

Strengthening youth diversion across Europe

Lessons and recommendations from the BRIDGE project

DIVERSION SHOULD BE THE PREFERRED RESPONSE FOR CHILDREN IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW WHILE PROTECTING THEIR RIGHTS AND PROCEDURAL SAFEGUARDS.

Youth diversion in Ireland, Greece, and the Netherlands



Ireland

Unconditional, flexible, and community-based diversion supported by voluntary and long-term youth work.



Greece

Broad range of educational, restorative and therapeutic measures, tailored to a child's unique needs and strengths.



Netherlands

Specialist, nationally coordinated diversion with a pedagogical, restorative, and social context focus.

Shared foundations: children's rights • procedural safeguards • age-appropriate • professional quality • positive development

Seven priorities for stronger youth diversion

1

Make diversion the preferred response

Broaden access through individualised, proportionate assessment, refrain from exclusion based on offence severity or recidivism, and prevent net-widening.

2

Protect rights at every step

Guarantee procedural safeguards by ensuring clear information, informed and voluntary consent, legal assistance, meaningful participation and protection against self-incrimination.

3

Tailor responses to children's needs

Offer educational, developmental and community-based interventions, with opportunities for voluntary restorative justice where appropriate.

4

Fund effective implementation

Sustain accessible services, clear delivery structures and require specialist, child-sensitive initial and ongoing professional training.

5

Connect systems of care

Coordinate justice, education, health, child protection, youth work and civil society support; before, during and after the child was diverted.

6

Share decisions with children

Treat children as active partners in their diversion pathway, in policy, programme design, training and evaluation.

7

Learn, evaluate and cooperate

- Measure the success of diversion through complementary outcomes, including wellbeing, education, fairness, victim outcomes, inclusion and reintegration, instead of relying on recidivism rates alone.
- Support sustained comparative learning through participating in and contributing to the European Youth Diversion Network.

From recommendations to action

National governments

- Strengthen and broaden diversion
- Embed diversion within a network of support and youth work organisations
- Guarantee safeguards and integrated support
- Expand evaluation criteria to include relevant desistance outcomes

European union

- Advance shared minimum standards and platform best practices through EU instruments
- Fund and support cross-border research, exchange and collaboration on diversion

Organisations and practitioners

- Professionalize and stimulate interdisciplinary exchange and collaboration
- Listen and involve children; evaluate and learn