

Case study

Evaluating a multi-country partnership's contribution to improving justice in child contact

ABOUT THIS WORK

Matter of Focus worked with women's rights organisations from five countries across Europe as part of a project to improve women and children's experiences of child contact following domestic abuse.

The Improving Justice in Child Contact (IJCC) project was led by Scottish Women's Aid and the University of Edinburgh and is funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020).

What we did

Achieving policy and practice change to better support women and children, and ensuring children's rights are respected, are challenging outcomes.

Our work on this project helped ensure that the programme focused on outcomes, and that data was collected in five different countries (Scotland, Bulgaria, Romania, Cyprus and Portugal) in similar enough ways to be able to make some comparisons and to be able to make claims about the contribution of the programme overall.

We worked closely with the core team to embed evaluation in the programme from the start, and mapped out the project's outcomes. We supported the evaluation of young people's involvement in the project coordination.

Everyone in this programme needed to be inspired to take action and have the support they need to make a difference in their country. We wanted them to feel that evaluation is practical and doable, and that the data and feedback collect can help them deliver a better programme.

ABOUT US

We are often invited to work with organisations as an evaluation partner, which we do alongside our outcome mapping approach. This can include tailored support, coaching or mentoring staff, critical friendship, research and evaluation capacity building or training, or working alongside teams as they undertake their outcome evaluation journey.

For more information see: www.matter-of-focus.com

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Evidence. Action. Change.

A great fit

The programme took a systems approach to tackle the problems women and children experience when contact with an abusive partner is ordered by the courts. This is important because the problem is a systemic one – with the police, court systems, social workers, children’s organisations, policy makers and domestic abuse support organisations all having a part to play to if change is going to happen. Because the Matter of Focus approach takes account of this complexity, there was a great fit.

An evaluation framework

We mapped the programme activities to the outcomes that are important through a collaborative process with the core team.

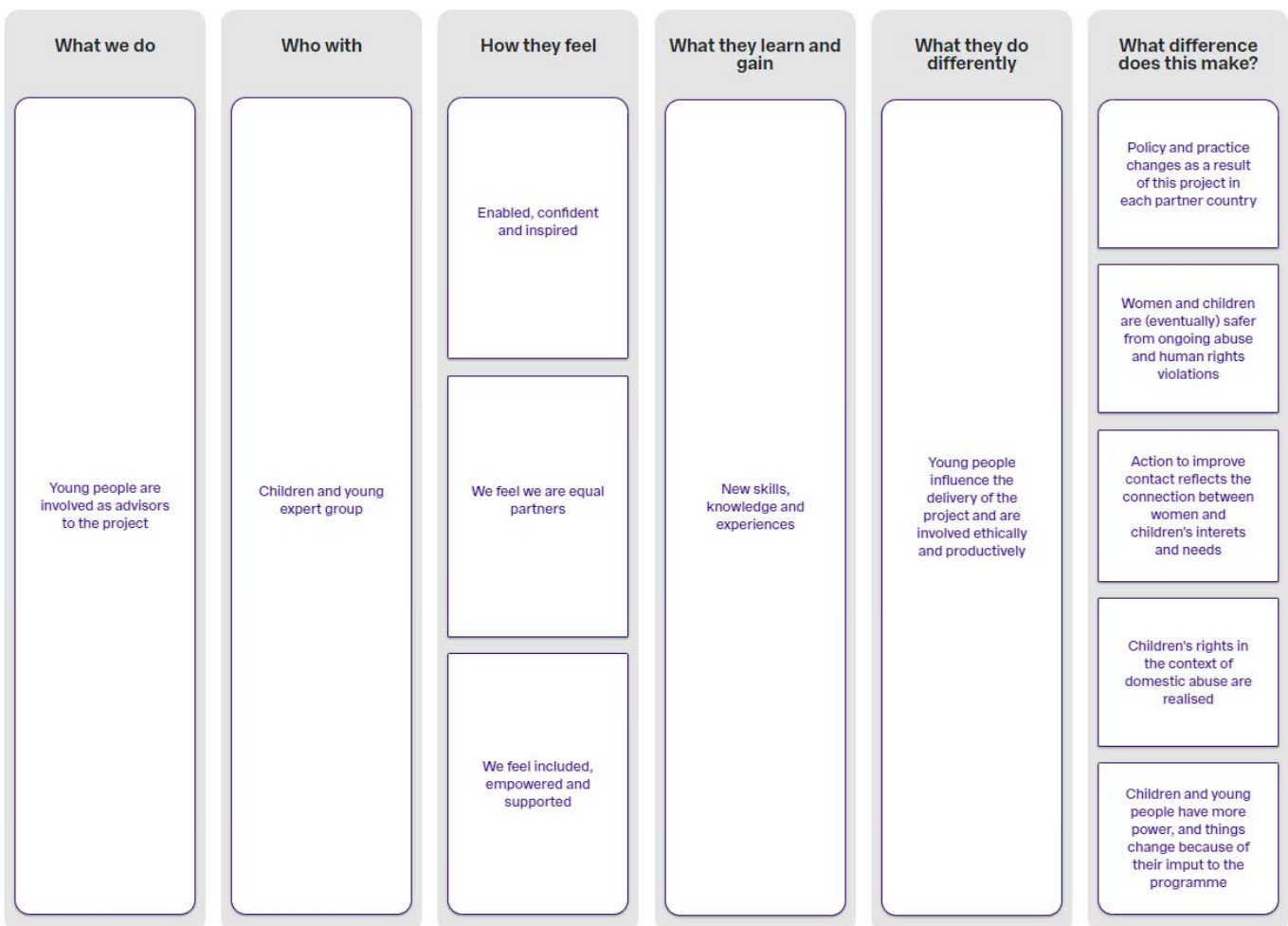
What we do	Who with	How they feel	What they learn and gain	What they do differently	What difference does this make?
Showcase models of children and young people's participation and system change	Women's rights organisations in 5 partner countries (partners)	Enabled, confident and inspired	How to address child contact issues in the context of domestic abuse	Project partners have a positive experience and stay connected	Policy and practice changes as a result of this project in each partner country
Coordinate actions across countries	Public partners in each country	Challenged and inspired to take action	Commonalities between the elements of the system that deny children and women's human rights	All take action to change the system and commit to ongoing change in their countries	Women and children are (eventually) safer from ongoing abuse and human rights violations
Support partner countries to try out models of action and participation	Wider relevant stakeholders	The findings from IJCC has impact and influence in other places		Key European stakeholder recognise domestic abuse as a children's rights issue particularly in contact scenarios	Action to improve contact reflects the connection between women and children's interests and needs
Provide overall evaluation	Children and young expert group	We feel we are equal partners	Cross-country learning enables each country to better challenge the system in their own country	Better implementation of children's rights under article 12 in contact cases	Children's rights in the context of domestic abuse are realised
				Partners identify future agendas and research gaps	

For more on our outcome mapping approach see: www.matter-of-focus.com/what-is-outcome-mapping

“ We thought it was really good to breakdown the ‘who with’ and the outcomes for different people. We’re recognising and valuing in our outcome mapping the importance of enhanced relationships between the project partners – the solidarity and support which ... is particularly important because that sort of emotional labour/relational approach outcome is often not identified and valued.”

We agreed a set of standard feedback questions for multi-stakeholder meetings that will take place in each country. These included the sectors that were engaged, and how different stakeholders think they can take action to ensure that women and children’s rights are realised in child contact following domestic abuse.

We worked with the young advisors group YELLO! to review the outcome map and make sure it reflected their perspectives.



Both of these maps formed the basis for evaluation of the project. We collated the data from within countries and pulled this together across the whole project. We collected data from group reflection, stakeholder surveys at two points, as well as feedback from the stakeholder meetings. We pulled this together into interim and final evaluation reports.



Read the final evaluation report: <https://bit.ly/3ECzJQz>

What did we find out about this project's contribution to outcomes?

- Over 180 stakeholder agencies were engaged with the project including the police, courts, social workers, local government and independent agencies with an interest in women and children's rights in contact and domestic violence.
- Across the countries, stakeholders report better understanding of the needs of women and children in families where domestic violence is an issue, and changes in attitudes around the rights of parents with a history of violence to have contact with children.
- Many new connections were made within each country, resulting in better communication and coordination potential despite very different contexts.
- Children and young people were engaged and involved in each country, and their voices were elevated to help professionals and policy-makers understand how these issues affect them and sharpen their resolve and perception of solutions
- In each country the project partners designed and developed ways of engaging with the issues that were suitable for their contexts
- There have been many policy and practice impacts across the partner countries:
 - In Bulgaria more specialist training has been developed and discussion is underway to improve children's experience in the court system
 - In Cyprus there will be a children's rights officer in the Women's House – a specialist service for domestic abuse.
 - In Scotland there is more protection for children in contact orders through the Children Scotland Act
 - In Portugal there have been widespread impacts building on the conducive environment created by the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, with several new laws that take children's rights into account in the case of domestic abuse.
 - In Romania, young people have engaged with key stakeholders with commitments for judicial and legislative change.
- Several countries report that they will continue their work on these issues and that further impacts are likely in the future.

If you would like to find out more about how Matter of Focus can help with your work, we would be delighted to have a conversation to discuss your evaluation challenges.

**Matter
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