



CBSS Expert Group on
Children at Risk

CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk (CAR)¹

Annual Report
Swedish Presidency 2016 - 2017

¹ CAR: The CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk consist of senior officials appointed by the ministries responsible for children's issues in the member countries to the Council of the Baltic Sea States; Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia and Sweden.

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Executive summary

- The Swedish Presidency of the CBSS highlighted the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030 as a framework for accomplishing the long-term priorities of the CBSS. Within the CBSS Expert Group for Children at Risk, the relevant priorities highlighted were 5.2, 5.3, and 16.2.
- The CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk met twice during the Swedish Presidency:
 - The meeting held in Stockholm on the 12th and 13th of October 2017 featured a special programme on child protection and welfare issues related to Agenda 2030 and the Regional strategy for cooperation on children at risk. The meeting adopted the following take-home messages:
 - Promote the implementation of SDGs, in particular 16.2, 5.2 and 5.3.
 - Educate and/or support foster families and staff in shelters and residential homes in order to give the most appropriate support to children who have experienced violence.
 - Ensure a child friendly justice system including child friendly complaint procedures.
 - Prioritise early and coordinated interventions for children and teenagers with conduct problems, based on the needs and rights of the children.
 - The meeting held in Stockholm on the 19th and 20th of April 2018 featured a special programme on unaccompanied children.
- The Swedish Presidency was the first year of the Mandate and the Regional Strategy for Cooperation on Children at Risk, July 2017-2020.
- The Expert Group started discussing when and how to celebrate its establishment. After consulting historical documents and the individuals involved in establishing the Child Centre and the Working Group, it was agreed to celebrate the 20th year of CBSS Cooperation on Children at Risk. The celebration will take place at the group's first meeting during the Latvian Presidency, to be held in November 2018.
- The Regional Strategy for Cooperation on Children at Risk 2017-2020 operationalises the Expert Group's priorities and how-to follow-up on key conclusions and recommendations, including:
 - The Tallinn Recommendations on Alternative Care and Family Support
 - The Conclusions from the Warsaw Roundtable on Deinstitutionalisation and Foster Care
 - The Stockholm Conclusions Promoting Good Practices in Protecting Migrant and Asylum Seeking Children, especially Unaccompanied Children, and Finding Solutions for the Children, Families, Societies and States
- The flagship projects of the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk are instrumental in the group's work in addressing its priorities and implementing the Regional Strategy for Cooperation on Children at Risk 2017-2020.
 - Non-violent Childhoods: Promotes the elimination of corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading punishments of children through the change of attitudes and behaviour. During the year, the project completed its national consultations and expert meetings, and developed the drafts of the guidance materials and the campaign that will be launched next year.
 - PROMISE: Promotes the Barnahus and similar models throughout Europe and coordinates the European Barnahus Movement. During the year, PROMISE 1 was closed, and PROMISE 2 was launched, thereby launching the support for national implementation.

- PROTECT Children on the Move: Broadly working to safeguard the human rights and the best interests of children in cross-border situations. During the Swedish presidency, the project organised three consultations on the identification and referral of children at risk of exploitation and trafficking. The final consultation for the third phase of this project developed *The Oslo Conclusions on the Identification and Referral of Children at Risk of Exploitation and Trafficking*.
 - AudTrain: A programme developed by the Council of the Baltic Sea States, including training and advocacy materials, which applies a child rights and a system-based auditing methodology in child welfare facilities. During the year, the results from the AudTrain II Project were disseminated, and the potential to follow-up the programme by engaging the alumni network was explored.
 - ProGuard: Strengthening and professionalising guardianship in Europe by creating a practical toolkit including a train-the-trainer methodology. During the year, the Children at Risk Unit participated in project activities, suggested key actors to invite to expert meetings, and gave input to the development of the project's toolkit and accreditation pilot.
 - TRAM: Supporting and enabling the integration of victims of trafficking among vulnerable migrants and refugees, including separated and unaccompanied children. The Children at Risk and Task Force against Trafficking in Human Beings Units cooperate on this project. During the year, the Children at Risk Unit participated in project activities, suggested key actors to invite to expert meetings, and gave input to the development of the project's tools.
- The Expert Group's implementation of the Regional Strategy for Cooperation on Children at Risk 2017-2020 is complemented by regular cooperation with key international, regional, and national actors. It is further enhanced through disseminating outcomes and following trends by contributing and participating in advisory groups, conferences and meetings.
 - Cooperation with other units in the CBSS Secretariat, such as the Task Force against Trafficking in Human Beings and Baltic 2030, ensures the mainstreaming of children's rights and child protection in the work of the CBSS and gains access to complementary expertise.
 - During 2017, all Member States contributed to the Children at Risk Unit, and the Children at Risk Unit operating budget was in balance.
 - It was agreed to increase the budget of the unit by 10%, following the budgets of the rest of the Secretariat, starting in 2019.

Composition and administration

Swedish Chair of the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk

Henrik Ingrid (until February 2018), thereafter Eva Wallin, the National Board of Health and Welfare.

Latvian vice-chair of the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk

Lauris Neikens, Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs.

The CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk

The CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk (CAR) consists of eleven members. The line ministries in the CBSS member states dealing with children's issues, mainly ministries of social and family affairs and designated child ministries have appointed representatives to the Expert Group. The European Commission Coordinator for the Rights of the Child has an open invitation to take part in the meetings and in other expert meetings organised by the Expert Group. The European Commission has a seat in the group as part of the CBSS set up.

The Children at Risk Unit at the CBSS Secretariat

Since 2002, the work as approved by the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk is executed by the Children at Risk Unit within the Permanent International Secretariat of the Council of the Baltic Sea States. The Children at Risk Unit provides secretarial and professional support to the Expert Group, interfaces with strategic partners, drafts relevant documents and reports, and develops and executes projects.

- Senior Advisor and Head of Unit – Turid Heiberg
- Programme Coordinator – Shawanna von Blixen
- Project Assistant – Marlene Riedel
- Independent Researcher – Daja Wenke (since 2012)

From EGCC to CAR: mandate, regional strategy, ToR, and acronym

The Swedish Presidency was the first year of the Mandate and the Regional Strategy for Cooperation on Children at Risk, July 2017-2020. The Mandate builds upon the achievements from the previous strategy period. The priority areas are closely related and the achievements in one priority area have relevance and impact in the other priority areas. The Terms of Reference for the members of the group was also reissued along with the Mandate and Strategy.

In conjunction with the renewed documents, the logo and the URL for the website were changed to reflect the move away from the 'Child Centre.' The new website is: www.childrenatrisk.eu. As the name of the Expert Group has been shortened to the Expert Group on Children at Risk – the abbreviation has been changed from EGCC to CAR from May 2017.

In the Expert Meeting in October 2017 the members were reminded of the opportunity to update the strategy to reflect changing situations. The meeting agreed that no amendments were required at the time.

Financing

The Children at Risk Unit operates on a budget built on member states' contributions.

During 2017, all Member States contributed to the Children at Risk Unit, and the Children at Risk Unit operating budget was in balance.

During the October 2017 CAR meeting, it was agreed to increase the budget of the unit by 10%, following the budgets of the rest of the Secretariat, starting in 2019.

The Expert Group has been successful in securing funds for specific actions through the European Commission and the Nordic Council of Ministers. Co-financing, a regular feature of external funding for projects, has been covered by the employment costs of the Children at Risk Unit staff. Partner organisations also regularly use employment costs to cover a respective share of co-financing.

Priorities 2017-2020

During the strategy period 2017-2020, the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk is supporting the member states in bolstering their child protection and welfare systems, notably in the following priorities:

- Prevention, early intervention, parenting and family support
- Child-friendly justice
- The wellbeing and best interests of children in alternative care
- Protecting children from sexual abuse and sexual exploitation
- Preventing trafficking and exploitation of children
- The best interests of children in migration

The work of the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk, is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It promotes children's rights and regional cooperation to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and violence against children. The Expert Group emphasises the importance of integrated strategies to ensure comprehensive and sustainable child protection systems at the national and regional levels. Additionally, the Sustainable Development Goals 2030, which reinforce the global long-term commitment to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and violence of children, is a key reference for the work of the Expert Group.

Children may experience different forms of violence every day or they may be exposed to certain forms of violence during their childhood. Thus, promoting comprehensive measures of child protection, including prevention, detection, intervention, and care is a cross-cutting approach. Listening to the child is also an essential component and part of several of the Expert Group facilitated projects. Promoting the well-being and safety of children constitutes a strategic contribution to the sustainability, safety and security of the Baltic Sea Region.

Regional and global ambitions

In all its work, the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk aims to support professionals and officials by improving their capacity to prevent abuse, exploitation, trafficking and violence of children by sharing good practices and by promoting new tools and the most recent knowledge. The [Regional](#)

[Strategy for Cooperation on Children at Risk 2017-2020](#) operationalises these goals in the context of the priorities established in the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk [Mandate July 2017-2020](#).

To achieve this, the Expert Group initiates and coordinates projects. A suitable group for each task is formed through cooperation with ministries, ombudsman offices for children, academia, international organisations and national organisations and agencies. Partners in the Baltic Sea Region are the main priority, while partners from outside the region are relevant depending on the funding source. International cooperation presents an important opportunity to gain new insights and good practices from outside the region, and to showcase the Baltic Sea Region as a proactive, safe and supportive region for children.

The Children at Risk Unit functions as a hub for professionals and policy makers by facilitating contacts across the region. Many of the Expert Group's activities are made possible through the close cooperation with international and other regional entities and with ministries, ombudsman offices for children, professionals, academics, organisations, parents and children.

The Expert Group cooperates with other units in the CBSS Secretariat such as the Task Force against Trafficking in Human Beings and Baltic 2030. This ensures the mainstreaming of children's rights and child protection in the work of the CBSS, and gains access to complementary expertise.

The Expert Group disseminates its work and follows trends by contributing and participating in advisory groups, conferences and meetings. Participation is ensured by the staff of the Children at Risk Unit, and enhanced when possible alongside the Chair or other members of the Expert Group. In this way, the group contributes knowledge to projects and activities targeting the Expert Group's priorities and expertise. The aim is to increase regional and global awareness about the human rights of children and the urgency of ending violence against children in all its forms.

Swedish Presidency highlights Sustainable Development Goals 5.2, 5.3, 16.2

The Swedish Presidency of the CBSS highlighted the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030 as a framework for accomplishing the long-term priorities of the CBSS. Within the CBSS Expert Group for Children at Risk, the relevant priorities highlighted were 5.2, 5.3, and 16.2.

The Sustainable Development Goal 16.2 aims to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children. Ending the abuse, exploitation, trafficking and violence against children is also mainstreamed across several other violence-related targets. Indicator 5.2 aims for the elimination of all forms of violence against all women and girls in public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation, whereas indicator 5.3 aims for the elimination of all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilations.

The CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk contributes to these goals by expressing support at relevant conferences and events, by keeping the Ministries responsible for children's issues in the region informed and aware of the initiatives at global and regional level, and by leading several projects that are relevant to the SDGs. The SDGs are a useful framework to achieve the long-term objective of the Children at Risk area within the CBSS, which is to promote comprehensive and sustainable child protection systems that prevent and respond to all forms of violence against children through increased cooperation among relevant ministries, other stakeholders and professionals in the Baltic Sea Region.

Meetings of the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk

The CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk met twice during the Swedish Presidency. The meetings were held on the 12th and 13th of October 2017 and on the 19 and 20th of April 2018. Both meetings were held in Stockholm.

The meeting in October 2017 featured a special programme on child protection and welfare issues related to Agenda 2030 and the Regional strategy for cooperation on children at risk. Of specific interest is the challenge to prevent violence against and among children and young people with various forms of conduct problems. It is well recognized that these groups are at risk of being subjected to harmful exposure to violence, as perpetrators as well as victims. Keynote speaker Carolina Øverlien informed about her research within these and related fields of study. Programmes presented from Sweden included MultifunC and Swedish Community Intervention Teams. The Latvian State Inspectorate for Protection of Children's Rights presented a project for 2016-2021, which developed a support programme for children with communication difficulties and behavioural challenges. Participants shared knowledge, evidence and data as well as addressing the rights of the child and gender equality as important aspects of work to protect children at risk.

At the conclusion of the October meeting, the group agreed on the following take-home messages:

- Promote the implementation of SDGs, in particular 16.2, 5.2 and 5.3.
- Educate and/or support foster families and staff in shelters and residential homes in order to give the most appropriate support to children who have experienced violence.
- Ensure a child friendly justice system including child friendly complaint procedures.
- Prioritise early and coordinated interventions for children and teenagers with conduct problems, based on the needs and rights of the children.

The second meeting in April 2018 featured a special programme on unaccompanied children. The special program focused on child protection and welfare issues related to the reception of unaccompanied minors. The Government has set up a national knowledge centre at the National Board of Health and Welfare to support municipalities and county councils to provide good-quality measures for unaccompanied girls and boys seeking protection and safety in Sweden. The aim is to stimulate national knowledge development and create the conditions for good-quality reception. Child marriage was also raised as an important challenge to be addressed in connection with migration to Sweden and other countries in the region.

At the conclusion of the October meeting, the group agreed on the following take-home messages:

- (TBD)

Representation in CSO meetings

The Children at Risk Unit presented the work of the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk at the 7-8 September 2017 meeting of the CBSS Committee of Senior Officials. The CSOs were informed about the status, success, and future of the comprehensive and unique approach to promoting the rights of the child as undertaken by the Expert Group.

Flagship Projects

The following projects were underway during the Swedish Presidency of the CBSS. The Expert Group's annual Plan of Activities (2017 – 2018) elaborates further on all foreseen actions.

Non-violent Childhoods: Promotes the elimination of corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading punishments of children through the change of attitudes and behaviour.

CAR Priority: Prevention, early intervention, parenting and family support.

Coordinated by the CBSS, co-funded by the European Union.

www.childrenatrisk.eu/nonviolence

PROMISE: PROMISE 1 and 2 promote the Barnahus and similar models throughout Europe and coordinates the European Barnahus Movement.

CAR Priority: Child-friendly justice.

Coordinated by the CBSS, co-funded by the European Union.

www.childrenatrisk.eu/promise

PROTECT Children on the Move: Broadly working to safeguard the human rights and the best interests of children in cross-border situations.

CAR Priority: Preventing trafficking and exploitation of children.

Coordinated by the CBSS. Phase 1 co-funded by the European Union. Phase 2 and 3 co-funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

www.childrenatrisk.eu/protect

AudTrain: A programme developed by the Council of the Baltic Sea States, including training and advocacy materials, which applies a child rights and a system-based auditing methodology in child welfare facilities.

CAR Priority: The wellbeing and best interests of children in alternative care.

Phase 1 and 2 coordinated by the CBSS and co-funded by the European Union.

www.childrenatrisk.eu/audtrain

ProGuard: Strengthening and professionalising guardianship in Europe by creating a practical toolkit including a train-the-trainer methodology.

CAR Priority: The best interests of children in migration.

Coordinated by Nidos, CBSS is a partner. Co-funded by the European Union.

www.childrenatrisk.eu/proguard

TRAM: Supporting and enabling the integration of victims of trafficking among vulnerable migrants and refugees, including separated and unaccompanied children.

CAR Priority: Preventing trafficking and exploitation of children.

Coordinated by ICMPD, CBSS is a partner. Co-funded by the European Union

Celebrating the history of the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk

During the Swedish Presidency, the Expert Group started discussing when and how to celebrate its establishment. The most recent celebration was in 2012, which marked the 10-year anniversary of the Expert Group's work formally belonging under the umbrella of the CBSS and having a supporting unit in the CBSS Secretariat.

However, after some digging through the archives and talking with the individuals involved in establishing the Child Centre and the Working Group, it became apparent that the concrete work started much earlier than 2002. An annex describing the history is attached.

As a result, the group agreed to celebrate the 20th year of CBSS Cooperation on Children at Risk. The celebration will take place at the group's first meeting during the Latvian Presidency, to be held in November 2018. It is especially fitting to celebrate in Riga, since both the Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers made key decisions at the 1998 Summit in Riga regarding the cooperation. Further, one of the very first seminars was held in Riga, and the eventual Reference Group decided in Riga that the work should become a part of the CBSS.

Progress report for the Regional Strategy for Cooperation on Children at Risk 2017-2020

[Link to the Regional Strategy for Cooperation on Children at Risk 2017-2020.](#)

Prevention, early intervention, parenting and family support

Objective 1: To promote the elimination of corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading punishment of children through collaborative, multi-stakeholder planning and action within and between governments in the Baltic Sea Region, across EU Member States and beyond.

The Baltic Sea Region is fast becoming a no-corporal-punishment zone for children with 10 out of 11 countries having prohibited corporal punishment. Sweden was the first country in the world to do so in 1979; Finland achieved prohibition in 1983, Denmark in 1997, Estonia in 2015, Germany in 2000, Iceland in 2003, Latvia in 1998, Lithuania 2017, Norway in 1987 and Poland in 2010. Russia still needs a clear prohibition of corporal punishment in all settings.

Launched in January 2017, the EU co-funded project Non-violent Childhoods is bringing the ban on corporal punishment from law into practice. Central to the work is promoting the recognition of children as rights-holders with the right to respect for their dignity, physical integrity and to equal protection under the law. As a result of national consultations and regional expert meetings, the project will deliver tools, guidance material and good practices based on research and experience to be used by decision-makers, academia, child rights advocates and practitioners. The project partnership includes the ministries of social affairs from Estonia, Finland, Latvia and Sweden as well as the Polish Ombudsman for Children and the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children.

During 2017-2018, the project completed its initial series of national consultations which identified good practices and challenges. On the basis of the information gathered through national consultations in Estonia, Finland, Latvia and Poland during 2017, a series of expert meetings discussed drafts of the upcoming guidance documents during winter and spring 2018. These meetings also helped develop the project's social media campaign. The project will be finalised, and the guidance and campaign will be launched, during the Latvian Presidency.

Objective 2: To collect and share information about the legislation, practices and national focal points in relation to cross-country child care issues.

The Secretariat was expected to develop a short analysis of the status of various international conventions in the member states. However, the analysis of cross-country child care issues was postponed to a relevant expert meeting at a later date.

Child-friendly justice

Objective 1: To promote child-friendly, multi-disciplinary and interagency services supporting child victims of violence, in particular the Barnahus model. Building on progress made in the EC funded PROMISE project, the objective of PROMISE II is the implementation of Barnahus in 10 European countries.

PROMISE 2 (2017–2019) launched January 2018. It builds on learning from the first PROMISE project (2015-2017), which supported government officials and practitioners from more than 11 countries to establish Barnahus or similar institutions. A series of exchange meetings, study visits and capacity building efforts raised the level of knowledge of the government officials and practitioners, who also contributed to the development of standards and guidelines. During the reporting period, the PROMISE 1 project finalised with a webinar presenting the publications of the project, presenting the European Barnahus Movement, and looking forward to PROMISE 2. The Barnahus label has become a concept and is promoted as a good practice by major stakeholders such as the Council of Europe, the European Commission, by the UN and by other regional entities.

PROMISE 2 promotes progress at national level in several European countries. It aims to ensure commitment from key authorities by facilitating inter-agency dialogue in national strategic roundtables, as well as developing plans and roadmaps, inter-agency agreements and frameworks. It further aims to contribute to building a competent and committed workforce, including professionals from law enforcement, judiciary, medical and mental health staff and social workers. Tailor-made training will be provided to Barnahus staff in areas such as forensic interviews, psychotherapy, medical treatment, multi-disciplinary collaboration and data collection. A key aim of PROMISE 2 is to ensure that children are placed at the centre of the process and that their voices are heard. A methodology will be developed to help Barnahus and child-friendly services gather children's views on their experience in Barnahus, the outcomes of the process and potential challenges that still need to be addressed. PROMISE 2 also reaches out beyond its partners. Several webinars will be organised, a newsletter will regularly be disseminated and social media will bring the latest news. Wikipedia will bring updated information about the Barnahus model.

During the reporting period, the partners of the project translated the Barnahus Standards into their national languages, and organised the many meetings in their countries.

The partners also released a renewed PROMISE Vision. The vision of the PROMISE project is a Europe where the human rights of children to protection from violence, support and to be heard are fulfilled. To this end, child victims and witnesses of violence in Europe are protected by child-friendly interventions and rapid access to justice and care. The Vision puts forth principles, criteria, standards, and challenges for stakeholders in Europe and globally to address.

In the Baltic Sea Region, nearly all countries will end up practicing the Barnahus model.

Objective 2: Continue the cooperation with the Council of Europe on promoting the Child-Friendly Justice Guidelines.

In 2015, the CBSS cooperated with the Council of Europe on a regional conference on handling child evidence. In 2017, as part of the PROMISE project, the CBSS developed the report "Enabling Child-Sensitive Justice: The Success Story of the Barnahus Model and its Expansion in Europe", which incorporated much of the learning from the 2015 conference. The Children at Risk Unit is in regular communication with the Council of Europe about opportunities to cooperate on the subject. The Council of Europe is using the PROMISE 1 publications and referencing the PROMISE project in their ongoing work.

The wellbeing and best interests of children in alternative care

Objective 1: Through the AudTrain child rights and system based Audit of Child Welfare Facilities project increase the capacity and skills of professionals responsible of auditing and monitoring children's situation and rights in residential care. Enhance children's rights to be heard, to be safe and secure and to be supported in their development in residential care.

During 2017-2018, the results from the AudTrain II Project were disseminated, and the potential to follow-up the programme by engaging the alumni network was explored. AudTrain is the name of a programme developed by the Council of the Baltic Sea States, which applies a child rights and a system-based auditing methodology in child welfare facilities. The methodology and auditing model was first developed and used in Norway and later introduced in the Baltic Sea region. While the Council of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat has a long-standing history of promoting the auditing of child welfare services and facilities in the region, it formally initiated the AudTrain programme in 2011. During 2015-2017, the programme was revitalised with national partners and practitioners in order to continue strengthening professional capacities and promoting a standardised method for monitoring child welfare facilities.

Objective 2: Follow-up of the Tallinn Recommendations on Alternative Care and Family Support and on the Conclusions from the Warsaw Roundtable on Deinstitutionalisation and Foster Care.

The 2015 Tallinn Recommendations on Alternative Care and Family Support and on the Conclusions from the Warsaw Roundtable on Deinstitutionalisation and Foster Care are continually followed-up on through the flagship projects of the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk. For example, as per the recommended actions for the Expert Group, the PROMISE project is promoting the Barnahus model, and the Non-violent Childhoods project is facilitating the implementation of laws for the prevention of violence against children. Further opportunities to act upon the recommendations are regularly explored and acted upon.

Protecting children from sexual abuse and sexual exploitation

Objective: the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk will continue to support the development of expertise and the dissemination of good practices and evidence based methods through regional cooperation. To promote child friendly investigations in relation to the legal process is of particular interest for the Expert Group.

The CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk supports the work of the Lanzarote Committee of the Council of Europe and the Icelandic representative is a member of the Lanzarote Committee. The Expert Group is an observer to the Lanzarote committee, and the Head of Unit and some of the Expert group members have on several occasions commented upon and discussed suggestions from the Council of Europe and the Lanzarote committee.

Preventing trafficking and exploitation of children

Objective 1: the overall objective of the cooperation between the Nordic Council of Ministers and the CBSS Expert Group on Children at risk in 2017 and 2018 is continued awareness raising of exploitation and trafficking with a focus on good practices in the identification and referral of children at risk as well as of child victims.

The PROTECT Children on the Move project consulted, trained and shared information among several hundred officials, professionals and experts during 2013 – 2018. It also issued resources such as the *Guidelines on the human rights and the best interests of the child in transnational child protection cases* as well as a special portal on Wikipedia providing information about transnational child protection. The project is in its third phase, with co-funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The Oslo Conclusions on the Identification and Referral of Children at Risk of Exploitation and Trafficking resulted from consultations in the region looking into good practices in identification and referral of children at risk of exploitation and trafficking. Held on 29-30 May 2018 in Oslo, this regional expert consultation gathered policy makers, practitioners, advocates and researchers from the Nordic and Baltic Sea Region, including Northwest Russia, and from other European countries who are concerned with the identification and referral of child victims of exploitation and trafficking. Together with leading European and international experts from the child rights and anti-trafficking field, the participants engaged in a review of the current state of knowledge, policy and practice and developed the Oslo Conclusions.

The results of a multi-country consultation process with child victims of exploitation and trafficking informed the discussion. The consultations with children were made on the basis of a methodology developed by the Children at Risk Unit. The aim is to hear children's recommendations on how boys and girls can find support in situations where they are at risk of violence, exploitation and trafficking. It also aims to raise children's awareness of sources of risk and resiliency. The children are not asked about their private stories but they are encouraged to develop recommendations for other children in difficult situations. The consultations with children are facilitated by specialists in facilities for children victims of exploitation and trafficking. The children are particularly selected and they participate on a voluntary basis. Overall, the children appreciated the opportunity to participate in the consultations. It felt good that someone was interested in them, listened to them and asked about their opinions. The feedback about the methodology has been so positive that the psychologists and organisations involved in the consultations with children were keen to continue using it in their work with child victims.

The speakers, panellists and participants asked and responded to critical questions, engaged in solution-oriented discussions and identified key learning from today's practices that could guide more effective and appropriate approaches to identification and referral, in the region and beyond. The discussions were enriched by a true story and performance from a young woman who was trafficked as a child.

The consultation was co-organized with the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs and was the third in a series of meetings organised as part of PROTECT III. The first consultation of this series took place in St Petersburg 26-27 September 2017. Co-organised with NGO Stellit, the 36 participants from 7 countries in the Baltic Sea region discussed for 2 days good practices in the identification and referral of children at risk of exploitation and trafficking. The second consultation took place in Vilnius, Lithuania on 12-13 December 2017. Minister Linus Kukuraitis from the Ministry of Social Security and Labour in Lithuania took part in the workshop together with 45 representatives from seven countries of the Baltic Sea Region discussing and sharing information about national tools and methods.

Objective 2: To enhance the knowledge base in the region on data, procedures and situation regarding the exploitation and trafficking of children including in begging and forced criminality.

Developing the *Oslo Conclusions on the Identification and Referral of Children at Risk of Exploitation and Trafficking* is the first step towards developing a resource with an overview of the situation in the region regarding the exploitation and trafficking of children. More resources will be developed pending on funding.

Objective 3: Facilitate the Nordic Network against Trafficking in Children and other specific networks at national or regional level

During the reporting period, the Children at Risk Unit took part in the meetings of the Nordic Network against Trafficking in Children. Representatives from the Nordic countries have been meeting twice a year for several years to discuss current issues and learn from good practices. The network is led by representatives from ministries and designated agencies and includes organisations that are active in combating trafficking and develop relevant tools. The Children at Risk Unit contributes its knowledge and expertise to these conversations and function as a secretary.

Objective 4: Increase the cooperation with the Task Force on Trafficking in Human Beings (TF-THB) at every level including at the strategic and project level in order to strengthen the impact of CBSS efforts.

The CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk cooperates with other units in the CBSS Secretariat such as the Task Force against Trafficking in Human Beings. Following the Groups' joint statement from October 2016, which underlined their complementary and distinct roles in preventing, identifying and protecting persons at risk and building capacity of key actors in the Baltic Sea Region, the two units in the Secretariat have continued to explore and work together on issues of common interest. The two units regularly inform each other about their work and participate in each other's events.

The CBSS Secretariat is partner to a project on Trafficking Along Migration Routes. Led by ICMPD, both the Children at Risk and Task Force against Trafficking in Human Beings units are engaged on the project. Foreseen outputs for the project include methodologies, cooperation activities, capacity building materials, and integration roadmaps. During the reporting year, the Children at Risk unit gave input to developing activities, notably in the work package for identification, referral, service provision and integration of victims of trafficking including children.

The best interests of children in migration

Objective 2: To promote a formal European network of guardians and a European system of accreditation to encourage a firmer level of professional guardianship in national systems in the Europe

The CBSS Secretariat is a partner to the ProGuard Project, which aims to strengthen and professionalise guardianship in Europe by creating a practical toolkit including a train-the-trainer methodology. The toolkit will roll out and deliver previously tried and tested training modules and tools and best practices in a structured way. Specifically, the toolkit will help guardians in their efforts to work in the best interest of the child, by strengthening their professionalism, mandate and position. It will also help to identify and apply durable solutions in the best interest of the child.

In the ProGuard Project, the CBSS will organise a meeting of Baltic Sea Region stakeholders on provisional guardianship of children in migration. This activity will be a key follow-up on the Unaccompanied Children conference from December 2016, which developed *The Stockholm Conclusions Promoting Good Practices in Protecting Migrant and Asylum Seeking Children, especially Unaccompanied Children, and Finding Solutions for the Children, Families, Societies and States – December 2016*.

ProGuard is co-funded by the EU and led by Nidos in the Netherlands. The partners include METAdrasi (EL), Danish Red Cross (DK), Jugendhilfe Süd-Niedersachsen (DE), Orphans court Latvia (LV), Amici dei Bambini (IT), Centre for missing and exploited children (HR), Child Circle (BE), National Institute for Health and Welfare (FI), Missing Children Europe and The Council of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat. The project runs from October 2017 to 2019.

Objective 1: to promote the [Stockholm] conclusions and recommendations from the conference and translate them into new projects to promote good practices and protect migrant and asylum seeking children including unaccompanied children.

The Stockholm Conclusions highlight central themes such as the need to provide quality standards in the reception and care systems, ensuring age assessment procedures are dignified and multi-disciplinary, providing effective guardianship services, ensure social integration and inclusion of the children and lastly several recommendations pointed to the need for capacity building of professionals and effective cross-border and in-country cooperation. Engaging communities, municipalities and mayors as champions for children and engaging parliamentarians were also seen as highly important. They were further followed up by *The Oslo Conclusions on the Identification and Referral of Children at Risk of Exploitation and Trafficking*, which was a key result of the PROTECT Children on the Move III project. A value added follow-up activity and funding is being investigated.

List of events and meetings July 2017 - June 2018

29 August, Stockholm: CBSS Secretariat Planning Day on Project Orientation

26-27 September, St. Petersburg: PROTECT Children on the Move III – workshop on Good Practices in Identification and Referral of Children at Risk of Exploitation and trafficking – including child participation.

9-11 October, Riga: Non-violent childhoods Latvian Consultation, meeting a range of experts and interest groups to discuss the Latvian experiences in bringing the ban on corporal punishment of children from law into practice.

12-13 October, Stockholm: Bi-annual Meeting of the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk. The first meeting organized during the Swedish Presidency with a special focus on preventing violence against and among children and young people with various forms of conduct challenges.

23-24 October, Utrecht: Kick-off meeting for ProGuard, a project on strengthening the guardianship role, train the trainers and guardians - and developing an accreditation model. CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk a partner, while NIDOS being project lead

2-3 November, Bergen: keeping a celebration speech during the dinner of an international event celebrating Barnhus Bergen 10 year. Barnhus Bergen was the first Barnhus in Norway, now there are 11.

6-8 November, Brussels: Participating in the EU Forum on the rights of children. Special focus was on detention of children.

13-15 November, Budapest: Participating in Trafficking Along Migration Routes (TRAM) project. Project lead is ICMPD and both TF-THB and CAR unit are partners in this project.

15-17 November, Estonia: National Consultation in Estonia as part of the Non-violent Childhoods project. The consultation consisted of interviewing and speaking with different target groups in different places in Estonia.

20 November, Stockholm: Taking part in a meeting about children's rights to complain organized by UNICEF.

21 November, Stockholm: Discussions with Heads of Barnehus in Denmark and Stockholm.

23 November, Stockholm: Presentation at the Swedish Institute during their program on Never Violence.

29 November-1 December, Warsaw: National Consultation in Poland as part of the non-violent Childhoods project.

5 December, Stockholm: Participating in a meeting on children who disappear organized by the Stockholm County Council.

12 - 13 December, Vilnius: PROTECT III Workshop on good practices in the identification and referral of children at risk of exploitation and trafficking. Child participation was part of the workshop and the participants discussed their recommendations. 45 officials and professionals met to advise on how to improve the system.

15 December, Vienna: OSCE Alliance Expert Coordination Team Meeting. Hosted by the OSCE Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings. The meeting presented updates from international organizations and discussed the topic for the upcoming OSCE Alliance against Trafficking conference.

15 January, Stockholm: Meeting between the Children at Risk Unit and Save the Children Sweden specialists on child participation to discuss possible cooperation.

25-26 January, Stockholm: Kick-off meeting for PROMISE II, aiming at supporting national developments in more than 10 countries in Europe by developing national roadmaps, agreements between agencies and disciplines, capacity building and through communication plans.

14-15 February, Stockholm: Participating in the Agenda 2030 for Children: End Violence Solutions Summit organised by the government of Sweden, Global Partnership to End Violence against Children and We Effect.

23 February, Stockholm: Meeting with the Civil Platform against Trafficking in Human Beings related to honour-based crimes. Discussions included reflections about the grey zone between honour based crimes and trafficking.

26 February, Riga: Mid-term partner meeting in the Non-violent childhoods project related to implementing the laws against corporal punishment of children in the region.

27-28 February, Riga: Expert meeting in the Non-violent childhoods project on the Guidance material on service provision and service providers.

5-8 March, Utrecht: Consultation and steering group meeting in ProGuard. The CBSS Secretariat/children at Risk unit will prepare for a regional conference in 2019 with representatives from governments and guardians to increase the understanding of guardians in guaranteeing access to rights and safeguarding the interests of unaccompanied children.

13-14 March, Warsaw: Expert meeting in the Non-violent childhoods project on the Guidance material on awareness raising and campaigning. Ideas for a regional campaign will be discussed to prevent violence against children.

17-18 April, Tallinn: Non-violent childhoods Expert meeting – positive parenting and parenting programmes.

19-20 April, Stockholm: Bi-annual Meeting of the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk. The second meeting organized during the Swedish Presidency.

3-4 May, Stockholm: Non-violent childhoods Expert Meeting on the implementation of legal requirements in the home setting.

9-11 May, Bhutan: Participation in the UN organised cross-regional meeting elaborating on progress in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals.

29-30 May, Oslo: PROTECT Children on the Move III – Consultation on Practices in Identification and Referral of Children at Risk of Exploitation and Trafficking. Participants engaged in a review of the current state of knowledge, policy and practice and developed the *Oslo Conclusions on the Identification and Referral of Children at Risk of Exploitation and Trafficking*.

31 May – 1 June, Malta: Presenting on a panel at the High level global conference on the universal prohibition of corporal punishment. Regional progress was highlighted.

Annex 1: A history of the CBSS Cooperation on Children at Risk

The CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk is a unique example of international cooperation. In 1998, the CBSS Heads of Government of the member states initiated regional activities on children's rights as the reverberations of two key events came together in synergy: the atmosphere of regional cooperation after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the international drive to improve the situation for children after the 1996 World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. With the help of improved transportation and communication technologies, the sharing of knowledge, models, and expertise internationally has become a precondition for good public policy and services in all sectors.

Today, the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk is relied upon to anticipate needs, follow trends, and enable robust and dynamic international cooperation supporting the rights of the child.

The Congress that shocked the world into action

In 1996, the world was shocked by the revelations from the First World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, convened on the initiative of the Swedish Government. This Congress launched a global discussion about the evidence and scope of the atrocity – sexual and otherwise – of violence against children. Despite global efforts, sexual abuse and violence against children is still pervasive. In all countries and regions, across all societies, children are exploited in numerous ways – starting from infancy and at all ages.

The world congress coincided with the Swedish Presidency of the CBSS. The CBSS Ombudsman for Democracy and Human rights wrote a letter asking the Swedish Foreign Minister to put the issue of sexually exploited children on the agenda for regional cooperation.

In Riga in July 1997, the CBSS Foreign Ministers decided the organisation should work in the field of child sexual abuse, violence in the media, and the situation of asylum-seeking minors.

In September 1997, the CBSS Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) decided the CBSS should implement the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This was in response to the May 1997 report issued by the CBSS on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

As a follow-up, the CBSS Working Group on Democratic Institutions (WGDI) reported in the 1997-1998 Annual Report that it decided to focus on the issue of commercial sexual exploitation of children in the Baltic Sea region. With the support of a Swedish delegation to the WGDI, an ad-hoc expert group was established to develop a report on commercial sexual exploitation of children in the Region, and to make recommendations for cooperation projects. The report showed that continued multidisciplinary regional cooperation on the topic was well motivated. Conferences and seminars were among the proposed activities.

CBSS cooperation on children at risk begins

In January 1998 the CBSS launched its Report on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the Baltic Sea Region.

At the CBSS Summit in Riga in January 1998, the Prime Ministers of the CBSS took note of the findings and "proposed that the Presidency of the CBSS organise the continued work in this field in accordance with the report." The Foreign Ministers of the CBSS "noted with satisfaction that the report

on Combating Commercial sexual exploitation of children has resulted in initiatives to arrange seminars with a view to raising the awareness of the issue among the relevant decision makers.” The CSO also reflected on the report, saying it points “to the importance of exchange of information and knowledge about the phenomenon and the necessity to raise awareness of the issue among the relevant decision makers (police and public prosecutors, social and health services, schools, media etc.).”

The financing for the start of the work came from all over the region. Sweden and Norway put their funds towards regional activities, while Denmark and Germany aimed at locally based activities. It is notable that many Nordic countries, Sweden and Denmark included, were still sending aid funding to some of the CBSS member states.

Sweden, Norway, and Estonia organised the first conference in Tallinn in September 1998. The meeting emphasised the importance of multidisciplinary work. It further “supported a stronger regional collaboration on the issue but it was also argued to broaden the mandate to include children at risk in the regional collaboration.” In this context, Sweden and others wanted to target all sexual exploitation of children, not just commercial. The term ‘Children at Risk’ came into use, which eventually became the formal name of the cooperation as an umbrella term for the diverse needs and priorities of all CBSS member states, notably Russia’s interest in street children and children in institutions.

Denmark, Germany and Latvia organised a seminar held in Riga in October 1998. The theme was abused children: cooperation among services, exchange of experiences, practical needs of the child.

The “Children at Risk project” takes form

The idea for an IT project first appeared during 1998. This became the “Child Centre” and was a key development in the establishment of the Expert Group.

The IT project and the ambition for comprehensive regional cooperation were strongly interconnected from the beginning. At the September 1998 conference in Tallinn on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the Baltic Sea Region, participants largely agreed on the need for stronger communication and cooperation in the Region. To address this, the CBSS Ombudsman for Human Rights and Democracy proposed that “each country should appoint an authority or organisation to be responsible for coordinating the internal part of the regional work” which would take place using modern communication technology.

During November 1998, the CBSS Working Group on Democratic Institutions discussed following up the Tallinn conference and the IT project idea. At the meeting, “The Commissioner [of the CBSS] referred to his earlier proposal to establish national contact-points on children’s issues in all CBSS member states. The contact-points would have as their primary goal to ensure that all CBSS countries continue to prioritise international co-operation on establishing better conditions for children. In order to ensure the political backing of the project members of the contact-points should include senior officials. Sweden will elaborate a proposal for the future development of the national contact-points.”

In addition to cooperation activities, the CBSS Commissioner was particularly interested in the Child Ombudsman’s system and encouraged member states to establish the office.

[A ministerial meeting "Children at Risk in the Baltic Sea Region"](#) was held in Stockholm on 17 March 1999 as a follow-up event to the Tallinn Conference. The IT network was proposed by the Swedish Minister for Social Security and Children as a way to use information technology as one way of improving co-operation, share information and for educational purposes. This was supported with a demonstration of teleconferencing between Stockholm and Russia. The demonstration impressed the audience despite its slow connectivity by modern standards. “[Minister] Klingvall proposed that the Swedish government would establish a group of experts to take forward the discussions and that this be done relatively quickly.”

The Swedish Minister for Social Affairs set up a special group for children at risk in the Baltic Sea Region in cooperation with the Norwegian Ministry for Children and Family Affairs. This group of four core representatives developed the idea of the IT network and also how to organise the cooperation among the member states on a more permanent basis. A CSO annual report from June 1999 notes "The Swedish Special Group for Children at Risk in the Baltic Sea Region has also continued its work as a focal point for regional co-operation."

The work on the IT network and regional cooperation on the topic developed organically for a time, and was seen as a follow-up activity of the 1996 World Congress. The "Cyber house" or "Child Centre" was envisioned to be a place to share knowledge and information. The visual of a house depicted how the IT network should function: different online "rooms" for different groups such as policymakers, scientists, professionals, children and young people. The idea was remarkable for its time, and as such difficult to be realised as planned.

The first meeting on the establishment of an IT-Network concerning Children at Risk in the Baltic Sea Region was held in Stockholm in [April 1999](#), which was attended by CBSS staff. A meeting in Visby in 1999 agreed on the initial plan for the IT-network, which would tie the member states together through a single server. The most immediate success of this decision was anchoring the cooperation. In addition to the planning discussions, the meetings on the development of the IT network also featured exchanges of national practice.

Integration into the CBSS

The restructuring of the CBSS Secretariat prompted the discussion on the integration of the work on Children at Risk in the Baltic Sea Region into the CBSS. The funding for the IT network would end around the same time that the integration was formalised. Before the current setup of the CBSS, the work and documentation was largely decentralised to the Foreign Ministries and line ministries.

An ad-hoc meeting was held in Stockholm in March 2000 to discuss priorities for future initiatives on children at risk. This meeting clarified that there was political support from all member states to continue the work. A priority paper was developed, which was discussed and confirmed in Oslo in June 2000 at the first meeting of the "Reference Group," which was composed of Senior Officials representing their respective countries and who have been mandated to contribute to the decision making on future strategic and policy initiatives on Children at Risk. The Reference Group would support the development of the IT network.

A memo from a CBSS Secretariat staffer to the Secretariat reports on the Meeting of the Reference Group on Children at Risk in Riga 5-6 February 2001, where the group agreed to seek its integration into the CBSS. The chair of the meeting said, "... politically, the Project had been a CBSS endeavour since the very beginning, when the Prime Ministers decided to launch it at their Riga Summit in 1998. The Establishment of the Reference Group had further consolidated the Baltic Sea nature of the project." The term "Project" here refers to the "Children at Risk Project", which at this point had become conflated with the "IT network."

The Chair also said "... the Reference Group had been created as a technical structure for the purpose of designing and launching the "Cyber House" Project. As the work progressed, the scope of the Group's responsibilities had widened, which was reflected i.a. in the Bergen CBSS Communique." The referenced June 2000 CBSS Foreign Ministers Communique "instructs the CSO and the WGD1 to support the newly established reference group of senior officials from ministries responsible for child matters in its efforts to enforce a coordinated and multidisciplinary approach towards children at risk in the Baltic Sea region and to further develop the Child Centre for Children at Risk IT network for intergovernmental exchange of information and experiences in the area of child welfare and protection."

A September 2001 meeting of the actors developing the IT network confirmed that the “Child Centre” should become a part of the work of the CBSS Secretariat.

In October 2001, the Ministers for Children’s Affairs in the Baltic Sea Region adopted a formal decision on the Secretariat function of the “C.A.R. Project” and the establishment of the Working Group for Cooperation on Children at Risk. In November the proposal to integrate was made to the CSO, which was adopted in February 2002. The unit was staffed from March 1st until June 30th by the Swedish Ministry of Health and Social Affairs and paid for both by Sweden and Norway. The delivery of an administrative and professional unit within the CBSS secretariat changed the way of working and strengthened the cooperation among the member states.

Formal establishment and evolution

In January 2002, the CBSS Working Group for Cooperation on Children at Risk (WGCC) met for the first time in Vilnius. There they elected the first chair and vice-chair, and agreed on the Terms of Reference for the group. They next met in Reykjavik in April, where they agreed on a proposal for the first Senior Advisor and Head of Unit, who took his post on 12 June 2002.

The priority paper from 2000 was updated and adopted by the Working Group in December 2002. The priorities included working against all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse, protecting unaccompanied children and preventing exploitation and trafficking, protecting street children, children with antisocial and self-destructive behaviour and children in institutions.

One of the first tasks of the Working Group was to develop the Action Plan for the cooperation for improved assessment care and reintegration of unaccompanied and trafficked children in the Region of the Baltic Sea States, which was adopted in 2004. As part of this work, the group of National Contact Points for Unaccompanied and Trafficked Children in the Baltic Sea States was established, which was eventually integrated into the Expert Group.

The mandate was expanded in 2008 towards an integrated child protection approach. At the same time, the name changed to the Expert Group for Cooperation on Children at Risk and the Expert Group (EGCC) in order to follow the standardized naming format established by the 2008 reform of the CBSS.

The Child Centre website was updated substantially in 2013. By this time, the connectivity, technology and privacy foreseen in the original website had long become obsolete. A private website for the archival documents of the Expert Group was created instead, and the focus of the public website changed to promoting the work and priorities of the Expert Group. In 2016 the name was simplified to the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk in conjunction with the adoption of a Terms of Reference for the group. The Expert Group adopted its 2017-2020 Mandate and Strategy documents, along with the new internal acronym CAR, at its May 2017 meeting. The URL of the website was changed, leaving the Child Centre framework formally in the past and highlighting instead the influence of the Children at Risk Expert Group.

Continued need to prioritise and combat violence against children

Over the years, the regional and political environment and situation has changed. All the countries in the region are members of the Council of Europe and all have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Council of Europe Lanzarote Convention on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, and recommendations and guidelines concerning integrated child protection systems, child-friendly justice and child-friendly social services. Nearly all countries in the Baltic Sea Region apart from Iceland, Norway and Russia are European Union members, and thus are influenced directly and indirectly by the greater European political agenda.

A significant development in the education, health and welfare/protection fields has taken place in each of the 11-member states of the Council of the Baltic Sea States during the past 20 years. Many children are relatively well informed about their rights and live in safety and security in their family setting. However, too many children still experience different forms of violence and feel that they have few reliable adults to turn to. The atrocities are also ongoing and taking on new forms, such as real time streaming of sexual violence and the grooming and harassment of children through online devices and in real life. Furthermore, quite a few unaccompanied children are currently travelling from country to country in Europe in search of safety and livelihood. Thus, there is still a great need to keep the topic of children at risk as a priority area of work and give high attention to develop appropriate preventive and protective measures.

The mandate of the Expert Group for 2017-2020 prioritises accordingly support to the member States in bolstering their child protection and welfare systems in the areas of prevention, early intervention, parenting and family support, child-friendly justice, the wellbeing and best interests of children in alternative care, protecting children from sexual violence and exploitation, preventing trafficking and exploitation of children and the best interests of children in migration. The results of the flagship projects of the CBSS Expert Group have enabled regional exchange of good practices, knowledge and models which has influenced the evolution and improvement of public policy and services for children. The Expert Group enjoys a high level of respect in ministries, national agencies, ombudsmen's offices, and organisations and among professionals, children and parents.