

Listening to Children Across the Barnahus Network

*A concept paper for the Barnahus Network
16 September 2026*

Purpose of this concept

The Barnahus Network commissioned a child participation consultancy to develop a concept and practical roadmap for a child participation mechanism at Network level. The purpose of the consultancy was to explore how the Network can build meaningful, safe and sustainable opportunities for children to contribute to its work, and to lay the foundations for a future Network Child Advisory Board.

The consultancy has resulted in this concept paper and an accompanying roadmap. The proposed approach is deliberately phased. It starts by learning from children and existing Children's Advisory Boards, builds the capacity and structures needed for meaningful participation, expands opportunities for participation, and then uses the learning from these activities to consider the future role and form of a "child participation mechanism", potentially a Network Child Advisory Board.

The concept thus provides both a methodology for developing child participation in the Network and a foundation for a future child participation mechanism, while leaving its eventual form open to learning and to children's views.

The concept is accompanied by a detailed roadmap setting out the activities, responsibilities and proposed timeline for implementation.

A child-friendly version of this concept has also been developed to make the proposed approach accessible to children and young people.

What is child participation, and why does it matter?

Child participation means children having the right to express their views on matters that affect them and having those views taken seriously. This right is recognised in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and Barnahus Quality standard 1.2.

Barnahus already involve individual children in decisions and processes concerning their own situations and cases, and in some places at a collective level, where children contribute to organisational and practice development and reform. This concept addresses a different level of participation: how children can contribute to the development and work of the Barnahus Network as a whole.

The Barnahus Network brings together Barnahus, ministries, government agencies, NGOs, academics and other stakeholders across countries. As the Network develops, it is important that children and young people have meaningful opportunities to contribute their perspectives to matters that affect the Network's work and priorities.

Child participation at Network level also provides an opportunity to strengthen the Network's understanding of what matters to children who have experience of Barnahus and related services,

and to ensure that their perspectives inform the Network's learning, development, advocacy and knowledge-sharing.

The Network recognises that meaningful participation requires more than creating opportunities for children to speak. Children need appropriate information, support, accessible opportunities to participate, safeguards, feedback and a genuine possibility of influencing decisions. The Network therefore proposes a gradual approach that builds the necessary conditions for meaningful participation rather than establishing a structure without first developing the foundations needed to make it work well.

Our plan: five steps over two years

The Barnahus Network proposes a five-phase process over two years to build the foundations the network's child participation mechanism, establishing the resources, procedures and safeguards needed for meaningful participation. The phases are intended to build on one another and progressively strengthen the Network's capacity and experience.

1. Learn and develop the approach with children

A central element of the approach is that children should contribute to decisions about how they want to participate in the Network. The Network will therefore work with children throughout the implementation of the roadmap.

The Network will also consult children regarding whether and how children would like to be involved in the Child Participation Working Group (CPWG). The roadmap specifically provides for the CPWG's way of working to be adapted following this consultation.

Children who are involved in already existing Children's Advisory Boards and similar participation structures can help the Network understand:

- what children find meaningful about participation;
- what forms of participation work well;
- what makes participation difficult;
- what support children need;
- how children would like adults to work with them;
- how children want to receive feedback;
- what children think a Network-level participation mechanism could look like; and
- what would make participation at international Network level worthwhile and accessible.

The Network will seek to involve children not only as sources of information about participation but as contributors to the development of the Network's own approach.

2. Learning and working together

The Network will draw on the experience and expertise of relevant organisations and practitioners working on child participation, safeguarding and related areas.

The Network will also coordinate this work with the European Barnahus Evaluation Framework Project to ensure coherence, avoid duplication and explore opportunities for complementary learning.

3. Building capacity across the Network

Child participation will depend not only on the capacity of Network Secretariat but also how members support meaningful participation in their own organisations and services.

The Network will strengthen the capacity of adults across the Network to support meaningful child participation. This will include developing a training programme, piloting a train-the-trainer approach and developing practical tools for Network members.

At the same time, children will be supported to understand their rights to participate and the opportunities available to them.

The Network will therefore develop a Child Participation Toolkit to support members in putting child participation into practice.

The roadmap foresees the toolkit being developed with review by both CABs and the CPWG and subsequently launched across the Network.

The Network will also develop a training programme on child participation. A train-the-trainer approach is proposed, whereby an expert supports the initial development and delivery of training to a smaller group of participants who can subsequently support training across the Network. This is intended to build sustainable capacity and reach a larger number of Network members.

4. Developing participation partnerships

The Network will also seek to work with organisations that already have experience of working with children and survivors of violence.

These organisations may become participation partners, contributing expertise, opportunities for engagement and links to children and young people who may otherwise not have opportunities to participate in Network-level activities.

The development of an informal "Participation partners network" is included in the roadmap as a distinct activity. This approach can help broaden participation beyond existing CABs and support greater diversity of perspectives.

5. Assessing the way forward

The Network will use the experience and evidence generated through the preceding steps to consider whether a permanent Network Child Advisory Board would be appropriate and, if so, what it should look like.

This process will include engaging with children about the purpose, role, membership, representation and ways of working of a possible future Child Advisory Board. The final assessment will therefore consider both the practical feasibility of such a mechanism and what children themselves identify as meaningful and useful participation.

Guiding principles

The development of child participation at Network level will be guided by the following principles.

Meaningful participation

Children's participation should have a genuine purpose and a reasonable possibility of influencing the Network's work. Participation should not be undertaken simply to demonstrate that children have been consulted.

Space, voice, audience and influence

The Network will draw on the Lundy model of child participation, considering whether children have:

- **Space** – safe and inclusive opportunities to form and express their views;
- **Voice** – appropriate support and means to express those views;
- **Audience** – people responsible for decisions who listen to children's views; and
- **Influence** – mechanisms through which children's views can contribute to decisions and change.

Inclusion and representation

Existing Children's Advisory Boards and other participation structures do not necessarily represent all children. Particular attention will therefore be given to reaching children who may be less likely to participate, including children with disabilities, children from marginalised backgrounds and children who may be less confident in formal settings.

Participation opportunities should be accessible and adapted to children's different needs and circumstances, including through interpretation, accessible formats and flexible methods of participation.

Voluntary and informed participation

Children should receive information that enables them to understand what participation involves, why they are being invited to participate and what may happen as a result. Consent or assent procedures will be developed in ways appropriate to children's age and circumstances.

Children should always be able to decline participation or withdraw from an activity without having to provide a reason.

Safeguarding

All participation activities must be conducted in accordance with the Barnahus Network Child Safeguarding Policy and relevant ethical requirements. Safeguarding considerations will be integrated into the design of participation activities rather than addressed only after activities have been established.

The Network also recognises that not involving children can itself carry risks, including the risk that problems remain unidentified and that children's rights are not realised.

Safeguarding therefore requires consideration of both the risks of participation and the risks of exclusion.

Message integrity

Children's contributions should be communicated accurately and respectfully. Their views should not be changed, softened or selectively presented in ways that alter their meaning.

Where children's views cannot be followed or acted upon, the Network should provide an appropriate explanation and feedback.

Recognition and compensation

Children's time and contributions should be appropriately recognised. The Network will develop a policy for compensation and recognition that takes account of relevant ethical guidance and ensures that compensation does not create pressure on children to participate.

Roles and responsibilities

The Barnahus Network Steering Group will have overall responsibility for overseeing the implementation of this concept. The Child Participation Working Group (CPWG) will support its implementation on a day-to-day basis and report to the Steering Group. The proposed roles are:

Who	Role
Children	Contribute their views and experiences and help shape the development of the Network's approach to child participation.
Existing Children's Advisory Boards	Provide experience and advice on meaningful participation and contribute to the development and review of the concept and toolkit.
Facilitators	Support communication and engagement between children and the Network, drawing on their existing relationships with CABs.
Child Participation Coordinator/Consultant	Coordinate implementation, support engagement with children and CABs, develop tools and training, and support monitoring and learning.
Child Participation Working Group (CPWG)	Provide professional expertise, guide implementation and report to the Steering Group.
Safeguarding lead	Oversee safeguarding in accordance with the Network's Child Safeguarding Policy.
Secretariat	Coordinate implementation, organise meetings and activities, manage resources and support communication across the Network.

Who	Role
Steering Group	Provide strategic oversight and approve the concept, resources and significant changes to the approach.
Network members	Apply and promote child participation in their own services and contribute to learning across the Network.

The current CPWG is composed of adults with expertise in child participation and safeguarding. An important part of the proposed process will be to explore with children whether and how they would like to contribute to the CPWG's work, and to adapt its working methods accordingly.

Monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning

The Network will monitor the implementation of the concept and assess whether it is creating the conditions for meaningful child participation.

The Network proposes to draw on the Lundy model and relevant elements of the Council of Europe's assessment approach, including consideration of space, voice, audience and influence.

Monitoring and evaluation will consider both process and outcomes. The Network recognises that many existing child participation assessment tools have been developed for individual organisations or national contexts. It will therefore be important to adapt the approach to the specific characteristics of an international network.

The development of the Network's monitoring and evaluation approach will also be aligned, with the European Barnahus Evaluation Framework Project, in order to promote coherence and avoid duplication.

Findings and progress will be shared through the Network's existing reporting mechanisms.

Resources and sustainability

Child participation requires dedicated resources. These include staff time, coordination, travel, interpretation, accessible materials, communication, training and appropriate recognition or compensation for children's contributions. A key prerequisite for the launch and implementation of the concept is that the Barnahus Network can secure funding necessary to implement key activities.

The Network will develop a funding and staffing proposal during the first phase. The current concept considers two potential staffing arrangements:

	Permanent staff member	Two-year consultant
Estimated cost over two years	€127,000–180,000	€152,000–245,000
Continues after two years?	Yes	Only if renewed

	Permanent staff member	Two-year consultant
Speed of implementation	Slower due to recruitment	Faster
Knowledge retained in Network	Yes	Requires careful documentation

These estimates are preliminary and would need to be confirmed before a final budget is agreed. The existing concept estimates overall costs at approximately €127,000–245,000 over two years, depending on the staffing option and including staff time, travel, translation, accessibility and recognition of children's contributions.

The Network recognises that child participation is not a one-off activity. The initial period is therefore intended not only to deliver specific activities but to establish capacity and structures that can support continued participation over time.

The way forward

The concept was approved by the Steering Group in September 2026, and will be implemented through the accompanying roadmap, which sets out the proposed activities, responsibilities and deadlines over the two-year period.

The process set out in the roadmap is intended to be developmental and iterative. The Network will learn, adapt and strengthen its approach as it gains experience and, importantly, as children contribute their views on what meaningful participation should look like.

Annex 1. Roadmap

Phase	Deliverable	Action	Person(s) responsible	Deadline
1	1.1	Funding and staffing model to be proposed by CPWG to Steering Group	Olivia Lind Haldorsson	31/12/2026
1	1.2	Steering Group to approve funding and staffing model	Olivia Lind Haldorsson	31/01/2027
1	1.3	Application to be made for funding for child participation concept implementation	Barnahus Network Secretariat	31/03/2027
1	1.4	Funding to be secured	Barnahus Network Secretariat	30/06/2027
1	1.5	Child participation coordinator/consultant (CPC) to be appointed	Barnahus Network Secretariat	31/07/2027
1	1.6	Retrospective review of published concept paper by CABs; findings to be incorporated into Phase 1 implementation	CPC	30/09/2027
1	1.7	Initial child participation self-evaluation	CPWG	30/09/2027
1	1.8	Decision-making pathway to be established with Barnahus CABs. Pathway to include details regarding feedback loop to children who contribute.	CPC	30/09/2027
1	1.9	Consent/assent procedure for children engaged in Network-level participation to be developed	CPC	31/10/2027
1	1.10	Compensation and recognition policy for participating children to be developed	CPC / CPWG	30/11/2027

Phase	Deliverable	Action	Person(s) responsible	Deadline
1	1.11	Consult with children via existing CABs regarding how (or whether) they wish to be involved in CPWG.	CPC	31/12/2027
1	1.12	Adapt CPWGs way of working as required following consultation with existing CABs.	CPC/CPWG	31/01/2028
1	1.13	Barnahus Network Child Participation Toolkit to be drafted and reviewed by CABs / CPWG. Toolkit to include: guidelines for CAB set-up; guidelines for inclusive representation; evaluation tools; accountability and feedback mechanisms; advocacy guidelines; examples of good practice; awareness-raising materials for children; risk assessment templates (including risk of not engaging in child participation)	CPC	31/07/2028
2	2.1	Align Child Participation Concept roadmap with European Barnahus Evaluation Framework workplan	CPC	30/09/2027
2	2.2	Barnahus Network Child Participation Toolkit to be launched	CPC	30/09/2028
3	3.1	Development of Network training programme on child participation	CPC	31/12/2027
3	3.2	Pilot 'train the trainer' model for the training programme	CPC	31/03/2028
3	3.3	Adapt training model as required	CPC	30/06/2028
3	3.4	Final child participation self-evaluation	CPWG	31/10/2028
3	3.5	Child participation training programme rolled out to the Network	CPC / Secretariat / CPWG	31/10/2028
4	4.1	Launch Participation Partners Network	CPC / Secretariat	31/12/2027
5	5.1	Assessment of viability of Network CAB, based on evidence from Phases 1–4	CPC	31/10/2028
5	5.2	Final project report	CPC	30/11/2028



The Barnahus Network is supporting countries to adopt Barnahus as a standard practice for providing rapid access to justice and care to children who are, or who may be, victims and witnesses of violence. We undertake this work support that all children enjoy their right to be protected from violence.

Our work is advancing Barnahus through research, evidence, and practice, and also supporting members to achieve excellence in practice. Our members are Barnahus, ministries, government agencies, NGOs, academics, individuals, and other stakeholders who share a commitment to full, incremental implementation of the Barnahus Quality Standards.

Learn more at www.barnahus.eu



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