



# Transnational child protection cases: exploring how to fulfil safeguards for children

Promise Soteria

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Co-funded by  
the European Union



Lunch break

Case experiences: hearing  
from experts

# Session on hearing children, with a focus on international family law cases

Insights from Mathias Lia Nordmoen, Senior Adviser, International Services,  
Division of Legal Affairs and Public Administration, The Norwegian Directorate for  
Children Youth and Family Affairs

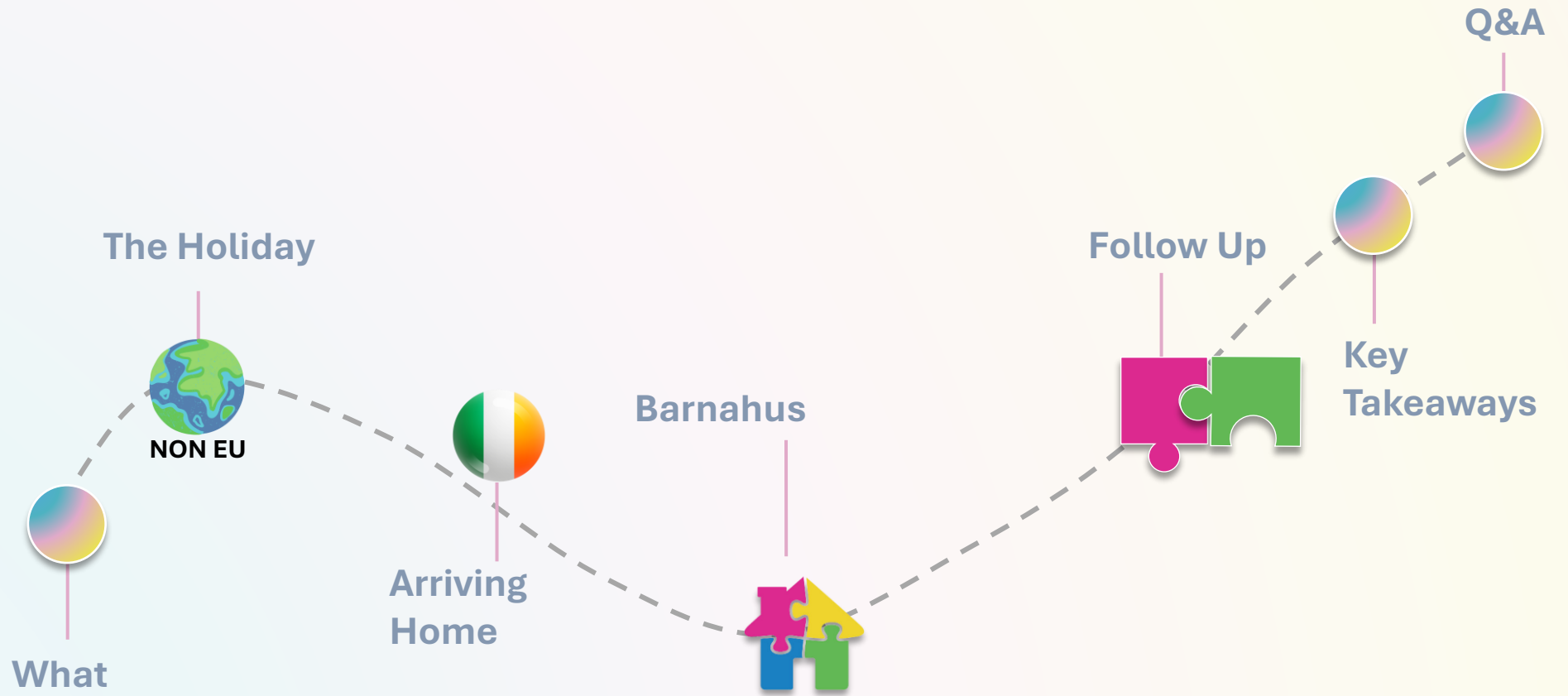
# The Role of Barnahus in Transnational Cases

## Barnahus

Sergeant Gillian Meaney – An Garda Síochána  
Niamh Whooley – Social Work Team Leader



6<sup>th</sup> May 2025.



# Holiday



Medical  
Attention

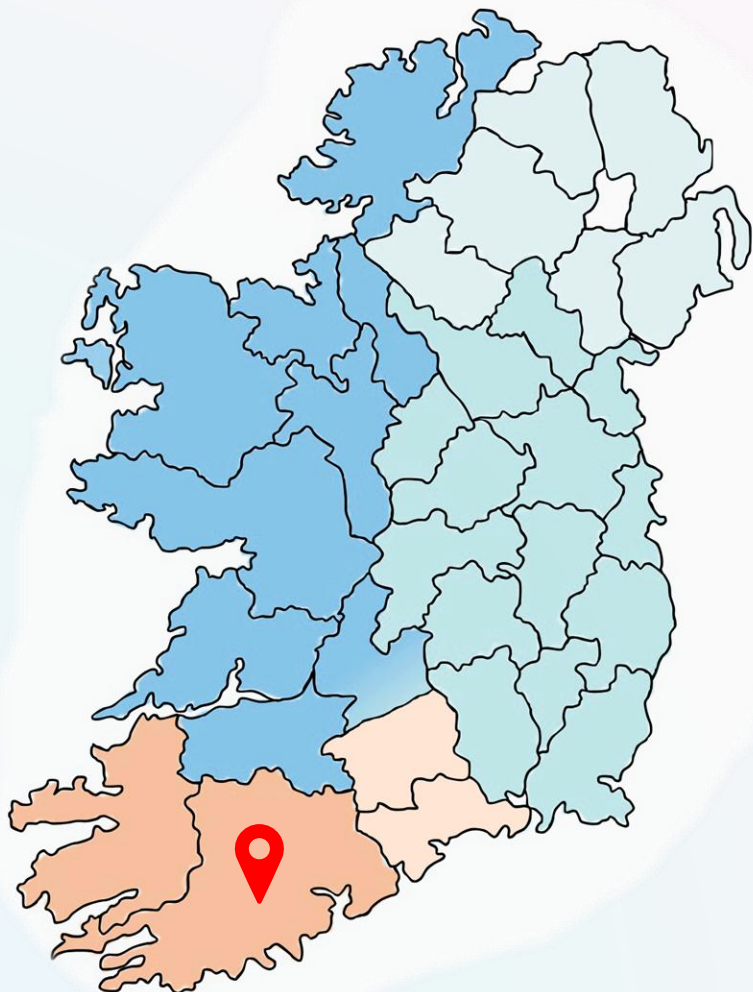
As a result  
of medical  
needs &  
police  
statement  
have to stay  
longer in  
Turkey

Violent  
sexual  
assault

Statement  
to Police –  
without  
legal  
representat  
ion/  
translator

An  
internation  
al lawyer  
becomes  
involved  
and finds  
statement  
not  
accurate

# Return to Ireland



No National Protocol



Aoife does not return to school/difficulty eating/difficulty sleeping.



Family finds information about Sexual Assault Treatment Unit – medical



SATU make mandated report to TUSLA.






TUSLA report to Gardai and refer to Barnahus.



# Barnahus

What is the Barnahus Model?

-  Icelandic for “**Children’s House**”
-  European model of practice to promote **interagency responses** to victims of **Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)** and non offending caregivers.
-  Barnahus focuses specifically on child victims of sexual abuse and incorporates **Forensic Medical Examiners**, **Child Protection Social Workers**, **Specialist Interviewers** from AGS and Tusla as well as a **Therapy team**.



# Four Rooms of Barnahus



## Therapy Room

- *Screening*
- *Therapeutic Intervention*



## Criminal Investigation Room

- *Specialist Interviewing*



## Child Protection Room

- *Protection needs of the child / siblings*



## Medical Examination Room

- *Forensic Medical Examination / Health Screening*

# The Barnahus Quality Standards



**Standard 1:**  
Key principles  
and cross-cutting  
activities



**Standard 2:**  
Multidisciplinary  
and interagency  
collaboration



**Standard 3:**  
Interagency case  
management



**Standard 4:**  
Forensic  
interview



**Standard 5:**  
Medical  
examination



**Standard 6:**  
Therapeutic  
services



# Aoife's Barnahus Journey

- Therapeutic intervention
  - Sleeping difficulties
  - Eating difficulties
  - Not going to school
  - Not socialising with friends
  - Low mood

Parenting support

School – Supported plan for Aoife to return to school



- No child protection concerns
  - Aoife is safe and protected living with her mother and father.



- Gardai met with Aoife and Aoife not happy with her Statement.
- Gardai contact Interpol
- Gardai arrange with Aoife for Aoife to have a Garda Specialist Interview



- Aoife has on ongoing medical appointments in Sexual Assault Treatment Unit and gynaecology services due to injuries sustained



# Aoife Today



Second Specialist Interview is planned.



Aoife is attending school.



Continues to engage in therapy & health.







Socialising with friends



Eating and sleeping

# Key takeaways



-  Barnahus supported Aoife to be heard and listened to
-  Barnahus gave Aoife choice and control
-  The Barnahus interagency process meant that at all times, Aoife's best interests were prioritised
-  This process has ensured Aoife's best and true evidence to be provided to the criminal process

# Key takeaways



- This is an ongoing case and Aoife continues to engage with therapy/health and Garda services.
- Highlights the lack of protocol in place when a child is a victim of a crime outside of the EU.

**Questions?**

**Thanks for your attention**



Role of  
lawyers/guardians  
to ensure best  
interests are  
fulfilled in  
transnational  
cases



# Introduction to KIND



Works across  
10 Countries



A growing team of staff  
members (12)



Partners with 14  
Organizations in  
Europe and the UK



Over 200 pro bono  
lawyers involved



# Case-Study: Mohammed's Story

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- Mohammed is a **17 years-old** boy from Egypt living in Poland. KIND's attorney in Poland was appointed as his **guardian ad litem** last year.
- We were notified of this decision **six days** after it was made. When reaching out to the foster care facility he was staying in, Mohammed had **left three days earlier**.
- Police were informed. No missing child alert was triggered as it was considered a **voluntary departure**.
- A few days later, we were advised that Mohammed had been detained in Germany by a Polish border guard. The boy was now **650 kilometers away**, in another Polish province.

# Case-Study: Mohammed's Story

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- After travelling to meet with him in person with an interpreter, we learned that:
  - He had wanted to go to Italy, where he was **promised a job by someone he met in the first closed reception facility he stayed at**. He was then moved to a foster care facility.
  - He was then **abducted close to the foster care facility** and kept in an apartment for seven days with four adult strangers. There, he was beaten and witnessed drug use.
  - He had been taken to Germany by one of the men, where he was **supposed to meet another person who would take him to Italy**.
- Thanks to information shared by KIND's partner in Italy, we knew that there was an **increase in Egyptian boys arriving in Italy and showing signs that they had been trafficked**. It allowed us to better spot and respond to signs and indicators in this case.

# Case-Study: Mohammed's Story

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- During this meeting, we explained his situation, the signs of trafficking in this case and his rights. This requires access to **specialist support** as well as **training**:
  - On what trafficking of human beings is
  - On what the signs are, to recognise it
  - On how to explain it to a potential survivor.
- We **reached out to La Strada** to share information about the trafficking indicators in this case and the case was reported to law enforcement. We also also warned the foster care facility.



# Building capacity around best interests assessments

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## What can CSOs do?

- Raise awareness about preconceived ideas on children on the move, their journeys and the risks they face.
- Provide training on legal frameworks, best interests assessments
- Capacity Building efforts, by supporting and connecting with other actors
- Support access to child centered safeguards

## What does the guidance say?

*To take proper account of their situation, children's circumstances should be individually and comprehensively assessed. This assessment should provide a holistic view of their situation and should feed into the ongoing best interests assessment that should inform all actions in their regard.*

*Authorities and actors will need to be able to identify what information may be necessary to seek abroad, to assess the situation of the child and inform the actions taken.*

# Support and Assistance to ensure best interests are fulfilled

## What can CSOs do?

### Information

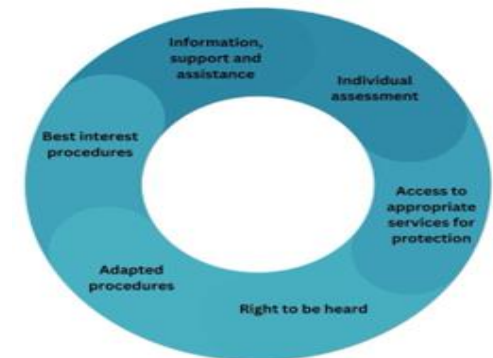
- Support the creation of child-centred tools and resources
  - Example: Child-friendly Know Your Rights sessions and guides.

### Support and Assistance

- Support trained and informed guardians to ensure best interests
- Specialist legal Assistance
  - Example: Pro bono support
- Access to Interpreters

## What does the guidance say?

- ✓ Children have a right to be fully informed about proceedings in which they are involved, in a language which they understand
- ✓ Children should receive legal assistance where necessary
- ✓ Children should be appointed a guardian, where this is necessary.





# Sharing of Information/Transnational Cooperation

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## What can CSOs do?

- Building and strengthening interagency and multi disciplinary regional networks
- Having clear pathways and referral mechanisms across the region.
- CSOs play a key role in contributing to the effectiveness of these networks and mechanisms.
  - Peer to peer support
- Contribute to policy and practical resources

## What does the guidance say?

*Ensuring a formal best interests procedure is in place which takes a multi-disciplinary, inter-agency approach and considers the whole of their situation.*

*The starting point for a multidisciplinary approach in transnational cases is understanding the roles and responsibilities of actors in other countries and having the channels and tools to work with them together to fulfil these safeguards across the process.*

*Guardians and legal advisors should receive or be able to access information related to proceedings in other countries involving the children. As necessary, guardians and legal advisors in one country should be facilitated to liaise with their peers in another country.*



# Thank you



Break

Break out groups

# Questions for networking & break out groups

Meet each other & exchange on

- 1) What needs for children involved do you see in transnational child protection cases?
- 2) What challenges you encounter or may encounter as professionals in similar cases;
- 3) What can you do to bring about improvements to how children's needs are fulfilled?

# Reflections on making progress

# Common Guiding Principles: building trust & collaboration

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Child rights-based approach

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Holistic and comprehensive approach

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Effective and child friendly justice procedures (timeliness)

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Prevention-focused

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Dynamic and resilient

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Transparent and accountable

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Resourced and sustainable

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Specific safeguards for children

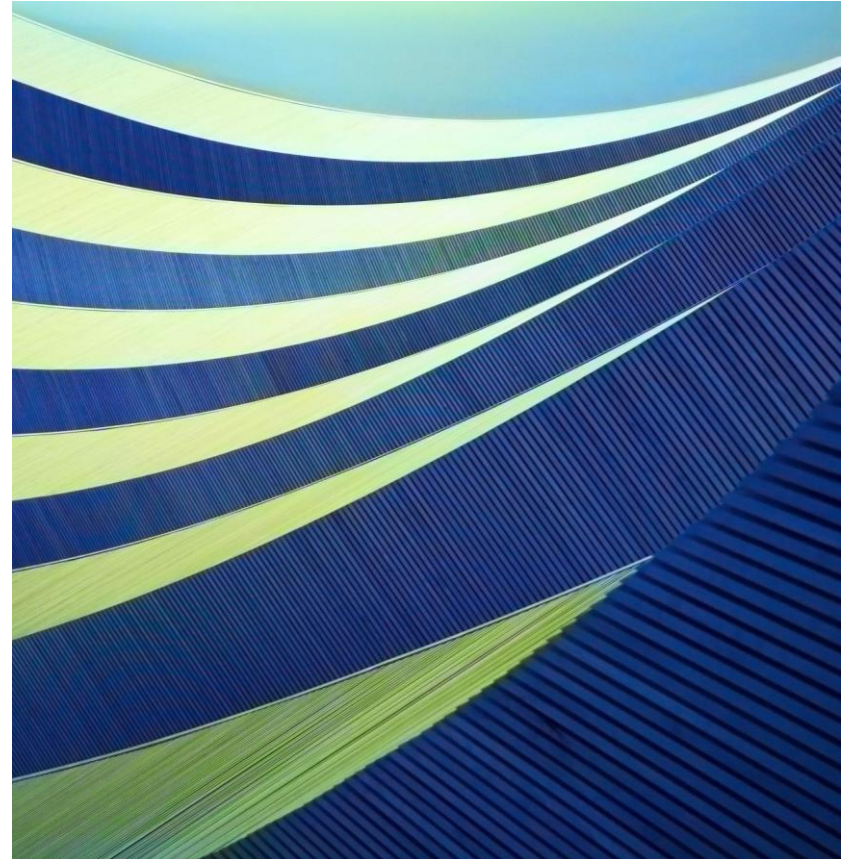
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Multidisciplinary and interagency approach

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Specialisation

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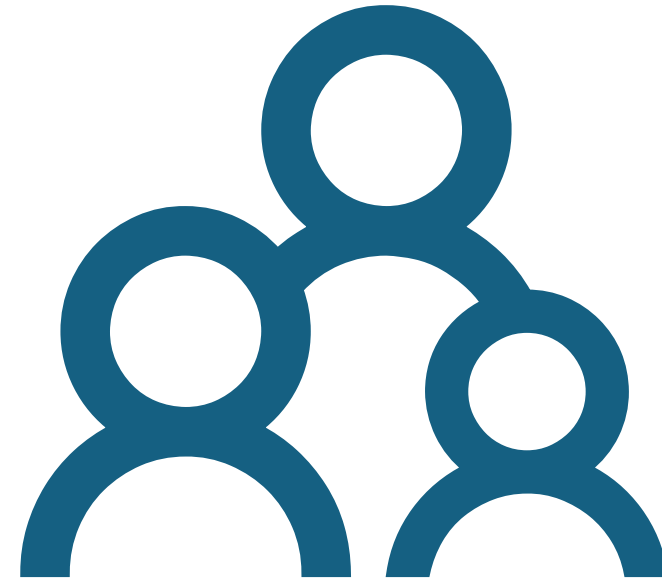
# Soteria Reflection Points

- ✓ **Raise general awareness of transnational elements in child protection cases**
- ✓ **Provide clear information on roles and responsibilities of actors involved**
- ✓ **Ensure adequate channels and capacity to support transnational cooperation**



# Soteria Reflection Points ctd

- ✓ **Build knowledge of evolving International and European legal framework**
- ✓ **Introduce/ further develop transnational child protection case management protocols**
- ✓ **Better mobilise resources to fulfil safeguards to children in transnational cases**
- ✓ **Working to meet new challenges and continue to improve outcomes for children in transnational child protection cases**





Word cloud: What priorities do you see for the future to fulfil children's rights better in these cases?



# Closing words from the partners

Thank you for your attention today!

We encourage you in your important work to fulfil children's rights in transnational child protection cases.

We hope to continue sharing and learning together.



# Sign off & Evaluation