

## INTERNATIONAL FORUM:

# PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND EXPLOITATION IN ALBANIA

Barnahus a promising model for supporting children and  
adolescents who have survived online and offline CSAE

Tirana, 14 October 2021

In partnership with:



**PROMISE**  
Barnahus Network



## INVITATION

Although Albania has made considerable progress in respecting the rights of the child, the country faces serious challenges in protecting children and young people from sexual violence. In 2019, CRCA/ECPAT Albania opened the first Barnahus in Albania, to support every child who has survived sexual violence and exploitation. So far, 65 children and adolescents in Albania have received support with psychological services, social services, free legal aid, etc. Barnahus Albania is part of the PROMISE Network, which brings together Barnahus centres and stakeholders in Europe.

Barnahus (Children's House) is a child-friendly interagency response model for the coordination of criminal and child welfare investigations of child sexual abuse cases and provision of support services for child victims and their families. The model was recognised in 2015 as a promising practice by the Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention). The first one opened in Iceland in 1998, inspired by the model of the Child Advocacy Centre in America dating back to 1985.

During the last two years, Albania has faced several extreme cases of violence and sexual exploitation, especially against girls, where violence has been linked to online sexual exposure of victims on social networks, as an opportunity to guarantee long-term sexual exploitation by organized groups of young boys or men. These cases have put Albania and its institutions at a crossroads in finding sustainable solutions, which put the child at the centre. This has made it urgent the need for discussion between decision-makers, public officials and professionals on what model shall Albania implement to protect and care for child-victims of sexual violence and exploitation.

In this context, the **CRCA/ECPAT Albania**, with the participation of the **ECPAT International**, **PROMISE Barnahus Network**, and the **Children's Rights Division of the Council of Europe**, are holding the **International Forum "BARNAHUS: A successful model in protecting children from sexual violence and exploitation"**, on 14 October 2021. The forum will be organized in hybrid form, starting from 10:00 CET, at Hotel MAK Albania in Tirana / Albania. **All participants, shall register to this link:** [https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_MLTyqCdYTimV4d-FTApGnQ](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_MLTyqCdYTimV4d-FTApGnQ)

Participants of the Forum will be senior representatives of public institutions, CSO's, international partners and child protection experts. Please confirm your participation by 13 October 2021 by email: [crca@crca.al](mailto:crca@crca.al)

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## WHY AN INTERNATIONAL FORUM?

During the last two years, Albania has faced several extreme cases of violence and sexual exploitation, especially against girls, where violence has been linked to online sexual exposure of victims on social networks, as an opportunity to guarantee long-term sexual exploitation by organized groups of young boys or men. These cases have put Albania and its institutions at a crossroads in finding sustainable solutions, which put the child at the centre. Lack of experience in handling cases, increased reporting by children and social prejudices that promote silence or non-reporting have made it urgent the need for discussion between decision-makers, public officials and professionals on what model shall Albania implement to protect and care for child-victims of sexual violence and exploitation.

Several studies and research on the issue of online and offline child sexual abuse in Albania show a concerning trend of increasing numbers of children and young people falling victims to sexual abuse and exploitation. Globally, qualitative research with children who have experienced online child sexual abuse and exploitation is still relatively rare. However, growing numbers of children are being supported by support services around the world for issues related to online child sexual exploitation and abuse. Seeking to understand and build on the strengths of such services and address their weaknesses is a priority. Amplifying the voices of young people who have had these experiences is vital for this work.

In 2021, the WePROTECT Global Alliance and ECPAT International in partnership with CRCA/ECPAT Albania conducted the Voices of Survivors project, the first ever research in the country that puts the voices of survivors of online child sexual exploitation at the forefront of the response to this problem. To measure the quality and effectiveness of support services, this project undertook two separate and distinct research activities: a) qualitative individual 'conversations' with young people who have experienced online child sexual exploitation and abuse focused on identifying their recommendations for support service practices; b) an online survey of frontline support workers currently providing support services to child survivors of online and offline forms of sexual exploitation and abuse.


International actors for many years have advocated for European countries establish multidisciplinary and interagency child friendly justice and welfare services for protection of survivors of child sexual abuse and exploitation. The implementation of the Barnahus model is increasingly named in recommendations and strategies as a promising practice to be supported and expanded. Is Albania ready to embrace and support the Barnahus model and implement it together with CSO's across the child protection services?

## OBJECTIVES

- Share the findings of the Voices of Survivors project in Albania, with a particular focus on the recommendations for the improvement of prevention and support services shared by the young survivors.
- Present the Barnahus model and its workings.
- Discuss with representatives of public institutions, CSOs, national and international experts on benefits of Barnahus model and how Albania can move forward.
- Strengthen national and international dialogue and cooperation between public institutions in Albania and CSOs in order to address online and offline child sexual abuse and exploitation, and the support needed for survivors to overcome trauma and build a new life.

## ORGANISERS & PARTNERS

**CRCA/ECPAT Albania** works to promote respect for the rights of children, youth, women and minorities, to develop their rights, to increase participation at the national and local level, through public advocacy, improving policies and legislation, capacity building, information and research, and establishing effective models of services for the care and protection of children, young people. CRCA has been licensed since 2011 to provide specialized services on sexual violence at the community and national level, while having 25 years of experience in child and youth protection services.



**BARNAHUS Albania** - In 2019, CRCA/ECPAT Albania established the first ever **Barnahus Albania**, to support every child who has survived sexual violence and exploitation. So far, 65 children and adolescents have received support with psychological services, social services, free legal aid, etc. We support and protect children and adolescents that have survived sexual violence or exploitation, by coordinating and bringing together psycho-social, health, community, and legal services. Barnahus Albania is part of the PROMISE Network.

**Children's Rights Division, Council of Europe** - The Council of Europe protects and promotes the human rights of everyone, including children. Based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the European Convention on Human Rights, the Council of Europe Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention) and other legal standards, the Council of Europe promotes and protects the rights of 150 million children in Europe.

**ECPAT International** - is the leading global network working towards the vision of ending the sexual exploitation of children. With over 30 years of experience in engaging with and managing multi-stakeholder processes and alliances across national, regional, and global levels; ECPAT is considered to be at the helm of all issues and manifestations pertaining to the sexual exploitation of children. With a Secretariat driving strategic direction, producing key research, and working on global advocacy; complemented by on ground efforts of 122 members in 104 countries, the network approach bridges local communities, governments, and the private sector; offering a global focus combined with customised national actions.

**PROMISE Barnahus Network** - The PROMISE Network was established in 2019 with a core mission to promote children's rights to be heard and to receive assistance in child protection and criminal justice investigations and proceedings. To this end, Promise supports national and local agencies, both governmental and non-governmental to establish Barnahus or similar models that progressively achieve international legal obligations, professional guidance and the Barnahus quality standards. The Network is a member-led organisation that works in support of, and in consultation with, stakeholders in Government agencies and local authorities, professionals from Barnahus and civil society from across Europe. The Network supports capacity-building, peer-to-peer networks, professional exchange, and practical tools, to promote Barnahus that practice in line with the European Barnahus Quality standards.

## PARTICIPANTS

The forum is open to representatives of ministries, justice and child protection systems, public institutions, CSOs, national and international experts working for children and young people, members of the Parliament etc.

## LANGUAGES

The International Forum will take place in Albanian and English with simultaneous translation. For the online participants, Zoom platform will be in use. Please register

## MEDIA & SOCIAL NETWORKS

The event is open to the media. Interested TV's and news platforms should contact our **Media Officer** ([albana.mustafaraj@crca.al](mailto:albana.mustafaraj@crca.al)) for further details. The meeting will be broadcasted live in CRCA/ECPAT page in Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/groups/crca.albania>

**TAGS:** #NEJEMI1 #mbrofemijetngadhuna #barnahus4ALB #CRCAshqiperi #ECPATalbania

**Handles** **Facebook:** @crca.albania @crca.al @ecpat @councilofeurope  
**Twitter:** @albaniacrca @ECPAT @PROMISEBarnahus @coe



## AGENDA

### 10.00 OPENING OF THE FORUM: Welcome speeches

- **Mrs. Bora Muzhaqi**, Minister of Children and Youth
- **Mrs. Altin Hazizaj**, Executive Director CRCA/ECPAT Albania & CRCA Kosova
- **Thomas Muller**, Acting Director, ECPAT International

### 10.30 PANEL 1: VOICES OF SURVIVORS

- **Mr. Mirgit Vataj**, Expert: Presentation of the Report for Albania
- **Mrs. Merita Xhafaj**, General Director, Ministry of Health and Social Protection
- **Mrs. Erinda Ballanca**, Albanian Ombudswoman

### 11.15 PANEL 2: BARNAHUS MODEL & ALBANIA

- **Mrs. Shawнна von Blixen**, PROMISE Barnahus Network: Barnahus Model, how it works and why is the best model for Albania
- **Mrs. Zaruhi Gasparyan**, Children's Rights Division, Council of Europe: Recommendations of the COE for the protection of children from sexual abuse
- **Mr. Klaudio Pulaha, Barnahus Albania**: Child protection system and protection of children from sexual abuse and exploitation in Albania

Q&A

### 12.15 PANEL 3: THE WAY FORWARD

Discussion among Government representatives, justice, law enforcement experts and CSOs

- **Mrs. Alma Tandilli**, Chairwoman, National Agency for Child Rights and Protection, Albania
- **Mr. Alfred Progonati**, Prosecutor, General Prosecutor's Office, Albania
- **Mrs. Silvana Alimadhi**, National Police Authority
- **Mrs. Redona Rustemaj**, Child Protection Unit, Municipality of Tirana

### 13.30 Conclusions of the Forum

### 14.00 Lunch Break

