



Barnahus

Innovative services to protect children

Barnahus

→ What is the current situation in Europe?

By January 2023, a total of **28 Council of Europe member States** had Barnahus and/or Barnahus-type services in place, i.e. **61%**.

Of the remaining 18 States, five were in the process of setting up such services, and 11 States had at least some other multidisciplinary and interagency services for child victims in place.

Map 1: Council of Europe member States where Barnahus, Barnahus-type services and other MD/IA services for child victims of crime are in place



The map is for illustration only and does not reflect a position of the authors or the Council of Europe on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers. Source: Data and analysis by Council of Europe, Children's Rights Division, Barnahus Mapping Study, 2023.

Barnahus: Innovative services to protect children

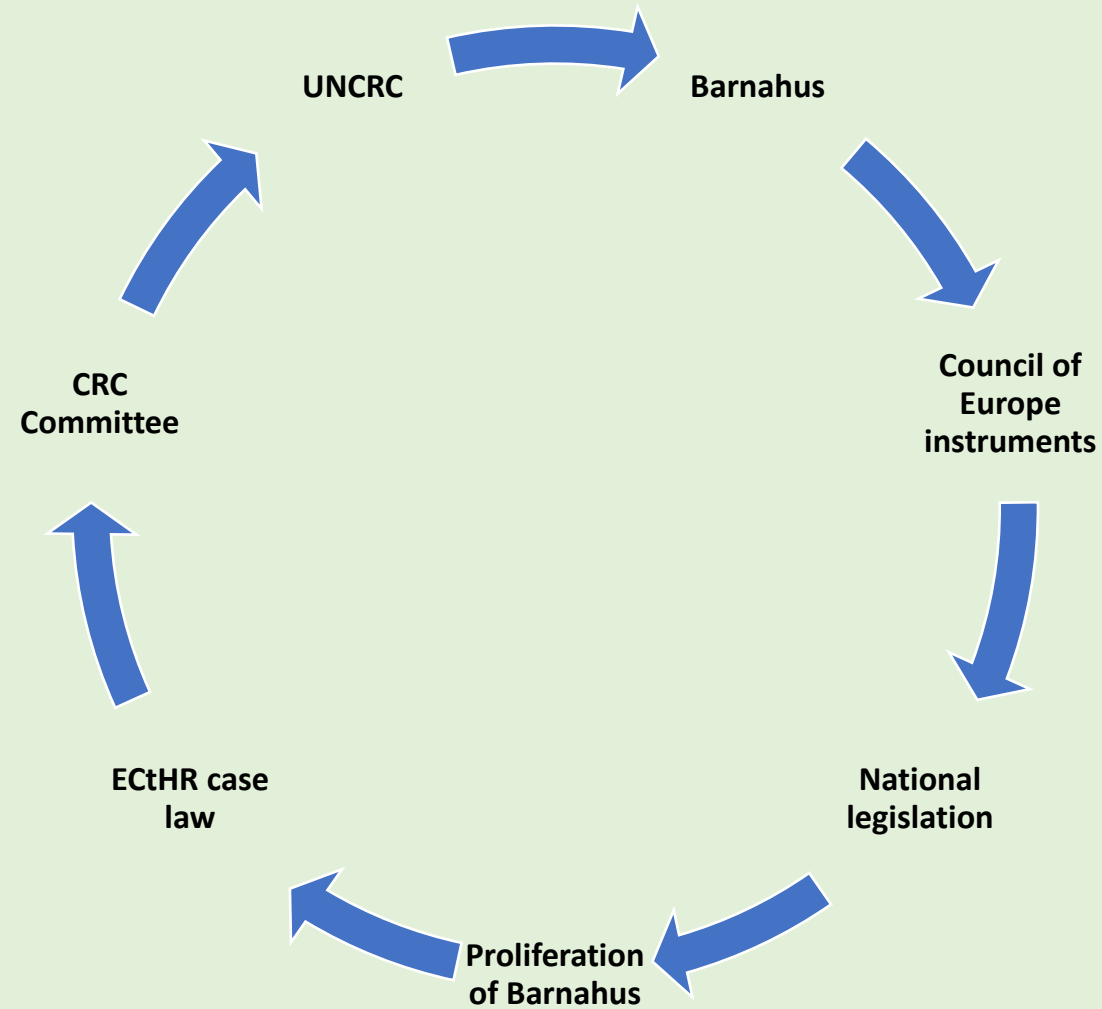
→ Why “innovative”?

“Barnahus”

englobes a multitude of structures and practices which have certain features in common, such as placing the child at the centre of operations, training staff, applying child rights-based methods of work, adopting a child-friendly and child-sensitive approach, while still allowing for contextual differences based for instance on socio-economic and geo-political aspects.

Barnahus: why “innovative”?

“Barnahus as a driver of change”



Barnahus: a European journey Mapping study on multidisciplinary and interagency child-friendly justice models responding to violence against children in Council of Europe member states

- **Published September 2023**

- **Study objective:**

Assess the **presence** and **scope** of Barnahus, Barnahus-type and other MD/IA services responding to violence against children in Council of Europe member states

- **Child rights-based approach:**

Data collection and drafting of the report guided by CoE child-friendly justice standards and with a view to International and CoE standards on the rights of the child



Barnahus: a European journey Mapping study on multidisciplinary and interagency child-friendly justice models responding to violence against children in Council of Europe member states

Barnahus	Barnahus-type services	Other MD/IA services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public institution - MD/IA services for child victims “under the same roof” - Child-friendly environment - Coordinate parallel criminal and child protection investigations - Forensic child interview with full respect of due process principles - Prevent secondary victimisation - Provision of or referral to support services and assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diversity of MD/IA services for child victims - Public or private service or public-private partnership - Safe, child-friendly environment - Coordination of criminal and child protection investigations - Forensic child interview - Respect for due process standards not guaranteed - Child may have to be heard again in court - Limited range of services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diversity of MD/IA services for child victims with varying set-ups and scope - Cooperation typically regulated by law, co-operation agreements or MoU

Barnahus: a European journey Mapping study on multidisciplinary and interagency child-friendly justice models responding to violence against children in Council of Europe member states

Survey questionnaire with all 46 member states (winter 2022-23)

Desk review (complementing data from States)

Analysis (mainly qualitative)

Peer review

Implementing the Barnahus Model in Croatia



Implementing the Barnahus Model in Croatia

- ❖ Improve the access and quality of the justice system for child victims and witnesses of violence in Croatia.
- ❖ Ensure that undue delays in the treatment of such cases are diminished.
- ❖ Ensure that all children who are victims and witnesses of sexual violence benefit from a child-friendly access to justice.

Implementing the Barnahus Model in Croatia

Analysis of the current legal, institutional and policy frameworks for child protection at national level

Roles and responsibilities of key actors, inter-agency information exchanges.

Assess the participation and involvement of children in relevant processes

Training gap analysis and recommendations to guide the development of appropriate training materials and organisation of training of trainers' workshops



Recommendations for improvement and a roadmap for the establishment of the Barnahus model in Croatia

Development of procedures and protocols to support inter-agency co-operation

Roundtables and workshops to raise awareness among decision makers

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 4:

“States Parties shall undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the present Convention.”

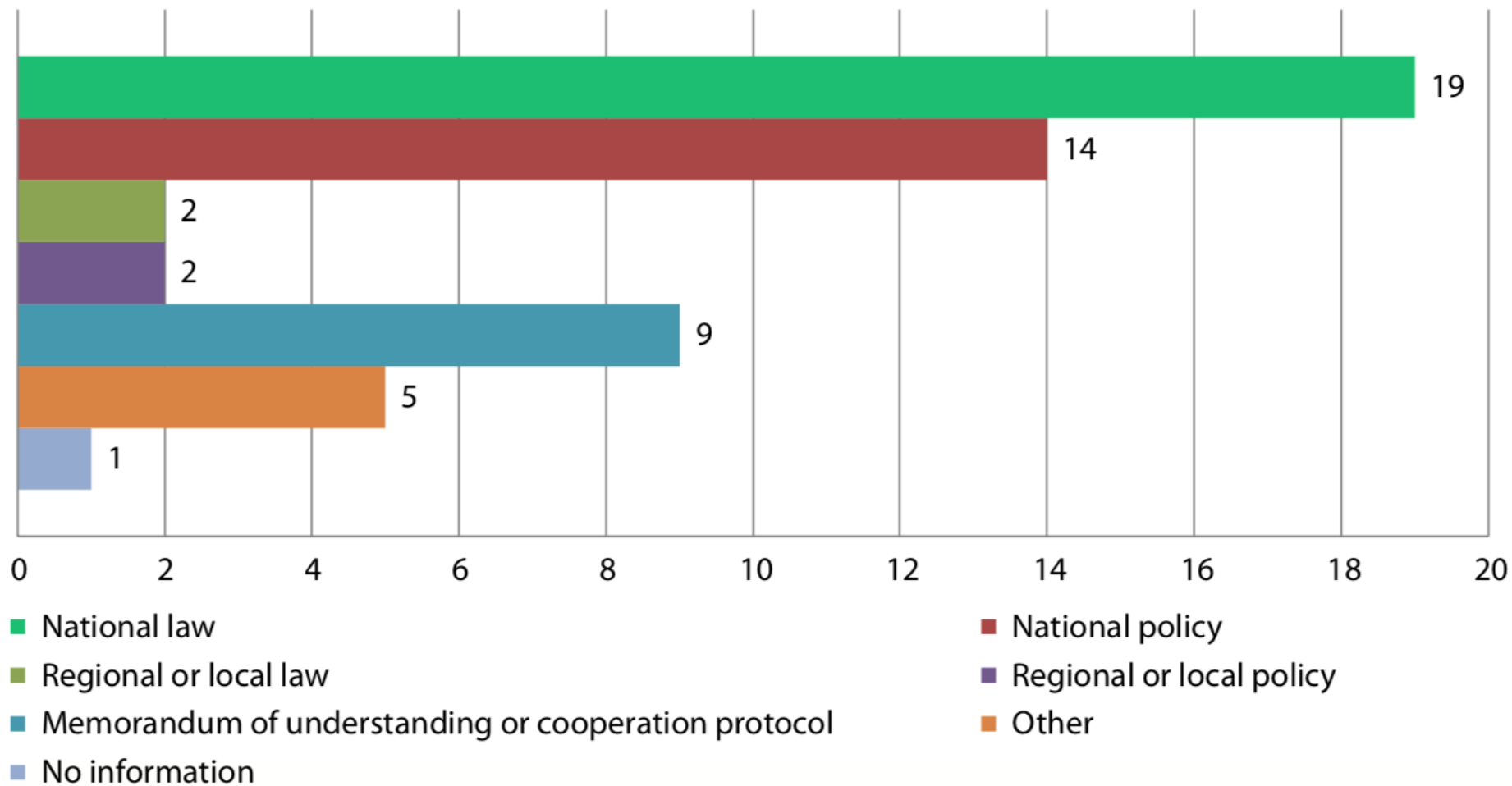
The Barnahus model can be viewed as an outcome of a **conscious attempt to translate or “operationalise” the principles of the CRC** to ensure the best interests of child victims and witnesses of abuse while respecting the rule of law.

Lessons learned from the study



Framework / structure underpinning Barnahus

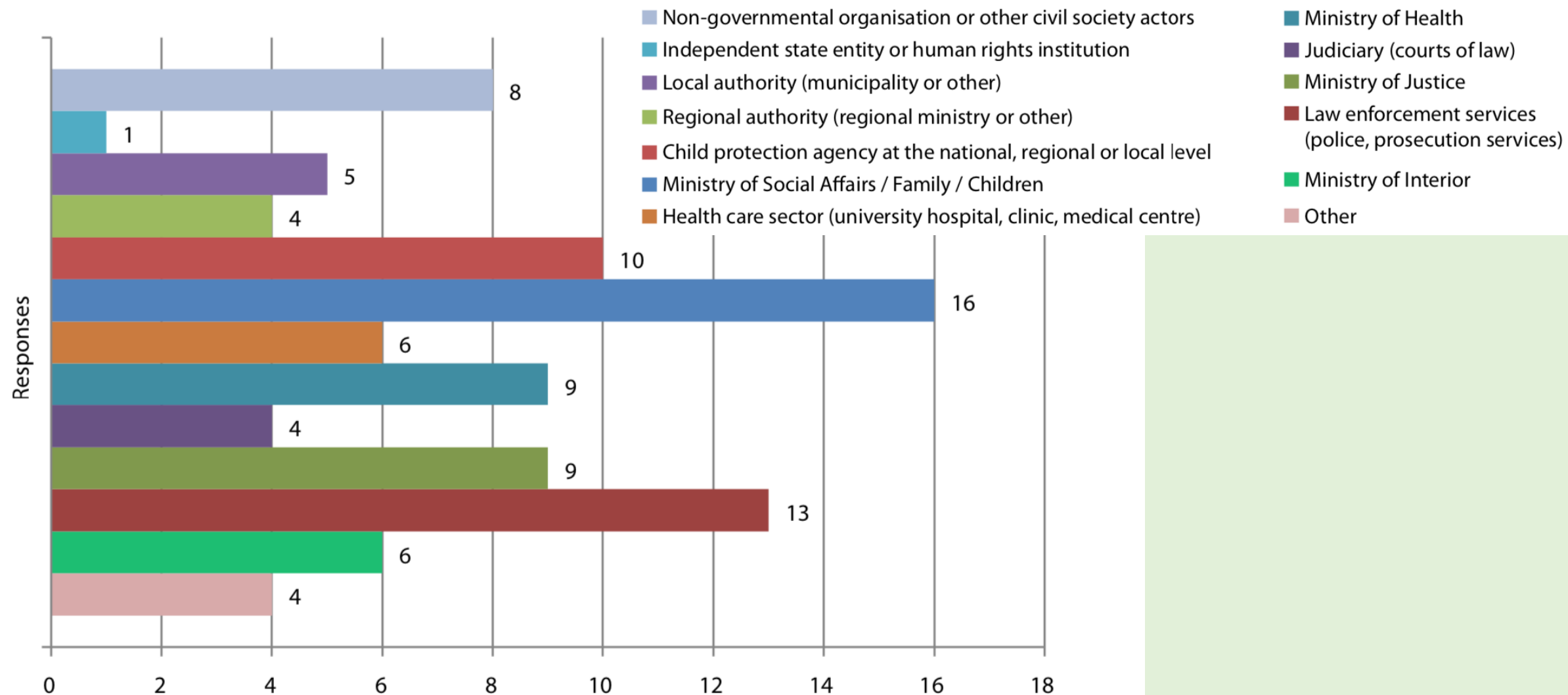
Figure 3: Information about the law and policy framework relevant for the setting up and operation of Barnahus or Barnahus-type services



N=27

Interagency co-ordination & leadership of Barnahus

Figure 4: Information about the institution(s) that have the lead role in operating Barnahus or Barnahus-type services



Multidisciplinary approach to Barnahus

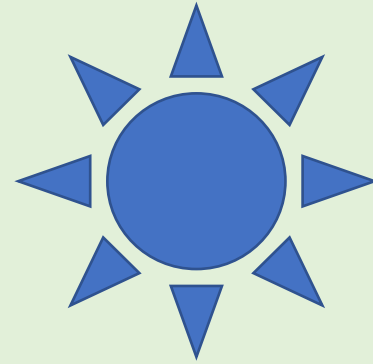
Child psychologists (15 States)

Medical staff (8 States)

Social workers (13 States)

Forensic interviewers (6 States)

Law enforcement professionals (5 States)



Indicative of a certain persisting difficulty to expand multidisciplinary teams and ways of working to include all relevant professional groups intervening at some stage in the provision of services to child victims and witnesses.

The reasons for some professional groups not being included in multidisciplinary approaches may be linked to a lack of specially trained personnel in some domains, a lack of sufficient resources, or organisational and methodological difficulties in working together.

Number and location of Barnahus

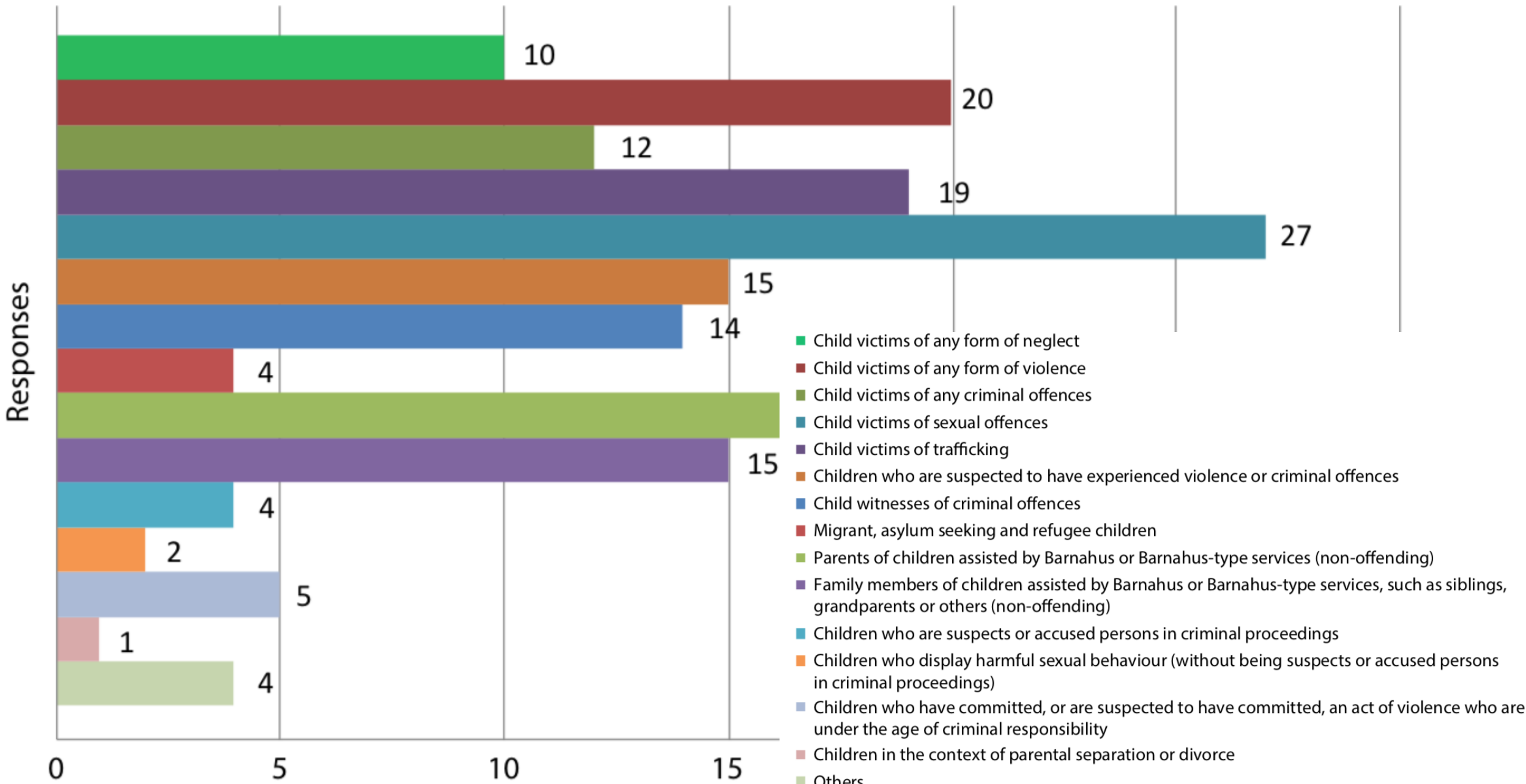
- How many Barnahus should a country have?
 - How big is the child population, how big is the territory, how quickly can child victims and witnesses receive help?

Where should they be located and why?

→ It depends...

→ But they should always be child-friendly

Figure 5: Target groups of Barnahus and Barnahus-type services



Target groups of Barnahus

- ❖ Victims of sexual violence still the most frequent target group.
- ❖ Many forms of violence covered, and often services are provided also to family members.
- ❖ Target groups are expanding, also into other areas such as migration contexts, children in conflict with the law, or parental separation / divorce proceedings.




Barnahus and Barnahus-type services catering for a broader set of target groups than child victims of different forms of violence may be faced with additional challenges and require very specific expertise among their professionals.

Referrals of children to Barnahus

The referral of a child victim/witness to Barnahus or Barnahus-type services differs from country to country.

Some States indicate that all cases reported for instance to the Social Welfare Services or Police are referred to Barnahus.



Others leave it to the discretion of specific officials or agencies to make a referral decision on a case by case basis;

condition the referral to specific elements, such as the initiation of a criminal investigation and/or judicial proceedings;

or limit referral to children living within the area of reach of the service.

Services within Barnahus

- ❖ The forensic interview (25 States)
- ❖ Interagency and multidisciplinary case conference (23 States)
- ❖ Crisis intervention assistance services for (non-offending) family members (23 States)
- ❖ Crisis intervention assistance services for the child (22 States)
- ❖ Short-term psychological support and therapeutic services (22 States)
- ❖ Interviews other than forensic interview (21 States)
- ❖ Forensic medical examination (20 States)
- ❖ Longer-term psychological support and therapeutic services for children (10 States)
- ❖ Short-term accommodation for the child and a non-offending family member (5 States)

Child interview

Child-friendly justice principles to secure the rights of the child and ensure a high probative value of the child's statement:

- Specially trained professionals conducting the child interview – Video recording
- Evidence-based interview protocols – Timing of the child interview

Where Barnahus or Barnahus-type services are not in place:

- More prominent role of prosecutors, judges and police officers interviewing/hearing the child
- Stronger variation of practices, less standardized and systematic training requirements
- More common that children are heard repeatedly

Use of Barnahus or Barnahus-type services may lead to:

- A clearer regulation of who conducts the child interview – More systematic training and training requirements – A stronger practice of employing forensic experts specifically for this task – A reduction of the number of hearings / interviews

Challenges to the sustainability of Barnahus

- ❖ Budget uncertainty is often cause for concern.
- ❖ Barnahus as a “project” (i.e. time-limited) in need of external project funding.
- ❖ Among States with Barnahus and Barnahus-type services in place, securing budget and guaranteeing sustainability remain among the main challenges.
- ❖ Without the commitment of the State, at national, regional or local level, the Barnahus model is inconceivable as a sustainable *modus operandi*. Need for Barnahus to be firmly anchored in the yearly government budget.
- ❖ Lack of monitoring and evaluation processes. Few evaluations made.

Opportunities

Through Barnahus and Barnhus-type services, Council of Europe member states have:

- Gradually increased and strengthened multidisciplinary and interagency services for children
- Extended such services more and more broadly to include evidence-based interviewing practices, medical and psychosocial examinations and assessments
- Improved the timeliness and professionalism of such, which makes it possible to reduce the number of such interviews, medical examinations and assessments, and hence reduce the risk of secondary victimisation of children

Opportunities

- The existence of Barnahus or Barnahus-type standards *per se is neither a guarantee nor a precondition for the implementation* of child-friendly justice standards;

However...

- Where Barnahus or Barnahus-type services are in place, child-friendly justice standards regarding the right of the child to be heard in criminal investigations and proceedings tend to be *implemented in a more reliable and systematic way*;
- Barnahus has the potential to improve the evidence gathering process in criminal justice proceedings and to empower child victims and witnesses to participate in proceedings in a meaningful way, while securing the rights of both the victim and the defendant.

Implementing the Barnahus Model in Croatia



An investment for the benefit of children and of society at large