

The Child at the Centre: Implementing Barnahus Quality Standards in Europe

Within PROMISE 2, several countries in Europe are intensifying their multi-disciplinary and interagency collaboration to ensure that child victims and witnesses of violence have access to Barnahus and benefit from a child-friendly, professional and effective response in a safe environment. Other Barnahus and child-friendly services in many more countries will also be engaged through webinars, networking and strategic communication. The rights of the child to protection, support and to be heard without being exposed to risks of re-traumatisation are central to Barnahus.

The European Barnahus Movement

PROMISE 2 (2017–2019) builds on learning from the first PROMISE project (2015-2017), which supported government officials and practitioners from more than 11 countries to establish Barnahus or similar institutions. A series of exchange meetings, study visits and capacity building efforts raised the level of knowledge of the government officials and practitioners, who also contributed to the development of standards and guidelines.

PROMISE produced a series of resources for government officials and practitioners who have an interest in establishing and operating Barnahus. *The European Barnahus Quality Standards* offer ground-breaking guidance and constitute the first attempt to define the principles and good practice standards for services that want to operate according to the Barnahus model. The *PROMISE tracking tool* provides a framework for services to assess their practice against the standards. The report *Enabling Child-Sensitive Justice* gives an overview of how the Barnahus model has emerged and gradually expanded in Europe and the *PROMISE Compendium of Law and Guidance* provides a comprehensive review of international and European law and authoritative guidance concerning the rights of child victims and witnesses. *Promoting Progress on Barnahus in Europe* guides the development of national and regional advocacy strategies.

The European Barnahus Movement was launched in June 2017 in the presence of the EU Commissioner for Justice and Consumer Rights, and the UN Special Representative on Violence against Children. The launch of the movement confirmed Barnahus as a good practice, validated the *Barnahus model* as a widely accepted concept and consolidated the European network of Barnahus staff and interested government officials and practitioners.

PROMISE 2

PROMISE 2 promotes progress at national level in several European countries. It aims to ensure commitment from key authorities by facilitating inter-agency dialogue in national strategic roundtables, as well as developing plans and roadmaps, inter-agency agreements and frameworks. It further aims to contribute to building a competent and committed workforce, including professionals from law enforcement, judiciary, medical and mental health staff and social workers. Tailor-made training will be provided to Barnahus staff in areas such as forensic interviews, psychotherapy, medical treatment, multi-disciplinary collaboration and data collection. A key aim of PROMISE 2 is to ensure that children are placed at the centre of the process and that their voices are heard. A methodology will be developed to help Barnahus and child-friendly services gather children's views on their experience in Barnahus, the outcomes of the process and potential challenges that still need to be addressed. PROMISE 2 also reaches out beyond its partners. Several webinars will be organised, a newsletter will regularly be disseminated and social media will bring the latest news. Wikipedia will bring updated information about the Barnahus model.

The PROMISE Vision

The vision of the PROMISE project is a Europe where the human rights of children to protection from violence, support and to be heard are fulfilled. To this end, child victims and witnesses of violence in Europe are protected by child-friendly interventions and rapid access to justice and care, based on the following main principles:

1. Respect for the participatory rights of the child by ensuring that she/he is heard and receives adequate information and support to exercise these rights;
2. Multi-disciplinary and interagency collaboration during investigations, procedures, diagnostic and needs assessments and service delivery, with the aim of avoiding re-traumatisation and securing outcomes that are in the best interests of the child;
3. Comprehensive and accessible services that meet the individual and complex needs of the child and her/his non-offending family or caregivers;
4. Ensuring high professional standards, training and sufficient resources for staff working with child witnesses and victims of violence.

The Barnahus model refers to multi-disciplinary and interagency interventions organized in a child-friendly setting fulfilling the following criteria:

1. The forensic interview is carried out according to an evidence-based protocol;
2. The evidentiary validity of the child's statement respects *due process*, whilst avoiding a need for the child to repeat her/his statement during court proceedings if an indictment is made;
3. A medical evaluation is carried out for forensic investigative purposes and to ensure the child's physical well-being and recovery;
4. Psychological support is available, including short and long-term therapeutic services addressing the trauma of the child and non-offending family members and caretakers;
5. An assessment of protection needs is carried out and followed up concerning the child victim and siblings in the family.

PROMISE 2 supports the involvement of national and local agencies, governmental and non-governmental, in establishing Barnahus and child-friendly institutions. It inspires progress in all countries by sharing good practices and high-quality standards for a European approach such as:

1. Preventing, investigating and responding to violence against children with multi-disciplinary and interagency cooperation among professionals and agencies in social and health care and criminal law before, during and after the judicial proceedings;
2. Identifying good practices in a) *coordination*, joint work and mutual adjustment between agencies; b) *cooperation* of agencies influencing each other; and c) *collaboration* in terms of shared services among agencies in a spirit of collective policy-making;
3. Raising awareness nationally on the rights of the child to a non-violent childhood.

To achieve this Vision, PROMISE promotes and supports the establishment of the Barnahus model, or similar models, in all countries in Europe and inspires efforts at the global level for increased multi-disciplinary and interagency collaboration to ensure that child victims and witnesses of violence benefit from a child-friendly, professional and effective response in a safe environment. Both the European and the global network of professionals are supported in spreading the PROMISE vision through webinars, communications and follow-up.

The work of PROMISE 2 is grounded in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the EU Victims Rights Directive, the EU Child Sexual Abuse Directive, the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive and the Council of Europe Lanzarote Convention. It also draws from relevant EU and Council of Europe recommendations and guidelines concerning integrated child protection systems, child-friendly justice and child-friendly social services.

Goals, ambitions and challenges

PROMISE 2 supports national actors in applying the Barnahus Quality Standards and other international and regional guidance material for child-friendly, multi-disciplinary and interagency cooperation.

Questions and challenges continue to arise in the establishment and operation of Barnahus. PROMISE 2 provides an opportunity to consider some of these issues through roundtables and workshops at the national level. Additionally, Barnahus experts, project partners and interested government officials and practitioners have the opportunity throughout to submit reflections and suggestions on how to identify strengths and challenges in the current systems:

- Today, in Europe, children who are victims of violence often face a system that contributes to their traumatisation. They wait a long time before receiving assistance from child protection services or for their case to be tried in court. They might be interviewed by several professionals and be treated in an intimidating manner.
- The integrated and coordinated approach in the Barnahus offers the child an improved experience of a shorter child-friendly journey through services and procedures.
- Barnahus offer all necessary services for child victims under one roof, including forensic interview, medical assessment and psychosocial treatment. It provides information and guides the child and guardians. Long-term follow-up is provided by the social services.
- In bringing together agencies and disciplines, the Barnahus maximises intervention strategies and saves money by ensuring an efficient use of resources including staff time.
- Strategies, action plans, laws or regulations define the role of Barnahus at the national and local level. Such frameworks should include the requirement in the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child that every child below the age of 18 have the right to protection from all forms of violence including sexual violence.
- The *best interests* of the child is a guiding principle in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In cases where criminal proceedings take prominence over the best interests of the child, Barnahus has an important role in balancing the requirements of the criminal justice process with the needs and rights of the child to assistance and protection.
- Good practice shows that if an agency external to the Barnahus, such as the police, is responsible for the forensic interviews, it is most effective if a core unit of police officers is fully integrated into the Barnahus structure and management routines.
- Clear procedures for the referral to Barnahus are necessary to avoid re-traumatisation caused by delays in admitting a child to a Barnahus. The procedures should include working closely with the child, parents and legal guardians as a way of having a strong emphasis on the needs of the individual child.
- The national context and situation determine if certain groups of child victims, such as child victims of trafficking, should be interviewed and followed up by specially trained units within the police or other services outside Barnahus. Experience shows that these special units still benefit from the Barnahus expertise in certain situations.
- Barnahus is a credible and competent actor in raising awareness about its multi-disciplinary and interagency services among the public and in exchanging lessons learned with other relevant sectors. It is recommended that regular overviews are conducted and statistics gathered to identify good practices and challenges of the follow-up of the child by the social services.
- Some Barnahus accept young perpetrators without compromising the need for child victims to be in separate and safe surroundings. If a Barnahus offers co-location of services, two separate budgets should be allocated to the different groups to avoid competition of services.
- A consistent good practice of Barnahus should be guided by internal assessments routines, monitoring and evaluations. An accreditation system to ensure high-quality standards is a future option.

PROMISE 2 is managed by the Children at Risk Unit in the Council of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat in close collaboration with Child Circle.

Project Partners

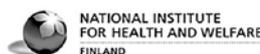
- › Council of Baltic Sea States Secretariat, Coordinator
- › Social Activities and Practice Institute, Bulgaria
- › Hope for Children CRC Policy Center, Cyprus
- › Social Insurance Board, Estonia
- › National Institute for Health and Welfare, Finland
- › World Childhood Foundation, Germany
- › Child Circle, Belgium
- › Szociális Szolgáltatók Közhasznú Egyesülete, Hungary, Region West
- › Terre des Hommes, Hungary
- › TUSLA, Ireland
- › Centre Dardedze, Latvia
- › Empowering Children Foundation, Poland
- › Save the Children, Romania

Experts

- › Barnahus Reykjavik, Iceland
- › Barnahus Linköping and Stockholm, Sweden
- › The National Police Directorate and 2 Barnehus, Norway
- › Børnehus Sjælland, Denmark
- › MDCK, Netherlands
- › Child and Youth Protection Center of Zagreb, Croatia
- › The Havens, Sexual Assault Referral Centre, Kings College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, England

PROMISE 2 stakeholders are committed to introducing and operating child-friendly, multi-disciplinary and rights-based services for child victims and witnesses of violence. With the formal support from national authorities, PROMISE 2 provides partner countries with opportunities to translate their commitment into action and engage with others in the process.

Find out more at www.childrenatrisk.eu/promise



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