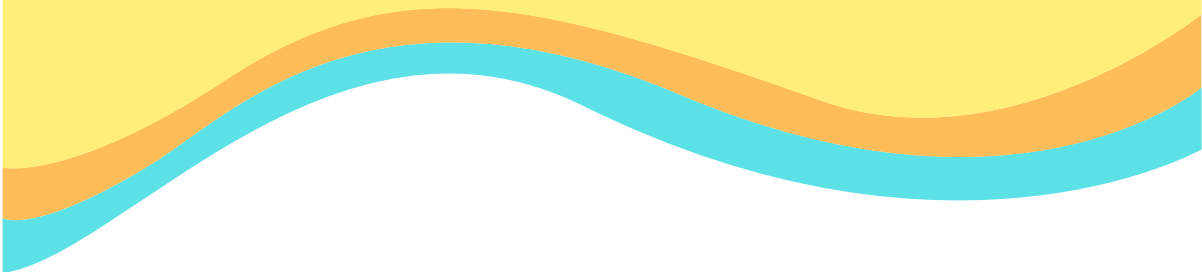
Panel Discussion: What's next? A strategy for the future

This panel was moderated by **Bruce Adamson**. The discussion brought together four representatives of European and international organisations who joined online to express their perspectives and discuss future strategies.

Velina Todorova, Vice Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child detailed various concerns of the Committee and ENOC such as the ramifications of the COVID-19 emergency measures for children's rights, especially children belonging to vulnerable groups. She emphasized the reality that children were not properly consulted before the implementation of emergency measures in many countries. Then, thanked ENOC for their work on CRIA and their statements to their continued dedication for transparency in children's rights, and she commended ENOC for organizing this important conference to explore solutions to these issues.

Dragoș Pișlaru, Member of the European Parliament, Vice-Chair of the Intergroup on Children's Rights echoed similar sentiments from the Vice Chair by agreeing that the solutions of this conference should be based around the recommendations presented by children themselves. He explained that children were most likely affected to the greatest degree by the pandemic which harmed their mental health, education, access to support and overall development. To do so, Dragoș Pișlaru stressed that resources must be adequately allocated to be able to carry out these initiatives efficiently so policy makers can be held accountable for these promises.





Valeria Setti, European Commission Coordinator for the rights of the child began by expressing the Commission's pride to finance ENOC and that they value the work of ENYA and ENOC. She continued by sharing key points about the Strategy on the Rights of the Child: addressing the need to protect vulnerable groups, it is the first strategy of its kind, the initiative extends beyond Europe, the strategy stresses that children should be considered as stakeholders in their communities, and that the document should inspire countries to adopt more robust approaches to children's rights. A final issue she mentioned was that what the Commission will be addressing in the future is the legal inconsistencies across the European countries regarding family relations.

Regina Jensdottir, Head of the Council of Europe Children's Rights Division provided a similar summary of the mental, physical and educational consequences for children created by the pandemic. She informed that these issues will be the focus of the Council of Europe's future initiatives. Additional issues she mentioned were related to the increase of sexual violence and privacy infringements in the digital environment as a direct consequence of measures adopted to contain the pandemic. In the digital environment specifically, she stressed the importance for clearer legal framework regarding the issue of sexually explicit images shared between minors. She mentioned that improving sexual education across Europe for children should also be a priority. Although these may be difficult topics, she concluded by stating that these challenging conversations are essential to meet the best interests of children.

Bruce continued by opening the floor for the panel to ask questions to ENOC members. **Velina Todorova** posed the question if ENOC members had been consulted by their governments during the design and implementation of emergency measures or during vaccination campaigns regarding children. The ENOC representative from Sweden, Elisabeth Dahlin, shared her experience that her office was not informed during the policymaking, but that they asked themselves to be included. **Dragoș Pîslaru** asked conference participants about the overwhelming need for mental health support and the addition of the digital environment. Young Advisor Madeleine confirmed this need and shared her perspective on the need for policymakers to take concrete steps to address this. **Regina Jensdottir** asked members what progress in the field of sexual education. **Theoni Koufonikolakou** explained ENOC's conference last year which covered LGBTIQ+ rights for children and mentioned ENOC's firm stance on non-discrimination. She also reminded of the ENOC 2017 position statement on [Comprehensive Relationship & Sexuality education: the right to be informed](#).



Plenary Session: Update from ENOC members on positive recent child right related developments in their jurisdiction

This session was moderated by **Caroline Vrijens**, Children's Rights Commissioner (Flemish), Belgium. Each ENOC member, in-person and on Zoom, spoke for one minute to share an update on their progress on initiatives from the past year. After each member shared, thirty minutes were allocated for questions and discussion on the updates. Topics discussed included the diverse perspectives on laws around physical and emotional impacts of corporal and verbal punishment, bullying in schools, policy making in countries consisting of individual nation states, the constitutionalizing of the UNCRC, and a proposal for updates in the future to be written and distributed to all members. **Caroline Vrijens** ended this session by thanking everyone for their incredible contributions and wished everyone luck for the next year's progress.

Conference Close

The conference was closed by **Theoni Koufonikolakou** who thanked everyone for their attendance and for those who helped organize the conference. She expressed her gratitude to see some members able to attend in-person and how important and valuable the live interaction is despite the context. She thanked again all those who made extra effort to travel to Athens and participate in this event, and those who attended online and whose contribution has been equally relevant and appreciated.

Throughout the Conference, Graphic Artist and Illustrator, Yorgos Konstantinou, visually captured and portrayed the dialogue and discussions.

Conference related materials and information are available on the ENOC [website](#).

Discussion on ENOC's Position Statements (only for ENOC members)

The first ENOC exclusive session consisted of **Theoni Koufonikolakou** reviewing the ENOC Statement on COVID-19 -Learning for the Future and the one on Children's Rights in the context of Pushbacks. She moderated discussion to ensure all members agreed before closing and took on board some last comments on the second statement.

The second day concluded by an evening walking tour for attendees in Athens. The group embarked on a one and a half hour walking tour guided by a private, experienced guide to learn about ancient and recent history of the Acropolis, Thiseio and Monastiraki Square areas.



DAY 3: 29 September 2021

ENOC 25th General Assembly [ENOC Members Only]

The ENOC General Assembly meeting consisted of an opening from ENOC Chair, **Bruce Adamson**, the passing of ENOC Chair to **Theoni Koufonikolakou**, and the election of the new ENOC Bureau.

The new Bureau is:

- Current Chair: **Theoni Koufonikolakou**, Deputy Ombudswoman for Children's Rights of Greece
- Past Chair: **Bruce Adamson**, Children & Young People's Commissioner Scotland
- Chair-elect: **Salvör Nordal**, Ombudsman for Children, Iceland
- Secretary: **Deborah McMillan**, Children's Commissioner, Jersey
- Treasurer: **Caroline Vrijens**, Children's Rights Commissioner (Flemish), Belgium

Additionally, two new Ordinary members were added to the Bureau as a part of the new Statutes:

- **Ketevan Sokhadze**, Head of Children's Rights Unit, Office of the Public Defender of Georgia
- **Helenca Pirnat Dragičević**, Ombudsman for Children, Croatia

The ENOC General Assembly meeting included a discussion on the Statutes Amendments and Membership Applications Working Group (Article 5.1-5.2-5.3 and Article 12.2) including voting to pass the term of the Membership Applications Working Group to be a three-year term. The statement on COVID-19 - Learning for the Future was reconfirmed to be endorsed by the members. The statement on Children on the Move was reviewed regarding the additions and amendments on the recommendations before being endorsed by ENOC. Additionally, the ENOC 2020 Accounts and Provisional Budget for 2021 were reviewed and approved. **Niall Muldoon**, Chair of the Working Group on Standards and Values, Ombudsman for Children, Ireland, delivered an update from the Working Group and moderated a review and passing of amendments regarding complaints and sanctions.

Theoni Koufonikolakou continued by discussing the ENYA Coordinator for the next year, and the members agreed for the Spring 2022 ENOC Seminar to be in Poland. She proceeded to close the conference by stating that ENOC will continue to grow and address the needs of children through the UNCRC guidelines. She also mentioned that Bureau members will now have an opportunity to volunteer to manage an ENOC project. She closed by explaining the next year's projects and thanked everyone for their cooperation with the hybrid format and valuable contributions.