



## Regional Strategy July 2020 – June 2025

### Vision & Mission of the CBSS Children at Risk Expert Group

*Our vision* for the Baltic Sea region (BSR) is that of a region where children enjoy the full range human rights as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Our vision is an integral part of the CBSS overall vision for the Baltic Sea region and forms an important contribution to the achievement of the CBSS long-term priorities.

In our vision, effective national child protection systems offer comprehensive prevention, protection and support, thereby providing equal opportunities for all children to grow, develop and thrive free from all forms of violence as defined in UNCRC article 19. Each child has equal opportunities and is offered meaningful opportunities for participation and active involvement in building a prosperous, safe and secure region for all.

Our mission is to promote children's rights and to bolster national child protection systems, including legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect children from all forms of violence, through regional dialogue and practical cooperation.

### The role of the Expert Group on Children at Risk

Our role embraces the two fundamental pillars of CBSS – political dialogue and practical cooperation based on tangible projects. To implement our strategy, we will act as a convenor, pathfinder, driver, initiator, coordinator and facilitator in close collaboration with national authorities, civil society, international and regional organisations, professionals, academia and other units at the CBSS Secretariat.

Our strategy draws on and contributes to global and regional legal and policy frameworks, ethical and safe data collection and the voices of children and youth. In implementing our strategy, we take note of relevant global and regional agendas, goals and strategies<sup>1</sup>, to ensure strategic direction, complementarity and added value in achieving global and regional commitments to children.

Child participation is a cross-cutting priority. We will explore concrete methodologies for ethical and meaningful child participation in the context our work, promoting the inclusion of children from a diversity of backgrounds and situations. In playing our role, the expert group supports awareness-raising to promote positive attitudes, norms and values to safeguard the rights of children. The expert group furthermore promotes **integrated strategies**, including sustainable measures that have been demonstrated to contribute to real positive change in the lives of children at risk:

- Prevention, Early Intervention and rapid response at first signs of harm
- Tailor-made Multidisciplinary Response and Support Services
- Encouraging a positive justice, law and policy setting
- Safe environments
- Parent and caregiver support
- Education and life skills, including investment in early childhood education

The Expert Group and the CAR Unit at the CBSS Secretariat is fully committed the mission of keeping children protected and safeguarded from actions that place them at risk of violence, abuse, exploitation, injury and any other harm.

## Priorities July 2020-June 2025

### Prevention and Early Intervention: Strengthening National Child Protection Systems

*The core strategic area and priority of the CAR Expert Group is to promote and facilitate regional exchange on key issues of concern to the CAR Expert Group Members with the purpose of identifying and promoting actions to strengthen national child protection systems, in particular measures for prevention and early interventions to protect children at risk.*

A child protection system can be defined as “certain formal and informal structures, functions and capacities that have been assembled to prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of children”.<sup>ii</sup> Key elements of a child protection system include human resources, finance, laws and policies, governance, monitoring and data collection as well as protection and response services and care management. Child protection systems involve coordinated interactions between a wide range of different actors such as children, families, communities, and subnational or national level authorities.

Prevention refers to measures that aim to reduce the vulnerability of children to a potentially harmful event. Meaningful, effective and knowledge-based prevention measures are based on identifying risk factors and sources of support and resilience for individual children or specific groups. Early intervention is understood both as a timely intervention before a risk transforms into actual harm and as interventions early in the life of the child from the period during the pregnancy and child birth through to early childhood. Experience and research shows, that a proactive approach with a priority on prevention and early intervention delivers better outcomes for children, parents and families.

Prevention measures and early intervention form part of a continuum of services for prevention, protection and empowerment of children and are a crucial aspect of child protection systems.

Key areas of concern to the expert group include alternative care, children with disabilities, children in migration, poverty/social exclusion and parenting and caregiver support. The Expert Group will make special efforts to promote strategies and action that engage children and their caregivers in shaping prevention and early intervention.

#### *Key Priorities*

- a. Regional exchange on children at risk through structured information-sharing frameworks and facilitated expert interventions to identify good/promising practice on prevention and early intervention constitutes the core priority of the CAR Expert Group;
- b. Mapping of national child protection systems and good/ promising practice for prevention and early intervention in the Baltic Sea Region to establish a regional registry of good practice and practical solutions to strengthen national child protection systems;



To implement this core strategic area of work and priorities we will play a role as *convenor*, facilitating dialogue and exchange with the aim of identifying promising and good practice, building mutual trust and promoting a regional approach and culture on children’s rights and child protection.

## Prevention and Early Intervention: Strengthening National Child Protection Systems

Priority	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5
<b>a. Regional Exchange</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2*Expert Group meetings (exchange and expert interventions according to agreed format, hosted by Presidency)</li> <li>• 2*Reports from Expert Group meeting based on expert group members summaries (bullet points on national situation and good practice according to agreed template)</li> <li>• Review of current templates and formats for exchange and reporting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2*Expert Group meetings (exchange and expert interventions)</li> <li>• 2*Reports from Expert Group meeting on national situation and good practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2*Expert Group meetings (exchange and expert interventions)</li> <li>• 2*Reports from Expert Group meeting on national situation and good practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2*Expert Group meetings (exchange and expert interventions)</li> <li>• 2*Reports from Expert Group meeting on national situation and good practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2*Expert Group meetings (exchange and expert interventions)</li> <li>• 2*Reports from Expert Group meeting on national situation and good practice</li> </ul>
<b>b. Mapping of national child protection systems: BSR Registry of Good Practice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of system to document good practice from the BSR in the area of child protection systems</li> <li>• Pilot Collection of good practice examples</li> <li>• Launch of Registry of good practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collection of good practice examples</li> <li>• Update of Registry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mid-term Report, including summary of good practice examples from registry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collection of good practice examples</li> <li>• Update of Registry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final Report</li> <li>• Evaluation</li> </ul>

## Protection, Support and Justice: Promoting multidisciplinary and interagency services for child victims and witnesses of violence (Barnahus)

*To promote the rights of child victims and witnesses of violence to be heard, receive information, assistance and support through effective, professional and child friendly and multidisciplinary interventions*

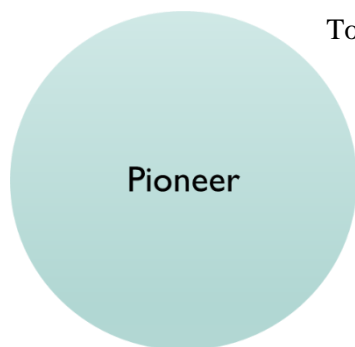
When there is suspicion that a child is exposed to violence, many different actors, including social services, medical and mental health services and law enforcement actors, have a duty to protect the rights and well-being of the child. If these actors do not work together, the child can be drawn into parallel enquiries and assessments, moving between different agencies and disciplines, potentially causing (re-)traumatisation of the child and preventing disclosure. This is a serious problem since the child's disclosure is fundamental to ensure the safety and protection of the child, to determine the need for physical and mental recovery, and to secure a successful and child-friendly criminal investigation and judicial process.

The [Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on child-friendly justice](#) provide that children are to be treated with care, sensitivity, fairness and respect in civil and criminal procedures, including in the process of gathering evidence from children. Child-friendly justice “refers to justice systems which guarantee the respect the effective implementation of all children’s rights at the highest attainable level”. Children are to be protected from intimidation, reprisals and secondary victimisation and professionals are to be trained in communicating with children. A fundamental requirement is that children’s rights are safeguarded without infringing on the rights of the other parties involved and relevant procedural laws.

The Barnahus model is a leading European multi-disciplinary and interagency practice responding to violence against children. The Barnahus can be described as a “one-stop-shop” or “one-window-system”, which ensures a child-friendly environment in one location where professionals gather to provide rapid access to justice and quality care for child victims and witnesses of violence. The services are oriented at the needs of the individual child, with a strong focus on avoiding (re-)traumatisation.

### *Key Priorities*

- a. Promoting multidisciplinary and interagency services for child victims and witnesses of violence through path-finding initiatives, coordination of broad partnerships (Promise Barnahus Network, Council of Europe, UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children (UN SRSG VAC));
- b. Implementation of flagship projects (Promise) with a focus on coordinating sustainable exchange, competence building training, peer support, networking, practical tools and interventions.



To implement the priorities in this area we will play a role as a pioneer and pathfinder. The Expert Group will supervise and provide advice to CAR initiatives and projects to develop sustainable networks, ground-breaking initiatives and innovative approaches, policy and tools. We will develop and nurture strategic partnerships to ensure synergies, trusted partnerships and joint and harmonised action.

**Protection, Support and Justice: Promoting multidisciplinary and interagency services for child victims and witnesses of violence (Barnahus)**

<b>Priority</b>	<b>Y1</b>	<b>Y2</b>	<b>Y3</b>	<b>Y4</b>	<b>Y5</b>
<b>a. Promise Barnahus Network</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of 5-year strategy and annual work plan Y1 and 2</li> <li>• Coordination &amp; Implementation</li> <li>• Chair of Steering Group</li> <li>• Fundraising</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordination &amp; Implementation</li> <li>• Chair of Steering Group</li> <li>• Fundraising</li> <li>• Barnahus Forum</li> <li>• Annual Report</li> <li>• Development of annual work plan Y3</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordination &amp; Implementation</li> <li>• Chair of Steering Group</li> <li>• Fundraising</li> <li>• Annual Report</li> <li>• Development of annual work plan Y4</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordination &amp; Implementation</li> <li>• Chair of Steering Group</li> <li>• Fundraising</li> <li>• Barnahus Forum</li> <li>• Annual Report</li> <li>• Development of annual work plan Y5</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of 5-year strategy</li> <li>• Coordination &amp; Implementation</li> <li>• Chair of Steering Group</li> <li>• Fundraising</li> <li>• Annual Report</li> </ul>
<b>b. Partnerships (UN SRSG VAC, CoE)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordination and exploration of activities and tools, promoting and drawing on relevant UN &amp; CoE Conventions and guidance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordination and exploration of activities and tools, promoting and drawing on relevant UN &amp; CoE Conventions and guidance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordination and exploration of activities and tools, promoting and drawing on relevant UN &amp; CoE Conventions and guidance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordination and exploration of activities and tools, promoting and drawing on relevant UN &amp; CoE Conventions and guidance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordination and exploration of activities and tools, promoting and drawing on relevant UN &amp; CoE Conventions and guidance</li> </ul>
<b>c. Promise 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kick-off</li> <li>• Project Implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project Implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project Implementation Reporting</li> <li>• Preparation for potential new project</li> </ul>		

## Partnerships for children’s rights and child protection: Promoting law, policy and joint strategies

*To promote international legal and policy instruments, concepts and guidance adopted by all CBSS Member States for children’s rights and child protection through broad international and regional partnerships and alliances*

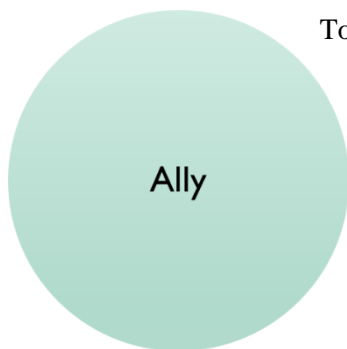
Building and nurturing partnerships with a broad range of stakeholders across borders is a fundamental and integral aspect of the work of the expert group to promote international law, policy and practical guidance to protect and implement children’s rights.

The Expert Group enjoys strong global partnerships and acts as an ally, observer and adviser in several regional and international fora. This allows us to share experiences, recommendations and practical tools from our region to a broader audience and to make important contributions to the implementation of regional and global agendas as well as international and relevant supranational law, policy and practice.

Engaging with other stakeholders on global and regional agendas, goals and strategies<sup>iii</sup> allows us to explore synergies, exchange information on emerging, developing and ongoing initiatives and to determine where we best can add value. This effectively contributes to ensuring that potential overlaps are transformed to helpful synergies, trusted partnerships and joint action to promote children’s rights in many different areas.

### *Key Priorities*

- a. Contributing to regional and global strategic events, consultations, workshops and training opportunities to disseminate practical tools and share learning from the BSR region;
- b. Developing and nurturing relations and joint initiatives with allies and partners in a broad range of areas to explore emerging, developing and ongoing trends and risks to children.



To implement the priorities in this area we will play a role as an ally, drawing on our strategic connections to global, regional and national actors in a broad range of areas of concern to children at risk

## Partnerships for children’s rights and child protection: Promoting law, policy and joint strategies

<p><b>Children’s Rights:</b> The close collaboration with the Council of Europe Unit on Children’s Rights and the observer role to the CoE CDENF provides meaningful opportunities to both contribute and learn from regional initiatives to implement CoE law and policy in various areas, including child participation, online violence, physical and humiliating punishment, child friendly justice and care.</p> <p>The Expert group is considered a trusted partner to the EU, and an important contributor to consultations, policy development and good practice. A strong partnership with the EU provides strategic opportunities to contribute experience, knowledge and good practice from the BSR for the implementation of EU law and policy related to children’s rights and child protection.</p> <p>Efforts will be made to coordinate the work and to develop joint initiatives of the Expert Group and the EC Expert Group on children’s rights to strengthen and harmonise regional strategies, initiatives and approaches relating to children’s rights, child participation, child protection, child friendly justice, children and migration and non-violent childhoods.</p>	<p><b>Non-violent Childhoods</b> (Physical and Humiliating Punishment): The Expert Group developed a broad partnership in the context of the Non-violent Childhood project, including Ministries and other national authorities, academia, civil society and the UN SRSG VAC, providing the Expert Group with important opportunities to promote and disseminate the practical guidance developed in the project. Our strong relations with the UN SRSG VAC form a basis for ongoing dialogue on the implementation of SDGs 16.2 and 16.3 and multidisciplinary response for child victims and witnesses of violence.</p> <p><b>Child Sexual Violence:</b> The Expert Group has an observer status to the Lanzarote Committee, which monitors the implementation of the Council of Europe Lanzarote Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse. This Convention is standard setting in Europe and establishes concrete measures to prevent sexual violence, to protect child victims and to prosecute perpetrators. Participation in this group allows us to both contribute and learn from regional initiatives to implement CoE law and policy in the areas of child sexual violence.</p>
<p><b>Trafficking &amp; Exploitation:</b> The Expert Group regularly participates in regional fora to prevent and combat child trafficking and exploitation, including the Nordic Network against Trafficking in Children and the OSCE Alliance Expert Co-ordination Team, providing opportunities to promote outcomes from the BSR and previous projects, including the storytelling method to hear the views of survivors called “Listen Up!”. The Expert Group also lends it support to the PSF supported network of survivors, “If you speak up, I will join” as appropriate. The partnerships in this area are coordinated with the CBSS Task Force on Trafficking in Human Beings (TF-THB).</p>	<p><b>Children and Migration:</b> The Children at Risk Expert group played a crucial role in the development of the <i>Stockholm Conclusions</i> and has been involved in several projects to protect the best interests of children in migration, including PROTECT and most recently Proguard, which promoted a formal European network of guardians and a European system of accreditation for guardianship. Partnerships have been developed with the Central European Initiative, the Nordic Council of Ministers, Ministries and other national authorities, academia, professionals and civil society. The Expert Group will continue to support partnerships which take forward the Stockholm conclusions and tools developed in the context of these initiatives.</p>
<p><b>Safe and Secure:</b> Children at Risk is a flagship for the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR). The Expert group will work in close collaboration with the CBSS Secretariat’s Civil Security team (which also coordinates the EUSBSR Policy Area Secure) to explore and strengthen the role of children and youth in promoting a common societal security culture in the BSR and as contributors to building resilient societies.</p>	<p><b>Child Participation:</b> Drawing on article 12 UNCRC, our previous and ongoing work and experience in the context of projects such as Non-violent childhoods, PROTECT and Promise, CoE recommendations and tools and a study from the EU, the Expert group will actively seek opportunities to consult with children in the context of planning, execution and evaluation of our work. This work will be implemented in close collaboration with the CBSS initiatives to engage with youth and the unit on Regional Identity in the CBSS Secretariat.</p>

## Implementation and Evaluation

This strategy will guide the development of annual workplans to support implementation and promote progress in the respective priority areas. The annual workplans will include clear objectives, activities, expected outcome and deliverables for each priority area. The annual workplans will be approved by the Expert Group. The CAR Unit at the Secretariat will report to the Expert Group on the implementation of the annual workplans two times per year.

The progress of the strategy will be evaluated against the annual workplans to determine the effectiveness of the strategy and to identify potential adjustments to maximise our impact in the priority areas. The Children at Risk Expert Group will make special efforts to include the perspectives of children in the evaluation and on potential adjustments to the strategy.

The Expert Group will furthermore monitor and explore emerging, developing and ongoing priorities and initiatives for children to ensure that our strategy and annual work plans remain relevant and targeted to activities that best represent our added value.

Adopted 10 June 2020

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<sup>i</sup> For example the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals; the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region; the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child; the Nordic Council of Ministers cross-sectoral strategy on children and young people and; relevant Council of Europe documents adopted by all CBSS Member States.

<sup>ii</sup> UNICEF/UNHCR/Save the Children/World Vision, 2013, p. 3.

<sup>iii</sup> For example the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals; the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region; the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child; the Nordic Council of Ministers cross-sectoral strategy on children and young people and; relevant Council of Europe documents adopted by all CBSS Member States.