

Building Trust and Resilience: Child Protection Systems in the Baltic Sea Region

The Council of the Baltic Sea States (cbss.org) is an intergovernmental political forum for regional cooperation. Consisting of 11 Member States (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia & Sweden) and the European Union, it supports a regional perspective on global challenges. The CBSS supports a global perspective on regional problems in our three long-term priorities: Regional Identity, Sustainable & Prosperous Region, Safe & Secure Region. Children at Risk is a flagship priority under the area of Save & Secure region, implemented by the Children at Risk Expert Group with the support of the Children at Risk Unit at the CBSS Secretariat in Stockholm.

The CBSS Children at Risk expert group (childrenatrisk.cbss.org) vision for the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) is that of a Region where children enjoy the full range human rights as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), including effective national child protection systems that offer comprehensive prevention, protection, and support, providing equal opportunities for all children to grow, develop and thrive free from all forms of violence. The mission of the Children at Risk Expert Group is to promote children's rights and to bolster national child protection systems, including legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect children from all forms of violence, maltreatment and neglect through regional dialogue and practical cooperation.

The expert group supports awareness-raising to promote positive attitudes, norms and values to safeguard the rights of children. The expert group places specific emphasis on child participation in all settings, including promoting strategies and action that engage children and their caregivers in shaping prevention and early intervention. The expert group furthermore promotes integrated strategies, including sustainable measures that have been demonstrated to contribute to real positive change in the lives of children at risk:

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

The core strategic area and priority of the CAR Expert Group is to promote and facilitate regional exchange on key issues of concern to the CAR Expert Group Members with the purpose of identifying and promoting actions to strengthen national child protection systems. The key priorities between 2020-2025 in this area include carrying out a mapping of national child protection systems and good/ promising practice in the Baltic Sea Region to establish a Regional registry of good practice and practical, administrative and legal solutions to strengthen national child protection systems.

To support implementation of this priority the expert group, under the leadership of our current Presidency and Chair, Norway, is seeking an experienced researcher/team of researchers to carry out a comprehensive mapping of child protection systems in the Baltic Sea Region.

Purpose of Child Protection Mapping

The overall objective of the mapping is to identify and document key elements and practice of well-functioning, accessible and resilient child protection systems that are adequately structured and equipped to function to protect children, including in periods of crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic. The results of the mapping are expected to contribute to:

- A collective understanding of national child protection systems in the region.
- Mutual trust among child protection systems and actors in the region.
- A systematic approach to documenting good practice and core elements of inclusive, sustainable, and resilient national child protection systems, in regional registry of good practice.

The mapping is an integral part of the key priority of the CAR Strategy 2020-2025 and is a key deliverable in a joint project, funded by the CBSS Project Support Facility, which is led by Norway, with the participation of Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland and Lithuania.

Focus and scope of the mapping

The project will develop a research framework, drawing on CAR cross-cutting priorities and internationally recognised elements of strong and sustainable child protection systems, including for example:

Legal and regulatory framework – implementation and enforcement

- What laws exist on protecting children against different forms of harm?
- How does the implementation and enforcement & accountability mechanisms impact on the child protection systems and their ability to reach and protect children? Have there been any concerns and good practice solutions during the crisis?

National Strategies and coordination mechanisms

- What national strategies and coordination mechanisms exist? Have there been any specific concerns that have surfaced and what good practice solutions to challenges during the crisis in terms of coordination have been identified?
- How has the crisis impacted on the implementation of national strategies, and what good practice measures have been taken to mitigate the effect of the crisis on implementation?

Norms, attitudes, and values

A key element of the research will be to look at how the understanding of children as rightsholders, and the perception on what constitutes the principle “the best interest of the child” (article 3 of the UN convention).

- How does the perception impact on the strategies and practice of child protection actors?
- What is the perception of different forms of violence against children, such as physical and humiliating punishment of children; gender-based violence; harmful practices, honour-related violence; the capacity and rights of child victims and witnesses of violence, and how does it impact on practice and protection?

Safe Environments

- What measures are taken to protect children in their family, community and schools, and online? How are children involved?

- How has the crisis impacted on the ability of the systems to provide children with safe environments and what good practice and strategic elements have contributed to this?

Parent and Caregiver support

- What measures exist to provide parent and caregiver support, including for example non-violent and positive parenting, early childhood caregiver engagement and support and parent/guardian understanding and supervision of adolescents as well as parental cooperation in e.g. divorce. How has the crisis impacted on the delivery of such support? Have there been any specific concerns that have surfaced and what good practice solutions to challenges during the crisis have been identified?

State Support – income and economic strengthening

- What measures exist to support families in need and to address child poverty?
- How has the crisis impacted on State support and what measures and good practice have been identified to ensure continued support, identification of vulnerable families, allocation of support etc.

Preventive, response and support services

Services play a crucial role in child protection.

- What services and practice for prevention and early Intervention; multidisciplinary and interagency services for victims; individual assessments; and child participation?
- How do the countries in the BSR ensure committed and aware workforce?
- How has the crisis impacted on these services and what measures and good practice have been identified to mitigate the negative effect of the crisis for inclusive, accessible, high quality services to children, in particular those hard to reach and the most vulnerable children?

Education and life skills

- How does the child protection system contribute to education and life skills? What measures and strategies exist to prevent and address out of school, mental health, alcohol and drugs, teenage pregnancy, and early marriage?
- How has the crisis impacted on the implementation and reach of the measures and what good practice had been identified to mitigate the negative effect of the crisis especially for those who are hard to reach and the most vulnerable children?

Child participation

- How are children involved in developing and implementing measures and strategies?
- What specific measures are in place in the child protection systems to enable children's participation?
- How has the crisis impacted on children's opportunities to participate in terms of space, voice, audience and influence? What measures and good practice has been implemented to ensure children's participation during the crisis?

Transnational collaboration and exchange

- Which transnational mechanisms exist in the region to facilitate exchange and collaboration in transborder child protection cases? Has the crisis had an impact on the potential transnational mechanisms and the collaboration, exchange between countries in the region?

Child welfare system organisation

It may also be relevant to explore whether systems are centralized or decentralized.

- How are systems organized and set up across the Region and how does that impact on reach, accessibility, sustainability, and resilience?
- What are the enabling and hindering factors in the different types of systems? Have there been any concerns and good practice solutions during the crisis?
- How does the child protection system interact or complement other welfare services for children and caregivers?
- What are the key challenges that are inherent to the way that child protection systems are set up and work, and how does that impact on children and caregivers?

Each element will be examined considering the UNCRC general principles (non-discrimination, best interests, the right to survival and development and child participation). Specific attention will be given to the most vulnerable and hardest to reach children. Other key areas of concern to the expert group include alternative care, children with disabilities, children in migration, poverty/social exclusion and parenting and caregiver support.

Role of the Consultant(s)

The Children at Risk Expert group is seeking an experienced researcher, or team of researchers, who will carry out a mapping of child protection systems in six countries: Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Lithuania and Norway.

With a specific emphasis on the cross-cutting priorities of the Expert Group on Children at Risk identified in the [CBSS Children at Risk Strategy 2020-2025](#), the consultant will:

- Develop a mapping/research framework drawing on internationally agreed elements of well-functioning and resilient child protection systems, including INSPIRE, and the core elements identified by the Children at Risk expert group.
- Map key elements of national child protection systems in the Baltic Sea Region, in six countries: Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Lithuania and Norway, including through desk research (e.g. law, policy, procedures, coordination mechanisms, organisation set up etc) and focus group consultations with national experts.
- Organise and facilitate participatory and qualitative focus group consultations in close collaboration with national partners and the CBSS Children at Risk Unit. The focus group consultation will gather and analyse relevant data and findings which will inform the consultants mapping and research.
- Identify good practice and strategic elements that contribute to inclusive, sustainable, and resilient child protection systems and, which have proven fundamental to ensuring inclusiveness and protection of most vulnerable societal groups in the BSR in a period of crisis (Covid-19).
- Identify specific crisis mechanisms that need to be deployed in times of crisis, including looking at the system and resources that need to be put in place so that child protection systems adapt and respond if a crisis occurs.
- Complete a country report including an overview of the key elements of the respective child protection systems in the six partner countries.
- Complete a comprehensive report, highlighting transferable good practice and strategic elements in the Baltic Sea Region, that contribute towards building inclusive, sustainable, and resilient national child protection systems, which, if needed, can adapt and respond quickly in times of crisis. The registry of good practice will importantly include good practice examples of transnational interactions between national child protection systems.
- Present the findings of the mapping in the project conference in a structured and comprehensive presentation.

- Contribute to the content of a registry of good practice hosted on the CBSS Children at Risk website, which will document key transferable good practice in close collaboration with national experts, technical experts and the CBSS Children at Risk Unit.
- Carry out all tasks in full compliance of the [CBSS Children at Risk Safeguarding Policy and Procedure](#).

Experience of Consultant(s)

- Minimum of 10 years' experience of research, analysis, data collection or similar work in a relevant area, preferably child protection or children's rights.
- Excellent analytical, communication and writing skills.
- Excellent organisational skills and an ability to plan and deliver on tasks in a timely manner.
- Excellent collaborative skills, including an ability to lead focus groups and harness knowledge.
- Excellent written and spoken English.
- A developed understanding of children's rights, child protection and child safeguarding

Partners

This project involves six partner countries in the Baltic Sea Region: Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Lithuania and Norway.

Each partner is expected to dedicate up to 10 days in-kind for national focal points who will: a) co-organise national focus groups with the international consultant; suggest experts to be invited to focus groups and bilateral interviews c) participate in focus groups (as relevant) d) provide information about relevant material e) contribute to national analysis and reports concerning their respective countries.

The Children at Risk Unit at the CBSS secretariat will support the partners and the consultant and will support the lead partner (Norway) with supervision of the consultant and management of the project.

Terms of the Agreement

This assignment is scheduled to start around 15 September 2021 and be completed by 15 July 2022.

Place of work

The Consultant will carry out most of the assignment at a place of the Consultant's discretion. In addition, the consultant will perform services using online platforms and telephone. The Consultant is expected to travel to the place of the final project conference, which will take place in June or July 2022.

Child Safeguarding

The CBSS Children at Risk Expert Group and the CBSS Secretariat is fully committed to keeping children we come in contact with through our work protected and safeguarded from actions that place them at risk of violence, abuse, exploitation, injury and any other harm. The CBSS Secretariat is committed to recruiting Consultants that are suited to apply strict child safeguarding practices. Background checks may apply.

To apply

Please send your (and your fellow consultants) CV(s) and a cover letter, including your quote for the assignment to Unni Nygaard (unni.nygaard@bufdir.no) and Olivia Lind Haldorsson (Olivia.lind.haldorsson@cbss.org) no later than **30 August 2021**. Please feel free to enclose examples of previous written work, including potential reports.