

The PROMISE project:

The Barnahus model supporting children's right to justice and care in Europe

Representatives from several governments and services in Europe are currently participating in exchange meetings to discuss the opportunity of establishing the Barnahus (Children's House) model at national level. This model ensures a child-friendly environment and provides rapid access to justice and quality care for child victims and witnesses of violence. The services are oriented at the needs of the individual child, with a strong focus on avoiding retraumatization.



International and European law guiding the PROMISE project

The objective of the PROMISE project, which will run from 2015 to 2017, is to promote child-friendly, multi-disciplinary and interagency services supporting child victims and witnesses of violenceⁱ. Drawing on UN, EU and Council of Europe law and existing Barnahus models, this project aims to strengthen capacity, knowledge and exchange between government's justice and child welfare sectors, the medical field, public/private forensic and therapeutic services as well as child rights NGOs and advocates. The project promotes a one-stop approach for child victims and witnesses of crime, limiting the number of interviews and ensuring comprehensive care including social, medical, therapeutic and legal support.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is the foundation for many laws with regard to children at risk of violenceⁱⁱ. In recent years, there has been a significant development of law, policy and practice concerning child victims and witnesses of violence at international, regional and national levels. Relevant European legal instruments include for example, the EU Victim Directive, the Directive on combating child sexual abuse and exploitation, the Anti-trafficking Directive and the Council of Europe Lanzarote Convention. The Council of Europe has developed relevant guidelines and recommendations on child-friendly justice and child-friendly social services.

Furthermore, guidance has been developed at the international and European level to strengthen the child protection systems' ability to prevent and respond to violence against children. Such guidance, including the European Commission's reflections on integrated child protection systems, recognizes that a key feature of these systems is a multi-disciplinary, interagency approach to prevent child victimization. The Barnahus model is a leading European multi-disciplinary and interagency practice model responding to child victims and witnesses of violence.

A key goal of the PROMISE Project is to provide high quality standards and practical guidance for a European child-friendly multi-disciplinary and interagency model, underpinned by assessment tools, policy analysis and advocacy. Another central goal of PROMISE is to stimulate the adoption of these practices throughout Europe through exchange and expert meetings, study visits and capacity building between professionals in the field.



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The Promise Vision

The vision of the PROMISE project is to promote the human rights of children and prevent all forms of violence against children. Child victims and witnesses of violence in Europe are to be 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 he/she 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 retraumatization 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 his/her 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 PROMISE project will be the agent of change by mobilizing national and local agencies, governmental and non-governmental, towards establishing Barnahus and child-friendly centers in many more countries in Europe. The Barnahus modelⁱⁱⁱ refers to multi-disciplinary and interagency interventions organized in a child-friendly setting fulfilling the following criteria^{iv}:

1. Forensic interviews are carried out according to an evidence based protocol;
2. The evidentiary validity of the child's statement is ensured by appropriate arrangements in line with the principles of 'due process'. The aim is to prevent that the child has to repeat his/her statement during court proceedings if an indictment is made;
3. Medical evaluation for forensic investigative purposes as well as to ensure the child's physical well-being and recovery;
4. Psychological support, short and long term therapeutic services for trauma to the child and non-offending family members and caretakers;
5. Assessment of protection needs of the child victim and siblings in the family and follow up.

The PROMISE project will inspire change by sharing good practices and high quality standards for a European approach to the multi-disciplinary and interagency framework and cooperation in all situations such as:

1. Multi-disciplinary and interagency cooperation among social-, health-, and criminal law professionals and agencies to prevent, investigate and respond to violence against children including measures before, during and after the judicial proceedings;
2. Ensure a range of general and specialized social services and mental health care for children and families;
3. Identifying good practices in a) *coordination*, joint work and mutual adjustment between agencies, in b) *cooperation*, agencies influencing and affecting each other and in c) *collaboration*, in terms of shared services among agencies in a spirit of collective policy-making;
4. Ensuring awareness raising at national level of children's rights to a non-violent childhood.

The PROMISE vision, and the work to promote and support the establishment of the Barnahus model, or similar models and child-friendly centers, in all countries in Europe will continue even after the EU funded project comes to an end, through the establishment of a European Network of professionals.



Expectations and outcomes:

The objective of the PROMISE project is to promote child-friendly, multi-disciplinary and interagency (MD/IA) services supporting child victims and witnesses of violence by enhancing the capacity and knowledge of service delivery across Europe and by promoting an effective and enabling environment for MD/IA implementation. The main outcomes of the PROMISE project are:

- **Common good practice, strategies and standards adapted to the national context:** Good practice and transferable strategies for MD/IA services are inspiring existing, new and developing initiatives providing support to child victims and witnesses of violence;
- **A competent workforce:** Professionals across Europe are better equipped to implement and assess child-centred services and to engage with children through MD/IA models, including for therapy, medical assistance and collecting forensic evidence and information from children, safeguarding children's rights, preventing re-victimisation and securing a child friendly justice process, including for particularly vulnerable victims;
- **Child-centred, effective and enabling approaches:** Guidance for governments on the efficient use of resources, legal reform, child-sensitive legal procedures and efficient coordination contributes to creating enabling environments for MD/IA services;
- **Sustainable exchange and mutual learning:** Building on networks and dialogue generated by the project, professionals across Europe play an active and continued role in mutual learning, exchange, development and dissemination of good practice for MD/IA services for child victims and witnesses of violence, inviting other initiatives across Europe to get involved;
- **A strong voice for child protection and child-centred services:** Child rights NGOs and advocates are better equipped to promote a) integrated national child protection systems; b) recognised standards and strategies for MD/IA services for child victims of violence; c) effective and enabling government practice for MD/IA service delivery; and d) methodologies for collecting and assessing data on MD/IA practice and standards;
- **Increased awareness of international and regional law and guidance:** Decision-makers, professionals and child rights NGOs and advocates are aware of, and promote, the rights of child victims/witnesses as set out in EU Directives and Council of Europe Conventions to receive assistance, to be heard and to receive information;
- **Sustainable information flow and dialogue:** The project website, social media and e-learning material are used as resources by decision-makers, professionals and child rights NGOs and advocates to inform good practice by public and private services, government authorities and child rights organisations/advocates.

ⁱ The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines **violence** as “all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse”.

ⁱⁱ Recently, the: “**Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**” is highlighting the prevention and protection of children against violence, in particular goal 16.2, which commits States to “end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture of children”. The Goals emphasize access to justice and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Child-friendly centers** refer to child-friendly and multidisciplinary settings, which may assume the same tasks as Barnahus without the responsibilities of eliciting the child's disclosure for the purposes of judicial proceedings.

^{iv} The PROMISE project will develop a **comprehensive and detailed list of quality standards** and criteria.





PROMISE

PROMISE is managed by the CBSS Secretariat Children's Unit. Partners include Child Circle, the Verwey-Jonker Institute, Barnahus in Iceland, Linköping and Stockholm and the KENTER in the Netherlands. It also builds on the expertise of prominent specialists in law, sociology, pediatrics, psychology and psychiatry from different European countries.

The Pilot Countries engaged on the project are: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, and the UK (England and Scotland). These countries have been identified as having the interest and potential to transform their current services for supporting child victims and witnesses of violence into a multi-disciplinary and interagency cooperation. The pilot countries will learn from existing Barnahus and similar models and also exchange experiences amongst themselves in order to support national level capacity-building and multi-disciplinary and interagency implementation strategies.

Find out more at www.childcentre.info/promise.



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