



## **New study: Slovenians consider sexual abuse of children a serious problem, but nearly half would not be able to recognise its signs**

Strasbourg/Ljubljana, 6 October 2020 – For majority of Slovenians, sexual abuse of children is a serious problem; nearly one in five have experienced at least one form of sexual abuse. However, awareness of this type of abuse is low, as parents don't feel comfortable discussing it with their children, and schools don't provide enough preventive education. These are among key findings of the study "Perceptions of child sexual abuse" in Slovenia published today. The study was conducted under the [project](#) "Supporting the implementation of Barnahus (Children's House)" run by the Council of Europe, in cooperation with the European Commission, and funded by the EU's Structural Reform Support Programme.

Almost 70% of Slovenians believe that sexual abuse of children is a serious problem in Slovenia, the study finds. However, nearly half of the respondents, 47%, would not be able to recognise its signs; moreover, almost a third believe that such abuse always involves the use of physical force, a quarter of respondents think that exposing children to sexual activities and pornography is not sexual abuse, and 17% think children cannot sexually abuse other children. Two thirds of the respondents think that schools do not provide enough information to prevent sexual abuse, and the absolute majority, 90%, believe education on the matters should be part of the school curriculum. At the same time, nearly half of parents find it awkward to discuss this topic with their children at home, and only one third have done so.

The study on personal experiences has shown that almost one in five respondents (18%) has experienced at least one form of sexual abuse up to the age of 18 years old; with inappropriate touching and indecent exposure being the most commonly mentioned forms. Only 6% of victims filed a criminal complaint, and only 3% of the complaints were followed by a trial and conviction.

**Lilijana Kozlovič**, Minister of Justice of Slovenia, said: "Worldwide, but also in Slovenia, child sexual abuse is one of the most underreported crimes. To combat it we need laws and policies, of course, but also more: we need a change in attitudes and the ways we work to make sure no child is left behind and that every suspected case is reported, efficiently treated and responded. Child sexual abuse is often surrounded by taboos, stigma and shame. This research helps in breaking the silence."

**Mirka Honko** of the [project](#) said: "For the Council of Europe, the research is a starting point for a more targeted work in Slovenia. It shows us what is the current level of understanding of the phenomenon of child sexual abuse in Slovenia and where are the gaps, so that we know how to train and educate people. I hope this study will be an inspiration for other countries to replicate the example of Slovenia." She stressed the importance of the study for the on-going process of drafting and adoption of a law on

Barnahus in Slovenia (Child protection in criminal proceedings and comprehensive treatment of children in the Children 's House Act).

The quantitative and qualitative results, as well as the methodology used were presented by **Nataša Mohorč Kejžar**, Research director at [IPSOS](#), the pollster that carried out the study. Some 1,100 face-to-face interviews were conducted with adult respondents from all over Slovenia; target groups with children were also organised.

**Background:**

*Barnahus (Children's House) is a Council of Europe-promoted model to address child sexual abuse by coordinating parallel criminal and social welfare investigations in a child-friendly and safe environment. It brings under one roof all relevant professionals (the judge, the prosecutor, the police, social workers and medical professionals such as psychologists, forensic doctors) to obtain from the child victim of sexual abuse the necessary information for investigation and court proceedings, to prevent his/her re-traumatisation and provide support, including medical and therapeutic assistance. The first Barnahus was set up in Iceland in 1998. Since then, similar services have been established in more than ten countries in Europe.*

*Since 2018, the Council of Europe and the European Commission have closely co-operated with the Ministry of Justice of Slovenia to support the country's authorities in establishing and operating the first Barnahus for child victims of sexual abuse in line with international standards and promising European practices.*

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