

RESEARCH GROUP  
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RESEARCH AREA  
SOCIAL SCIENCES (POLITICAL SCIENCES, LAW,  
EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES)

# Applying the Principles of Effective Interviewing (Méndez Principles) in Pre-Trial Criminal Proceedings in Bulgaria



## INTRODUCTION

Interrogations are a critical part of criminal proceedings, yet traditional coercive methods often lead to false confessions and unreliable testimony. Vulnerable individuals – suspects with mental or developmental challenges, victims of domestic violence, vulnerable witnesses, and children – face additional risks during questioning. This project aims to align Bulgaria's interrogation practices with the **Méndez Principles**, ensuring that investigative interviews are ethical, effective, and human rights-compliant. The study examines current practices in Bulgaria and their compliance with international human rights standards, seeking to identify areas for reform and improvement.



## THE MÉNDEZ PRINCIPLES

Adopted by the UN in 2021, the **Méndez Principles** promote non-coercive, rapport-based interviewing techniques that enhance the reliability of evidence while safeguarding human dignity. These principles emphasize **special protections for vulnerable persons**, including access to legal counsel, recorded interviews, and trauma-informed approaches. Many countries have successfully integrated these standards, improving both **justice outcomes and public trust in law enforcement**. The principles offer a scientifically grounded approach to investigative interviewing that reduces the risk of wrongful convictions while ensuring that victims and witnesses are treated with dignity and respect.

## METHODOLOGY

The research employs a **mixed-methods approach**, combining **legal analysis** with **empirical data collection**. Surveys for **investigators, prosecutors, and magistrates** are currently underway, gathering insights on real-world interrogation practices. Additionally, interviews and **focus groups with law enforcement and legal professionals** will provide qualitative perspectives. The project collaborates with the **Association of Prosecutors and the Chamber of Investigators in Bulgaria** to ensure practical relevance.



## PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- **Analysing Bulgarian Interrogation Practices:** Conducting **comprehensive research on existing pre-trial interrogation methods**, with a particular focus on their impact on vulnerable individuals. This includes examining procedural safeguards, the role of legal counsel, and the techniques employed by investigators.
- **Evaluating Training Needs and Practices:** Investigating the **current level of training among law enforcement and judicial personnel** regarding ethical and effective interrogation techniques, and identifying areas for improvement. The project assesses whether existing training aligns with best practices and the Méndez Principles.
- **Legal and Policy Analysis:** Examining Bulgarian legislation and compliance with **EU directives and ECtHR case law** regarding suspects' and victims' rights. The research seeks to highlight inconsistencies and gaps in the legal framework that may hinder the protection of vulnerable individuals.
- **Developing Adapted Interviewing Guidelines:** Based on findings from legal analysis and empirical research, the project will propose **evidence-based methodologies for ethical and effective interrogations**, tailored to Bulgaria's legal and cultural context. The guidelines will emphasize the need for interview techniques that foster truth-seeking without coercion or intimidation.
- **Assessing Institutional and Procedural Challenges:** Exploring **barriers to the implementation of international best practices**, including resource limitations, institutional resistance, and existing procedural constraints within Bulgarian investigative bodies.
- **Promoting Legislative and Institutional Change:** Recommending policy reforms to strengthen procedural safeguards for vulnerable individuals in criminal proceedings. The project will provide specific recommendations for legislative amendments and institutional reforms.

## PRELIMINARY FINDINGS & EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- A scholarly study on **state obligations to prevent domestic violence** under ECHR and an analysis of Bulgarian legislation and practice are scheduled to appear in an upcoming issue of an international journal specializing in victimology.
- The project will culminate in a **final conference and a collective monograph** summarizing key findings and recommendations.
- Outcomes will include **adapted interviewing guidelines, legislative proposals, and training resources** for practitioners
- The research will contribute to aligning Bulgarian investigative practices with **European human rights standards**, enhancing protections for vulnerable persons in criminal justice.
- **Policy Briefs and Recommendations:** The project will produce policy briefs outlining specific legislative and procedural reforms needed to improve interrogation standards in Bulgaria.
- **Increased Awareness and Advocacy:** By disseminating findings through academic publications, conferences, and stakeholder engagements, the project aims to foster greater awareness and advocacy for ethical interrogation reforms.



## RESEARCH TEAM

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