

Minister of Education and Children, Mr. Asmundur Einar Dadason

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues. Good morning to you all and thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important event - as we celebrate the launch of the council's new strategy for the rights of the child. I had the honour of reviewing the strategy throughout the drafting process and I must state how impressed I am with its progressive and innovative tone - it truly heralds a new era for the rights of the child - **An era where we simply must uphold child rights to a higher standard than ever before!**

The strategies strong emphasis on innovation particularly strikes a chord with me. As we build back better in a post COVID Europe, a Europe where more children than ever have had to flee their homes and their security - **innovation must be at the heart of how we govern, develop policy, and implement human rights.**

I want to congratulate all of you, the child rights division, Ms. Regina Jensdottir, and the Council of Europe and share sincere support for the strategy's implementation on behalf of the Icelandic Government.

Children's rights have always been, and always will be, a priority of the Icelandic Government in our cooperation with the Council of Europe - at least while I am Minister! We have benefitted from our collaboration with the Council and appreciate your work and follow it with great interest. Iceland has

strived to be a contributing member of the Council, **and I am delighted that our Barnahus model has been tried and tested in many of the Council's Member States, giving us valuable lessons on how we can improve the model further.**

The Barnahus originated from a strong desire in Iceland to break the mould of our justice system to fit the needs and rights of children. During its development, we sought to innovate, think outside the box and learn from the experiences of others, building a justice system with child rights at heart, as it should be! **Showcasing how innovation and child rights go hand in hand!**

During the implementation time of the Sofia strategy and long before, **the Council has been instrumental in the establishment of Barnahus all around Europe simultaneously as it has set standards for its Child-friendly, multidisciplinary, and interagency approach.**

Long before I took office as Minister of Education and Children, I was concerned about the long-term consequences for children when they don't receive the support they need, when they need it and how it can impact their entire lives. Even though Iceland is by many considered among the best places in the world for children, we have seen far too many instances where children are dealing with consequences that could have been significantly diminished, even prevented, with early intervention methods.

From my first days in office, for the past four and a half years we have been working towards revolutionizing services in the interest of children's prosperity in Iceland. Hundreds of individuals, institutions, and organizations have contributed to this effort. **On this journey, we stood on the shoulders of the Barnahus model, building on its legacy of bringing sectors and systems together - for children's wellbeing.**

In some cases, the changes needed to improve our systems were small, for example, increasing cooperation between service providers, but in some cases, the changes were on a much larger scale, including restructuring the child protection system in the entire country. This work has resulted in four bills being passed by the Icelandic Parliament, and there are more to come. **Most prominently I would like to mention our new legislation on the integration of services in the interest of children's prosperity as well as new child protection legislation. During this term, we have also introduced Iceland's first policy and action plan for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.**

As you can imagine, implementation of such a legislation calls for a substantial increase in the government's investment in services for children and families. Following the development of the legislation a comprehensive monetary and economic evaluation of the legislation was conducted. **The results showed that increased investment in integration of services and early prevention for children will have positive effects on the government finances in the long run.**

The financing of the legislation is projected to give a 9,6% p.a. return from the year 2070.

This means that these changes are projected to yield more returns than almost any other investment made by the government, be it innovation or creating a large-scale dam for electricity production.

These proposed changes, even though they are very carefully evaluated, are indeed cost effective, yield great returns and moreover, these changes will make a difference in the lives of children and their families, increasing their wellbeing and overall prosperity.

As I mentioned earlier, the rights of children have always been, and always will be, an Icelandic priority in its cooperation with the Council of Europe. We expect the rights of children to be a key priority during our upcoming chairmanship of the Council of Europe, which starts in November 2022.

During our chairmanship, as well as in our further work in Iceland, we will focus on continuing our journey of innovation for child rights and child friendly justice for all children. Our aim is to expand our vision for the Barnahus model, as is in line with the main objectives of the new strategy. **In the next year we intend to lead a discussion on the future of Barnahus and how we can work together to innovate and integrate the model to reach even greater potential for more groups of vulnerable children.**

We will also bring light to the importance of children being given ample opportunities to claim their rights and make their voices heard - specifically those most vulnerable. There we need to give specific focus on seeking out the voices of children that have experiences from emergency situations such as in Ukraine, as well as other parts of the world. **We need to listen to the voices of these children here and now! We need to amend and improve our services in line with their opinions, experiences, and their rights. It has always been important, but never as important as it is today!**