

Building a Europe
for and with children



REPUBLIC OF CROATIA
Ministry of Justice and Public Administration

Co-funded
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by the Council of Europe

Joint EU-Council of Europe project

Implementing the Barnahus Model in Croatia

Presentation of the Inception report

Launch conference
30 January 2024



The project is co-funded by the European Union via the Technical Support Instrument, and co-funded and implemented by the Council of Europe, in cooperation with the European Commission, Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM).



General information

- The project is co-funded by the European Union via the Technical Support Instrument, and co-funded and implemented by the Council of Europe, in cooperation with the European Commission, Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM).
- **Budget:** 666,503 EUR
- **Duration:** 1 September 2023 – 28 February 2026 (30 months)
- **Croatian Beneficiary authority:** Ministry of Justice and Public Administration



General information

The project is divided into three components, leading to the following outcomes:

1. Legal, policy and institutional framework is established for the sustainable operation of Barnahus model in Croatia;
2. Enhanced knowledge and capacities of professionals working with and for children to respond to child sexual abuse;
3. Awareness of professionals and the wider public on the situation of child sexual abuse in Croatia is enhanced.



General information

Stakeholders and members of the project Advisory Group :

- Ministry of Justice and public Administration
- Judiciary (Supreme Court of the Republic of Croatia, High Criminal Court of the Republic of Croatia, State Attorney's Office of the Republic of Croatia, County Court in Zagreb)
- Ministry of the Interior, including Police and Police Academy
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy
- Ministry of Science and Education
- Croatian Bar Association
- Ombudsperson for Children
- Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb
- Judicial Academy
- Croatian Chamber of Psychology

Beneficiaries: children at risk, victims and/or witnesses of any type of violence, including physical and sexual abuse.

Target groups: relevant authorities and professionals in contact with children and/or dealing with cases of child sexual abuse.



Preparation of the Inception report

- Bi-lateral consultations took place from 24 to 26 October 2023 in Zagreb and on 28 November online.
- Consultations were conducted on the basis of the same questionnaire
- Draft version was sent for comments to the partners (Ministry of Justice and Public Administration and EC/DG REFORM) as well as the members of the Project Advisory Group.
- [Final inception report](#) was endorsed by the project Advisory Group on 12 December 2023.



Inception report

- **Objective:** to offer a preliminary exploration of the views of the different actors involved in the future implementation of a Barnahus (Children's house) in Croatia
- The challenges and gaps identified as well as the areas for improvements should be viewed as opinions **based on the working experience of each professional group** and as such, they may be contradictory
- **First step** in exchanging views and identifying challenges among agencies

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Inception reports - Main findings

1. Legal, policy and institutional framework ensuring child-friendly justice
2. Challenges in inter-agency coordination, information sharing and management of child abuse cases
3. Training needs and awareness raising
4. Child participation



1. Legal, policy and institutional framework ensuring child-friendly justice

Identified gaps and challenges

- Multiple pre-trial interviews
- Police interview not considered as an evidence in court
- No specialised network of judges and lawyers
- Second interview by the judge might happen
- Special room for interview not available everywhere in the country
- Pre-recorded interviews for all children older than 16 not automatic in all courts
- Court expert assistants not always available



Identified gaps and challenges (follow-up)

- Confidentiality and data protection issues
- Delays of the proceedings
- Statistics on reported cases
- Safety measures after the sentence and when parallel civil and criminal procedures not coordinated
- Medical examination only possible in health institutions
- Discrepancies between Zagreb and the rest of the country
- Lack of financial and human resources



Recommendations :

- Once Barnahus is set up, only **one interview** in the premises
- Between now and the establishment of the future Barnahus: measures to reduce the number of **pre-trial interviews**, to automatically use **special rooms** (in court or at the police) and **pre-recorded interviews** for all children under 18;
- Develop a network of **specialised judges and lawyers**
- When appointed by the Supreme Court, the **juvenile judges' skills and competences** should be examined more carefully
- Modify the Law on Courts to **reduce the number of juvenile courts** (from 15 to 5) to enhance specialisation and sharing of experiences



Recommendations (follow-up):

- Reinforce **confidentiality and data protection** of the child
- Detailed reasons of the **long delays** should be explored in the forthcoming legal and policy analysis
- Review of the **role and training requirements of the court expert assistants**
- Encourage the use of **safety measures**
- Sign an agreement so that **medical examination** can take place in Barnahus
- Find **financial and human resources** to implement these measures and implement the Model
- Implement these measures **in Zagreb but also in courts outside Zagreb**
- Keep **political commitment** as high as possible



2. Challenges in inter-agency coordination, information sharing and management of child abuse cases

Identified gaps and challenges

- Several inter-agencies experiences but not one public institution with all services under one single roof
- Daily and practical implementation of the Protocol on the procedures in case of sexual violence
- Issues in data and information sharing between agencies
- Disparities between Zagreb and the rest of the country



2. Challenges in inter-agency coordination, information sharing and management of child abuse cases

Recommendations

- Daily and practical implementation of the Protocols ensuring the interagency coordination should be clarified and reinforced
- Adopt systematic multidisciplinary and interagency approach to encourage coordination at national level
- Improve data sharing processes and develop a single secured database gathering all the information on the child
- Legal obligation for agencies to cooperate under the Barnahus model
- Develop 4 or 5 Barnahus / children's houses in Croatia so that the services are available all over the country
- Consolidate financial and human resources



3. Training needs and awareness raising

Identified gaps and challenges

- Not all judges and public prosecutors dealing with child sexual abuse are specialised or necessarily experienced in children's rights
- Requirements to be included in the list of lawyers appointed to defend the child are too low
- Trainings are not always compulsory and continuous during the career
- Trainings do not always include a multidisciplinary and interagency approach
- Lack of information on online child sexual abuse



3. Training needs and awareness raising

Initial training needs

- How to interview, communicate and behave with child victims and witnesses of sexual abuse/child-friendly communication;
- Training in trauma base treatment for child recovery to provide better long-term care for the child;
- Training on child development and how to detect signs of abuse;
- Training on interviewing children based on evidence-based protocols/interviews;
- Interdisciplinary training involving all the professionals dealing with child sexual abuse cases;
- Online child sexual abuse;
- Human trafficking and sexual crime;
- Child-friendly medical examination.



3. Training needs and awareness raising

Recommendations:

- Set up a system of specialised and trained judges, public prosecutor and lawyers
- Prepare a detailed gap analysis to identify training for legal and non-legal professionals working with and for children
- Further develop multidisciplinary and inter-agency trainings
- Compulsory for career development and dealing with and for children
- Lifelong
- Avoid duplication
- Mobilise financial and human resources and build on the existing training structures and competences



4. Child participation

Identified gaps and challenges

- Children's opinions are not systematically consulted and taken on board when preparing a Strategy, an Action Plan, a Protocol, a Law, etc. concerning children.

Recommendations

- Creating procedures and tools for involving children more systematically in development of national documents concerning children;
- Need for awareness raising on child participation at national level



Conclusions

- Future Barnahus in Croatia is considered as a major benefit by all the stakeholders consulted
- Having all the services/agencies under the same roof would avoid duplication and re-victimisation of the child
- It would help to speed up the entire procedure and reduce the backlog of pending criminal cases
- It would also be a place where professionals could find support
- Help to detect and prevent cases, increase the number of convictions, and improve the general prevention of crime



Thank you!

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