

Children who are victims of physical and sexual abuse: over 20,000 cases of abuse, with more girls than boys being victims of sexual abuse. Save the Children Romania is launching the ‘B-FRAME’ project, which aims to encourage local authorities to establish nine new Barnahus centres dedicated to protecting children who are victims of physical and sexual abuse during legal proceedings

- *In 2025, the directorates-general for social assistance and child protection recorded 20,403 cases of child abuse, neglect or exploitation.*
- *For sexual abuse, the figures for 2025 show 1,712 cases, of which 1,536 involved girls and 176 involved boys. This disparity persists year on year.*
- *Throughout 2025, the Esc_ABUZ reporting helpline recorded over 50,000 reports concerning child sexual abuse material, compared with 19,369 in 2024.*

Bucharest, 25 August 2026: Save the Children Romania, together with the General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection, Sector 6, Bucharest, and the ‘Hope For Children’ CRC Policy Centre in Cyprus, is launching the project ‘Barnahus-FRAME: Promoting Resilient and Multidisciplinary Environments’ (B-FRAME), funded by the European Union’s ‘Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values’ (CERV) programme. Over the course of two years, the project will prepare for the establishment by local authorities of nine Barnahus-type centres in nine counties, will involve over 340 professionals in capacity-building activities, of whom at least 180 will take part in the training programme, and will draft two legislative proposals for the incorporation of the Barnahus model into judicial proceedings.

The current situation regarding child abuse in Romania

In 2025, the directorates-general for social assistance and child protection recorded 20,403 cases of child abuse, neglect or exploitation. 16,939 of these occurred within the family and 970 in educational establishments.

Regarding sexual abuse, the data for 2025, provided by ANPDCA ⁽¹⁾, indicate 1,712 cases, of which 1,536 involved female victims and 176 involved male victims. This disparity persists year on year. What is failing to keep pace is the criminal response: of the 1,712 cases of sexual abuse and exploitation recorded in 2025, criminal proceedings against the perpetrator were initiated in 1,127 cases.

These figures reflect only what comes to the attention of the authorities. The gap between these figures and the actual extent of the problem can be estimated by taking into account other research on the under-reporting of child abuse, which has revealed, for example in an analysis published in the prestigious scientific journal **Child Maltreatment**, a prevalence of childhood sexual abuse of 127 cases per 1,000 people in studies based on self-reports from victims, compared with just 4 per 1,000 in those based on official reports from institutions specialising in the protection of children’s rights (such as ANPDCA).²

¹ ANPDCA, ‘The Situation of Abused, Neglected and Exploited Children’, January–December 2024, <https://copii.gov.ro.ro>.

²Stoltenborgh, M., van IJzendoorn, M. H., Euser, E. M., & Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J. (2011). A Global Perspective on Child Sexual Abuse: Meta-Analysis of Prevalence Around the World. *Child Maltreatment*, 16(2), 79–101. The meta-analysis covers 217 publications (1980–2008), 331 independent samples and approximately 9.9 million participants.

Thus, for every child who has been sexually abused and whose case is recorded by the authorities, approximately thirty others remain unrecorded and, consequently, outside the scope of any intervention by the child protection system.

In the context of Romania, this enormous discrepancy shows that we are dealing with a situation of incomparably greater severity, involving at least 50,000 children a year who suffer some form of sexual abuse or exploitation and who are not identified by social services or law enforcement agencies. Of the children surveyed in the Save the Children study, nearly one in three (29 per cent) received images or messages with sexually explicit content online, and one in five was asked to send explicit photographs or videos.³ Furthermore, throughout 2025, the Esc_ABUZ reporting hotline recorded over 50,000 reports concerning child sexual abuse material, compared to 19,369 for the whole of 2024. 84 per cent of the reported material had been produced by the children themselves, under duress, threat or emotional manipulation.

The pilot centre in Bucharest and the Barnahus model, the only one capable of protecting the rights of children involved in legal proceedings as victims of serious abuse

In 2022, Save the Children, in partnership with the General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection, Sector 6, opened Romania's first Barnahus-style pilot centre. Since it opened, 165 children who have been victims of sexual abuse and serious physical violence have received integrated services there: psychological assessment and counselling, hearings for legal purposes, social services and a general medical examination.

"Through this project, we are transforming a successful pilot model into a reality accessible to children across the country. Instead of a child victim being shuttled between police stations, hospitals and courts, Barnahus brings all the specialists together around the child, offering them protection and justice without exacerbating their trauma." "Barnahus offers child victims of violence access to integrated services in a safe, friendly environment centred on their needs," said **Gabriela Alexandrescu**, Executive President of Save the Children.

Barnahus brings together social work, criminal investigation, medical examination and therapeutic support under one roof, in a space designed for children. This internationally recognised model was created in Iceland in 1998 and is aimed at children who are victims of sexual abuse and domestic violence, as well as children who have witnessed serious acts of violence. In August 2026, the Barnahus network comprised 58 member organisations from 32 countries,⁴ including Barnahus Romania.

B-FRAME is building on the experience of the centre in Bucharest and preparing to establish nine new centres of this kind in our country. The project's objectives are as follows:

- *Expanding the national network.* Providing technical assistance at national level to local authorities to set up at least **nine Barnahus centres**, which involves selecting and fitting out the premises, establishing collaboration protocols between the child protection department, the police, the public prosecutor's office and the hospital, and planning staffing and the budget. Each

³Save the Children Romania, press release of 18 November 2025, 'Sexual abuse and exploitation of children reach critical levels in Romania'.

⁴ Barnahus Network, 'Progress on Barnahus implementation', data valid as of August 2026. The network states that it does not publish statistics on the total number of centres or a list of countries offering such services, as the degree of compliance with quality standards varies from place to place and the situation is evolving rapidly. <https://barnahus.eu/barnahus/the-practice-in-barnahus/progress-in-europe/>

centre will operate according to scientifically validated procedures provided by Save the Children and the DGASPC Sector 6 Bucharest.

- *Professional capacity building.* Over 340 social workers, police officers, prosecutors, judges, doctors and psychologists will be involved in capacity-building activities, of whom at least 180 will take part in the training programme itself. This is structured around the NICHD Protocol for interviewing children and child-centred practices (considered to be the most effective ‘ ‘ globally at present), with mixed-profession groups in which all professionals work together.
- *Legislative reform.* At least two legislative amendments, one of which concerns the recognition of video-recorded interviews conducted at Barnahus centres as admissible evidence in court. This measure applies the principle of a single hearing to avoid re-traumatising children through repeated hearings.
- *Adaptation to new forms of violence.* Standard operating procedures developed at European level and adaptation of the model to online sexual exploitation, including interviewing techniques for cases involving digital evidence and grooming situations.

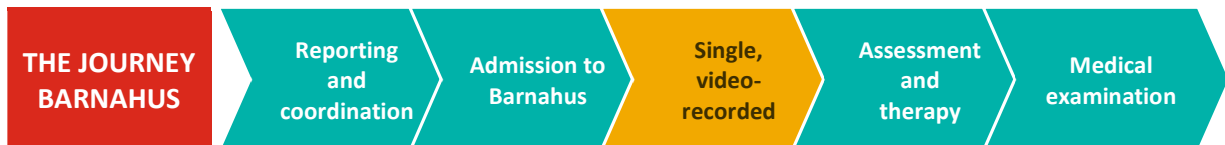
*“A child who has experienced violence does not need institutions working one after the other, but people and professionals working together for the child’s sake. This is what we learnt from the experience of Romania’s first Barnahus pilot centre, opened in Sector 6 in partnership with Save the Children: when services and institutions rally round the child, the intervention becomes safer, more coherent and better tailored to their needs. B-Frame takes this lesson further and creates the framework within which institutions, professionals and civil society can work together in the service of the child. “After nearly 30 years of partnership between DGASPC Sector 6 and Save the Children, we know that change is built through cooperation and trust. The child should not have to learn how the system works. The system must learn to work together for the child,” said **Gabriela Schmutzer**, Director General of DGASPC S6.*

How the Barnahus model works

The journey of a child who is a victim of abuse, before and after the integrated intervention by the multidisciplinary team.



Each institution operates according to its own procedures, and the child is forced to recount the assault at least six times – often more than ten – and is subjected to continuous retraumatization.



Single interview

A single interview, conducted by a trained specialist, rather than having to repeat the account to strangers.

A single location

The child no longer has to travel between the police station, the public prosecutor's office, the doctor's surgery and the hospital.

More robust evidence

The account obtained through open-ended questions is both less traumatic and more robust in court.

The Barnahus model, created in Iceland in 1998, is recognised by the Council of Europe's Lanzarote Committee as best practice in child-friendly justice.

The project benefits from the strategic support of the National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption (ANPDCA) and is in line with European strategies on children's rights and the fight against sexual abuse. We estimate that, in the centres to be established, over **400 children who are victims of abuse and exploitation will benefit directly from the services offered in the newly established centres.**

How does the Barnahus intervention model contribute to the protection of children who are victims of serious abuse?

A child who discloses sexual abuse goes through a fragmented institutional process. They are interviewed by the police, then by the prosecutor, undergo a psychological assessment in a different location, and are medically examined in a hospital. Each institution operates according to its own procedures, and the child has to recount the assault each time, in front of people they do not know.

The report published by Save the Children in February 2023, based on 50 in-depth interviews with specialists from the police, public prosecutors' offices, courts, directorates-general for social assistance and child protection, and psychology practices, has reconstructed this process. The key finding concerns the number of times the child has to recount the incident: the child's interaction with state institutions *"requires the child to recall the abuse they suffered at least six times by the end of the process, but in most cases this number reaches and exceeds ten"*.⁵

⁵ Save the Children Romania, Report on the interaction of child victims of sexual abuse with the state institutions involved in managing these cases, February 2023. Qualitative research based on 50 in-depth individual interviews with specialists, conducted between July and September 2022, as part of a project carried out in partnership with DGASPC Sector 6 and funded by the Active

Each repetition of the hearing forces the child to relive the abuse in front of a stranger, and the repetition of this exposure, months apart and without therapeutic support between stages, causes the child to be re-traumatised – an abuse no longer inflicted by the abuser, but by the very procedure used by the justice system.

The best interests of the child do not conflict with the interests of the criminal investigation. In the hearing, the two coincide: a statement obtained through open invitations, in a setting where the child does not feel as though they are being interrogated, is both less traumatic and more reliable as evidence. Barnahus ensures these conditions through its standards. In the province of Tarragona in Catalonia (Spain), where the model has been piloted since 2020, the duration of proceedings has fallen from 2.98 to 1.27 years, and the conviction rate stood at 84.5 per cent, compared with 77 per cent (which is, in any case, much higher than the results in Romania, according to the data below) in areas without a Barnahus. In Iceland, the number of indictments tripled following the opening of the first centre. The Council of Europe's Lanzarote Committee has recognised the model as good practice, considering that states with such services apply child-friendly justice standards more consistently and systematically than those without them.⁶

What happens in the absence of such a framework developed at national level can be seen, in the case of Romania, in the Judicial Inspection Report (2014–2020), which highlighted a judicial practice that is cause for concern from the perspective of children's rights. Of the more than 18,000 complaints concerning offences under Articles 218–222 of the Criminal Code involving child victims, recorded between 2014 and 2020, 80 per cent were resolved by dismissal or by the withdrawal of criminal proceedings, whilst an indictment was issued in 3,496 cases, less than 20 per cent of the total. For the remaining cases, decisions were taken not to pursue criminal proceedings (2,279) or to dismiss the case (12,639).⁷ It is well known that statements which change from one hearing to the next are exploited by the perpetrator's lawyer, with the prosecution's case weakening as the proceedings progress.

"The CRC 'Hope For Children' Policy Centre operates Barnahus in Cyprus, in close collaboration with the relevant public authorities, providing a safe and child-friendly environment where child victims of sexual abuse or exploitation can access coordinated services under one roof, including forensic interviews, medical examinations, psychological support and legal assistance. Through this multidisciplinary and trauma-informed approach, the organisation has developed significant expertise in providing integrated responses for child protection. This experience directly underpins its contribution to the B-FRAME project, supporting the strengthening of multi-agency cooperation and the development of effective, child-centred systems in both Cyprus and Romania," said Dr Emma Mesikämnen, Director of the Research & Development Division at the "Hope For Children" CRC Policy Centre, Cyprus.

About the project partners:

Save the Children Romania – project coordinator, with 36 years' experience in child rights protection and the initiator of the country's first Barnahus pilot centre.

Citizens Fund Romania (EEA Grants 2014–2021). <https://stopabuz.ro/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Raport-Barnahus-decembrie-2022.pdf>

⁶Council of Europe (2023). Barnahus: a European journey — Findings of a mapping study on multidisciplinary and interagency child-friendly justice models responding to violence against children. Data collected in the winter of 2022–2023 across the 46 member states.

⁷ The Judicial Inspection Report ordered by Decision 111 of 11 June 2020 of the Plenary Session of the Superior Council of Magistracy (2021). The data extracted is taken from the journalistic investigation on the Dela0.ro website.

The General Directorate of Social Assistance for Sector 6, Bucharest – the partner responsible for implementing social policies within Sector 6, which contributes to the training programme, the drafting of the Barnahus procedures manual and the legal analysis of legislative proposals.

The ‘Hope For Children’ CRC Policy Centre (Cyprus) – the largest child protection organisation in Cyprus, a founding member of the Barnahus Network and operator of the Children’s House in Nicosia. It contributes through the exchange of best practice, study visits and expertise in institutionalising the model.

The National Authority for the Protection of Children’s Rights and Adoption (ANPDCA), the central institution for the protection and promotion of children’s rights. It provides strategic support to the project and coordinates the working group on legislative proposals.

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About Save the Children

For 36 years, Save the Children Romania has been developing social programmes, public policies and sound practices for the benefit of children in Romania. The organisation’s expertise and the complexity of its nationwide projects make it an essential social institution, whose role is to act as a mediator between society and public authorities, for the benefit of children. Over more than three decades of activity, Save the Children has been actively involved in society, identifying concrete solutions to protect and support vulnerable children, whilst at the same time advocating for viable collaboration with decision-making authorities to ensure the best interests of the child. Save the Children has taken on the role of vigilant oversight of public authorities, ensuring that they implement sustainable public policies to address the root causes of children’s vulnerability. At the same time, the organisation has succeeded in creating active networks of solidarity by encouraging corporate social responsibility and social responsibility in the wider community. Over 4,522,000 children have been involved in Save the Children’s programmes and campaigns.