Barnahus (Children’s House): a leading model in Europe for child-friendly, multidisciplinary and interagency response towards child sexual abuse

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What is Barnahus?

- Coordinates parallel criminal and child welfare investigations of cases on violence against children, including OCSEA, and provides support services for child victims and their families.

- Unique interagency model that brings together all relevant criminal, health care and child protection actors in one child-friendly premise.
Child-friendly justice approach

- Council of Europe Lanzarote Convention
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- EU Directives on Victims’ Rights and Child Sexual Abuse
- Council of Europe guidelines on child-friendly justice
- Barnahus Quality Standards (CBSS)
- Sustainable Development Goals: 16.2
Leading response model in Europe

- Developed in Iceland in 1998
- Identified by the Lanzarote Committee in 2015 as an example of a promising practice
- Being replicated/adapted in more than 20 countries
Child at the centre of proceedings

➢ To avoid repeated interviews with the child by many agencies and professionals in different locations

✓ Reduces risks for secondary victimization of child victims

✓ Ensures evidentiary validity of the child’s disclosure

✓ Ensures due process – also for the defendant
**Purpose:**
Parallel criminal investigations and welfare assessment

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<td>FORENSIC INTERVIEWS</td>
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Embedded in a national or local structure
Formal agreements for interagency collaboration
Public funding
Key common criteria of Barnahus

- Assessment of protection needs
- Forensic interviews
- Principle of due process
- Therapeutic services for trauma
- Psychological and crisis support
- Forensic medical evaluation
<table>
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Barnahus and online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA)

➢ All Barnahus deal with cases of OCSEA
  ✓ Children forced to take/send pictures of sexual nature
  ✓ Photographs/videos of sexual nature shown to or taken of the child
  ✓ Sexual abuse through internet
  ✓ Meeting of perpetrator through internet

➢ A rising trend: increase in sexting, cyber-grooming and cyberbullying
➢ Non-contact violence still underestimated in courts
Evolving model: Barnahus response to OCSEA

➢ “Online” vs. “offline” child sexual abuse
  ✅ Anonymity - 24/7 potentially lifelong exposure – high number of victims per perpetrator(s)
  ✅ Longer investigation times by law enforcement (local, national, international)
  ✅ Different methods to detect OCSEA

➢ Emerging promising practices
  ✅ Specific treatment focus of OCSEA cases on safety (physical, emotional, virtual)
  ✅ Education on internet safety
  ✅ Relationship within family/caretakers: trust vs. surveillance
Why Barnahus?

- **Compelling results:**
  - *twice* as many cases of suspected child sexual abuse investigated
  - *three times* as many cases prosecuted
  - number of convictions *doubled*
  - increased *visibility* and higher number of reported cases

- **Centralised expertise** on child sexual abuse strengthens:
  - Research, data collection
  - Staff training and specialization

- Does not require an important financial investment, but change in working methods and mindsets

- Both offline and online child sexual abuse
What does the Council of Europe offer?

Step-by-step approach and support throughout the process:

- Feasibility assessment
- Defining implementation modalities and the organizational and operational set up: Purpose and scope of Barnahus, roles and responsibilities for each partner
  - Barnahus law; local interagency agreement/procedures
- Training and tools for staff and professionals
  - EndOCSEA@Europe: OCSEA training for judges, prosecutors, lawyers and criminal investigators
THANK YOU!

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WEBSITES
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