



Children and Youth Advisory Board for the PROMISE – TRM Project

Methodology for ethical, safe and meaningful
participation



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Methodology for ethical, safe and meaningful participation

A child participation methodology covering safeguarding and ethical, meaningful participation of -18 years old, to be used for the organisation and execution of the child and youth advisory board.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

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|-------------|---------------------------------------|
| BSR | Baltic Sea Region |
| CBSS | Council of the Baltic Sea States |
| CRC | Convention on the Rights of the Child |
| FOCUS GROUP | Children and Youth Advisory Board |
| NGO | Non-governmental Organization |
| TRM | Transnational Referral Mechanism |
| ToR | Terms of Reference |
| UN | United Nations |

Key Terms and Definitions

For the purpose of this Methodology, the following definitions are used:

A **child** is any person under the age of 18 years¹.

Child protection refers to preventing and responding to violence, exploitation and abuse against children, including sexual exploitation, trafficking, child labor and harmful traditional practices. (UNICEF, 2006).

A **Children and Youth Advisory Board** (alternatively known as Children and Youth Advisory Group or Children and Youth Advisory Council) is a group of children and young people who provide counsel and support to organisations and governing bodies and create and participate in a variety of projects and initiatives. (GenerationOn, no date: 9).

A **trafficked child** is any person under eighteen who is recruited, transported, transferred, harbored or received for the purpose of exploitation, either within or outside a country, even if no element of coercion, deception, abuse of authority or any other form of abuse is used. (Haldorsson et al, 2007).

Trafficking in persons is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. (IOM, 2019).²

Youth/Young persons are persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years. (UNESCO, no date).

Background and introduction

In 2022, the CBSS with partners embarked on a project aimed to address trafficking in children named “Child Specific Referral Mechanisms and Multidisciplinary Collaboration – Responding to COVID-19 trends through securing a safe pathway to justice, protection and assistance for child victims of trafficking” (Promise TRM).

¹ Art.1, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

² The definition is based on Article 3 of the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*.

Building on the current Baltic Transnational Referral Mechanisms ('TRM') for trafficked persons set up in 2018, the project seeks to facilitate child-friendly justice and safe pathways to recovery and durable solutions for child victims, by strengthening mechanisms for referral within and between countries in the Baltic Sea Region ('BSR') and by promoting multidisciplinary and inter-agency models (Barnahus) that provide a comprehensive approach to justice, protection, and recovery.

Child and youth participation is a central element of the project and involves setting up a child and youth advisory board consisting of representatives from the Baltic Sea Region. The role of the advisory board is to provide input and advice on project activities and outputs.

The present methodology guides the establishment and operation of the focus group, including principles for ethical and meaningful participation, safeguarding and the focus group's envisaged engagement with the Promise TRM project. It should be read together with the CBSS Guidelines on setting up a Children's Advisory Board³, the Promise Child Safeguarding policy⁴, the CBSS Child safeguarding policy⁵ and Guidance on the use of photos⁶.

Underlying Principles and Approach

The establishment and operation of the focus group must be fully grounded in children's rights as enshrined by the United Nations ('UN') Convention on the Rights of the Child ('CRC'). The four general principles underpinning the CRC (best interests; life, survival and development; non-discrimination; and participation) are at the core of any intervention with and for children and young people when planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the focus group in any aspect and related activity.

Article 12 of the CRC establishes the right of children to express their views freely in all matters affecting the child, his/her views being given due weight in accordance with his/her age and maturity. This provision and principle have been elaborated on in the General Comment on Article 12 produced by the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The General Comment includes nine basic requirements for the implementation of the right of the child to be heard, in relation to the nature and features of child participation, which shall guide the establishment and operation of the focus group:

³ <https://childrenatrisk.cbss.org/publications/guidelines-setting-up-a-child-advisory-board-at-the-council-of-the-baltic-sea-states/>

⁴ https://childrenatrisk.cbss.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2024/05/Child-Safeguarding-Policy_EN.pdf

⁵ <https://childrenatrisk.cbss.org/publications/cbss-child-safeguarding-policy/>

⁶ <https://childrenatrisk.cbss.org/publications/guidance-on-the-use-of-photos-of-children/>

1. **Transparent and informative.** Children and youth should clearly understand that they have a right to be heard, and that their opinions will be taken into account and valued. Transparency also means that participants are fully informed about the purpose of their involvement, and how this will take place. Background information that they should receive include: the Project, the implementing partners, the concepts of trafficking in human beings, child protection, and any other related terminology.
2. **Voluntary.** Children and young persons should be aware that their participation is voluntary, and that they always have a choice as to whether to participate or not. They should know that they can opt out of the process at any time, and how to go about doing so.
3. **Respectful.** The views and opinions of every child and young person should be heard and valued. No participant should be humiliated or exposed to harm as a consequence of their participation, and each of them should feel free to express themselves without fear of discrimination.
4. **Relevant.** Children and young persons should be enabled to understand why the issues that the Project seeks to address are relevant to them, and why their views and contributions are being sought. They should be enabled to understand both the relevance and the limitations of their participation and should be given the opportunity to identify themselves the issues that they believe are most important – in the broader framework of the Project aims and activities.
5. **Child-friendly.** Children and youth should feel welcomed. Activities should be entertaining and engaging and should promote children's confidence in speaking out. Working methods should take into account the level of maturity, evolving capacities, age, diversity and capabilities of all participants. Meeting times and places should be suitable, accessible and friendly for children and youth. In the case of online meetings, children and youth should receive easy-to-follow instructions. Technology (possession of or ability to use devices) should never become an obstacle to participation for any of the children and young people involved (see below).
6. **Inclusive.** All children and youth have the right to participate without discrimination and risk of stigmatisation. Methods, approaches, languages and arrangements should encourage and facilitate the participation of each individual in line with his/her age, maturity, gender, and any other personal characteristics. Existing patterns of discrimination, power and status imbalances and cultural sensitivities should be taken into account and proactively addressed.
7. **Supported by training.** Participation has to be facilitated by professionals who are trained and equipped to work effectively with children. Moreover,

children and young persons themselves should have access to training that is aimed to support them in acquiring new relevant knowledge and skills throughout the process.

8. Safe and sensitive to risk. Each participant shall be protected from any form of violence, abuse, exploitation, or any other risk that may arise from getting involved in the initiative. Risks should be anticipated and mitigated. Child safeguarding policies and procedures shall be in place, and be understood by all staff involved (see below). Children and youth have to be informed about the fact that all considerations in relation to their safety have been taken into account and addressed. Opportunities and risks related to participation should be illustrated clearly to participants. Expectations should be openly shared by both sides and discussed.
9. Accountable. Children and youth should be kept up-to-date about the ways in which their contributions have been used to advice, inform or influence processes and developments. A system to monitor their participation should be in place, and children should be informed about the outcomes of their participation – included any unintended and/or negative ones.

(Adapted from: Save the Children, 2021: 3-11).

Child safeguarding

Creating a safe environment is central to child participation. The establishment and operation of the focus group must adhere to the Promise Child safeguarding policy, the CBSS Child safeguarding policy and Photo policy and the CBSS Guidelines on setting up a Children's Advisory Board.

An essential component of supporting meaningful participation is the creation of safe and comfortable spaces where children feel able and willing to speak about their views, experiences and ideas, free from any form of discrimination, harm or shame. Creating spaces such as these empowers them not only to exercise their right to participate but also allows them to become aware of their other rights including their rights to respect, safety, protection and freedom from discrimination.⁷

The following key considerations, which are further elaborated on in the CBSS Guidelines on setting up a Children's Advisory Board must be considered in the context of the project:

⁷ Guidelines on setting up a child advisory board (CBSS 2023), page 5
<https://childrenatrisk.cbss.org/publications/guidelines-setting-up-a-child-advisory-board-at-the-council-of-the-baltic-sea-states/>

- All partners and staff involved in the Promise TRM project must adhere to the project safeguarding policy.
- CBSS staff and other persons who engage with the focus group must be aware of child safeguarding and know how to implement safeguarding in practice. Staff must be supported in their role.
- Special consideration must be put in place for vulnerable children and youth and ensuring sensitivity to cultural diversity.
- Children and youth should be involved in safeguarding and not be merely passive objects to safeguarding measures.
- Special procedures must be put in place to ensure informed consent.
- The privacy and data of all children and young people involved in the focus group must be protected.
- Safeguarding measures must be clearly communicated including in child friendly and accessible ways.
- A risk assessment must be carried out for participation in the end conference, and a child safeguarding responsible must be appointed. Children must be accompanied by a chaperon.
- All incidents and suspicions of harm against children in the context of the project must be reported in accordance with the Promise TRM child safeguarding policy.

Establishing the focus group

The following criteria, drawing on the CBSS Guidelines on setting up a child advisory board should be considered to the largest extent possible in establishing the focus group:

- Age group 16-29
- Gender balance
- Diversity
- Language
- Geographical representation
- Interest, experience, and motivation
- Capacity to engage in the focus group online, and to travel to the end conference
- Sustainability of the group
- Links to a broader child protection agenda

All participation is based on informed consent. To become members of the focus group, participants below 18 years old should have permission from parents or guardians.

The Council of the Baltic Sea States coordinates a series of youth working groups and focus groups to improve the political impact of young people on decision-making in the Baltic Sea Region.

To ensure access to youth in the Baltic Sea Region and promote sustainability of the advisory board, a decision was made to set up the group as a CBSS Baltic Sea youth focus group on child protection with a specific focus on the Promise TRM project objectives and outputs, during the project.⁸

The recruitment of children and youth to the group shall therefore follow the established procedure to solicit interest and appoint representatives to the youth working groups facilitated by the CBSS.

This procedure involves issuing an open call on the CBSS website to express interest in joining the focus group. The call is open for approximately 1 month, and is part of an open call to join a wide variety of different Baltic Sea Youth Working Groups, including a security working group and a working group on culture.

Applications will be open for children and young people aged 16-29 years old, who are interested in child protection and/or transnational cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region, including all CBSS member states and other states such as Ukraine.

Participation in the Promise TRM end conference will be opened to a broader audience, and a separate process will be set up to invite and prepare children and young people to participate and contribute to the conference. This involves issuing a call for expression of interest to participate and contribute to the conference. The call will be opened to children and young persons who are residents or nationals of CBSS member states between 16-29 years old. Members of the focus group will be prioritised if spaces must be limited.

The focus group will have one or several adult facilitators from the CBSS Children at Risk Unit. The Facilitator should give the focus group members guidance and mentorship, while allowing them to have autonomy and ownership of their activities.

The tasks of the adult facilitator(s) include:

- Ensure that the principles and considerations in this methodology are upheld at all times, with a specific priority to child safeguarding.
- Organise and facilitate activities.
- Empower and inspire the focus group members to actively engage.
- Ensure that each member can participate on their terms.

⁸ <https://cbss.org/youth/working-groups/>

- Keep the work of the group on track.
- Facilitating child and youth participation in the Promise TRM end conference, including the preparatory meeting.
- Acting as the child safeguarding officer in the Promise TRM end conference.

Role and Activities

The key role of the focus group in the context of this project is to provide perspectives and ideas on how the project outputs can be made more child friendly, relevant, appropriate and adapted to children.

The CBSS shall, together with project partners and the focus group propose and organise opportunities to learn about the Promise TRM project and to provide feedback and input to the project activities and outputs.

Key activities include:

- An orientation session (online)
- Online meetings on Promise TRM mechanisms, tools and outputs, including a learning agenda, through which the focus group learns about different aspects of child trafficking, and opportunities to share their perspectives on the deliverables of the project.
- Preparatory meetings (online and in person) for the Promise TRM end conference.
- Attending the Promise TRM end conference.

Through a series of meetings and consultations, children and youth will also be encouraged and guided to produce a statement, which will be launched at the Promise TRM end conference and will be widely disseminated to relevant audiences and stakeholders through the Project's communication channels.

Guiding principles

While participation in the focus can offer unique opportunities to children and young people, the demands of the focus group could place pressure on them at some stages. They can experience stress in relation to the different tasks they committed to, and/or added and excessive responsibility for the people they are trying to help (children at risk or victims of trafficking, namely). Some members could also feel guilty because they have been afforded this opportunity whilst other peers have not.

The focus group facilitator will be appointed to plan, communicate with, and support the members of the group. The facilitator must always keep communication open with children and youth and is responsible to ensure that the following considerations are central to planning and executing the activities:

- The activities must be meaningful, ethical, inclusive, and feasible in terms of frequency and participation.
- Realistic expectations from partners and the focus group members about activities.
- The focus group members' time and willingness to participate must always guide the type, format, frequency, and agenda of the activities.
- Planning of activities will take into consideration the focus group availability and be communicated in good time.
- All participation is voluntary and based on informed consent and can be ended at any time.
- All activities will be planned with respect to the participants' willingness to undertake them, and their availability vis a vis school and other ongoing commitments they have.

In implementing the activities, it is important to identify the core values to be upheld. These are important points that help set the foundation for a respectful and productive climate in the focus. The adult facilitator shall help children and youth to identify values collaboratively, and to understand what really matters to them, and how individuals in the group are going to interact with each other and feel safe, valued and comfortable.

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Implementing the Barnahus Quality Standards throughout Europe

A series of PROMISE projects supports Europe to adopt the Barnahus model as a standard practice for providing child victims and witnesses of violence rapid access to justice, protection, and recovery. We undertake this work to fulfil the vision of a Europe where all children enjoy their right to be protected from violence.

A Barnahus provides multidisciplinary and interagency collaboration to ensure that child victims and witnesses of violence benefit from a child-friendly, professional and effective response in a safe environment that prevents (re)traumatisation. With the formal support from national authorities, our initiatives provide opportunities to translate national commitment into action and engage internationally in the process. In addition, regular networking and strategic communications continually activate our growing network of professionals and stakeholders who are committed to introducing and expanding Barnahus services nationally.

The first phase of PROMISE projects (2015-2017) set European standards and engaged a broad network of professionals. The second phase (2017-2019) promoted national level progress towards meeting the standards and formalised the PROMISE Barnahus Network. The third phase (2020-2023) delivered University level training and case management tools, established a European Competence Centre for Barnahus, and is taking steps toward an accreditation system for Barnahus. Ongoing projects focus on specific themes, responding to the needs for data, tools, and competence building as expressed by Barnahus staff and their stakeholders around Europe.

Learn more at www.barnahus.eu and www.childrenatrisk.cbss.org



