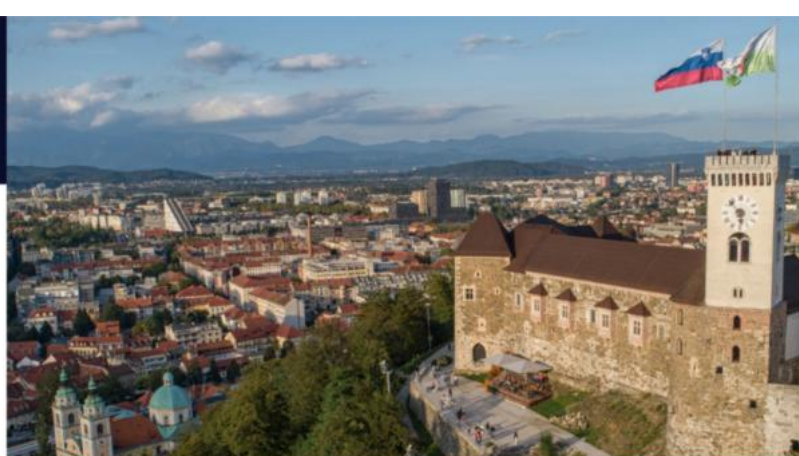


Growing up in cities

Local solutions for children

5–7 November 2025, Ljubljana

Social Innovation Lab



Learning Lab YELLOW – Strong Families, Safe Children: Local Pathways to Integrated Protection with UNICEF

5 November 2025, 15:30 – 17:30 CET

Background

Across Europe, violence against children remains one of the most pervasive and damaging social challenges. It affects children in their homes, schools and communities, cutting across geography, income and identity. Around half of all children in the region experience some form of physical, emotional or other violence during their childhood. Although the European Union and national governments have made significant legal and policy progress, persistent gaps in implementation remain. Early signs of neglect or abuse are too often missed, family support systems are under-resourced, and institutionalisation is still used too frequently when families are in crisis.

The consequences are far-reaching. Violence and neglect undermine children's development and well-being, with lasting effects into adulthood. They also place a considerable burden on health, education and justice systems, and represent a fundamental violation of children's rights.

While national frameworks provide the legal direction, child protection is lived and delivered at the local level. It is in municipalities, local authorities and community-based services that families seek help and where early action can prevent harm and family separation. Economic pressures, migration, housing insecurity and mental health concerns are increasing vulnerability, while local social services often face fragmented responsibilities, inconsistent funding and chronic underinvestment in prevention. When prevention fails, children are too often placed in institutional settings rather than family-based care, despite clear evidence that institutionalisation harms children's long-term outcomes.

This Learning Lab takes place at a moment of growing recognition that local action can shift this trajectory. Across the region, municipalities are demonstrating how investment in statutory family support, early intervention and coordinated service delivery can keep families together and children safe. Family support services that are accessible, rights-based and adequately funded help families overcome temporary crises, reduce the need for placements, and support reunification when separation occurs. Gatekeeping mechanisms are essential to ensure that children are not unnecessarily placed in residential care, and rely on strong local capacity, trust and a skilled social service workforce.

Speakers

- **Stela Grigoraș**, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF's Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia

Objectives

- Understand trends in violence against children and child protection challenges in Europe, including the rising number of children entering residential care.
- Explore the role of statutory family support services and gatekeeping in prevention and deinstitutionalisation.
- Identify how local governments can implement EU Recommendation 2024/1238 on developing and strengthening integrated child protection systems in the best interests of the child, including through better coordination between sectors.
- Exchange practical local experiences and develop actionable ideas to strengthen child protection systems at the municipal level.

Programme

15:30 – 15:40	<i>Welcome & Introduction</i> • Welcoming remarks • Ice-breaker
15:40 – 16:15	<i>Introductory Presentation</i> • Global and European trends in violence against children • The role of statutory family support and prevention measures • EU Recommendation 2024/1238: strengthening local governance and integration
16:15 – 17:00	<i>Interactive Group Work on:</i> • Prevention & Gatekeeping • Family-Based Care • Cross-Sectoral Coordination
17:00 – 17:30	<i>Joint reflections, conclusions, takeaways</i>

Contacts

Eurocities	Henriett Horvath	henriett.horvath@eurocities.eu	+32 491 26 94 98
UNICEF	Stela Grigoraș	sgrigoras@unicef.org	