



ELEVATING EXCELLENCE: UNITING FOR EFFECTIVE CHILD PROTECTION WITH THE BARNAHUS MODEL



Government
of Montenegro



Co-funded by the
European Union



**Conference hosted by the Government of Montenegro
in cooperation with Council of Europe and UNICEF**

17- 18 April 2024, Hotel Hilton, Podgorica

Concept Note and Programme

Background

Barnahus (Children's House) is a unique inter-agency and multidisciplinary approach that brings together all relevant services under one roof to provide every child survivors or witness of violence with a coordinated and effective response. The core purpose of Barnahus and other similar integrated and multi-disciplinary services, are to coordinate parallel criminal and child welfare investigations and support protection, recovery and justice for these children in a child-friendly and safe environment.

The Barnahus model was first launched in Europe in Iceland in 1998 and sought inspiration from the Child Advocacy Center model in the United States. The comprehensive child-focused response of the Barnahus and other similar child-friendly justice services, has been promoted by the Council of Europe as a promising practice and is strongly anchored in the provisions of the [United Nations convention on the Rights of the Child](#) and the [Lanzarote Convention](#). The [Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2022-2027](#), [UNICEF Child Protection Strategy 2021-2030](#) and [EU Strategy on the Rights of the child 2021-2024](#) underscore the importance of Barnahus and similar child-friendly justice services for children. The relevance of the Barnahus model for child rights is further underscored by the recent recommendations of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Committee to numerous states to adopt and implement this innovative approach, while highlight the alignment of the Barnahus model with the fundamental child rights principles enshrined in the CRC.

This recognition has charted a clear path and garnered interest of many European and neighbouring states to explore the model in their own countries to take steps in reaching excellence in their response to violence against children by establishing and implementing this model. In their endeavours to set up Barnahus, national actors have been adapting the model to their own contexts and it keeps evolving, inspiring a diversity of multidisciplinary and interagency services for children throughout Europe and beyond. According to the recent mapping study¹ carried out by the Council of Europe by January 2023, a total of 28 Council of Europe member States has Barnahus and/or Barnahus type services in place, i.e. 61%. Of the remaining 18 States, five are in the process of setting up such services, and 11 States have at least some other multidisciplinary and interagency services for child survivors in place.

Governments, international and European intergovernmental organisations and civil society actors play an important role in providing sustainable action to generate political will to explore and adapt the Barnahus model and to support harmonised practices according to European and international law, guidance and standards. At the core of this conference lies the recognition of the paramount roles played by each of these stakeholders.

The Government of Montenegro' commitment to child protection is evident in its alignment with international standards, including the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Lanzarote Convention. These efforts are part of the country's EU accession strategy and the pursuit of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Central to this commitment is the adoption of the Barnahus model, aimed at enhancing the state's response to child violence. The 2017–2021 Strategy for the prevention and protection of children from violence first proposed the establishment of a Barnahus Children's House. The forthcoming 2024-2028 Strategy, developed with UNICEF's assistance, plans to actualize this proposal. The Directorate for Social Welfare and Child Protection and the Council for the Rights of the Child have been appointed as the leading bodies in this initiative. In 2022, Montenegro conducted a pivotal feasibility study, analyzing the legal and policy framework and identifying challenges for integrating the Barnahus model, thus laying the groundwork for establishing the Children's House.

The Council of Europe and UNICEF are committed to supporting the Government of Montenegro and other countries in establishing and maintaining high-quality and sustainable Barnahus services, which consistently strive to attain the pinnacle of the quality standards. The Conference “**Elevating Excellence: Uniting for Effective Child Protection with the Barnahus Model**” was initiated in the context of a cooperation of the Government of Montenegro with UNICEF and Council of Europe, to introduce the Barnahus service in the country. The conference will be co-funded by the European Union.

¹ [Mapping study on multidisciplinary and interagency child-friendly justice models responding to violence against children in Council of Europe member states](#)

Objectives of the Conference

The forthcoming conference “**Elevating Excellence: Uniting for Effective Child Protection with the Barnahus Model**” will serve as an interactive platform for governments and stakeholders from various sectors to converge and delve on its successes, identifying areas for improvement, and considering potential adjustments to national legal frameworks.

Specific objectives of the Conference include:

- **Knowledge exchange and learning** by providing a unique opportunity for governments, practitioners, researchers, and advocates to share their experiences, best practices, challenges, and lessons learned in implementing the Barnahus model. The conference will enable participants to gain insights into different strategies, innovations, and solutions that have been successful in various contexts.
- **Fostering strong government commitment and leadership.** An essential aim of the conference is to bolster the leadership and engagement of participating governments as the duty bearers towards children survivors and witnesses of violence and exploitation, including sexual violence. The conference intends to offer policymakers insights that will encourage them to prioritize such services, allocate resources, craft supportive policies, and incorporate this approach into their national child protection strategies.
- **Enhancing quality and holistic approach of service:** Another vital objective of the conference is to emphasise the significance of delivering high-quality, child-centered, trauma-informed, culturally sensitive, and multidisciplinary services within the Barnahus framework. It will, also emphasise the close cooperation of all relevant sectors, primarily justice, child protection, law enforcement and health as a prerequisite for meaningful and holistic support to children survivors of crime.
- **Strengthening international collaboration:** The conference acts as a catalyst for building and reinforcing collaborative networks at the international level. It encourages the exchange of expertise, resources, and technical support among countries, thereby accelerating the adoption of the Barnahus model in regions where it is not yet fully implemented and adapting the model to each country context.
- **Addressing emerging challenges:** Child protection and the Barnahus model continuously evolve in response to new challenges and emerging issues. The conference aims to facilitate discussions on emerging trends, such as the impact of digital technology on child abuse, new forms of exploitation, emergency and crisis situations, and the evolving legal landscape.

The Barnahus conference in Montenegro will convene a diverse group of participants, including government officials from European and Central Asian countries, the European Union, international organizations, development partners, and experts on the Barnahus model, child protection, and child rights. These participants will bring a wealth of experience from various sectors such as social services, justice, health, and law enforcement.

Programme

DAY 1 – 17 April 2024

8:00	REGISTRATION OF PARTICIPANTS
09:00	<p>Opening of the Conference</p> <p>Dragoslav Scekic, Deputy Prime Minister for Demography and Youth and President of the Council of Child Rights, Government of Montenegro</p> <p>Regina de Dominicis, Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia, UNICEF Representative to the UN and Special Coordinator for the Refugee and Migrant Response in Europe</p> <p>Regina Jensdottir, Coordinator for the Rights of the Child, Head of the Children's Rights Division, Council of Europe</p> <p>Oana-Cristina Popa, Ambassador of the European Union to Montenegro</p> <p>Annika Ben David, Ambassador of Sweden</p> <p><i>Moderator: Suzana Radevic, Bureau for Information, Government of Montenegro</i></p>
9:40	<p>Keynote Speech</p> <p>Bragi Guðbrandsson, Member of the United Nation's Committee on the Rights of the Child, founder of the Icelandic Barnahus</p>
10:00	<p>Setting the scene: An overview on Barnahus development</p> <p>Daja Wenke, Independent Researcher and Policy Analyst, Rights of the Child - Implementation of International Standards</p> <p>Susanna Greijer, Independent Researcher, Legal and Policy Consultant, Children's rights and protection of children from violence</p>
10:30	<p>The Trauma of Justice: A child survivor's journey</p> <p>Matthew McVarish, Co-Founder of Brave Movement</p>
10:45	COFFEE/TEA BREAK

Panel 1

Building the Foundation for Barnahus Implementation

11:15	<p><i>Moderator: Regina Jensdottir, CoE Coordinator for the Rights of the Child, Head of the Children's Rights Division</i></p> <p>Oleksandr Banchuk, Deputy Minister of Justice, Ukraine Andrej Del Fabro, Head of the Child-friendly Criminal Justice Department, Ministry of Justice and Simona Mikec, Director, Children's House, Ljubljana, Slovenia Niko Tatulashvili, Adviser to the Prime Minister of Georgia on Human Rights, Georgia Des Delaney, Chief Social Worker, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Ireland</p>
12:30	LUNCH

Panel 2

Collaborative partnerships and inter-agency coordination

13:30	<p><i>Moderator: Ina Verzivoli, Child Protection/Justice for Children, Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, UNICEF</i></p> <p>Miia Ståhlberg, Senior Specialist, Institute of Health and Welfare, Finland Jasmina Muric, Deputy Minister for Family Care and Demography, Government of Republic of Serbia Xhilda Papajani, Head of Social Protection Department, Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Albania Laura Korhonen, Director of Barnafid, National Centre on Violence Against Children, Professor of child and adolescent psychiatry, Sweden Mira Antonyan, Director, Child Protection Centre hosting "Safe Corner" Yerevan, Armenia</p>
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Panel 3

The Importance of International Partnerships and Coordination of Barnahus Services

14:30	<p><i>Moderator: Zaruhi Gasparyan, Head of Cooperation and Capacity Building Unit, Children's Rights Division, Council of Europe</i></p> <p>Aleksandra Marchewka, Policy Officer, DG REFORM, European Commission Olivia Lind Haldorsson, Senior Adviser & Head of Children at Risk Unit, CBSS</p>
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	<p>Ina Verzivoli, Child Protection/Justice for Children, Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, UNICEF</p> <p>Regina Jensdottir, Head of the Children’s Rights Division, Coordinator for the Rights of the Child, Council of Europe</p>
15:30	COFFEE/TEA BREAK
<p>Panel 4</p> <p>Montenegro's Journey and the Feasibility Study</p>	
16:00	<p><i>Moderator: Sabina Zunic, Deputy Representative, UNICEF Montenegro</i></p> <p>Irina Urumova, Author of the Feasibility Study on Barnahus in Montenegro</p> <p>Aleksandar Bakrac, State Secretary, Ministry of Justice of Montenegro</p> <p>Maja Knezevic, Public Prosecutor, Basic Prosecutors office in Podgorica</p> <p>Mersida Aljicevic, Director of Directorate for Social and Child protection, Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare of Montenegro</p> <p>Iva Ivanovic, child psychiatrist, Children’s Hospital, Clinical Centre of Montenegro</p> <p>Maja Raicevic, Executive Director, CSO Woman Rights Centre</p>
17:30	END OF DAY 1

DAY 2 – 18 April 2024

Panel 5

Forensic Interviewing and Evidence Generation

9:00	<p><i>Moderator: Daja Wenke, Independent Researcher and Policy Analyst, Rights of the Child - Implementation of International Standards</i></p> <p>Lucia Popescu, Member of the Superior Council of Magistrates, Republic of Moldova Anne Siv Åvitsland, Assistant Chief of Police, The National Police Directorate, Norway Tamar Dvalidze, Deputy Head of the Project Management Division, International Relations Department, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Georgia Dimitar Kolev, Child Rights Expert, Bulgarian State Agency for Child Protection, Bulgaria</p>
10:30	COFFEE/TEA BREAK

Panel 6

Addressing emerging challenges through Barnahus model

11:00	<p><i>Moderator: Susanna Greijer, Independent Research, Legal and Policy Consultant, Children's rights and protection of children from violence</i></p> <p>Afroz Kaviani Johnson, Global Technical Lead on Children's Online Protection, UNICEF Margrét Magnúsdóttir, Leader of Barnahus, Iceland Yulia Usenko, Head of the Department for the Protection of Children's Interests and Combating Violence of the Office of Prosecutor General, Ukraine Laura Korhonen, Director of Barnafrið, the Swedish National Centre on Violence Against Children, Professor of child and adolescent psychiatry and Olivia Lind Haldorsson, Senior Adviser & Head of Children at Risk Unit, CBSS</p>
12:30	<p>Wrap up and Closure of the Conference: Concluding Observations & Recommendations by International Experts</p> <p><i>Moderator: Ina Verzivolli, Child Protection/Justice for Children, Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, UNICEF</i></p> <p>Bragi Guðbrandsson, Member of the United Nation's Committee on the Rights of the Child, founder of the Icelandic Barnahus</p>

	<p>Daja Wenke, Independent Researcher and Policy Analyst, Rights of the Child - Implementation of International Standards</p> <p>Susanna Greijer, Independent Researcher, Legal and Policy Consultant, Children's rights and protection of children from violence</p> <p>Matthew McVarish, Co-Founder of Brave Movement</p> <p>Irina Urumova, Author of the Feasibility Study on Barnahus in Montenegro</p>
13:30	LUNCH