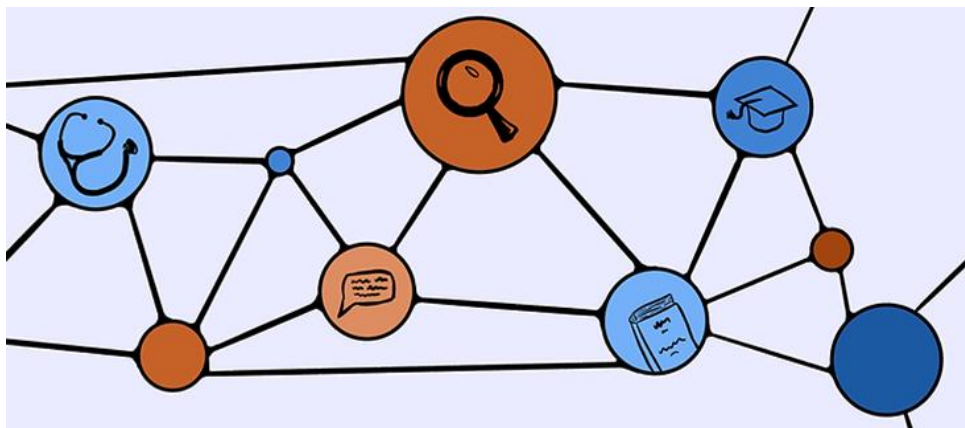




Newsletter



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Project overview

The SERENA project (Assessing and improving access to health and social care **S**ervices for children **R**endered vulnerable by **A**buse) is a Horizon Europe research initiative bringing together leading institutions across Europe to better understand and improve health and social care pathways for children affected by maltreatment.

The project is coordinated by Prof. Catherine Quantin (INSERM, France) and involves more than twenty partner institutions from twelve European countries.

The project focuses on identifying barriers and opportunities within healthcare and social systems in order to strengthen detection, response, and long-term support for children who experience maltreatment.

Through a combination of large-scale quantitative analyses, qualitative research with professionals and survivors, policy and literature reviews and economic evaluations, SERENA aims to produce evidence that can inform policy and improve service provision across Europe.

Editorial Note by Prof. Dr. Catherine Quantin, SERENA project coordinator

"One year after the launch of the SERENA project, we are excited to share our very first newsletter! It offers a glimpse into the progress achieved by our dedicated consortium and the momentum we've built together."

"This journey would not have been possible without the strong collaboration between all partners and the outstanding commitment of our work package leaders, whose guidance and energy have driven rigorous and impactful research. Thanks to these collective efforts, we are proud to already showcase significant results. This issue illustrates how our multidisciplinary and transnational collaboration is analyzing care pathways across Europe, with the aim of enhancing practices."



SERENA at a Glance



**Funded by
the European Union**

**SERENA is a five-year project
with a total EU contribution of
€6.36 million.**

Funding Scheme

- ▶ HORIZON Research and Innovation Actions

Topic

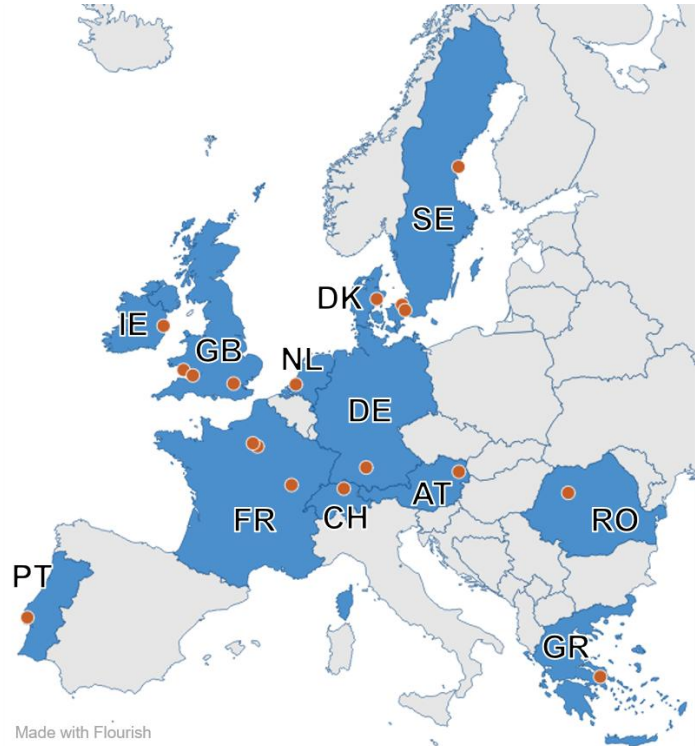
- ▶ Access to health and care services for people in vulnerable situations

Call

- ▶ Ensuring access to innovative, sustainable and high-quality health care (Two stage - 2024)
- ▶ Grant agreement ID: 101151854
- ▶ DOI: [10.3030/101151854](https://doi.org/10.3030/101151854)

Consortium

- ▶ **21 beneficiaries and 1 associated partner**
- ▶ **12 European Countries** (Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom)
- ▶ **Coordinated by Prof. Catherine Quantin**, Institut National de la Santé et de la Recherche Médicale (INSERM) in France



Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



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Leanaí agus an Teaghlaigh
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Project Coordination and Governance



During its first implementation period, SERENA successfully established the governance and management structures required for a large-scale European research collaboration.

The project **kick-off meeting took place in January 2025**, bringing together partners from across the consortium and introducing the work packages and research strategy. The governance structure of the project was adopted and the project management framework was established.

In September 2025, the first annual consortium meeting and General Assembly were held in Cardiff, United Kingdom, providing an opportunity for partners to review progress, discuss methodological developments and coordinate the next phase of research activities.

The project management team, led by INSERM, continues to monitor progress through regular meetings with work package leaders and through the Executive Committee, ensuring that project activities remain aligned with the objectives defined in the Grant Agreement.

The project is also supported by **an independent Scientific Advisory Board**, providing guidance and external expertise on the scientific direction of the project.

A project that began in January 2025

So far, several scientific work packages have already started:

- ▶ Identification of health and care services for children who experienced maltreatment (qualitative studies and literature reviews)
- ▶ Study on the healthcare of maltreated children
- ▶ Health and social care pathways after the recognition of maltreatment
- ▶ Societal costs of maltreatment

Identification of health and care services for children who experienced maltreatment

One of the core research components of SERENA focuses on understanding the services available to children affected by maltreatment and the barriers that hinder access to care.

These work packages are coordinated by Cardiff University and involve two key tasks. The first task consists of conducting comprehensive literature reviews on existing services for maltreatment and their accessibility. The second task consists of conducting interviews with adult survivors and health and social care professionals in Wales, Denmark, and France. During this first period, several key research steps were completed:

- ▶ Development of scoping review protocols examining both qualitative and quantitative studies related to child maltreatment services.
- ▶ Searches, including systematic ones, across multiple international databases and grey literature sources.
- ▶ Screening of thousands of publications to identify relevant papers.
- ▶ Consultations with professionals and individuals with lived experience were conducted in Wales, Denmark and France
- ▶ Development of a structured protocol for qualitative interviews with professionals and adults with lived experience of maltreatment.

Ethical approval procedures are currently underway across participating countries, with several institutions expecting final approval in early 2026.

Study on the healthcare of maltreated children

Another key component of the SERENA project focuses on analyzing the healthcare use of children before and after a diagnosis of maltreatment. These work packages are coordinated by Dijon University Hospital (CHU) and draw on national hospital databases from seven countries.

- ▶ A major milestone achieved is the development of algorithms to identify different types of child maltreatment (namely physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse and neglect) within hospital databases across the participating countries.
- ▶ A paper on the observed multinational trends for physical abuse in infants and children in 5 European countries has been published.
- ▶ Analyses on trends for other types of maltreatment are ongoing.
- ▶ Analyses on the first hospital stay with identified maltreatment and healthcare use prior to this first hospitalisation are ongoing.
- ▶ Data collection on short-term (two years) healthcare utilization is ongoing.

This large-scale data analysis will contribute to a deeper understanding of healthcare utilization patterns before and after maltreatment is identified in hospitals, particularly through comparisons with a control group.

Health and social care pathways after the recognition of maltreatment

Understanding how children who experience maltreatment navigate between health and social services is crucial for improving their care pathways. This work package, led by Swansea University, examines these pathways through a scoping review and by conducting pathway analyses of children referred to social care in Denmark, Wales, and England. These analyses leverage linked administrative data from the health, social care, and education sectors. So far:

- ▶ The literature review extraction has been completed
- ▶ The pathway analysis plan has been developed, including the creation of an algorithm to match maltreated children with control counterparts.

Subsequently, analyses of linked data from these three countries will be supplemented by analyses of aggregated data from over 20 countries.

Societal costs of maltreatment

Beyond health and social care pathways, SERENA also examines the economic and societal impact of child maltreatment. These work packages, led by Erasmus University Rotterdam, aim to estimate the excess costs associated with healthcare utilization, education, and productivity losses related to child maltreatment.

- ▶ The research team has developed a harmonized methodological approach for analyzing healthcare utilization data across participating countries.
- ▶ Data extraction from national medico-administrative databases is ongoing.

Understanding the economic consequences of child maltreatment is critical for informing evidence-based policy decisions and emphasizing the urgency of early prevention and intervention.

Looking Ahead

The next phase of the SERENA project will focus on expanding data collection and advancing the analyses across participating countries. Upcoming activities include:

- ▶ Completion of ethical approvals for qualitative research
- ▶ Launch of interviews with professionals and individuals with lived experience of maltreatment
- ▶ Expansion of quantitative analyses using healthcare databases
- ▶ Development of integrated analyses combining qualitative, quantitative and economic findings

These research efforts will ultimately lead to evidence-based recommendations aimed at improving detection, care pathways and support services for children affected by maltreatment across Europe.

Research Highlights

SERENA - Assessing and Improving Access to Health and Social Care Services for Children Rendered Vulnerable by Abuse: Protocol for a Cross-Sectoral Longitudinal, Mixed-Methods, Multi-Country Study Using Nationwide Data in Europe (Pre-Print)

The pre-print outlines the design and objectives of the EU-funded SERENA project, which seeks to improve access to health and social care services for children who experience maltreatment across Europe. Using a longitudinal, mixed-methods, multi-country approach, it examines health and social care pathways before and/or after maltreatment detection, associated physical and mental health outcomes, and societal costs. Combining nationwide administrative data from seven countries, child protection data from 26 countries, and qualitative interviews with adult survivors and professionals, the study identifies barriers, facilitators, and intervention points in service provision. SERENA represents the first large-scale, cross-sectoral effort to generate operational and economic recommendations to enhance child protection and care in Europe. *Preprints.org, 2025*

[Read paper here](#)

Hospitalisations for physical abuse in infants and children less than 5 years, 2013–2021: a multinational cohort study using administrative data from five European countries

The paper presents a multinational cohort study of hospitalisations for physical abuse in children under five across Denmark, England, France, Ireland, and Wales between 2013 and 2021. Using validated algorithms on administrative health databases, it analyses incidence rates, hospitalisation proportions, age-specific trends, and coding differences across countries. Results show that infant hospitalisations for physical abuse remained stable over time but increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, while rates in children under five were lower but followed a similar pattern. The study demonstrates the feasibility of comparing temporal trends across countries and underscores the value of hospital data for child physical abuse surveillance, contributing to evidence generated within the EURO-CAN Cost Action and SERENA project. *The Lancet Regional Health - Europe, 2025*

[Read paper here](#)

Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on characteristics, extent, and trends in child maltreatment in 34 Euro-CAN COST Action Countries: a scoping review of the literature

The paper provides the first comprehensive review of how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the characteristics, magnitude and trends in child maltreatment across 34 Euro-CAN countries. Drawing on 87 studies published between 2020 and 2024, it examines multiple forms of maltreatment across sectors such as healthcare, education, child protection services and justice, identifying both consistent and divergent patterns during and after the pandemic. Initiated within the EURO-CAN Cost Action (WG5) and further developed as part of the SERENA project, the study highlights key evidence gaps, methodological challenges and the need for more harmonised and resilient child protection data systems in Europe. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 2026*

[Read paper here](#)



Highlights

SERENA at ISPCAN 2025 Congress: From Research to Global Impact

SERENA partners actively contributed to the ISPCAN 2025 Congress (6–9 October 2025, Vilnius, Lithuania), one of the most influential global forums on the prevention of child abuse and neglect, bringing together researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and international organisations.

The participation of the SERENA consortium marked an important step in positioning the project within the international child protection and public health community, while contributing to the global exchange of evidence and practices.

SERENA was represented through scientific conference communications, addressing key dimensions of child maltreatment and care systems:

- a multinational perspective on healthcare use and inequalities in access to services for children affected by maltreatment
- an analysis of child protection systems and service responses in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic
- research focusing on care pathways, detection challenges, and systemic barriers in accessing support services

These contributions reflect SERENA’s integrated approach, combining quantitative data analysis, qualitative insights, and system-level understanding to generate evidence that is directly relevant for policy and practice.

Participation in ISPCAN 2025 enabled:

- the dissemination of early scientific outputs of the project at global level
- engagement with international stakeholders and expert networks in child protection
- the strengthening of SERENA’s role in the European and global research landscape
- the identification of opportunities for future collaboration, joint dissemination, and policy dialogue

Importantly, this presence contributes to SERENA’s broader objective of ensuring that research findings are not only scientifically robust, but also translated into actionable knowledge for improving detection, care pathways, and long-term outcomes for children affected by maltreatment.

Through its participation in ISPCAN, SERENA reinforces its commitment to bridging research, policy, and practice, and to contributing to a coordinated European and global response to child maltreatment.

[Read about it here](#)

Call for participation in Wales

Researchers from **Cardiff University** are recruiting participants for a SERENA study exploring how children and young people who experienced abuse or neglect access health and social care services.

The study is being conducted in Wales, Denmark and France and aims to understand barriers to accessing support.


Who can take part?

- Adults aged **18–35** who experienced abuse or neglect in childhood and lived part of their childhood in **Wales**
- **Professionals** working in health care, social care, the third sector, or other services supporting people affected by childhood abuse

Participation involves a **confidential one-to-one interview**, online or in person.

 Interviews will take place between **March and July 2026**

 **Contact:** SERENA@cardiff.ac.uk

 <https://www.serena-horizon.eu/joinserena>

Continue to follow us for more Project updates:

<https://www.serena-horizon.eu/>



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