Multi-agency and interdisciplinary cooperation in cases of unaccompanied children and possible victims of trafficking

- Child-friendly model of intervention

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Introduction

✓ The case for the “Barnahus-model“ or One Shop Stop response – to avoid re-traumatisation by multiple interviews and elicit narratives for identifying child victims of trafficking, sexual exploitation and abuse

✓ What requirements are stipulated by international law with regard to children on the move who are at risk of being victims of exploitation, trafficking and abuse?
Barnahus, evolving approach

- Barnahus has assumed a key role in the Justice as well as Child Protection System of the Nordic Countries
- Allowing for difficulties of definitions, Barnahus can be found in 50 locations in Iceland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark
- Recommended by international and professional bodies *inter alia*:
  - Council of Europe: the Lanzarote Committee and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Guidelines of Child-friendly justice (2010) etc.
  - ISPCAN, the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect: The multidisciplinary award 2006
Child sexual abuse and exploitation

Uniqueness of Crimes against Children

✓ The vulnerability of the child victim
  ✓ Child victims do not normally bring charges against their offenders
  ✓ The “silent” crime, secrecy of the abuse
  ✓ Child victims difficulties in disclosures

✓ Lack or absence of evidence other than the child’s disclosure
  ✓ Medical evidence in less than 10% of cases and only conclusive in less than 5% of all cases
  ✓ Other hard evidence or witnesses other than the child victim’s rarely exist
The Child’s narrative:
Uniqueness of the Intervention

☑ Addressing child abuse and exploitation is not only a judicial issue but requires **multiagency intervention**

☑ The child’s victim’s **disclosure** is the key for:
  - Ensuring the safety of the child – **the child protection agencies**
  - Providing assistance to the child victim with the aim of physical and psychohological recovery – **the health services**
  - Uncovering the crime in terms of criminal investigation, prosecution and sentencing – **the judicial system**
  - Preventing the perpetrator from reoffending
Multiple interviews – Harmful to the Child Victim

✓ All the different agencies: the Child Protection Service, the Medical Profession, the Police etc. need to have the child’s account

✓ Repetitive interviews by many professionals in different locations can have very harmful effect for the child victim

✓ Re-victimisation – re-traumatisation
  ✓ Refers to painful/stressful re-experiencing of trauma as a consequence of sexual violence
Violation of the “best interest of the child”

✓ Retraumatization!
Multiple interviews –
Harmful for the Criminal Investigation

✓ Repetitive and unstructured interviews can distort the child’s account
  ✓ Suggestibility and leading and misleading questions
  ✓ The child’s disclosure becomes contaminated
  ✓ Discrepancies in the child’s story
  ✓ The evidential value of the narrative diminishes

✓ Additional harmful experience: the Absence of a child-friendly facilities
  ✓ High level of stress precludes optimal expression
  ✓ Police stations or Hospitals: Wrong messages!
Multiagency collaboration

- The Gov. Agency for Child Protection
- The State Police
- The State Prosecution
- The Police Dep. in Reykjavik
- The University Hospital – Dep. of Paediatric and Dep. of child Psychiatry
- Association of the Directors of Local Social Services
- The Child Protection Services in Reykjavik
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The Barnahus in Reykjavik
On arrival at Barnahus
Interviewing room
The monitoring room
The medical room
Facts that must not be forgotten

- Children moving across borders, unaccompanied children and asylum-seeking children are (probably) **already traumatized**

- Significant number of children on the move are **trafficked, sexually exploited and/or victims of abuse**

- A prerequisite for discovering and identifying child trafficking, exploitation and abuse is to **listen to the child**

- **Danger of re-traumatization** derives from multi-sectorial response if interventions are not co-ordinated in a child-friendly or sensitive manner
CRC General principle of Non-discrimination

• Unaccompanied children and children at risk who are possible victim of trafficking should
  – Enjoy the same protective and participatory rights as all other children; Art 22
    • Access to the child protection services
    • The child should be listened to
  – Be ensured suitable alternative care as appropriate (prevalence given to foster placement/family setting) Art 20; recruiting foster families
    • Needs assessment
    • Trust and disclosure
Avoiding re-traumatization: international law

✓ The CRC, the principle of the “best interest of the child”
✓ The UN Guidelines on Justice in Matters involving Child Victims and Witnesses of Crime (2005)
✓ The CoE Convention against Trafficking (2005)
✓ The CoE Lanzarote Convention (2010)
✓ EU Directive on Trafficking (2011)
✓ EU Directive on victims (2012)
Barnahus and unaccompanied children

- In Iceland a formal collaboration since 2016 between the relevant agencies:
  - The Directorate of Immigration
  - Government Agency for Child Protection and the relevant local child protection services
  - The Legal Guardian appointed by the RC
  - Others as appropriate, e.g. police

- The child’s narrative provides basis for
  - The asylum application
  - Individual assessment, e.g. age, mental health
  - Protective measures, including accommodation
  - Collaboration between agencies and rapport building with unaccompanied children