



UNIVERSITY OF TARTU

CHILD AS A WITNESS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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08.12.2022

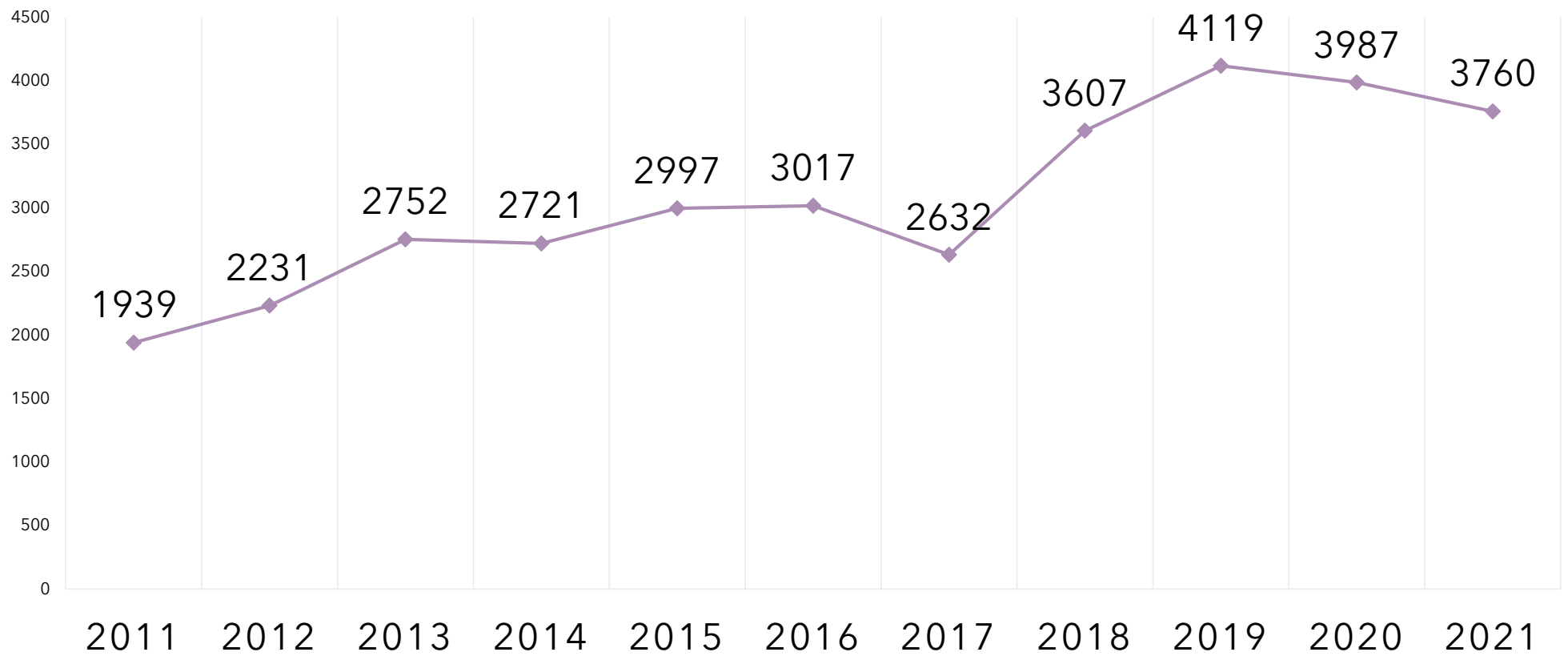




Outline

- Scope of the problem
- Data and methods
- Identification and referral of children who witnessed domestic violence
- Referral of child who witnessed domestic violence
- Status of the child in criminal proceedings
- Child-friendly justice
- Helping child witness of domestic violence
- Conclusions

Number of registered domestic violence crimes, 2011-2021





According to the police, in 2020 and 2021, 27% of domestic violence crimes involving children involved a child victim or witness.

Every third call made to the police about domestic violence daily, involves a child as a victim or witness.

Aim of the study

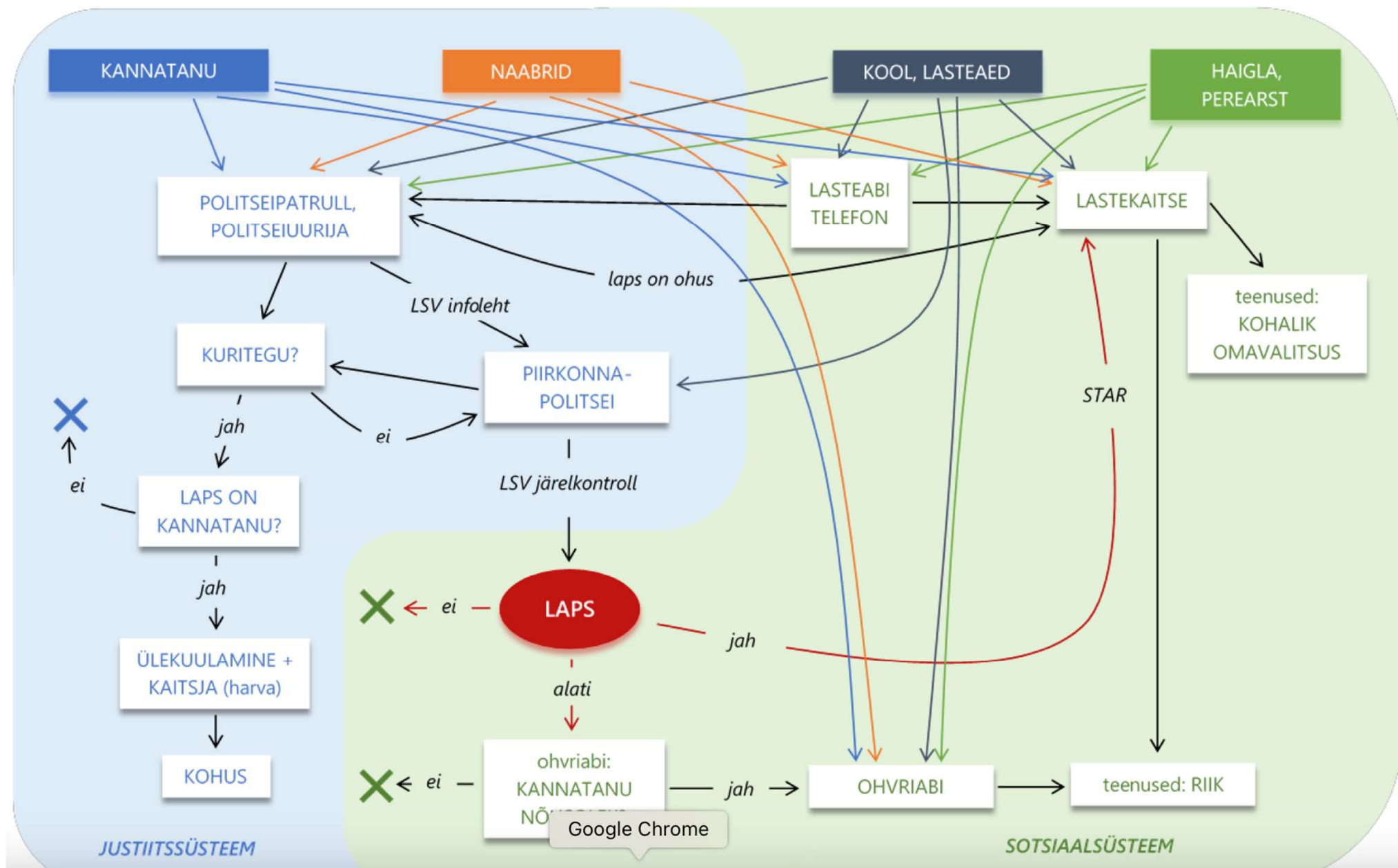
- How are children treated within the criminal justice system that deals with violent adults?
- What support is provided to the child, and by whom?
- To what extent this practice meets international standards?

Data

- Method: group- and individual semi-structured interviews
- Sample: 31 interviews with 48 police officers, prosecutors, lawyers, judges, NGOs, victim support service workers, and child welfare specialists
- Data collection period: November 2021 - January 2022.

Identification and referral of child witnesses of domestic violence

- Kindergarten, school
- ER, doctors, nurses
- Child welfare system (social workers)
- Children's helpline services (Lasteabi)
- **Police**
- Victim Support Services (incl NGOs, shelters etc)



Number of children affected by domestic violence incidents

	2020	2021
Victim	907	922
Affected person	3713	5115
Witness	110	114
TOTAL	4730	6151

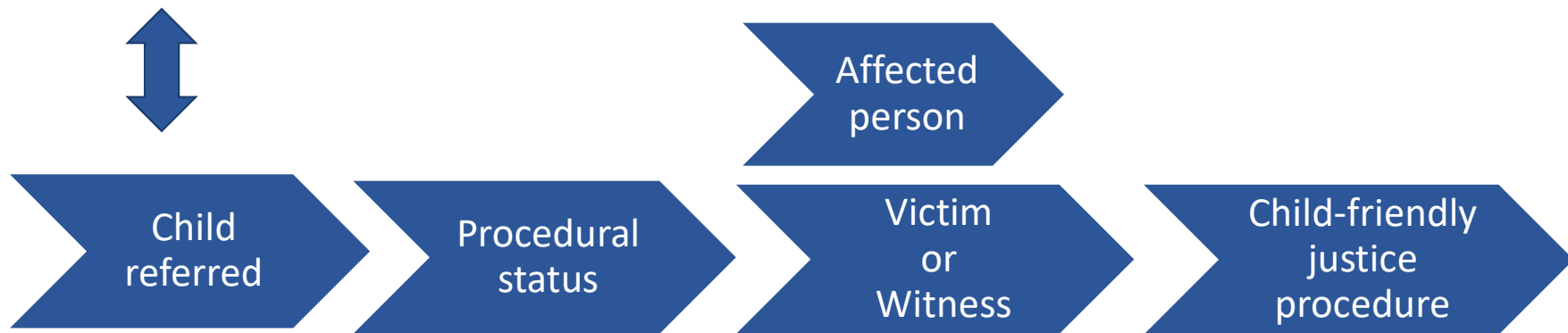
Source: Registration forms filled by police in case of violence in close partnership

'Affected person' means that the child was involved in the incident of intimate partner violence, but was not the direct victim: for example, he or she witnessed or overheard the incident while in the next room.

Criminal Justice



Child welfare

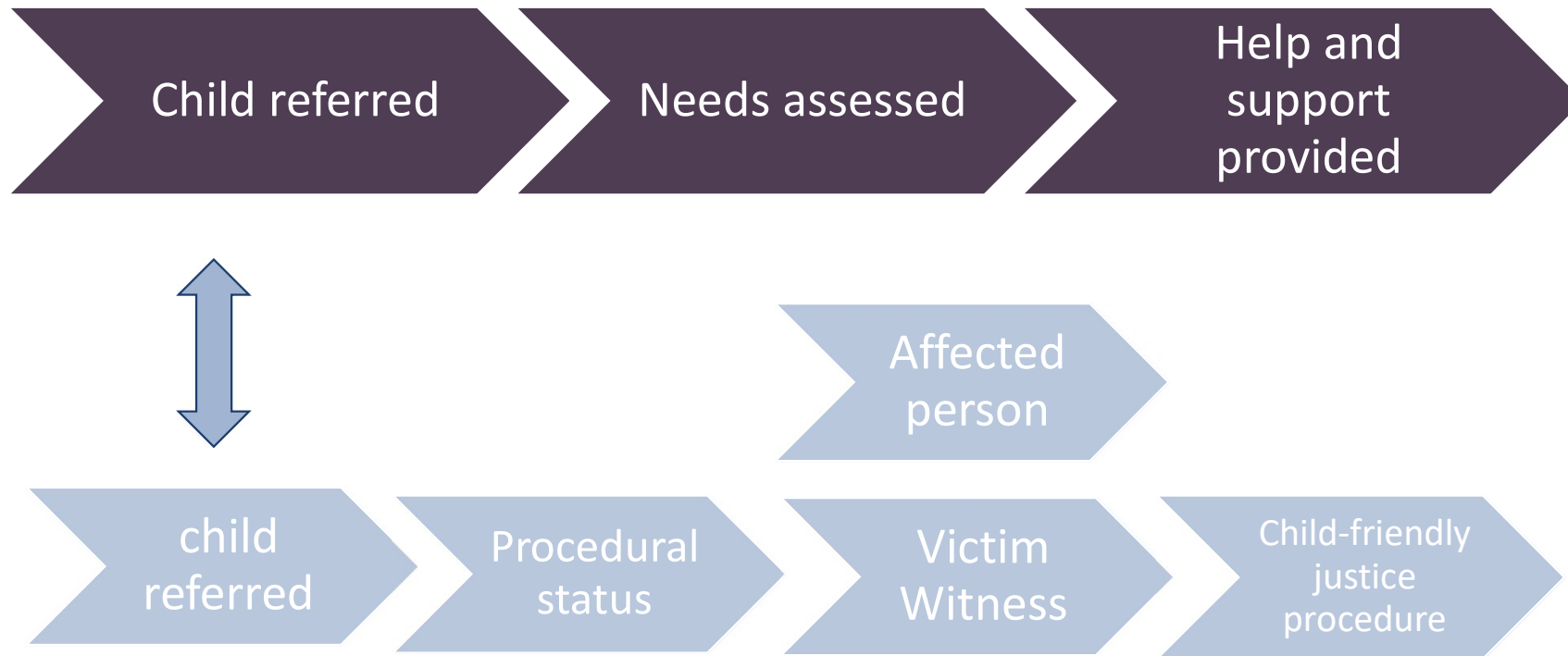


Child-friendly justice (from interviews)

- Exclusion of the child from the proceedings where possible;
- Use of the competence of children's homes;
- A specialised or trained police officer, prosecutor or judge interviews the child;
- The child is interviewed in the presence of a trained specialist.
- The child is interviewed in settings that are less traumatic to him or her.



Child welfare

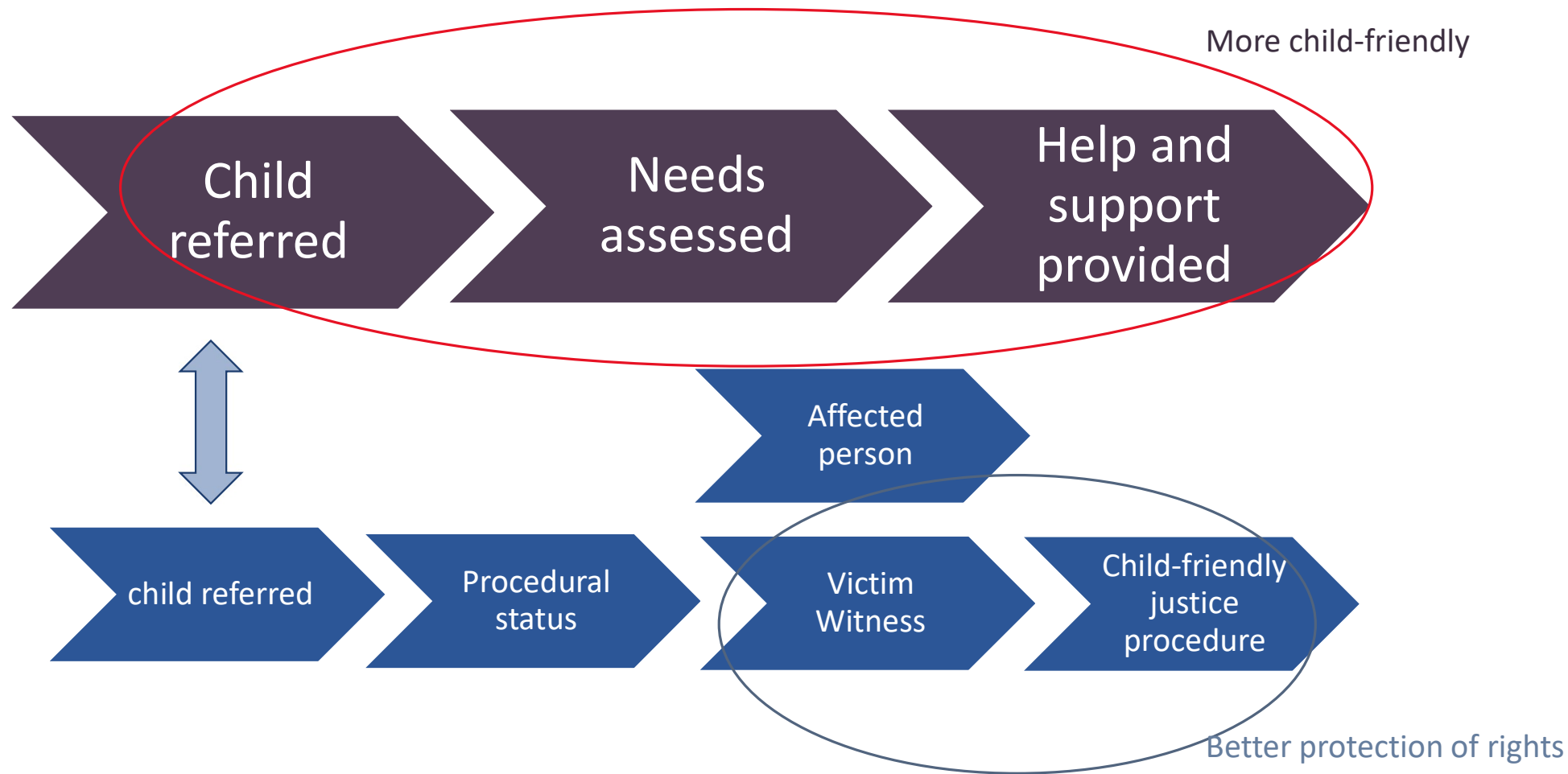




Who helps the child?

- Child protection/welfare
- Victim Support Services
- NGOs and other organisations





Shall a child be given victim or witness status?

-	+
Re-victimization by CJ procedure;	Deprive child of the right to be informed;
Loyalty conflict;	The child is not given voice in the process;
Child welfare assistance (local government provided) independently from CJ status.	Limited access to VSS (state provided)

Conclusions

- Estonia has a well-developed system to identify, refer and assist children exposed to domestic violence.
- The police mainly, but the criminal justice system, in general, play an essential role in this process.
- Therefore, the justice system shall be child-friendly at all stages.
- The role of child welfare shall increase as they have special competence in working with vulnerable children and assisting them.
- However, they would need further support and training in dealing with children exposed to domestic violence.

Thank you for your attention!

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