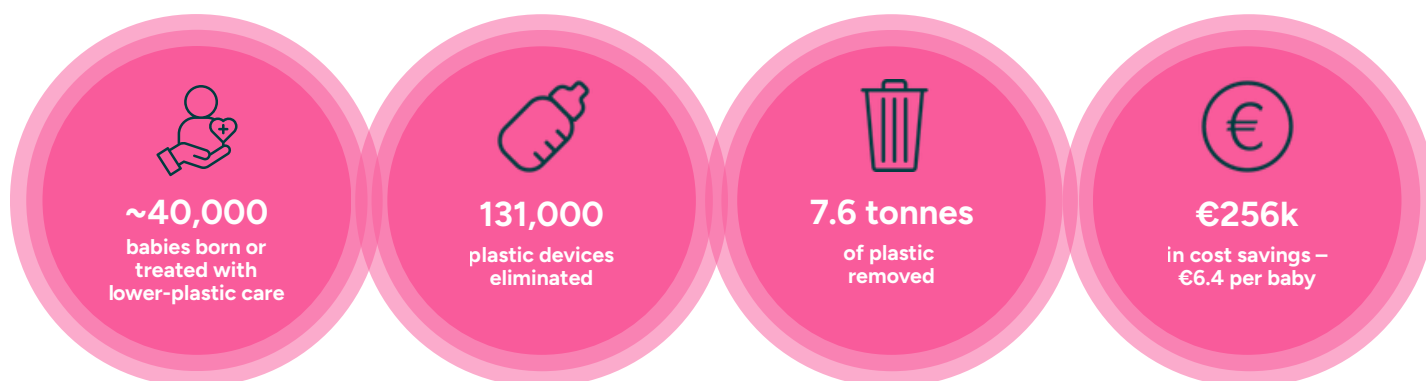


How Europe's hospitals are detoxing baby care, and saving money doing it

Every year, **6.5 million babies are born in Europe** – and from first breath to first feed, most are surrounded by plastics containing toxic chemicals now found in placentas, blood, and brain tissue. A midwife at Newcastle Upon Tyne Hospital in the UK puts it plainly: the overall risk is comparable to smoking during pregnancy.

Finding that unacceptable, **Health Care Without Harm Europe** has led the Born Green Generation project – partnering with eight leading hospitals across France, the UK, and Denmark to prove that safer, lower-plastic maternity and paediatric care is not only possible, but practical and cost-effective.

Impact at a glance: 12 months, eight hospitals



The problem: A toxic start to life

Plastics in clinical settings, from baby bottles to nappies, cannulas, and disposable gowns, are not inert. Endocrine (hormonal) disrupting chemicals such as phthalates, PFAS, and bisphenols leach from plastic products, particularly when heated. Researchers have found these substances in placentas, blood, lungs, and brain tissue.

The first 1,000 days – from conception to age two – are the most critical window for brain, hormonal, and immune development. Exposure to hormone-disrupting chemicals during this period is linked to increased risk of cancers and developmental disorders. This is causing great concern for midwives, doctors and other medical staff as they start to perceive this trend showing up in their wards.

Healthcare's plastics problem is also a resilience and climate problem. Every single-use plastic item in a hospital is made from fossil fuels, **harming human health at every stage**, from production to use to waste disposal.



Innovation in practice: What the hospitals did

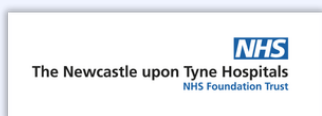
Born Green Generation works from the ward up. Frontline medical staff like midwives and children's doctors identified plastic-heavy processes, tested safer alternatives, and embedded changes through new Standard Operating Procedures. The result is healthier care for babies, less waste, and real savings for hospitals. Three examples show how transformative small shifts can be:



Products: Glass baby bottles

Babies who are bottle fed receive up to 8 single-use plastic bottles a day, each of which is a potential source of chemical leaching. The hospital worked directly with suppliers to switch to reusable glass, removing 17,451 single-use items and 352 kg of plastic in a year, saving €5,476.

The power of sharing across borders: Now being piloted at Great Ormond Street Hospital in the UK.



Processes: Rethinking surgical prep

Teams switched from a single-use plastic device for surgical skin cleansing to a reusable metal clamp with standard sterile equipment. The change, backed by infection prevention specialists, removed 2,300 items and 50 kg of plastic, saving €19,310 annually.

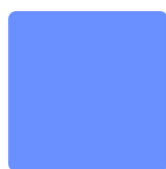
The ripple effect: So successful, it was rolled out hospital-wide via new Standard Operating Procedures.



Patient care: Calmer, greener hearing tests

Clinicians simplified the newborn hearing screening process, replacing three disposable electrodes per baby with a single reusable ear cover. The result: 15,200 fewer plastic items, €12,400 in savings, calmer babies, fewer failed tests, and reduced nurse time.

Win-win: Better for babies. Better for budgets. Better for staff.



“Babies in our hospitals are being exposed to toxic chemicals from the plastics surrounding them from their very first moments of life - in the bottles they're fed from, the equipment they're monitored with, the gowns they're wrapped in - all of which can significantly impact their long-term health. This is a public health crisis that also fuels the climate crisis. We've spent a year proving, hospital by hospital, that this doesn't have to be the case. Safer alternatives exist, they work clinically, and in many cases, they actually cost less. Removing harmful plastics from newborn and paediatric care isn't a radical act – evidence shows it is just what good modern care looks like.”



Josephine Frame

Midwife & Green Perinatal
Clinical Officer, HCWH Europe

The bigger picture: Scale and policy ambition

Health Care Without Harm Europe's Born Green Generation innovation is rapidly spreading across hospitals - with healthcare professionals from ten new countries going through a committed practice change programme, and hospitals from a further nine countries, from the US to India to Australia, expressing interest.

The scale of change is being driven by three levers: Clinicians change what they do on the ward; those clinicians become advocates who bring colleagues along; and the evidence they generate feeds into hospital policy and national standards.

Within the next four years, the project aims to reach **1,000 hospitals**, protecting **5 million babies**, eliminating **1,000 tonnes of plastic**, and saving healthcare systems **€35 million**. At the policy level, Health Care Without Harm Europe is advocating for stronger EU protections to reduce plastic and chemical exposure for babies and pushing for action on chemical regulation through REACH, while engaging with Global Plastics Treaty negotiations.

About Health Care Without Harm Europe

Health Care Without Harm Europe represents a network of over **8,000 hospitals and healthcare providers** across 28 countries in the WHO Europe region, working toward a more sustainable health sector, part of a global network of more than 70,000 hospitals.



Press & media enquiries: Mariana Abdalla, Associate Director of External Affairs, mabdalla@hcwh.org



Partnership enquiries: Lyndsay Stecher, Director of Partnerships & Development, lstecher@hcwh.org

