

## Final handbook for the PRO CHILD project

KA210-VET-12AF5C5D

### Project description (needs, objectives)

With this project, we had high hopes of being able to strengthen and develop our participating organizations further. More concretely, our ambition was to achieve the following results:

- Gain new knowledge so that our children will be better off
- Improve internal operations through the exchange of experiences and knowledge
- Get an international perspective on how to work with children's right's-related processes
- Act as ambassadors for your country and your organization
- Highlight and make visible the positive things that are done in one's own organization
- Strengthen the children's perspective further and make more aware of the special vulnerability of abused children and their need for protection by society
- Improve networking systems among the different actors involved
- Enhance social services efficiency in response to child abuse
- Better understand training needs of professionals and promote an upskilling path
- Develop a common model with best practices, based on both countries' working methods and knowledge of how to work to protect children's rights
- Gain practical experience of participating in EU projects and how to run development work together with European colleagues

All the above-listed expected results were in different ways connected to the general and specific objectives identified by the partners for this project, which were as follows:

General Objective: *To contribute to more effective responses to child abuse at local level by sharing best practices among professionals*



Co-funded by  
the European Union

### Specific Objectives:

*SO 1-To promote an integrated upskilling path for professionals of municipalities, regions, state authorities and associated non-public actors regarding child abuse interventions;*

*SO 2-To learn from each other through the development and exchange of best practices*

With this project, we set out to strengthen and develop our participating organisations by collaborating and learning from one another. We aimed to gain new insights to better support children, improve our internal operations, and get a fresh perspective on how other countries handle children's rights. We also wanted to showcase the great work already being done in our own organisations.

A big part of our mission was to raise awareness about the unique vulnerability of abused children and ensure they receive the protection they need. We focused on boosting our networks, making social services more effective in tackling child abuse, and understanding how to better train our professionals. Our goal was to develop a shared model of best practices, drawing from each country's strengths, while gaining hands-on experience in running EU projects alongside European colleagues.

At the heart of our efforts were two specific objectives. First, we aimed to create a comprehensive upskilling path for professionals across municipalities, regions, state authorities, and partner organisations, ensuring they are well-equipped to handle child abuse cases. Second, we focused on learning from each other by developing and sharing best practices, so that together we can respond more effectively to child abuse at the local level.

## Partners description

### TROLLHÄTTANS KOMMUN | SWEDEN

Trollhättans kommun is a medium-sized municipality of ca 60 000 inhabitants in the West Sweden Region. As the largest municipality in the local area Fyrbodalen, Trollhättan provides a wide range of public services to its citizens, including but not limited to, preschool and elementary school education, child care, elderly care, social services, urban and spatial planning, business promotion, technical services, parks and street management, sustainability issues, project management etc. Part of the municipality's organization is Barnhus Fyrbodalen (e.g. Children's House in English).



Barnahus Fyrbodal is a collaborative organization between the police, prosecutors, healthcare and social services. It has branches in different locations in the Fyrbodal area, where the Trollhättan branch is the head office and is incorporated under the municipal responsibility of Trollhättans kommun. Its target group are children aged 0-18 who are suspected of being exposed to violence in a close relationship, sexual abuse or honor-related crime. The basis of its work is a report from social services or the police. All authorities cooperate in every matter that is reported to the police. This is done through a legal consultation, which takes place in the form of a joint planning for the child in question. At the Barnahus, police interrogations are held by specially trained police. Social services assess protection and possible intervention based on the child's needs. Lastly, the Barnahus also function as an expert organization and educate/share information on the subject of abuse.

## **UNIONE DELLA ROMAGNA FAENTINA (URF) | ITALY**

URF is an association of six neighbouring Municipalities located in the south-east area of Emilia-Romagna Region (Italy). Having all the functions of the 6 municipalities transferred, URF is in charge of the local policies and services both for the development of the territory and for the care and social wellbeing of its citizens

Within Social Services Departments of URF a specific Service deals with Childcare, where its professional staff (social assistants and administrative staff) is dedicated to taking charge of minors and their families.

This Child Service is committed to:

- minors with a socio-economically disadvantaged background, for which there are mainly economic and housing assistance interventions;
- children victims of abuse/ mistreatment and parental negligence and/or inadequacy;
- minors who are living with some kind of distress (social and relational, behavioural, etc.)
- children with disabilities living in disadvantaged or critical environment;
- unaccompanied foreign minors.

The Service takes charge of children as a consequence of:

- a direct contact of the family;
- reports from other Services or Entities (schools, Hospitals, law enforcement, voluntary associations,...)
- order of the Judicial Authority.



The work of social assistants is largely carried out in cooperation with healthcare staff (in particular with psychologists of the local Health Service) law enforcement, judicial bodies and in collaboration with local networks. The Service works in close collaboration with “Family Center”, that deals mostly with prevention actions (educational consulting, family mediation, prenatal courses, family initiative “first 1000 days”, adolescent distress,...).

## The activities in Sweden and Italy

### 1<sup>st</sup> PROJECT MEETING IN SWEDEN | TROLLHÄTTAN 20-24 NOVEMBER 2023

The first project meeting took place in Trollhättan in November 2023.

On the first full day, the Italian delegation visited Barnahus Fyrbodalen in the morning, where they were introduced to its operations and the various partner organizations involved in child protection. A presentation provided an in-depth overview of the Barnahus model in Sweden, with a particular focus on its implementation in Trollhättan.

In the afternoon, the delegation visited a sheltered accommodation for children to gain practical insight into how such facilities operate in Trollhättan. This visit aimed to illustrate the available support structures for children exposed to violence.

The second day began at University West in Trollhättan, where the delegation was given a tour of the university and its facilities. During the visit, Barnahus delivered a presentation on its intervention model, explaining how it is applied in practice. In the afternoon, the delegation took part in a guided tour of Trollhättan, showcasing the city and its key landmarks.

The third day centered around the Children’s Conference at University West, which addressed issues related to violence against children and child protection efforts. Keynote speakers included Swedish Minister of Social Services Camilla Waltersson Grönvall, forensic scientist and doctoral student Anna Jinghede, and Chamber Prosecutor Katarina Olsson. Their lectures covered topics such as “*Violence Against Children - Prevalence, Risk Factors, and Support Services*” and “*The Legal Process for Children Exposed to Violence.*” The event concluded with a dinner, attended by Camilla Waltersson Grönvall.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> PROJECT MEETING IN ITALY | FAENZA 7-9 MAY 2024



Co-funded by  
the European Union

The second project meeting was hosted by Unione della Romagna Faentina in May 2024.

The first day, the Swedish delegation, composed of 11 professionals (Barnahus coordinators, social workers, a prosecutor, a police officer, a doctor and a psychologist) was introduced to the local Child protection system, its main principles and procedures, thanks to a programme of several presentations by referents from social services, child neuropsychiatry, non-profit sector and referents from legal sector and law enforcement. These contributions provided a multidisciplinary perspective of this area of operation.

The delegation was then led to Faenza Civil Hospital for an operational illustration of the health care procedures put in place at the hospital for reception and taking charge of victims of mistreatment/abuse in the emergency room (particularly referred to children and women) by Medical and Healthcare staff.

The second day was entirely dedicated to the seminar “CHILD PROTECTION - Local reality and European perspectives” organized by the Child Service of Unione della Romagna Faentina. During the event, several experts in the childcare and legal field at local and regional level, illustrated and discussed the state of the art and perspectives of the protection system, bringing it into direct comparison with the Swedish system, illustrated by referents of Barnahus Fyrbodol in Trollhättan.

The morning of the third day was spent visiting three social care facilities that support and shelter minors and women victims of violence: “SOS DONNA - Servizio Fenice” - anti-violence support centre, “Casa Ritrovata” - shelter accommodation for minors, Family Center - public service supporting the positive growth of families with minor children. In the afternoon took place a workshop involving the Swedish delegation and the Italian team, aimed at comparing the two national child protection systems and how mutual understanding can bring local improvements and a common European perspective.

During the three-day meeting, the Swedish delegation was also provided with the opportunity to visit the city of Faenza and some of its most characteristic places, as well as the nearby picturesque town of Brisighella.

## **Good practice/s learned by each partner**

### **THE EXPERIENCE OF THE SWEDISH TEAM IN ITALY**

The Swedish team that travelled to Italy is highly satisfied with the cooperation established through the PRO.CHILD project. Throughout the collaboration and study visits, the team identified several key differences in the approach to children's rights and protection. At the same time, they gained valuable insights and inspiration from the Italian methods and practices.

A significant distinction noted by the Swedish team was the fact that corporal punishment of children remains legal in Italy. This fundamental difference was carefully considered throughout the visit. Additionally, several aspects of child protection work diverged between the two countries, leading to important discussions within the project. The main differences identified include:

- The perception of violence and maltreatment - The team observed a greater tolerance for violence in Italy compared to Sweden, where efforts are more proactively focused on prevention.
- Honor-related violence - Unlike Sweden, Italy does not have specific laws addressing this issue, which the team found noteworthy.
- Judicial system differences - In Italy, there is a specialized court handling cases related to children, whereas in Sweden, all cases go through the same judicial system. Similarly, the Italian law enforcement system consists of multiple types of police forces, unlike Sweden's unified police structure.
- Stronger collaboration between social services and psychologists - The Swedish team expressed a desire to strengthen cooperation in this area, inspired by the Italian model.
- Healthcare system involvement in child protection - In Italy, hospitals and healthcare institutions play a direct role in child protection, working closely with social services. The Swedish team was impressed by this integrated approach, as it provides a strong foundation for securing children's safety.
- Psychologists' role in child protection - Italian psychologists work more directly with children, in close collaboration with social services. This approach inspired the Swedish team, leading to two meetings between Swedish and Italian psychologists involved in the project. These meetings aim to exchange ideas and explore new methods for enhancing child protection.

Further discussions also focused on the differences between the Swedish and Italian judicial systems. While the Italian model of a dedicated children's court was found to be beneficial in ensuring specialized legal processes for children, the Swedish team also noted that Italian judges handling child-related cases do not receive specialized training in working with vulnerable children. This is an area where the team seeks to gain further insight.



Co-funded by  
the European Union

Overall, the Swedish team found the exchange with their Italian counterparts highly valuable. Their key takeaway from the PRO.CHILD project is the importance of establishing a universal definition of violence across Europe to ensure that all children receive the same level of protection and rights to safety.

Barnahus Fyrbodal has a strong interest in continuing international collaboration, particularly in learning how different countries approach child protection and the judicial process for children. There is also a keen interest in cooperating with countries that have a similar "Barnahus" model, to further develop best practices in child protection.

### THE EXPERIENCE OF THE ITALIAN TEAM IN SWEDEN

The exchange with PRO.CHILD Project team in Trollhättan focused on the child victim of abuse/maltreatment. We were presented with the Barnahus Fyrbodal working model for listening to the child and the "BIM model" as a form of early and intensive intervention with children and their families in less serious situations.

In the comparison between the two realities, Italian and Swedish, we felt united by the reference to the same values of child protection, and we recognised ourselves in the same theoretical knowledge and clinical evidence on the harm of violence against children.

We found in Sweden a public system in many aspects similar to the Italian one, which provides for the protection of the child a function of 'protection', entrusted to the social services, and a function of (criminal) justice, entrusted to the Judicial Authority and the Police; the same principles are affirmed: protected listening, not repeatedly listening to the child, timeliness, importance of network and team work.

What struck us was to see these principles concretely applied in an operational model: a single listening to the minor, in which the two instances of 'protection' and 'justice' are 'held together', a timely intervention, an 'accompaniment' of the minor with a prompt and concrete response to his request for help; a clear definition of roles, tasks, interventions.

We reflected on the differences between the Swedish and the Italian context:

- at the regulatory and cultural level there is a different understanding of the concept of violence and ill-treatment, which brings, in our opinion, into a higher

‘tolerance threshold’ of violence in our country and a higher presence of criminal sanctions in Sweden, as unlawful behaviour;

- a less complex organisation of the public system: e.g. a single judicial authority and a single police force;
- at the same time, a greater articulation and complexity of social services, with various specialisations, and with a far greater number of operators than in the Italian context. There is also a close link between the social services and the University, a place of training but also of research and theorisation of practices (e.g. BIM);
- the presence of an institutional body (the Barnahus) which has the task, conferred by law, and therefore the authority, to exercise coordination of the various agencies and professions.
- greater codification compared to the Italian reality, of procedures and operating methods, through standards and structured guidelines.

Having been able to reflect on the above mentioned aspects has made us more aware of our work and the meaning of our actions, it has motivated us to start a path of reflection and confrontation in our territory in order to be able to concretise, also in our reality and in our context, the shared principles of child protection and prescribed by international legislation.

In the working tables that followed the trip to Sweden and from the comparison also with other social services in our Region (Emilia Romagna), the difficulty of defining a shared procedure emerged, since each service and institution has its own paths, with its own rules, and these do not facilitate or prevent sharing (e.g. secrecy linked to criminal investigations).

A positive aspect that is present is the ability of professionals to collaborate and act in synergy in the most serious situations and where urgent action is needed, but in many other situations this is not the case. In many situations there is a different assessment of the presence of ill-treatment/abuse, i.e. situations considered by the social service as possible ill-treatment, are not taken into account as such by the police and/or the justice system. Sometimes the social service does not understand in which judicial framework it is operating (i.e. if criminal investigations are in progress) and this creates impasses in the social work, e.g. it entails waiting times and the impossibility to act in order to assess the protection needs of the child; at the same time, a prompt intervention by the social service may risk undermining a criminal investigation.





Comparison and networking is therefore fundamental and crucial, it allows us to get to know each other better and to know each other's procedures; it is necessary to identify possible points of collaboration and integration and must concern all subjects. It is important to pursue the objective of 'rendering operational and concrete the right of the child to be heard and protected'.

We will bring this request to the local discussion tables with the police forces and the other subjects of the local network, to the attention of the judicial authority., the Region, and the possible interlocutors.

We are deepening these issues, bringing our contribution, also through our participation in the project CHILD (Towards a CHILD-friendly Legal Order for Fair Justice Provision), financed by the European Commission through the JUST programme, and carried out in Italy by the Cooperative '*Una casa per l' uomo*', with the aim of developing a justice system more suitable for children who are victims and/or witnesses of serious abuse, in nine EU countries (Italy, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Greece, Cyprus, Austria, Romania, Estonia).

***Important note: Views and opinions expressed are those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.***