



International Workshop Agreement

IWA 49

Child-friendly multidisciplinary and interagency response services for children who are victims of violence — Requirements and recommendations

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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular, the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO documents should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see www.iso.org/directives).

ISO draws attention to the possibility that the implementation of this document may involve the use of (a) patent(s). ISO takes no position concerning the evidence, validity or applicability of any claimed patent rights in respect thereof. As of the date of publication of this document, ISO had not received notice of (a) patent(s) which may be required to implement this document. However, implementers are cautioned that this may not represent the latest information, which may be obtained from the patent database available at www.iso.org/patents. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights.

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Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at www.iso.org/members.html.

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Introduction

0.1 Background

It is estimated that, worldwide, up to 1 billion children aged between 2 years to 17 years have been affected by physical, sexual, or emotional violence or neglect.^[1] This includes being subjected to physical punishment by caregivers, bullying in school, and physical, emotional, and sexual violence. Every four minutes, a child dies due to violence somewhere in the world. On average, violence claims the lives of approximately 130 000 children and adolescents under the age of 20 every year, with boys facing a higher risk of dying from violence compared to girls.^[2]

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has estimated that over 1 billion women and men alive in 2024 were subject to sexual violence when they were children. 650 million (1 in 5) girls and women alive today have been subjected to sexual violence as children. Among them, over 370 million (1 in 8) have experienced rape or sexual assault. For boys, between 410 million and 530 million (1 in 7) have been subjected to sexual violence in childhood. This includes 240 million to 310 million (1 in 11) who experienced rape or sexual assault.^[3]

Furthermore, technology has a significant impact on children’s well-being, offering both opportunities and risks. While the internet facilitates learning, social interaction and creativity, it also exposes children to dangers such as cyberbullying, grooming, and sexual exploitation since perpetrators often exploit social media and online gaming platforms, live-streaming services, and encrypted messaging apps to distribute child sexual abuse material,^[4] solicitate minors, or engage in sexual extortion.

Globally, 1,6 billion children (2 in 3) experience violent punishment by caregivers at home. Among them, over two-thirds are subjected to both physical punishment and psychological aggression, such as screaming and name-calling. Nearly 550 million children (1 in 4 globally) live with mothers who are victims of intimate partner violence, exposing them to additional risks and trauma.^[2]

“The impact of violence is devastating, immediate and lifelong. Violence against children impairs their brain development, their physical and mental health and their ability to learn”, according to Reference [5]. While the criminal justice process is a priority for most states, child victims and witnesses of violence have the right to a holistic response that supports their full recovery.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)^[6] and its *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography*^[7] and the Council of Europe *Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (the Lanzarote Convention)*^[8] underscore the obligation of state parties to create systems that safeguard children from all forms of violence and abuse and adopt measures to promote their physical and psychological recovery. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child systematically recommends that state parties establish child-friendly, multidisciplinary and interagency services to address violence against children and ensure that children receive timely, effective support.^[9]

Multidisciplinary and interagency (MDIA) response services are a cornerstone of effective child protection systems. MDIA response services provide holistic, child-centred and child-friendly responses to violence and abuse. They bring together child welfare, criminal justice, and medical, therapeutic and legal professionals under one roof to deliver a coordinated and child-centred response.

In many contexts, the lack of integration between these services results in fragmented and inconsistent support for child victims. This often forces children to navigate complex systems alone, reliving their trauma by recounting their experiences multiple times to different professionals. The absence of a child-centred approach exacerbates the difficulty of disclosure, particularly in cases of sexual violence, where feelings of fear, shame, and stigma already act as significant barriers. MDIA response services help reduce re-traumatization for children subjected to sexual exploitation or abuse and child victims and survivors of violence by preventing the repetition of their experiences.^[10] These services are part of a broader continuum of child protection mechanisms that address the needs of children and their families throughout the entire process of healing and protection.

MDIA principles can be adapted to a range of resource environments and governance frameworks while maintaining a child-centred approach. The Barnahus (Children’s House) model, developed in Iceland, for

instance, integrates child welfare, criminal investigation, and medical and therapeutic services under one roof, minimizing the risk of re-traumatization while ensuring a coordinated response. In 2015, the Committee of the Parties to the Convention for the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (the Lanzarote Committee) recognized the Barnahus (Children's House) model as a promising practice.^[11]

Children's Advocacy Centers in the United States emphasize multidisciplinary collaboration, providing child-friendly environments for interviews, medical examinations, and therapy. In countries with fewer resources, community-based MDIA initiatives demonstrate the flexibility of the model, relying on community involvement to deliver services, ensuring accessibility and cultural relevance.^[9]

The promotion and implementation of MDIA response services align closely with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 16, which aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable institutions. Specifically, MDIA response services contribute to Target 16.2, which seeks to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and all forms of violence against children, as well as Target 16.3, which focuses on promoting the rule of law and ensuring equal access to justice. By fostering coordinated, child-centred responses, MDIA response services also intersect with SDG 5, which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, by addressing the gendered dimensions of violence and supporting survivors, as well as with other SDG targets related to violence against children.

Efforts to establish and expand MDIA response services have been supported by a range of international and regional organizations.

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child recommends that state parties establish MDIA response services.

As part of its core commitment to strengthening comprehensive child protection systems, UNICEF has consistently promoted child-friendly, integrated, and multidisciplinary services for child victims and witnesses of violence worldwide. These efforts are designed to foster coordinated, child-centred approaches that address the complex needs of children in a holistic manner.

The European Union in its Strategy for the Rights of the Child^[12] has also emphasized the urgency to present an initiative aimed at supporting the development and strengthening of integrated child protection systems, which will encourage all relevant authorities and services to better work together, in a system that puts the child at the centre.

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The Council of Europe has promoted the Barnahus (Children's House) model since 2015 and has been assisting its member states in establishing and expanding the existing services with a view to providing children with access to child-friendly justice.^[13]

The Council of the Baltic Sea States has advanced the Barnahus (Children's House) model since 2015, focusing on capacity building, standard development, and international cooperation to enhance child-friendly, multidisciplinary approaches to child abuse cases. These efforts led to the creation of the Barnahus Quality Standards^[14] and formalized the Barnahus Network,^[15] a member-led platform connecting professionals and policymakers across Europe. The network supports the establishment and operation of the Barnahus (Children's House) model, promotes best practices, facilitates training, and fosters cross-border collaboration to strengthen MDIA response services globally.

This document recognizes the contributions of all these organizations and others that have supported and promoted MDIA response services globally, while underscoring the need for continued collaboration to expand MDIA response services globally.

0.2 Use of this document

This document is intended to establish a consistent global baseline in the establishment and provision of MDIA response services, based on a consensus of key experts and organizations involved in their drafting and good practices worldwide. It can be used alongside relevant United Nations standards in addition to local, regional or global standards.

This document is designed to ensure equality and fairness in the provision of MDIA response services worldwide. While they form a universally applicable foundation, this document also recognizes the need

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for adaptability, allowing governments and stakeholders to contextualize the model to suit specific legal, cultural, and social environments. Beyond this baseline, states and other actors are encouraged to innovate and expand upon these requirements and recommendations to achieve the highest levels of service quality and effectiveness.

The aim of this document is global application, ensuring that the requirements and recommendations outlined are relevant and applicable to diverse geographical contexts, from high-resource settings to those with more limited capacities.

This document serves as a resource for collaborative efforts, whether led solely by governmental organizations or in partnership with non-governmental organizations. It is also intended for use by international organizations, monitoring bodies, stakeholders and agencies or service providers for child victims of violence.

See [Annex B](#) for information regarding workshop contributors for this document.

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Child-friendly multidisciplinary and interagency response services for children who are victims of violence — Requirements and recommendations

1 Scope

This document provides requirements and recommendations for child-friendly multidisciplinary and interagency (MDIA) response services for children who are victims of violence. It provides a holistic framework for MDIA collaboration to ensure that children are provided with a child-friendly, professional and effective response in a safe environment.

2 Normative references

There are no normative references in this document.

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

ISO and IEC maintain terminology databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

- ISO Online browsing platform: available at <https://www.iso.org/obp>
- IEC Electropedia: available at <https://www.electropedia.org/>

3.1 child

person below the age of 18 years

Note 1 to entry: Adapted from Reference [16].

3.2 parent

person(s) with parental responsibility, according to national law

Note 1 to entry: In case the parent(s) is/are absent or no longer holding parental responsibility, this can be a guardian or an appointed legal representative.

Note 2 to entry: Adapted from Reference [16].

3.3 violence

all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse

Note 1 to entry: This includes all kinds of non-intentional forms of harm, including making a child witness violence.

Note 2 to entry: Adapted from Reference [17].

3.4 victim

child affected by violence, including a child who has witnessed violence, irrespective of their legal status and their recognition as a victim of a crime by a legal system

3.5

survivor

person who has been affected by violence as a child, irrespective of their legal status and their recognition as a victim of a crime by a legal system

Note 1 to entry: Survivors can identify with the term “victim” or “survivor” or another term. Therefore, it is important to use the term that an individual prefers when engaging with them. See Reference [18].

3.6

child-friendly

any behaviour, conduct, practice, process, attitude, environment or treatment which is humane, considerate, adapted to the level of maturity and understanding of the child, and in the best interests of the child, for the child to feel safe, protected, understood and actively involved

3.7

multidisciplinary and interagency response service

MDIA response service

established and coordinated mechanism to deliver interventions and assist, protect and respond to the needs of children affected by violence, which is coordinated between different agencies through a formal setup, and consists of a combination of, or involvement by, several professional disciplines or specializations

Note 1 to entry: A multidisciplinary response can be regulated by, for example, joint standard operating procedures (SOP) or practical guidelines.

Note 2 to entry: The formal setup for interagency coordination and cooperation can be done by, inter alia, a law, policy, memorandum of understanding or other agreed cooperation framework.

Note 3 to entry: The agencies involved can include line ministries, public institutions and relevant private and non-governmental entities.

Note 4 to entry: The MDIA response service mechanism is active during child protection, welfare, and criminal justice investigations and proceedings.

3.8

trauma-informed manner

practice grounded in and directed by a complete understanding of how trauma exposure affects people’s neurological, biological, psychological and social development

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4 Requirements and recommendations

4.1 General

MDIA response services shall be based on the four general principles of the UNCRC.^[6] These are:

- non-discrimination (UNCRC Article 2);
- the best interests of the child (UNCRC Article 3);
- the right to survival and development (UNCRC Article 6);
- the right to participation (UNCRC Article 12).

MDIA response services should also uphold the right to recovery and reintegration (Article 39), ensuring that children subjected to violence are supported to recover their health, self-respect, and dignity, and are reintegrated into their communities.

MDIA response services shall protect the best interests of the child during investigation and handling of cases involving violence against children.

MDIA response services shall provide comprehensive and coordinated support for children before, during and after criminal and child protection and welfare investigations. The case management and individual assessments of each child shall be coordinated by child protection professionals and involve thorough