



Barnahus Quality Standard on Child Protection



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Introduction

The Barnahus Quality Standard on Child Protection provides guidance to Barnahus professionals on child protection practice in Barnahus. It aims to contribute to excellence in child protection practice in Barnahus, solid collaboration with professionals and agencies that have a formal or statutory role in child protection, and a balanced approach, which supports protection, justice and recovery of each child who is referred to Barnahus, according to their specific needs.

While child protection is a central aspect to many Barnahus, the involvement of child protection services in Barnahus varies between countries, including differences in who can make referrals, when the child protection investigation starts and how it is coordinated with the police investigation, whether statutory child protection services are integrated within Barnahus, and more generally, how Barnahus fits into the broader child protection system.

Child protection in Barnahus may further be shaped by law, policy, procedures and the way that the participating agencies function in a specific country, region or local community. In some cases, financial and human resources determine the scope and function of the Barnahus in this area.

In implementing the Barnahus Quality Standard on child protection, it is recommended that each Barnahus carefully considers national and local practice, legal frameworks, procedures, resources and organisation that may have an impact on child protection in Barnahus.

Stockholm, June 2025

Terminology

Child protection is here defined as “measures and structures to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence affecting children” (UNCRC article 19)

Child safeguarding is here defined as the responsibility of all organisations to make sure their staff, programmes, services, partners and operations do no harm to children (Keeping Children Safe).

Health is here defined as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” (WHO)

An agency with a *statutory* role in child protection is here referred to as an agency, which is established by law. This means that the agency is governed by law, and has legal authority and duties defined in national legislation.

An agency with a *formal* role in child protection is here referred to as an officially recognised agency that operates within the child protection system, but it is not established by law. This means that the agency has a defined, and potentially regulated role, but it may be derived from policy, guidelines, local agreements, or administrative decisions, rather than from law.

A professional with a designated role in child protection in Barnahus is here referred to as a member of the Barnahus multidisciplinary team with a formally assigned role and responsibility, including specific duties, that concern child protection.

What is the standard?

11.1 Roles and responsibilities in Barnahus

- a. The role and mandate of Barnahus in supporting child protection assessments and interventions is clearly defined and formalised through agreements with agencies that have a formal/statutory role in child protection in the Barnahus uptake area, in line with standard 2.
- b. Professionals with a designated role in child protection in Barnahus have clearly defined, tasks and responsibilities.

11.2 Coordination and collaboration

- a. The Barnahus plays an active role in supporting the coordination of parallel child protection, health¹ and criminal investigations and interventions based on the needs of the child, promoting a balanced approach, mutual trust and effective collaboration, with a specific emphasis on avoiding (re)traumatisation and secondary victimization, and undue delay, in line with standards 1.1 and 1.3, 2, 5, 6, 7 and 8.
- b. Special efforts are made to ensure that coordination and collaboration with agencies with a formal/statutory role in child protection supports a continuum of protection and care before, during and after Barnahus interventions, and that gaps in protection, care, information-sharing and support are identified and addressed.
- c. Collaboration with agencies with a statutory role in child protection is regulated by formal inter-agency agreements and/or structured coordination mechanisms, including supporting exchange of information, and is facilitated by regular interagency meetings and ongoing dialogue, in line with national and international protocols and regulations, in line with standard 2 and 5. Also see standard 11.2 a.

11.3 Joint case planning and management

- a. Professionals who have a designated role in child protection in Barnahus are an integral part of the multidisciplinary team in Barnahus and play an active role in case planning and management,

¹ Health is here defined as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” (WHO)

in line with standard 5. They participate actively and are heard in individual assessments, including concerning the best interests of the child, and case planning meetings, including follow-up and onward support, alongside other members of the multidisciplinary team.

b. Special efforts are made to involve case workers from agencies with a formal/statutory role in child protection who are not members of the multidisciplinary team in Barnahus, and to encourage active involvement in team meetings.

c. Barnahus professionals take special measures to provide children with space, voice, audience and influence in line with standard 1.2, ensuring that children have meaningful and ethical opportunities to participate in individual assessments, case management and planning of interventions carried out in Barnahus.

d. Barnahus professionals carefully consider the views of the child in all case planning, protection measures and interventions in Barnahus, and in contributions to assessments, planning and interventions carried out by agencies with a formal/statutory role in child protection giving due weight to the best interests of the child, in line with standard 1.2.

11.4 Skills, proficiency and professionalism

a. Professionals with a designated role in child protection have relevant education, specialised training, experience and expertise to contribute, conduct and coordinate assessments and interventions concerning child protection in Barnahus. Also see standard 9.

b. Assessments and interventions concerning child protection in Barnahus, are carried out using consistent methods, evidence-based tools and practical checklists and routines.

c. Assessments and interventions concerning child protection in Barnahus draw on contributions from the multidisciplinary team, the child, non-offending caregivers, and other relevant professionals and individuals, in close liaison with agencies with a formal/statutory role in child protection in the child's uptake area. Also see standard 5 and 11.3.

d. Assessments and interventions in Barnahus concerning child protection are inclusive, participatory, trauma informed, culturally, linguistically and gender sensitive, and adapted to each child and the age, development, situation and evolving circumstances of the child.

e. Professionals with a designated role in child protection in Barnahus have access to regular training, consultation, supervision and peer support, in line with standard 9.

f. Professionals with a designated role in child protection in Barnahus have access interventions for self-care, and measures to prevent stress and burnout, in line with standard 9.

g. All assessments and interventions concerning child protection in Barnahus are carried out in line with child safeguarding principles and practices in line with standard 2, including preventing contact with persons who may cause harm to the child or put the child at risk. Also see standard 4.4.

h. Contributions to assessments and interventions concerning child protection that are carried out by agencies with a formal/statutory role in child protection are done according to standard 11.4 a, b, c, d and f.

11.5 Information and onwards support

a. Children, caregivers and siblings, where relevant and appropriate, should have access to relevant and targeted information, adapted to their individual needs and circumstances, regarding the process and available interventions. Children and caregivers should be informed about who to contact if they have questions or require further information. Children should have opportunities to receive and seek child-friendly and age-appropriate information independent of their caregivers. Also see standard 1.2, 5.5, 5.6, 7.5 and 8.3.

b. Clear roles, responsibilities and routines are in place in Barnahus to inform, protect, and provide onwards support to children after a visit at Barnahus. Also see standard 1.2, 5.5 and 5.7.

11.6 External knowledge-building

a. Barnahus provides knowledge-building and training for relevant professionals including from agencies with a formal/statutory role in child protection, including on the type of cases seen in Barnahus, specialised interventions in Barnahus, interagency collaboration and coordination in Barnahus, joint case planning and management in Barnahus. Also see standards 9 and 10.

b. Training, formal and informal consultation and exchange of expertise is carried out in a collaborative way that values and recognises the different professionals' expertise in child protection, and in a way that builds collaboration and mutual trust within the pathway and across

the child protection continuum, and that emphasises and strengthens interagency collaboration in children's recovery. Also see standards 9 and 10.

c. Barnahus promotes consistent use of evidence-based tools and methods, and provides consultation to case workers and agencies with a statutory role in child protection who liaise or work together with Barnahus on specific cases.

Also see standard 10.

Why should this standard be met?

European Legal Provisions²: Procedural safeguards for children ensure that children can participate in child protection procedures involving them, that they are not re-traumatised by such procedures and that their best interests are taken into consideration in all actions in their regard. In particular, under international and EU legal obligations, child-centred procedures typically require the following types of procedural safeguard:

- **Information, support, and assistance for children**
- **Comprehensive holistic approach**
- **Adapted procedures:**
 - *Adapted and child-friendly settings*
 - *Limited number of interviews*
 - *Adapted interview procedures*
 - *Possibility of video recording of testimony, and use of remote links to courtrooms, to avoid contact with perpetrators*
 - *Medical examinations only as strictly necessary*

Guidance³: This standard promotes a child rights-based approach and ensuring a holistic and comprehensive approach to responding to violence against children. A child rights approach prioritises the realisation of all children's rights, shifting away from viewing children merely as subjects of welfare concern. UN CRC General Comment No. 13 highlights that a children's rights-based approach involves enhancing the capacity of duty bearers to respect, protect, and fulfil rights, as well as empowering rights holders to claim their rights. Guiding principles, derived from international and EU law, should shape the role of various actors in fulfilling child protection obligations and ensure that all work towards common objectives.

² Read more about guidance and procedural safeguards in: O'Donnell, R. and Randazzo, S. *The role of EU and national laws in strengthening multidisciplinary interventions for child victims and witnesses of violence* © Child Circle and the Council of the Baltic Sea States (2025) Published by Child Circle and the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS)

³ Read more about guidance and procedural safeguards in: O'Donnell, R. and Randazzo, S. *The role of EU and national laws in strengthening multidisciplinary interventions for child victims and witnesses of violence* © Child Circle and the Council of the Baltic Sea States (2025) Published by Child Circle and the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS)

In instances of violence against children, the UN CRC underscores the shared responsibility of all actors involved. The involvement of multiple actors aims to ensure that children's rights are upheld across all sectors and services involved in child protection. The FRA mapping notes: “An integrated child protection system that emphasises prevention must adopt a children’s rights approach, not a welfare approach. This requires holistic CRC implementation.”

Authoritative guidance from the UN Committee on Child Rights and the European Commission Recommendations on developing and strengthening integrated child protection systems, child protection systems promote multidisciplinary inter-agency interventions. The European Commission Recommendations on integrated child protection systems in particular contains recommendations addressing system requirements, including:

- **Defined responsibility and accountability**
- **Cooperation frameworks**
- **Allocation of sufficient resources**
- **Case management systems**
- **Transnational cooperation**
- **Contingency planning**
- **Sharing information on trends and best practices**
- **Prevention strategies**

The European Commission Recommendations on integrated child protection systems in particular contains recommendations addressing these system requirements.

Research: A recent mapping of child protection in Barnahus across Europe, noted that while there are substantial differences, there are also common challenges, concerning for example coordination, collaboration, joint case management, exchange of information, specialisation and competence and child protection being deprioritised in favour of the criminal investigation⁴.

Research further suggests that while collaboration with Barnahus can be highly effective in severe cases, it may also contribute to delays in less severe cases, as social workers wait for the formal investigation to unfold, sometimes taking weeks or months. This often stems from the reluctance to engage in discussions with the child before the formal investigative interview at Barnahus, and

⁴ Birgersson, A., Jonsson, L., Wilson, S. *Child Protection mapping: Outlining challenges and good practices in Barnahus supportive role to child protection*, Published by the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) (2024)

an adaptation to the criminal justice process. It is further argued that the interagency collaboration at Barnahus in certain circumstances can add a “further layer of division/delay mechanisms”, adding further administrative and organisational thresholds, which can result in a delay in immediate protection of children who disclose violence.⁵ This indicates an important role for Barnahus to prevent undue delay in addressing disclosure so that welfare and protection needs can be addressed promptly.

⁵ Ponnert, Lina *Accumulated Silence When “Passing the Buck”: Organisational Tensions in Child Welfare Investigations* in Johansson, S., Stefansen, K., Bakketeig, E., & Kaldal, A. (2017). *Justice and Recovery for Victimized Children: Institutional Tensions in Nordic and European Barnahus Models*. Springer Nature.

Examples of indicators and/or evidence that the standard is being met⁶

Roles and Responsibilities

Formal Agreements

- Formal written collaboration agreements or regulations between Barnahus and agencies with a formal/statutory role in child protection are in place.
- Evidence of a strategy towards drawing up collaboration and service agreements, procedures and protocols where these are not yet in place.
- Documentation from multidisciplinary team workshops about how they are going to meet these and other standards.
- Evidence of audits on how Barnahus assessment is evidenced/referenced within the child protection formal/statutory assessment.

Professionals with designated role

- Professionals responsible for supporting child protection will have a high level of child protection experience; experience within the formal/statutory child protection sector and sufficient seniority to hold agencies to account, evidenced through personnel documentation.
- Procedures that support recruiting to right experience and values, including employment psychometrics, are in place.
- Job descriptions outlining specific tasks and responsibilities are in place
- Documentation that introduction and guidance on the Barnahus Quality Standards, in particular the standard on child protection, are offered to new staff members.

⁶ These indicators were developed by professionals participating in the workshop on the new Barnahus Quality standard on child protection, moderated by Eimear Timmons, Lighthouse England.

Coordination and collaboration

- Formal written service agreements between Barnahus and agencies with a formal/statutory role in child protection are in place.
- Formal procedures between Barnahus and agencies with a formal/statutory role in child protection and shared protocols that guide collaboration, coordination, information sharing, consultation, referral and onwards support are in place.
- Evidence of joint meetings, for example a meeting protocol outlining roles, responsibilities and action for the respective professionals with a designated role in child protection.
- Evidence of formal or informal meetings, training, workshops, professional exchange and/or other measures to facilitate team building, building trust and addressing challenges to coordinate and collaborate.
- Shared data and outcome measures associated with key child protection performance indicators.
- Anonymous/confidential feedback mechanisms for professionals.
- Evidence of strategic dialogue between senior management to address barriers, feedback from professionals, gaps in formal agreements, to develop performance indicators, joint training and team building and to escalate barriers to policymakers and legislators.

Joint case planning and management

- Formal procedures between Barnahus and agencies with a formal/statutory role in child protection and shared protocols that guide collaboration, coordination, information sharing, consultation, referral and onwards support are in place.
- Special measures and procedures to involve child protection professionals based outside the Barnahus in the multidisciplinary team, and to encourage active involvement, are in place.
- Barnahus professional(s) with a designated role in child protection attends external child protection meetings.
- Written records of interventions, advice and shared resources, including pre-Barnahus are developed and shared with the professionals involved, both in Barnahus and in agencies with a formal/statutory role in child protection.

- Quality improvement projects are developed through a collaborative approach between Barnahus and agencies with a formal/statutory role in child protection, to address gaps in the service or where there is inequity in access to the service to vulnerable groups.

Child Participation

- Statutory CP professional attend the Barnahus with the child for pre-assessment, introductions and MDIA consultation with the Barnahus team, evidenced by agendas and meeting protocols.
- Home visits (including joint home visits with the statutory child protection worker) to build trust with the child and family – supporting breaking barriers for fair access for all children – are organised. *See practice example from Sweden below.*
- Shared special measures, methods, procedures and training are in place to provide all children with space, voice, audience and to support the involvement of children in their own case management.
- Meetings with children and caregivers are adapted to abilities, needs and language, evidenced by agendas and meeting protocols.
- Information to children and caregivers is adapted to abilities, needs and language, evidenced by adapted information materials, checklists, protocols.
- Professionals receive training and support in the measures, methods and procedures to consider and act on the views of the child in case planning, protection measures and interventions in Barnahus.
- Tools to measure children's and professionals' perception of children feeling involved and safe in Barnahus are in place.
- A child advocate, child liaison or similar role is in place.

Skills, proficiency and professionalism

- Professionals with a designated role in child protection have mandatory individual training plans which are fully implemented, including in the Barnahus Quality standards, methods, tools, checklists and routines in Barnahus.

- A plan for developing the competence and continued education of the whole team in Barnahus in child protection is in place and implemented through training, peer support and joint workshops.
- Training plans are reviewed yearly, including adaptations to individual and team needs, national training standards, professional standards, legal obligations and research.
- Pre and post training evaluations on confidence in the training subject.
- Externally agreed standard of training for agencies working with Barnahus are in place.
- Professionals from Barnahus and agencies with a formal/statutory role in child protection are offered joint training, capacity building activities and team-building opportunities.
- Methods, evidence-based tools and practical checklists and routines for child protection are in place.
- Specific measures, checklists, protocols and tools are in place to ensure that assessments and interventions in Barnahus concerning child protection are inclusive, participatory, trauma informed, culturally, linguistically and gender sensitive, and adapted to each child and the age, development, situation and evolving circumstances of the child.

Guidance, supervision, counselling

- Interventions to prevent stress and burn out is for Barnahus staff are in place.
- The members of the Barnahus team have access to both individual and group guidance, supervision, including clinical/reflective supervision, reflective case discussions and professional support.
- The members of the Barnahus team have access to individual and group counselling, including related to individual cases, to address professional and personal emotional strain, challenges and ethical dilemmas in working with child victims and witnesses of violence.
- Processes for escalating/recommending measures to address stress and burnout in external professionals working with the Barnahus team are in place, acknowledging impact of the work for the whole sector.
- Team building and social events internally and externally are organised.

Child Safeguarding⁷

- A formally agreed⁸ child safeguarding policy including a mandatory code of conduct, is in place.
- Formally agreed procedures for reporting and escalating child safeguarding concerns are in place.
- A designated child safeguarding role is in place.
- Formally agreed child safeguarding procedures for recruitment, accreditation and security checks are in place.
- All internal and external staff working in Barnahus receive training and support in child safeguarding, including Barnahus policies and procedures

Information and onwards support

- Procedures, routines and/or checklists are in place to ensure that each child, and caregiver/siblings as appropriate, receive relevant and targeted information, adapted to individual needs and circumstances, regarding the process and available interventions.
- Procedures, routines and/or checklists are in place to determine the type, format, adaptations, timing and other relevant factors, including impact on well-being, recovery, child safeguarding, child protection, criminal investigation and justice procedure, in sharing targeted and appropriate information with children and with caregivers/siblings as appropriate.
- Clear roles and responsibilities are assigned to designated staff members ensure that information reaches children, caregivers and siblings, as appropriate.
- Evidence, e.g. written records, that children and caregivers have been informed about who to contact if they have questions or require further information.
- Evidence, e.g. written records, that children have been provided opportunities to receive and seek child-friendly and age-appropriate information independent of their caregivers.

⁷ See Barnahus Child Safeguarding Guidance for further support

⁸ Formally agreed by the agencies collaborating in Barnahus

- Evidence, e.g. written records, of a formally agreed process and pathway for information sharing, child safeguarding, and action and responsibilities for onwards support for each child, and siblings/other children in the child's social network as appropriate.
- Practical tools such as apps, child logs, journals, letters etc are used to support information sharing before, during and after the Barnahus visit.
- Evidence, e.g. written records, that each child, and caregivers/siblings as appropriate, have received information about onwards support, potential onwards interventions, support persons, and agencies with a designated/formal/statutory role in coordinating and/or providing onwards support.

External knowledge-building

- Evidence, e.g. meeting documentation, methodology, agenda, feedback etc that consultations, training and exchange has taken place with relevant professionals.
- Evidence, e.g. meeting documentation, methodology, agenda, feedback etc., that participatory and trust-building approaches are applied to training, consultation and exchange
- Evidence, e.g. written communication, that Barnahus promotes use of evidence-based tools and methods.
- Evidence, e.g. written records, meeting documentation, feedback that Barnahus has provided consultation with case workers and agencies with a statutory role in child protection who liaise or work together with Barnahus on specific cases.
- Online training resources and educational programmes, including webinars, self-learning courses, platforms for professional exchange and reflection are shared with relevant external partners.
- Written information material, guidance, checklists, practical tools and other relevant resources are shared for free online.
- Joint projects, activities, research, educational programmes, webinars and resources are developed and implemented with relevant external partners.

Learn More

Implementation Handbook for Barnahus Quality Standard on child protection standard (available September 2025 at barnahus.eu)

Checklist for collaboration between services for child protection and other agencies within Barnahus (available September 2025 at barnahus.eu)

Child Safeguarding in Barnahus (available September 2025 at barnahus.eu)

[Toolkit for implementation of Barnahus Quality Standard 5](#)

Cross-references with other standards

The Barnahus Quality Standard on child protection is linked to many of the other standards, in terms of synergies, and, often mutual, impact on the fulfilment of the standards, in particular:

Cross-cutting principles and practices (Standard 1)

Assessment of the best interests of the child

Children and caregivers influence on timing, location and set up of interventions

Adequate information, adapted to child

Preventing undue delay in planning and executing assessments and interventions

Multidisciplinary Team (Standard 2):

Formal interagency collaboration agreements

Roles and responsibilities

Liaison and interagency team: Mutual respect, collaborative and inclusive culture

Monitoring and Evaluation

Process and practice during and after Barnahus

Interagency collaboration and joint case management (Standard 5)*:

Formal Procedures and routines

Individual Assessment

Continuous case planning and review

Support Person

Child participation

Follow up and onward support

Capacity Building (Standard 9)

Training of professionals

Guidance, supervision, counselling

Prevention: Information sharing, awareness raising and external competence building (Standard 10)

Data Collection, information sharing and awareness raising

External competence building

Standard 5. Interagency case management

*) Barnahus Quality Standard 5 has recently undergone review and is therefore included below for reference.

5.1 Formal procedures and routines: Interagency case review and planning is integral to the work of the Barnahus team and the respective agencies in the Barnahus. It is formalised by procedures and routines, mutually agreed by the Barnahus team and the respective agencies that practice in Barnahus.

5.2 Individual Assessment: The Barnahus ensures that there is an individual assessment of each child who is referred to Barnahus. The individual assessment is carried out and updated, drawing on contributions from the interagency team, the child, caregivers, and other relevant professionals. The individual assessment establishes the circumstances of the child, special needs and other elements that must inform planning, interventions (including the child investigative interview) and follow up.

5.3 Continuous case planning and review: Case review and planning meetings, involving the relevant agencies in the interagency team, takes place on a regular basis in the Barnahus.

5.4 Continuous case tracking: The Barnahus ensures continuous documentation and access to relevant case information for interagency team members on the progress of the case until the case is closed, observing national laws on data protection, privacy, and confidentiality.

5.5 Support Person: A designated, trained individual or member of the Barnahus team oversees and documents the multidisciplinary response to ensure that there is continuous information-sharing, support and follow up with the child and non-offending family/caregivers.

5.6 Child Participation: Children are empowered and supported to contribute to their own case planning and management in Barnahus. Barnahus carefully considers the views of the child in all case planning and management.

5.7 Follow up and onward support: Case management in Barnahus connects with relevant external and parallel case management, interventions, processes, and agencies to ensure coordination, timely referrals, follow up, and onward support during and after the interventions in Barnahus.

Implementing the Barnahus Quality Standards throughout Europe

Projects under the umbrella of PROMISE have been supporting Europe to adopt the Barnahus model as a standard practice for providing child victims and witnesses of violence rapid access to justice and care. We undertake this work to fulfil the PROMISE vision: a Europe where all children enjoy their right to be protected from violence.

A Barnahus provides multidisciplinary 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 which prevents (re)traumatisation. With the formal support from national authorities, PROMISE projects provide opportunities to translate national commitment into action and engage internationally in the process. In addition, regular networking and strategic communications continually activate our growing network of professionals and stakeholders who are committed to introducing and expanding Barnahus services nationally.

In the early years, we established European standards, formalised the Barnahus Network, and expanded into University training and case management tools. We further laid the groundwork to establish a European Competence Centre for Barnahus and an accreditation system for Barnahus. Our current focus is on addressing gaps and specific needs identified by Barnahus in Europe. This includes strengthening inclusive and resilient child protection systems particularly in times of crisis, improving national systems' ability to effectively handle transnational cases, and enhancing the role of Barnahus within broader child protection systems.

Access the PROMISE tools and learn more at www.barnahus.eu



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