



PROCHILD

PROTECTION AND SUPPORT OF ABUSED
CHILDREN THROUGH MULTIDISCIPLINARY INTERVENTION



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NEWSLETTER

TACKLING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

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PROCHILD PROJECT

The PROCHILD project seeks to create a multi-professional, integrated model of cooperation with stakeholders involved in response to violence against children. The project will tackle underreporting and fragmentation of services and implement a joint approach based on complementary competences and the child's best interest.

BACKGROUND

Child abuse affects all social classes and ethnicities, and it features a variety of characteristics, such as the age of the victim, violence type and severity, the context where it takes place and relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. This phenomenon is difficult to identify and monitor due to the cultural mechanisms of minimisation and denial. Child abuse is often repeated and victims get protection and rehabilitative, social and psycho-emotional treatment at a later stage. Clinical eviden-

ce and research have shown short, medium, long-term consequences of violence on health highlighting how physical and psychological damage require early, integrated and specialist treatment.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives of the project are to:

- Protect fundamental rights of children
- Promote early detection and reporting of abuse/mistreatment cases;
- Adopt a multi-professional model of protection & care of child victims
- Develop integrated and shared protocols among Social and Health Services, Educational Agencies, Police, Judicial Authorities
- Increase the skills of professionals for an early identification of the phenomenon
- Search for viable and appropriate ways to make victims of violence and their families/caregivers, an active part of the assessment and improvement of protection and support services.

EXPECTED RESULTS

The outcome expected from the project includes:

- An e-learning platform for professionals and students that will host training materials,
- Awareness-raising on what child abuse is, and what to do to give/receive support, targeted to families, minors, school staff, social and health professionals, police and judicial authority,
- Completion of local/ national protocols contributing to the creation of an integrated intervention model for early detection of abuse/mistreatment, reporting and protection of child victims,
- Starting the dialogue for the creation of an Italian epidemiological registry on violence against children that will enable data analysis and intervention.

THE CONSORTIUM

PROChild is a transnational project involving:

- Alma Mater Studiorum, Università Di Bologna, Italy
- Terveyden Ja Hyvinvoinnin Laitos, Finland
- La Voix De L'enfant, France
- IARS International Institute, United Kingdom
- Katholische Fachhochschule Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany
- Institouton Ygeias Tou Paidiou, Greece



PROJECT UPDATES

In December 2019, the PROCHILD partnership met in Athens to discuss the project's developments. Day 1 kicked off with ICH welcoming all partners to the meeting and they gave an opening presentation of their work and the progress so far. UNIBO then presented Work Package (WP4), which focused on discussing its timetable, in addition to its activities and their deliverables. The day continued with Work Package 2 (WP2) and IARS' presentation on progress, provisional schedules, and future activities. The partnership discussed communication, dissemination, and sustainability plans. The Athens meeting concluded with a shift towards Work Package 5 (WP5), which will focus on the development of training materials for professionals involved in child safeguarding.

The WP4 activities have contributed decisively to the project's goals

and are used as the basis for future development in WP5, where the contents elaborated by WP4 will be transformed into training activities for professionals.

Within WP4, partners ran surveys that were aimed at assessing the quality of Child Protection Services (CPS) children and their families experience when a suspicion of Maltreatment/Abuse (M/A) is confirmed, in order to better understand strengths and bottlenecks in the process of integration and cooperation of services. Moreover, partners evaluated the awareness raising materials addressed to minors, families and the general public, which are already in use at their countries, to evaluate how efficiently they're communicating in the view of preventing and promptly intervene in case of M/A.

Eventually, partners organised roundtables and focus groups with professionals from the health, social, school services as well as representative of the police and judicial authorities and third sector organisations to favour dialogue

among them. These discussions led to the identification of recommendations to improve cooperation among services and will be finally elaborated in a list of procedures to support CPS in their daily activities. The full report on recommendations for a transferrable interdisciplinary model of intervention can be read here: https://www.prochildproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/D4.4-Recommendations-for-a-transferable-interdisciplinary-model-of-intervention_final.pdf

FINLAND

NON-VIOLENT CHILDHOODS ACTION PLAN READY TO PREVENT VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

New Non-Violent Childhoods action plan was published in Finland in November. The action plan covers prevention of physical, emotional, sexual and online violence in different settings. It includes 93 actions to prevent violence against children, and to safeguard victims of child abuse. These actions are implemented nationally in 2020-2025. The 600-page action plan is also a handbook for professionals and students in social and health care, the police, education, the courts and non-governmental organizations.

Non Violent Childhoods action plan is based on research evidence and the needs of professionals. It displays check-lists and practical methods to prevent and reduce violence against children. It stems from the fact that

child victims of violence need better coordinated help and support at the right time.

The action plan includes action such as:

- Developing ways to recognize parents' adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and prevent violence against children
- Ensuring that experiences of violence, abuse and bullying are always addressed in school health care setting
- Informing children and adolescents where to report about sexual harassment, grooming or other types of abuse and where to get help
- Increasing training for professionals about child sexual abuse

About 80 professionals from different fields participated in the making of the Non-Violent Childhoods action plan. Also the implementation of the action plan requires multiprofessional co-operation. Project PROHILD supported the drafting of the action plan by producing reports on good practices and professionals' training needs in WP 3, and organising roundtable discussions in WP 4. PROCHILD will continue to support the implementation of the action plan by providing training for professionals in WP 5.



READ THE NON-VIOLENT CHILDHOODS ACTION PLAN (IN FINNISH, ENGLISH SUMMARY INCLUDED):

http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/161899/STM_2019_27_J.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y



GERMANY

REFLECTIONS FROM THE SOCIAL/ HEALTH SERVICES, LAW ENFORCEMENT AND EDUCATIONAL SECTORS

Between November 2019 and January 2020, KatHO NRW organised several focus groups with experts from different professions. The aim of these discussions was to give professionals from different areas of child protection an opportunity to exchange experiences and to work together with them on the development of a protocol to improve cooperation in child protection. It has been possible to bring together professionals from health care, law enforcement, education and social work. While some participants had extensive knowledge and experience regarding the protection of children in their professional capacity, others expressed their insecurity concerning this topic although they have worked in their profession for many years.

Therefore, the focus group meetings contributed to identify and analyse the problems that are currently complicating the further integration and collaboration among services. The obstacles that have been mentioned included a lack of child protection protocols in institutions working with children, a lack of communication and information sharing among different agencies, restricted access to further education and high quality training on child protection procedures for professionals from health care and education as well as parallel networks of services.

The focus group discussions did not only collect the obstacles mentioned above but offered insights to combat these in the future:

■ Easier access to training on child protection topics for professionals from education and health care

While there is a significant amount of workshops, online courses, help-hotlines for professionals and protocols, many participants who were not involved in child protection groups or something alike, did not know about this. These often sophisticated and expensively developed materials or projects are not well promoted and professionals are therefore not aware of their existence. Additionally trainings and workshops are time consuming and participants reported that their workload prohibits a frequent participation.

■ Establishing multi professional networks and shared protocols

Cooperation and communication between agencies is often between individuals and not institutionally organized. This complicates cooperation when individual professionals to whom a case was assigned change. Networks and protocols should therefore be independent of individuals.

■ Higher quality support and supervision for frontline workers

Those professionals who participated in the focus group discussions reported that they felt insecure about their decisions in cases of suspected violence against children. Their agencies/institutions often do not provide regular supervision. Even if it is available, not all professionals might know about it. For example, existing help-hotlines that enable anonymous support for professionals are not widely known and therefore seldom used. Support and supervision should be easily accessible for each professional regardless of their agency or profession.

■ Increasing the awareness of each professionals' role and contributions to build a mutual understanding

A mutual understanding of each agencies' role and responsibilities is crucial to a functioning cooperation

between professionals. This reduces the risk for misunderstandings and prejudices that might complicate the communication and information sharing among agencies.

■ **Systematic evaluation of individual protocols**

There is a need for the systematic evaluation of existing protocols that were developed and are used by individual institutions. That way good practices can be extracted and evaluated and then be combined to a shared protocol that allows for the most effective child protection process.

The focus group meetings offered different perspectives on the obstacles that successful child protection involves. While there are still many important changes required, many things have improved over the last years. More and more institutions like hospitals or schools are aware about the consequences of child maltreatment and hence take this topic more seriously than they did a few years ago. The participants of the PROCHILD focus groups felt that the opportunity to get together with other professionals was another important step in the right direction.

ITALY

ESTABLISHING A DIALOGUE AND SETTING UP A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY NETWORK IN ITALY



In the view of fostering networking and integration among professionals from protection and support services for minors victim of abuse and their families, the University of Bologna has organised three meetings with several professionals from the Police, Law enforcement, Social & Health care service, Schools and Third Sectors of the Bologna District. Moreover, the last event was organised within the AOPI Network (the Italian Association of Paediatric Hospitals), which gathers professionals, notably from the social & health field (medical and non-medical staff) coming from specialised centres of different Italian Hospitals and dealing distinctively with cases of maltreatment and abuse.

These meetings allowed to analyse local and specific problems hindering effective collaboration among operators and brought to the development of recommendations for improving child protection systems through a bottom-up approach.

These the main results emerging from the discussion:

- Standardising and institutionalising collaboration among Child Protection Services in case of full-blown or suspected mistreatment/abuse, thus guaranteeing consistency in the decisions process among professionals involved in a case.
- Including the treatment of mistreatment / abuse of minors in training courses, first of all within the University courses, to increase professionals' awareness and skills.
- Providing local health workers and hospitals with specific recommendations to deepen their knowledge on child abuse in order to act as "sentinel" in some doubtful situations.
- Creating a digital repository of the AOPI group to collect and share procedures, good practices and tools.

- Defining a common record to start the census of cases of mistreatment / abuse in the AOPI Group's Hospitals (Italian epidemiological register).
- Paying particular attention to the cases when the emergency regards both mother and the minor and both need support and ready placement in structures responsible for their reception.
- In case of protected interview, trying to counter the risk of evidence concealing and fostering collaboration with the police forces.
- Assessing properly the role of professionals in the investigation process. Indeed, they present the judicial authority a "qualified report", where the professional denounces the existence of a "Sufficiently well-founded suspicion". It is obviously not up to the healthcare, social care, school and other professionals to verify the concrete existence of the crime prosecutable ex officio, as this assessment is the activity of the Judicial Authority.
- Identifying "qualified access profiles" for accessing sensitive information about minors. This requires a secure data management system where the circulation of data, is regulated and the circle of services within which each professional can share data is defined.
- Involving the School in working group in a permanent way since the theme is more than ever of daily management.
- Organising a Winter School within the PROCHILD project, in collaboration with the PROCHILD project partner organisations and the AOPI Network.

Participants to the roundtable and focus groups organised by the University of Bologna were enthusiastic about the opportunity to discuss within a multi-disciplinary network and they expressed the willingness to carry out these activities and to create a "permanent working table". It was agreed, in the light of the excellent and qualified participation, to continue these roundtables in order to give continuity to the multidisciplinary management of cases of maltreatment and abuse.



GREECE

DEVELOPMENT OF PROTOCOLS AMONG THE ACTORS INVOLVED IN THE ASSISTANCE AND PROTECTION OF ABUSED CHILDREN

The Institute of Child health hosted 4 round table meetings and 3 focus groups in order to define a protocol of collaboration among all professionals involved in child protection cases, from the sectors of social welfare, health, education, justice and police.

The professionals that were invited and accepted to attend were from:

- health services (pediatrician, nurse and social worker from a children's hospital in



Athens),

- mental health services (child-psychiatrists from community centers for the mental health of children & adolescents)
- social services (social workers from municipalities of the region of Attica),
- educational services (educational project coordinators),
- representatives of NGOs dealing with refugees and unaccompanied minors,
- social worker from NGO "The smile of the child",
- the police,
- law authorities.

We were particularly honored by the presence of the Supreme Court Attorney and the Ombudswoman for the rights of the Children in most of these meetings. We had to have four roundtables, which is more than the project plan advised, because in Greece there are no guidelines for the management of child protection cases set in any of the relevant sectors, which means that we had to start from point zero. The only existing protocol has to do with how each professional could identify and should investigate a child abuse and neglect case, but there is no described process concerning which service should undertake a case, on what phase of the process they should be involved, or what information can be shared and with whom.

Having already had two roundtables before the focus groups, it was clear that the professionals involved in child protection feel isolated from professionals of other sectors. As there is neither sufficient cooperation among different sectors in Greece, nor sufficient

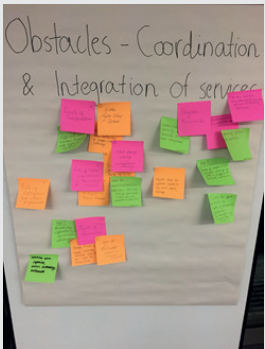
knowledge regarding what other professionals' roles are, or how other sectors handle child protection cases, most professionals stay focused on their own professional difficulties and underestimate the possibility of collaborating successfully with each other. However, it was positive that even from the first roundtable, some attendants mentioned how useful it had been to meet with stakeholders from other sectors and start to realise what other professionals' views and difficulties regarding child protection are. These remarks led us to decide that it would be more useful to have two focus groups with the professionals being divided as described in the project at first, namely one with professionals from health, welfare and education services and one with professionals from justice and police services, but then merge the two groups into one, and have a focus group including professionals from police, law, health, welfare and education services, which proved to be very useful not only for the purposes of the project.

Based on the suggestions and remarks made by the professionals that participated in the 3 round tables and 3 focus group meetings, the ICH team developed a first draft of a services collaboration protocol, which was reviewed by the experts participating in round table meetings and then discussed in the 4th and final round table meeting. The ICH team then edited the protocol according to the comments made by the participants during the last round table meeting, and the second version has recently been sent to everyone via email to be finally approved.



UNITED KINGDOM

IDENTIFYING OBSTACLES OF SERVICE FRAGMENTATION AND CORRESPONDING RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SAFEGUARDING PROFESSIONALS IN THE UK



During January 2020, IARS conducted an in person roundtable and two focus groups, in addition to an online roundtable. The purposes of these sessions were to gain feedback from professionals and practitioners working in Social and Health Services, Educational Agencies, Police, and Judicial Authorities, and relevant

Third Sector actors. The roundtables were an opportunity for all participants to define shared protocols for collaboration among services. The focus groups' main aims were to identify and analyse the problems that are currently hindering the further integration and collaboration among services, and provide recommendations for protocols that can be implemented as part of a transferrable, interdisciplinary intervention model moving forward.

Overall, IARS was able to recruit participants who represented a diverse network of sectors. These included professionals from health services, police and authorities services, frontline social workers, education, and the third sector. Among some of these professionals, some had extensive experience leading child safeguarding teams and exhibited comprehensive knowledge of the current landscape of service fragmentation, different integration models that have worked in the past, and recommendations that would improve efficiency and relationships among services.

The top obstacles that were identified in the focus groups included: the lack of communication and in-

formation sharing among agencies, diminishing funds and resources for child safeguarding and prevention measures, low capacity for frontline practitioners and agencies, the exclusion of health services and the voluntary sector in key multi-agency meetings, lack of access to high quality trainings with an emphasis on interagency cooperation, and lastly, the nonexistence of spaces and opportunities for professionals to discuss obstacles, solutions, and coordination.

Some of the proposed recommendations to combat these obstacles and create a model of intervention involved:

- Streamlining and centralising information sharing among services, perhaps in a shared systems model
- Higher quality support and supervision for frontline workers
- Greater financial and resource investment from the UK government
- Increased access to educational and face-to-face training opportunities, specifically focused on interprofessional collaboration
- Allowing child safeguarding professionals to lead child safeguarding strategies
- Designating a centre for multi-agency support,
- Returning to a focus on preventative measures in child safeguarding
- Higher quality of management to decrease barriers of cooperation among agencies
- Increasing the awareness of each agency's role and contributions to build agencies' understanding and confidence in each other
- Including health and voluntary services in key multi-agency meetings

We feel that the roundtables and focus groups were successful and provided feedback and data from professionals that exceeded our expectations. A more detailed account of the results will be published on PROCHILD's website. It is clear from our findings that there is a considerable amount of improvement that can be made to increase the cooperation and integration of services. We hope that the recommendations given from the professional will be considered in future models of intervention.



FRANCE

DEVELOPING A TRANSFERRABLE INTERDISCIPLINARY INTERVENTION MODEL WITH CHILD PROTECTION PROFESSIONALS AND SERVICE USERS

The second part of 2019 allowed all PROCHILD project partners to work on the WorkPackage 4 "Development of protocols among the actors involved in the assistance and protection of abused children in accordance with a transferable interdisciplinary intervention model."

In order to achieve the objectives of this Work Package, the LVDE team focused on the objective of developing, with the participation of all actors involved in child protection, but also with the participation of victims of child abuse, a transferrable interdisciplinary intervention model.

From September to October 2019, roundtables and focus groups were proposed to professionals from the judicial authority, the security forces, the social and health services, and the education and care services to successfully identify barriers that lead to inadequate child protection. As well as to be able to formulate and bring forth suitable recommendations for a better response to how cases of child abuse are managed.

The first round table, organised for the 17th of September 2019 (in the morning) concluded with the recommendation that an institutional model must be identified to individualise the management of different circumstances that professionals must face. Further, to ensure the necessary systematisation of this model to incorporate all professionals, including those who are not particularly motivated by or deal with child protection to avoid any difficult situations.

The second roundtable (which took place in the afternoon of the 17 September 2019) allowed professionals to discern that it was easy to miss an emergency situation by working on a fictitious practical case inspired by real events. Several recommendations have emerged from reflections of professionals faced with each problem posed by the practical case. Recommendations adapted to each stage of a child's life, from the pregnancy of the mother, to birth, and help to parenthood with almost systematic support for the family and the development of the child, by enabling professionals to work in real interdisciplinary model for the identification and management of risky situations (via alert systems, sharing information...).

The in-depth reflections carried out during these roundtables also helped to define the lines of work of the four working groups (organised on the 1st and the 14 of October 2019) in which professionals from the circles mentioned above participated.

The lines of work of these groups were:

- 1 - The sharing of information between different professionals from pregnancy, social watch and alert,
- 2 - Prevention and training of professionals and parents,
- 3 - Accompanying end-of-placement measures.



(Working groups on the 1st of October 2019)



(Working groups on the 14 of October 2019)

Many recommendations have emerged from these working groups. The synthesis we can make is to say that any risk of child abuse must be anticipated as soon as possible, since it has been proven that the sooner the support is put in place, the better the results will be in terms of prevention by working on parenthood or/and taking care of the minors concerned.

WP4 also enabled the PROCHILD project partners to conduct interviews with people who have been directly involved in the care of abused minors. Parents or former child victims were able to express their feelings about the support offered to them by all the actors working with minors (doctors, social workers, police/gendarmes, lawyers or teachers).

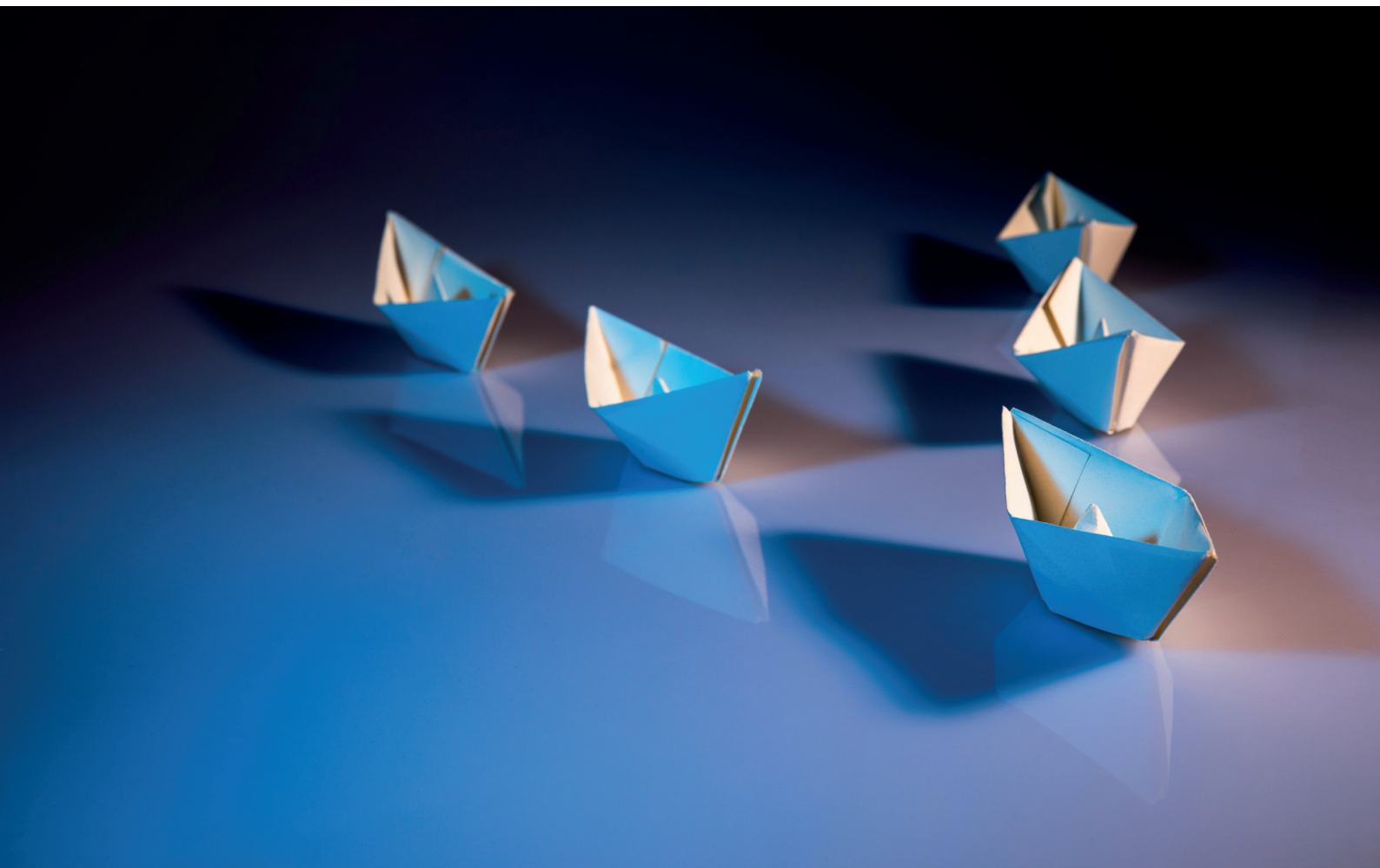
The LVDE team chose to interview adolescents or young adults who had been former child victims, as well as the families of these former victims. No young child has been questioned. The witnesses shared their

direct experience before, during and after the criminal proceedings, in which they participated as victims or parties to the proceedings. While some witnesses were able to explain that they felt supported during the proceedings, it emerged from the interviews that professionals accompanying victims are not sufficiently trained. Moreover, it is undeniable that sharing information would allow better care for victims, hence the need to develop an interdisciplinary intervention model.

Finally, WP4 also enabled all partners, and thus the LVDE team, to draw up a non-exhaustive list of materials available to professionals but also families in each country. In this regard, France is not left behind, having made valued contributions in the form of written books dedicated to child abuse, websites (such as www.jenesuispasavendre.org), educational videos and on a general level, targeted leaflets that can inform anyone who might have queries about "how to protect

a child victim of abuse”.

Also, all the work carried out in this Work Package has allowed deep reflections that will certainly fuel the work of the LVDE team on how to progress and advance the PROCHILD project and in particular the establishment of training courses for professionals.



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