



16 November 2022

## **Joint statement**

### **on the occasion of the 8<sup>th</sup> edition of the European Day on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (18 November)**

**issued by five Council of Europe member States**  
(Andorra, Belgium, Monaco, San Marino and Slovenia)

and supported by 40 other Council of Europe member States:  
Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus,  
Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece,  
Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta,  
Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal,  
Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland,  
Türkiye, Ukraine and United Kingdom

as well as by Mexico.

### **Getting it right: ensuring child-friendly justice through Barnahus structures in Europe**

On 18 November 2022, the Council of Europe will mark the 8<sup>th</sup> edition of the European Day on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse. On this edition, the objective is to ensure child-friendly justice in Europe.

The Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention) aims, among other things, to establish a safe and protected environment for children that have been sexually abused or exploited. In this regard, certain articles of the Convention pay special focus on coordination of national measures (Art. 10), on establishing protective measures and assistance to child victims during the whole process (Art. 11, 14 and 31) specially during investigation (Art. 30, 31 and 34) and regarding interviews with the child (Art. 35).

In this sense, the Barnahus model has shown to be an effective response mechanism to child sexual abuse in particular and to violence against children in general. The concept of Barnahus is to create a safe child-friendly environment for the justice processes to take place and coordinate these processes with welfare professional to provide a holistic support to child victims and witnesses of violence. Barnahus ("Children's House" in Icelandic language) is a multidisciplinary interagency model of specific services for child

victims of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse with a strong child-friendly justice approach. Hence, criminal and child welfare investigations are coordinated, in order to reduce the negative impact of such proceedings on child victims and witnesses. The production of valid evidence goes along with the support and assistance of child victims and witnesses, including medical and therapeutic evaluation and treatment, in order to avoid re-victimisation and provide a recovery track for children as early as possible.

We welcome the initiatives of the Council of Europe to promote the Barnahus model since 2015, first through recognising the model as a promising practice and then through developing technical co-operation projects to assist member states in creating structures based on this model as in Slovenia where the Barnahus was inaugurated in May 2022 and in Finland, Ireland and Spain where projects are underway. We would also like to underline the importance of the leaflet on [“Child-friendly, multidisciplinary and interagency response inspired by the Barnahus model”](#).

We are proud that the Lanzarote Convention is one of the Council of Europe international instruments that has been ratified by all member states and beyond. But we must go forward and encourage all parts to set up, in accordance with their national legal systems, structures like Barnahus, as it is an effective way to contribute to the implementation of the Convention. We applaud all efforts made within the Council of Europe and member states in order to create national structures following this model, and to share knowledge and good practices between the parties to improve it, as well as the initiatives and activities on prevention, protection, recovery and awareness of child abuse, and to keep collaborating with all stakeholders to contribute to this end.

We will continue our efforts on fighting against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse beyond ratification of the Lanzarote Convention, and we will look forward for an effective implementation of its provisions, and in this sense, we advocate for the promotion of structures inspired by the Barnahus model, as an example of child-friendly, multidisciplinary and interagency response.