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RESEARCH GROUP LAW

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.

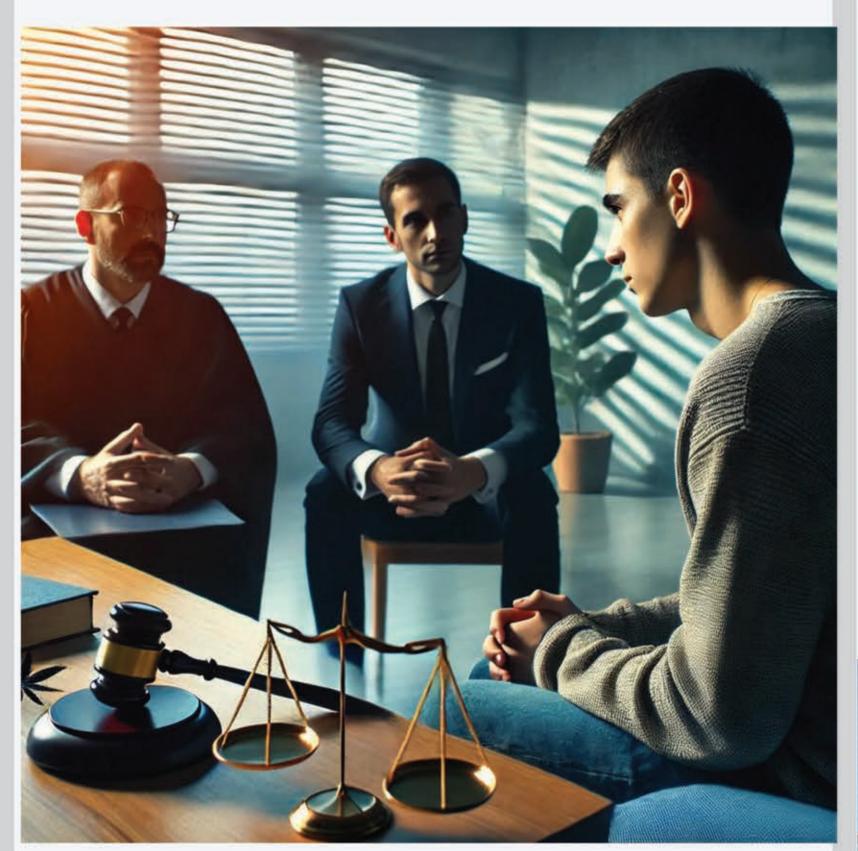


#### THE MÉNDEZ PRINCIPLES

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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