



CBSS Expert Group on
Children at Risk

CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk¹

Annual Report
Latvian Presidency 2018 - 2019

¹ 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 Latvian Presidency of the CBSS aimed to enhance cooperation in civil protection to strengthen resilience in the region against major emergencies and disasters, fighting against trafficking in human beings to prevent and mitigate consequences of this severe crime and lastly combating organised crime and strengthen border management. The CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk contributed to these goals through its work against trafficking and exploitation of children.
- The CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk met twice during the Latvian Presidency:
 - The meeting held in Riga on the 6 and 7 of December 2018 included the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the CBSS cooperation on children at risk. The celebration was initiated with a reception and a lunch on the 6 of December organised by the Latvian Presidency and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The work of the Expert Group was highlighted in the presence of the Senior Officials and invited guests. In the evening, a dinner was organised by the Ministry of Welfare in a restaurant in Riga, honouring some key persons and their role in initiating the cooperation and ensuring its success. Key documents are included as annexes to this annual report.
 - The meeting adopted the following take-home message: “We had a very successful celebration highlighting the results of the cooperation on children at risk. The group look forward to the future, as there are many more things to be done”.
 - The meeting in Riga on the 7 and 8 of May 2019 included thanking Turid Heiberg, who is ending her mandate as the Head of the CBSS Children at Risk Unit. Turid was warmly appreciated by the members of the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk.
 - Olivia Lind Haldorsson has been appointed as the new Head of Unit and will start her assignment from September. Olivia has worked for over 20 years in senior positions with child rights, she is very well connected after many years of working from Brussels and a key player in the PROMISE project.
 - The meeting in May featured a special visit to a support centre for out-of-family care and a visit to the Children Helpline of the State Inspectorate for Protection of Children's Rights and the Consultative Unit for children with challenging behaviour.
 - The meeting adopted the following take-home message: “In recognising the two phases of development the cooperation has undergone under the past 20 years, looks forward to consolidating its work and taking it to the next level when the group enters a next phase of cooperation with a new management team.”
- The Regional Strategy for Cooperation on Children at Risk 2017-2020 has been updated to capture the rapid development in the field of child rights and protection - and the significant contributions by the projects that have been handled by the Expert Group.
- 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 Latvian Presidency, 6 Guidance Reports, a comic book and a campaign were developed and launched at a high-level conference in November 2019 in Stockholm.
- PROMISE: Promotes the Barnahus and similar models throughout Europe and coordinates the European Barnahus Movement. During the year, PROMISE 2 gave support for national implementation in 10 countries. A new proposal, PROMISE 3, to be handed in to the EC in beginning June aims to deliver university level training in forensic interviewing, relevant therapy necessary for Barnahus in Europe and a case management tool including a child participation tool. The PROMISE Network, which is being developed in parallel, aims to ensure long-term support for Barnahus and similar services by formalising the European Barnahus movement into a European PROMISE Network with a steering group and a General Assembly.
- PROTECT Children on the Move launched a new report in December 2018: “Listen Up! Creating conditions for children to speak and be heard. Professional communication with children at risk of exploitation and trafficking. Experience and lessons learned from the Baltic Sea Region”. The Children at Risk unit has also during 2019 supported survivors of child trafficking and exploitation in childhoods to organise in the region.
- ProGuard: CBSS Expert Group is partner in a project aimed at strengthening the professional level of guardianship systems in Europe. A toolkit has been developed to support guardians in their efforts to work in the best interest of the child, by strengthening their professionalism, mandate and position. A pilot accreditation system for guardians has also been developed for guardianship organisations to assess how the national system fulfils common and transparently defined general European standards.
- 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 2018, all Member States contributed to the Children at Risk Unit, and the Children at Risk Unit operating budget was in balance.

Composition and administration

Latvian Chair of the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk

Lauris Neikens, Ministry of Welfare

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

Maria Pârja, Socialstyrelsen

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 – Shawwna von Blixen
- Project Assistant – Marlene Riedel (employment ended December 2018)
- Independent Researcher – Daja Wenke (since 2012)

The work is actively supported by CBSS staff specially assigned to support the Children at Risk Unit:

- Media and Communications Assistant - Silvija Marcinkeviciute (starting April 2019)
- Financial Controller - Mia Skyten

Mandate, Regional Strategy, ToR, and abbreviation

The Latvian Presidency worked within the framework of the Mandate and the Regional Strategy for Cooperation on Children at Risk, July 2017-2020. 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 is complementing the Mandate and Strategy.

The 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 CAR is to be used only in internal communication.

The strategy has been updated considering many new achievements and commitments

Financing

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

During 2018, all Member States contributed to the Children at Risk Unit, and the Children at Risk Unit operating budget was in balance. All members have also contributed to the 2019 budget including with the agreed increase in contributions.

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.

During the Latvian Presidency, the Expert Group presented regional achievements to the EU Forum and the European Commission in Brussels, to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg and to the UN cross-regional meeting organised in Addis Ababa/Ethiopia.

Latvian Presidency highlights

The Latvian Presidency of the CBSS highlighted enhancing cooperation in civil protection to strengthen resilience in the region against major emergencies and disasters, fighting against trafficking in human beings to prevent and mitigate consequences of this severe crime and lastly combating organised crime and strengthen border management.

The CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk contributed to these goals through its work against trafficking and exploitation of children. A main achievement was the follow-up of the "Oslo Conclusions on Identifying Children at Risk of Exploitation and Trafficking" (May 2018) by developing the "Listen Up!" report (December 2018) systematising the lessons learned about the conditions for children to speak and be heard. The report aims at supporting professionals in their communication with children at risk of exploitation and trafficking. CBSS has also been active in supporting survivors of trafficking and exploitation in childhoods to organise in the CBSS member states.

In February, the Children at Risk Unit was invited to take part in the TF-THB Task Force meeting and in the international conference organised by the Latvian Ministry of Interior on "Human trafficking - a crime with too few convictions and too many victims". The Children at Risk Unit presented achievements in the Tour the Table session in the Task Force meeting and was part of discussing findings in the international conference.

The 20-year celebration of the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk was also highlighted by the Latvian Presidency and the Senior officials.

Meetings of the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk

The CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk met twice during the Latvian Presidency. The meetings were held on the 6 and 7 of December 2018 and on the 7 and 8 of May 2019. Both meetings were held in Riga.

December meeting:

The meeting in December included in addition to regular agenda items the preparation to and the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the CBSS cooperation on children at risk. The celebration was initiated with a reception and a lunch on the 6 of December organised by the Latvian Presidency and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The work of the Expert Group was highlighted in the presence of the Senior Officials and invited guests. In the evening, a dinner was organised by the Ministry of Welfare in a restaurant in Riga, honouring some key persons and their role in initiating the cooperation and ensuring its success. A journalist at Radio Latvia and TV24 Ansis Bogustovs assisted in the moderation of the event.

The objective of the dinner was to celebrate and spread awareness about the positive achievement of the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) Expert Group on Children at Risk. The 20-year jubilee event was an excellent opportunity to share information about the achievements of the Expert Group on Children at Risk with the Committee of Senior Officials, the Nordic Council of Ministers, other international, national as well as local entities.

The honourees at the event were:

- Ingrid Åkerman and Agneta Björklund for initiating regional cooperation on children at risk, who presented information about the origin of the cooperation.
- Bragi Gudbrandsson for initiating the first Barnahus and being active in the PROMISE² project. In addition, Bragi has been part of establishing the Expert Group and been the Icelandic representative for almost 20 year.
- Centre Dardedze represented by Liena Krūmina and Agnese Sladzevska for being a regional example on how to promote child participation and NGO advocacy on children at risk in general. Agnese presented how the CBSS cooperation and the launch of Centres Dardedze was mutually beneficial and continues to be as we work together on Barnahus, Non-violent Childhoods programme and other initiatives.

The State Secretary of the Ministry of Welfare of Latvia, Ingus Alliks presented honorary certificates (with the assistance of Lauris Neikens). The Head of the Children at Risk Unit of the Secretariat of the Council of the Baltic Sea States Turid Heiberg, presented broaches crafted by jewellers Inita and Vitauts Straupes at Baltu Rotas as honorary tokens. The broaches of the sun - a motif from ancient Prussian 2th-4th century, are a symbol of light, everlasting movement, returning, solidarity and entirety.

The State Secretary of the Ministry of Welfare of Latvia, Ingus Alliks expressed special gratitude to the Head of the Children at Risk Unit of the Secretariat of the Council of the Baltic Sea States Turid Heiberg for the managing of the work on children at risk at the secretariat and support the Council of the Baltic Sea States Expert Group on Children at Risk. For her work, she was presented a pin/an amulet "the bird of luck" crafted by jewellers Inita and Vitauts Straupes at Baltu Rotas. It is believed that the Lucky Bird connects Earth with Heaven, the masculine with feminine, and the ever-present with the changing.

Expert Group Members gave spontaneous gratitude and messages about the value of the group and the achievements, as well as the work that is still to be done. A collection of messages from all the member countries was circulated and presented on the screen, along with a short slideshow which sparked memories and stories.

At the end of the December meeting, the group agreed on the following take-home message:

“We had a very successful celebration highlighting the results of the cooperation on children at risk. The group look forward to the future, as there are many more things to be done”.

May meeting:

- **Turid Heiberg** and her achievements during the last 6 years as Head of the CBSS Children at Risk Unit was warmly celebrated by the Expert Group members. Turid is not ending her mandate before end of August but this was her last Expert Group meeting. The members acknowledged the solid programme that has been built and implemented including the strengthening of the regional child rights community of policy makers, professionals and experts. Furthermore, the members acknowledged the solid reputation of the work at European level by the Council of Europe and the European Commission. International reputation has also been gained through the UN and by other regional entities. Lastly, the issue of child participation has in the later years been promoted and models and methodologies have been developed to capacitate professionals in listening to children - and to enable children to give recommendations and to organise as survivors of violence including trafficking. Turid highlighted that the work of the Children at Risk Unit is a team effort and praise should also be directed towards **Shawna von Blixen** as programme coordinator, **Daja Wenke** as a researcher on most of the projects, **Marlene Riedel**, project assistant, media and communications assistant **Silvija Marcinkeviciute** and financial controller **Mia Skyten**. The **chairs** of the different Presidencies are to be appreciated for their valuable guidance and support and **partners** in the projects are the building blocks and inspiration to the programme as such.
- Olivia Lind Haldorsson was introduced as the new Head of Children at Risk Unit to take up work from September.
- On the 8 of May the members visited a support centre for out-of-family care [Riga support centre of out-of-family care “AIRI vecākiem” (OARS for parents) established by Latvian SOS Children’s Villages Association] getting information about its role in the implementation of the support measures for out-of-family care providers. The objective of the visit was to gain an in-depth view of the Latvian system on the support of out-of-family care and to promote discussions and sharing of knowledge about different practices in the field. The members visited also the Children Helpline of the State Inspectorate for Protection of Children's Rights and the Consultative Unit for children with challenging behaviour.

At the end of the May meeting, the group agreed on the following take-home messages:

- In recognising the two phases of development the cooperation has undergone under the past 20 years, looks forward to consolidating its work and taking it to the next level when the group enters a next phase of cooperation with a new management team.

Flagship Projects

The following projects were underway during the Latvian Presidency of the CBSS. The Expert Group's annual Plan of Activities (2018 – 2019) 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.

Children at Risk 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.

Children at Risk 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.

Children at Risk Priority: Preventing trafficking and exploitation of children.

Coordinated by the CBSS. Co-funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers and partly the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs.

www.childrenatrisk.eu/protect

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

Children at Risk 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

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 programme Non-violent Childhoods is bringing the ban on corporal punishment from law into practice. The project partnership included 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.

The “Non-violent childhoods: moving on from corporal punishment in the Baltic Sea Region” programme organised national consultations and regional expert meetings. Six guidance reports, a comic book and a campaign were launched at a high-level conference in November 2018 in Stockholm. Each report focuses on a specific theme; a step-by-step guide, implementing the ban in the domestic setting, positive parenting, awareness-raising campaigns, service provision and tracking progress. The comic book aims to raise awareness and show the importance of trusted adults. The comic book brings the story of a young boy and his parents, who thinks they can motivate him to study more by using corporal punishment. Meanwhile, the son feels he cannot talk with adults, and even his peers because then everyone would know his shame. But change is happening. School staff is learning, and the boy is getting the support needed to feel empowered.

The publications are translated into Estonian, Finnish, German, Icelandic, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Arabic, English, French, Russian and Spanish.

Currently, CBSS is cooperating with the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Human Rights in Austria (lead partner) in developing a Europe wide project: “Violence free Zone Europe” and CBSS may render support to some countries in the region to continue efforts to reduce corporal punishment against children.

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 has repeatedly been postponed and such an analysis would also be needing extra funding. The Ministry of Justice of Latvia is however organising an international meeting “The Matters related to the protection of the rights of the child in cross-border cases” in June 2019 in the framework of the International Day

of Children. The objective of the meeting is to introduce the experts of children's rights with the Latvian system of child protection. The objective is to promote the cooperation in the protection of the rights of children having Latvian nationality living abroad. The international experts who have been invited come from the following countries: United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, Denmark and Norway.

Child-friendly justice

Objective 1: To promote child-friendly, multi-disciplinary and interagency services supporting child victims of violence, the Barnahus model. Building on progress made in the EU funded PROMISE project (2015-2017), the objective of PROMISE II is the implementation of Barnahus in 10 European countries (2017-2019). PROMISE 3 (2020-2022) aims to deliver university level training in forensic interviewing and relevant therapy necessary for Barnahus in Europe and a case management tool including a child participation tool. The PROMISE Network aims to ensure long-term support for Barnahus and similar services by formalising the European Barnahus movement into a European PROMISE Network.

The Barnahus model is a leading European multi-disciplinary and interagency practice responding to violence against children. The model ensures a child-friendly environment and provides rapid access to justice and quality care for child victims and witnesses of violence. Barnahus have been set up – or are being set up - in all the countries of the Baltic Sea Region apart from Russia. Latvia has piloted the model and is awaiting amendments in legal regulation for its permanent establishment.

Barnahus is also because of the PROMISE project and/or with the support of international organisations and the Council of Europe being established in other countries in Europe. In June 2017, in Brussels, the European Barnahus movement was launched. By the end of 2019, it is expected that more than 20 countries in Europe have one or more Barnahus.

PROMISE 2 is currently supporting strategic dialogues between ministries, national authorities including social welfare, child protection, police, prosecution, judges, health systems and service providers in the 10 partner countries. Roadmaps and stakeholder agreements are being developed. By beginning June 2019, a new EU proposal for PROMISE 3 will be handed in and parallel the groundwork to establish the PROMISE Network is taking place. The PROMISE Network will be established through commitment from Barnahus partners and by negotiating a 4-year EU operational funding agreement (2022-2026).

The PROMISE project has increased the knowledge and application at national level of the PROMISE quality standards (the update is ongoing). Prosecutors and judges are engaged in Barnahus and professionals are trained to implement their duties in forensic interviews, therapy, medical and legal support and to work in a coordinated fashion. Children are provided with a safe space in Barnahus to express their views to an experienced audience and have opportunities to influence service review and development. A case management tool is developed to enable quality assurance and monitoring at national level and to provide comparable data at Europe level. The Network is expected to function according to democratic values with an elected Steering Group and a General Assembly for all members to voice their opinion about needed progress.

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 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 2018-2019, 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 were 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 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 on protecting children from sexual abuse and exploitation through regional cooperation. To promote child friendly investigations in relation to the legal process is of interest for the Expert Group and integrated in the Barnahus model.

The CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk supports the work of the Lanzarote Committee of the Council of Europe and 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: to develop a regional approach on how to strengthen child-sensitive communication and best interests determination and to develop a methodology(ies) for hearing the child's story.

The PROTECT Children on the Move project consulted, trained and shared information among several hundred officials, professionals and experts during 2013 - 2018. Early on, it issued resources such as the *Guidelines on the human rights and the best interests of the child in transnational child protection cases* with funding from the EU as well as a special portal on Wikipedia providing information about transnational child protection. During 2016-2018 the work was co-funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The *“Oslo Conclusions on the Identification and Referral of Children at Risk of Exploitation and Trafficking. Strengthening child-sensitive communication and best interests determination. Hearing the Child's Story”* was presented and adopted in a regional expert consultation in Oslo in May 2018 by policy makers, practitioners, advocates and researchers. A conference statement was also developed. The Oslo Conference was co-funded by the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs. Late 2018, another report was developed based on the methodologies developed for child participation as part of the consultations during 2016 - 2018. *Listen Up! Creating conditions for children to speak and be heard. Professional communication with children at risk of exploitation and trafficking. Experience and lessons learned from the Baltic Sea Region.*

A concept for a follow-up project has been developed and is actively seeking funding.

Objective 2: To support the self-organising of survivors of trafficking and exploitation in childhood.

Survivors are organising in the region. CBSS is supporting these efforts by lending a hand, resources and information about regional set-up when asked for.

Objective 3: Be pro-active in 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 aims to meet twice a year 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 with its knowledge and expertise to these conversations.

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 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. TF-THB and the Children at Risk Unit work together in the secretariat, have regular meetings and cooperates on projects. The Children at Risk Unit was invited to the last TF-THB meeting in February and presented the work of the Expert Group during the Tour the table session. TF-THB is invited to present their achievements in the Expert Group meeting in May 2019. The Children at Risk Unit gave support to TF-THB to develop a glossary of terminology.

The best interests of children in migration

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

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 (2016) continues to inform the work related to providing quality standards for unaccompanied children including asylum-seeking children in general. The Stockholm conclusions are still being used, and referred to, by national and regional institutions. They are also being translated into the ProGuard project where CBSS Expert Group is a partner.

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 ProGuard Project (2017 – 2019) aims to strengthen and professionalise guardianship in Europe by creating a practical toolkit including a train-the-trainer methodology and a pilot accreditation tool for national guardianship systems. The toolkit has been developed with the assistance of guardians and guardianship organisations and has been tested. The toolkit aims to support guardians in their efforts to work in the best interest of the child, by strengthening their professionalism, mandate and position. The toolkit is translated into several languages apart from English (French, Finnish, Greek, Danish, German, Italian). www.guardianstoolkit.eu

The pilot accreditation system for guardians will enable guardianship organisations to assess how the national system fulfils common and transparently defined general European standards. The pilot accreditation system will assess the guardianship system in place, it will not assess performance and impact of the system. Ideally it can be used as a national review.

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), The Association of Employees of Latvian Orphan's and Custody Courts (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 CBSS/Expert Group on Children at Risk supports the Baltic Sea regional participation and dissemination of results.

List of events and meetings July 2018 – June 2019

4-7 September, Iceland: Presenting the Barnahus model and celebrating Barnahus Iceland 20 years

12 September, Oslo: Meeting of the Nordic Group on child trafficking

13 September, PROMISE Webinar: Putting the child at the center: discussions on ensuring an inclusive and child-friendly setup - Standards 3&4 Inclusive target group; Child friendly environment. Organised by the PROMISE Project. www.childrenatrisk.eu/promise/webinars.

20 September, PROMISE Webinar: Law as one enabling factor. A look at the range of realities: Denmark Norway and Sweden (full legislation, some legislation, no legislation). Showing that it is a nice to have but also not an absolute condition for establishing a well-functioning Barnahus or similar cooperation. t www.childrenatrisk.eu/promise/webinars.

1 October, Stockholm: Actions against sexual exploitation of children, a meeting organised by the Swedish platform against human trafficking

4-5 October, Utrecht: Steering group meeting in ProGuard, a project about the professional guardianship of unaccompanied children

11 October, PROMISE Webinar: How the comfort of courthouse dogs enables children to tell their stories at the Barnahus. www.childrenatrisk.eu/promise/webinars.

18 October, PROMISE Webinar: Medical examination of children at the Barnahus. www.childrenatrisk.eu/promise/webinars.

14 November, Stockholm: Final partner meeting for Non-violent childhoods.

15-16 November, Stockholm: High level conference on implementing measures to end corporal punishment of children. Organised by the Council of the Baltic Sea States and co-hosted by the Government of Sweden in cooperation with the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children. This was an event of the Non-violent Childhoods Programme.

3 December, Virtual: Meeting the National Child Advocacy Alliance, USA to discuss their learnings over the years, including the accreditation and progress tracking tools.

6-7 December, Riga: CAR biannual meeting including celebrating CAR 20 year.

16 January, Stockholm: Meeting with Bonigi (<https://bonigi.se/om-bonigi>) to discuss how to evolve an existing case management tool to be able to track progress towards meeting the Barnahus Quality Standards and to collect comparable European data on violence against children.

14 February, PROMISE Webinar: In this webinar, we heard the perspective from the judicial/police sector about the value and results of when child victims and witnesses of violence give evidence via a forensic interview at the Barnahus. Main speaker: Símon Sigvaldason, Icelandic Judge.

20 February, Riga: TF-THB meeting

21 -22 February, Riga: International conference “Human trafficking - a crime with too few convictions and too many victims”.

25-28 February, Addis Ababa: Speaking in cross regional meeting organised by the Special Representative to the UN Secretary-General on Violence against children.

26 February, Brussels: informal EU expert group meeting on the rights of the child, to present the results of the Non-violent childhoods project.

7 March, PROMISE Webinar: With reference to Barnahus Quality Standards 3 and 6, this webinar presented strategies and approaches to meeting the individual needs of every child and ensuring equitable access to child-friendly justice at the Barnahus. This included adaptations for children with disabilities or language barriers, including using interpretation. The webinar will also discuss adapting the interviews to different age groups and what you can expect from children of different ages. Main speaker: Gordana Flander, Director of the Child and Youth Center in Zagreb. More information at <http://www.childrenatrisk.eu/promise/webinars/>

11 March, Virtual: Meeting with the Family Justice Center in Reykjavik to get to know each other, to understand the model, and to learn how it can complement the Barnahus model.

12 March, Brussels: Director and Deputy Director General met with DG Justice, Emanuel Crabit and Valeria Setti, to promote strategic cooperation with the CBSS and the future of the PROMISE programme of activities.

14 March, PROMISE Webinar: With reference to Barnahus Quality Standard 6, this webinar explored how a forensic interview is conducted. In doing so, the speakers presented the preparation, protocol, and follow-up involved with conducting a forensic interview of a child victim or witness of violence. Main speaker: Ólöf Ásta Farestveit, Director of Barnahus Iceland.

14-15 March, Brussels: ProGuard Conference. Toolkit and a list of standards for guardianship of unaccompanied children were discussed at national level. The toolkit and standards were the point of departure for discussions among the 60 participants from government and policy level. The European legal and policy frameworks was discussed including how to professionalise guardianship for unaccompanied children in Europe and recommendations to improve the guardianship systems.

29 March, Virtual: Meeting with the Finnish representative to coordinate an EU Finnish Presidency with the final PROMISE partner meeting.

9 April, Stockholm: Estonian delegation visits the CBSS and Barnahus Stockholm.

23-26 April, Stockholm: PROMISE 1 Audit.

7-8 May, Riga: Children at Risk Expert Group Meeting.

13-14 May, Strasbourg: Presenting recommendations on implementing the ban against corporal punishment to the Council of Europe/ CAHENF-VAC.

16-17 May, Strasbourg: Presenting the Barnahus model to the Council of Europe regional project End Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

27-28 May, Dubrovnik: Final partner meeting in ProGuard.

13-14 June, Cyprus: PROMISE presentation to a national group, promoting the Barnahus model.

Annex 1: Achievements and challenges – 20 year with CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk

By political decision in 1998, the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) initiated regional cooperation activities implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Member states have for 20 years shared knowledge, models and good practices. With the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk as the hub of cooperation, the region has developed ground-breaking research on young people's attitudes to sexual behaviour and online risk-taking behaviour. Furthermore, the Expert Group has developed the European Barnahus Movement, guidance to support the implementation of laws against violence, a child-rights and system-based approach to audit and monitor child welfare facilities and guidelines to promote the human rights and best interests of children in transnational situations.

The Expert Group's Regional Strategy for Cooperation on Children at Risk is based on these achievements. It has a future oriented approach and continues the good work implemented thus far. The Regional Strategy supports the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its target to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and violence against children.

Post 2020 and up to 2030, the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk intends to continue the work to end violence against children by highlighting the lifelong impact on children of sexual violence and exploitation, trafficking and other forms of violence and the correlated substantial costs for the society. While the Expert Group will maintain its focus on the Baltic Sea Region, it will continue to encourage cooperation and sharing of experience with other regions.

A significant development in the fields of education, health and social welfare 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 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. To fulfil the vision of the Baltic Sea Region as a violence-free zone for children, the Expert Group highlights key learning from recent years as important for future work:

- Listening to the child
- Rapid follow-up of signs of harm in a responsible and confidential manner
- Tailor made support to the child and the family
- Investment in early childhood education and care
- Taking children's recommendations into account for the development of preventive strategies and interventions
- Promoting the inclusion of children from a diversity of backgrounds and situations
- Integrated strategies with comprehensive and sustainable measures

The history

The Council of the Baltic Sea States decided already in 1997 that the CBSS should work to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. At the 1998 Summit in Riga, the Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers supported CBSS initiated cooperation activities on children at risk, which firmly established the regional work and commitment to protect children at risk under the auspices of CBSS. In 2002, the CBSS Senior Officials established the Expert Group as a formal group of the CBSS and the Children at Risk Unit as part of the Secretariat.

The CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk has through its history addressed areas of common interest, including transnational issues relevant to all member States, by engaging ministries and national agencies, ombudsmen for children, academia, organisations, as well as children.

Today, the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk is acknowledged as a notable actor at the national and regional levels and by the Council of Europe, the EU and the United Nations. The Expert Group will continue to renew itself by listening to the cooperating partners, including children, and strengthen its role in the Baltic Sea Region - as a model region.

Annex 2: List of Statements to the 20th Anniversary Celebration of the CBSS Children at Risk Cooperation

Denmark: Participation in the Expert Group Children at Risk has been and continues to be very useful for Denmark. Its value lies in part as a forum for sharing the different approaches and the knowledge the countries accumulate in relation to one of the most vulnerable groups in our societies – the children at risk. And in part as creating a network across the countries in the region which can be useful in other contexts as well.

Estonia: As a result of expert support from CBSS Estonia has experienced considerable improvements with noticing and providing child friendly services to sexually abused children. Today we have integrated Barnahus in Estonia and the service is available state wise.

Finland: Sharing the experiences, development and visions for the future is valuable. We can learn from each other and promote the knowledge-based development. Together we can be stronger than countries alone.

Germany: The CBSS expert group “Children at Risk” has provided important impulses for our work in the area of child protection. In addition, the group has become a vital part of our international network which proved to be very helpful not only in the context of the Baltic region. It is impressive to see what the group has accomplished over the last two decades and what a difference committed people can make.

Iceland: Regarding the value of the expert group such regional work is extremely important for a small nation like Iceland as the venue gathers and exchanges information on best practices, changes in policies and legal frameworks in the region. That information helps the other countries to evolve and better their systems and services for children all around the region.

For Iceland the work of the Expert Group on Children at Risk has been vital to the spread of the Barnahus concept internationally, not only to the region but to Europe as a whole. The Agency feels that the Expert Group has been instrumental in introducing the Barnahus model and has been an integral part of the spread of Barnahus internationally.

Latvia: Latvia highly appreciates the opportunity to be part of the international cooperation the Council of the Baltic Sea States and the Expert Group on Children at Risk has facilitated so well. The endeavours of the expert group are remarkable. The work of the expert group has resulted in many fruitful multilateral collaborations reaching over the Baltic Sea Region. The fruitful work of the expert group has promoted impetus to innovative approaches enhancing the wellbeing and safety of children in the region. Special gratitude must be addressed to the creative and very committed team of the Council of the Baltic Sea States Children at Risk Unit ensuring effective coordination of the expert group’s work.

Lithuania: CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk is a great value for the local and regional cooperation and sharing good practice of children’s rights. Expert group activity aims, and task are picture of the most important child rights issues of the countries. Raising Child rights issues at international level as violence, corporal punishment against children, alternative care, human trafficking and family and children support create opportunities to improve national Child rights protection system. Important to note, that group work through cooperation, project implementation, experts meeting, seminars and etc. has affects to Child rights policy making in the Baltic Sea region.

During 20 years of the group activity has been involved different professionals – experts, which are value of the group.

Congratulations on the Expert Group 20th anniversary! Best wishes for the coming 20 years and more!

Norway: The cooperation on children at risk within the CBSS has been of great value. Sharing information and learning about the countries' different policies, perhaps even adopting some elements at home is one thing, but networking and the understanding of each other's positions, should not be underestimated. This has proven to be especially valuable in regard to transnational child protection cases.

Poland: Projects carried out by the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk, being of a more local and regional nature, can better identify problems occurring in its member states, and then indicate possible paths of their solution, also adapted to the specificity of our countries. Non-governmental organisations and other institutions, whose statutory tasks include the issues of children's rights, are also involved in the implementation of projects. What is more, the opportunity to not only learn the social policy systems of other countries but, above all, the chance to get to know new solutions and ways of dealing with social problems similar in essence and challenges of the modern world is extremely valuable. This aspect of the exchange of good practices is an exceptional added value of participation in the Group. Inspirations which I draw from meetings and exchanges of views on children's rights result in the possibility of proposing interesting solutions also at the national level.

Undoubtedly, an added value is also the activity of the CBSS Secretariat, with Ms Turid Heiberg as the Head of the Children at Risk Unit, which is operating very efficiently, enabling smooth communication between individual participants of the Group.

Russian Federation: One of the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk unique values is that it brings all countries of the Baltic Sea Region together on an equal footing. It allows for an exchange of the best practices and expert opinions in the field of children protection – the field that we all prioritise in our countries, just as it provides a reliable platform for strengthening broader international cooperation and mutual understanding between the CBSS member states.

Sweden: The regional work within CBSS and the expert group Children at Risk increases the possibility to identify common challenges and sharing experiences. This collaboration promotes activities based on the best available knowledge. Together we can find relevant activities and priorities that give a greater impact on the protection of the rights of the child.

We are looking forward to the upcoming years of work within the CBSS Expert group on Children at Risk with the aim to find joint actions that contribute to better support and protection of all children in the region.

Nordic Council of Ministers' Office in Latvia: Dear CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk! Thank you for the good co-operation for children's best during 2016-2018! It was good to observe Baltic and Nordic professionals and civil servants from municipal and governmental institutions and non-governmental organisations engaged in lively professional discussions. Many of them acknowledged that the networking seminars enriched them professionally.

Congratulations on your 20th anniversary! All the best for the coming 20 years and more!