**Press-release**

**A Centre for integrated services for child victims or witnesses of crime was open in Balti**

*May 20, 2022 |* **The first Barnahus-type regional centre for integrated services for child victims or witnesses of crime was inaugurated today in Balti municipium, joining three services from distinct areas – social, legal and medical - under the same roof, thus offering an increased level of protection for children throughout the process of penal investigation. The new centre will serve the entire northern region of the country, including Balti municipium and 11 districts, in total 571 localities.**

The regional centre represents a high-profile social institution that provides 4 types of specialized, complex and multidisciplinary assistance for child victims or witnesses of sex crimes, child trafficking or domestic violence. Such services are requisite in the process of evidence collection in penal cases, including among others: forensic interview, forensic-medical examination and expertise, psychological crisis assistance, assistance for the assurance of protection of children at risk.

*”All the services are provided in a safe and child-friendly environment to prevent the re-traumatization of the children”*, **declared Daniela Simboteanu**, president of the National Centre for Child Abuse Prevention (NCCAP), organisation that brought this innovative concept and implemented it in Balti in close cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and with the support from international partners and donors. At the international level, the concept of Barnahus-type centres is considered to be a model of good practice that is fully consistent with the provisions of child protection legislation of UNO, EU and Council of Europe.

For the establishment of the Centre, the local public authority from Balti municipium offered an edifice that was capitally repaired with the financial contribution from OAK Foundation, World Childhood Foundation and the East-European Foundation. At the same time, with the financial support from ERIKS Development Partner Foundation the necessary medical equipment was procured, while the furniture and child-friendly spaces were covered from resources allocated by Soros Moldova, with financing from the European Union. The total financial contribution for the renovation and equipment of the Barnahus-type Centre in Balti, offered by international donors, amounts to circa MDL 3 million. MDL 1 478 752 were also allocated from the state budget for the functioning of the Centre in 2022.

The Centre operates based on the Governmental Decision no. 708/2019 and based on a cooperation agreement among 8 state institutions: Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice, General Police Inspectorate, Superior Council of Magistracy, Prosecutor General office, National Council for State-Guaranteed Free Legal Aid and Forensic Medicine Centre.

The categories of specialists who will provide services in the Centre are the ones whose functional attributions empower them to participate in the examination of penal cases involving children as victims or witnesses: investigative judges, prosecutors, police, medics, forensic doctors, that are assigned by their institutions per each case separately. Another category of specialists will be employed directly by the service provider, in this case the National Centre for Child Abuse Prevention: psychologists, lawyers, interviewers, medical staff, social workers.

The event was attended by the prime-minister of the Republic of Moldova, Natalia Gavrilita.

„I am glad we are inaugurating an institution so much needed in the region today. The creation of the Regional Centre for integrated assistance of child victims and witnesses of crime represents one more step towards a more civilized approach by the state versus the social problems generated by crime and neglect. An open and participatory democratic society refuses to pretend not seeing the dark sides of the human behaviour manifested in our communities. It was way too often that we saw domestic violence being tolerated, hidden and event tacitly consented about”, declared the Prime-Minister of the Republic of Moldova, Natalia Gavrilita, during the launch event.

As a founder of the new service, the Minister of Labour, Family and Social Protection stated:

“The plan of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection as well as the Child Protection Program for 2022-2026 stipulate the creation of two more Barnahus-type centres, one in the Centre (Chisinau) and the other in the South (Cahul) of the country. These two centres will to be established in the following years, since the Ministry of Finance is going to allocate the necessary financing provided for in the state budget. Moreover, as a result of the agreement signed by the representatives of 8 institutions, we will improve the case referral mechanisms, so that these should be solved as efficiently as possible, in a child friendly environment”, stated Marcel Spatari, minister of Labor and Social Protection.

* The Centre started its functioning based on the Governmental Decision no. 708/2019.
* The interinstitutional cooperation agreement stipulates ”accomplishment of efficient measures to guarantee a coordinated, prompt and professional response and a safe environment for child victims/witnesses of crime during the penal investigation process”.

According to the data provided by the General Police Inspectorate, in 2021 there were registered:

* 73 child witnesses of domestic violence;
* 374 child victims of sexual crimes;
* 13 child victims of human trafficking;
* 40 child victims of severe neglect.

Detailed data and other relevant information may be accessed [here](https://www.cnpac.md/ro/statistica/date-ale-mai-privind-cazurile-de-abuz-fata-de-copii/).

According to the Study *”Analysis of the practice of multidisciplinary assistance to child victims of crimes in the framework of the Centre for Psychosocial „Amicul” (NCCAP), for the period 2014-2020”*, accomplished by NCCAP in partnership with UNICEF in 2022, in 2014-2020 NCCAP provided multidisciplinary assistance to 610 child victims/witnesses of crimes, which represents 37,7% from the total number of 1619 children assisted by the specialists of the Centre „Amicul” (NCCAP) in the respective period. The majority of the assisted children – 170 (27,9%), were victims/witnesses of domestic violence (art. 2011, Penal Code), being followed by child victims of rape, of violent sexual actions, sexual crimes involving perverse actions etc. According to the study, the number of assisted girls victims of violent crimes is double – 404 (66,2%), compared to the number of boys victims of crimes – 206 (33,8%). The full version of the study may be found [here](https://www.cnpac.md/ro/analiza-practicii-asistentei-multidisciplinare-a-copiilor-victime-ale-infractiunilor-in-cadrul-centrului-de-asistenta-psihosociala-amicul-cnpac-2014-2020/).