



Mandate July 2020 - June 2025

Vision & Mission

The *vision* of the Children at Risk Expert Group for the Baltic Sea region (BSR) is that of a **region where children¹ enjoy their rights as recognised in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.**

Our vision is an integral part of the CBSS overall vision for the Baltic Sea region and forms an important contribution to the achievement of the CBSS long-term priorities.

In our vision, effective **national child protection systems offer comprehensive prevention, protection and support, thereby providing equal opportunities for all children to grow, develop and thrive free from all forms of violence².**

In our vision, **each child has equal opportunities and is offered meaningful opportunities for participation and active involvement** in building a prosperous, safe and secure region for all.

The *mission* of the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk is to contribute to the fulfilment of our vision for children by **promoting children's rights and bolstering national child protection systems**, including legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect children from all forms of violence, through regional dialogue and practical cooperation.

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

The mandate is complemented by a Regional Strategy for Cooperation on Children at Risk.

The role of the Expert Group on Children at Risk

The role of the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk embraces the two fundamental pillars of CBSS – **political dialogue** between States and **practical cooperation based on tangible projects.**

The Expert Group on Children at Risk will act as **convenor, driver, initiator, coordinator and facilitator** to stimulate dialogue and exchange on cross-border concerns, to develop and nurture strategic partnerships and to contribute to the development and implementation of tangible projects.

The Expert Group works closely with representatives from national authorities, civil society, international and regional organisations, professionals, academia and engages in close cooperation with other units at the CBSS Secretariat.

¹ Child is here defined according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), meaning any person aged under 18 years.

² Violence is here defined according to the UNCRC, article 19 “all forms of physical and mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation and sexual abuse”.

We convene **national, regional and global actors** to exchange information on emerging, developing and ongoing initiatives, to explore joint opportunities and to engage key stakeholders in practical projects. This work effectively contributes to ensuring that potential overlaps are transformed into helpful synergies, trusted partnerships and joint and harmonised action.

Our work draws on, and contributes to relevant **legal and policy frameworks, authoritative guidance, ethical and safe data collection and the voices of children and youth**. We take note of relevant global, regional and the Expert Group members' national **agendas, goals and strategies**³, to ensure strategic direction, complementarity and added value in achieving global, regional and national commitments to children.

The Expert Group commits to ensure that **child participation**⁴ is a cross-cutting priority in all our work. During this mandate, the Expert Group will promote and explore concrete methodologies for ethical and meaningful child participation in the context our work, promoting the inclusion of children, including children who are marginalised and/or particularly vulnerable.

In playing our role, the expert group supports awareness-raising to promote positive attitudes, norms and values to safeguard the rights of children. The expert group furthermore promotes integrated strategies, including sustainable measures that have been demonstrated to contribute to real positive change in the lives of children at risk:

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

Members of the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk

The CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk consists of one senior representative appointed by the ministry responsible for children's issues in each member state of the Council of the Baltic Sea States. The European Commission, as a member of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, may also appoint a member to the group.

Expert Group Chair and Vice-Chair

The Expert Group follows the CBSS Presidency rotation scheme and appoints a chairperson and a vice-chairperson accordingly for a period of one year. Only member states that pay their financial contribution to the CAR may assume their scheduled presidency of the group.

The Chair and Vice-chair decide together on relevant day-to-day issues and advise the Children at Risk Unit when to notify all the members of the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk for their opinion about principal and urgent issues.

³ For example the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals; the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region; the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child; the Nordic Council of Ministers cross-sectoral strategy on children and young people and; relevant Council of Europe documents adopted by all CBSS Member States.

⁴ UNCRC Article 12, para 1 recognises that "States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child."

The Chair approves the agenda and chairs the meetings of the Expert Group. The Chair shall be briefed by the Secretariat about the content of the topics to be presented in the Expert Group meetings. The Chair hosts the Expert Group meetings, including providing venue and catering, and facilitates agreements with the hotel and other practical issues.

The Chair is consulted on the agenda of public meetings organised by the Expert Group. Unless otherwise decided, the Chair opens and chairs public meetings.

The Children at Risk Unit at the CBSS Secretariat

The agreed strategy and annual work plans are executed by the Children at Risk Unit (CAR Unit) within the Permanent International Secretariat of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, under the guidance of the Expert Group.

The CAR Unit provides secretarial and professional support to the Expert Group, builds and nurtures strategic partnerships, drafts relevant documents and reports, and develops and executes projects.

The CAR Unit keeps the Chair informed about major developments in the ongoing projects, new project and funding opportunities and alerts the Chair to other principal and urgent issues.

Expert Group Meetings

The members of the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk meet face-to-face at least twice a year. The expert group meetings are facilitated and moderated by the Expert Group chair. Expert Group members may be accompanied by national experts or other representatives when relevant to the agenda and the topics discussed, if participation is announced prior to the meeting and accepted by the Chair. Conference call/Online meetings between face-to-face meetings may be organised exceptionally if necessary and approved by the Chair.

The Expert Group meetings are the principal fora for adopting decisions relating to the strategy, annual work plans, budget, projects and other relevant issues. The Expert Group takes decision by consensus. Decisions about substantial matters and new projects are to be formally noted as decisions in the minutes from the Expert Group meetings and recorded in the Plan of Action. The silent procedure approach is to be applied in-between the Expert Group meetings for decisions regarding principal and urgent issues, including new projects.

The key purpose of the expert group meetings is to facilitate exchange on national and regional child protection concerns and solutions. Each Expert Group meeting may feature presentations, discussions and field visits on a specific topic, determined and organised by the Chair.

Expert Group meetings normally include a Tour de Table where the country representatives present recent national developments and country-specific information related to the priorities established by the Regional Strategy for Cooperation on Children at Risk. This presentation should include information from national agencies and resource persons and other organisations and institutions as relevant. Bullet points are to be handed over to the Children at Risk Unit, who will place the information on the CAR SharePoint for easy reference.

At the meeting, the Secretariat presents updates and reports on the implementation of the annual work plans, projects, the budget and other relevant issues.

Tasks of the Expert Group Members

The members of the Expert Group are to consult on a regular basis with the policy and administrative level of the Ministry responsible for children's issues and inform about the achievements of the Expert Group, of issues of interest in the different CBSS member countries and the advantages of regional cooperation.

Furthermore, the Expert Group members are to inform the CBSS CSO's and other relevant Ministries as well as relevant stakeholders in society regarding the work of the Expert Group on Children at Risk. Where appropriate, the Expert Group members are encouraged to establish, informally or formally, a small network of resource persons in Ministries and other relevant State agencies with whom the member should regularly consult. The network should ideally include units and ministries dealing with the priority issues of the Expert Group.

If capacity allows and when there is an interest of the Member State, the Expert Group members are to inform the Children at Risk Unit about important issues relevant to the regional strategy and priorities and assist the CAR Unit in identifying national experts and partners who should be included in projects or in other activities carried out by the Children at Risk Unit.

National engagement by the Expert Group members in the Expert Groups project activities is conducted on a voluntary basis.

Regional Strategy and Priorities

A Regional Strategy and Priorities are developed every 5 years. This is communicated to the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) of the Council of the Baltic Sea States.

Each year, the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk develops an annual work plan, an annual budget and an annual report.

The Regional strategy shall be based on previous, ongoing and emerging work with a clear focus on the added value of the Expert group in promoting children's rights and national child protection systems by means of regional collaboration. The annual work plans shall contain concrete activities and progress indicators to support the implementation of the strategy.

The Expert group shall develop broad and strategic partnerships to implement the strategy and make every effort to involve children in planning, consultation and implementation as appropriate.

Funding and resources

Member states of the Council of the Baltic Sea States contribute financially to the work of the Expert Group and the secretariat functions. Contributions are calculated using the key as that used by the Council of the Baltic Sea States. The 7 larger member states each contribute 12% of the budgeted costs, and the 4 smaller countries each contribute 4%. The accounts are audited yearly, with the report available in April/May each year.

The Children at Risk Unit continuously explores possibilities and applies for external funding for projects relevant to the Regional Strategy in accordance with the CBSS Principles and Guidelines for Fundraising.

The member state hosting the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk meetings bears the costs of the meeting. The participants cover their travel and accommodation expenses.

Transparency

Reports and updated information about the work and activities from the work of the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk are publicly available on the website: www.childrenatrisk.eu (www.cbss.org).

The Children at Risk Unit reports on its meetings and activities regularly to the Expert Group, including at each Expert Group meeting. The Expert Group's Sharepoint site stores important documents for internal information.

The Children at Risk Unit updates the CBSS common calendar with events and meetings and contributes to CBSS reports and updates that are made available to the CSO.

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

Adopted 9 June 2020