

Council of the Baltic Sea States

Task Force against Trafficking in Human Beings

Strategic Plan 2025-2030

The Council of the Baltic Sea States (hereinafter - CBSS) Task Force against Trafficking in Human Beings (hereinafter – TF-THB) Strategic Plan for 2025-2030 is a guiding instrument assisting the CBSS Member States in their joint efforts to counteract all forms of trafficking in human beings in the Baltic Sea Region.

The Strategic Plan outlines a vision for the work of the TF-THB together with Secretariat, contains:

- 1) Vision and Mission
- 2) Key principles
- 3) Strategic Objectives for the period 2025-2030
- 4) Implementation

Vision and Mission

Trafficking in human beings is actively combated in the Baltic Sea Region through continuous efforts to eliminate this crime and ensure the protection of vulnerable individuals. The States in the Region recognise the risk factors and vulnerabilities that facilitate human trafficking and are committed to disrupting criminal schemes, prosecuting and convicting perpetrators, and ensuring that victims are adequately protected and assisted. Frontline workers and professionals are trained to engage in effective cross-border and multi-agency collaboration.

The TF-THB plays a central role in launching anti-trafficking efforts across the Baltic Sea Region and promotes a united front against human trafficking, in cooperation with relevant government agencies, law enforcement, social services, and non-governmental organisations in the Member States. The TF-THB's strategy emphasises collaboration of the region with international partners.

The TF-THB enables practical multi-agency cooperation and the sharing of knowledge to prevent all forms of human trafficking. Its unique value lies in fostering an environment of intense dialogue, a pragmatic approach, and mutual assistance between the member states. With a cohesive strategy, a responsive Secretariat, and flexible members, the TF-THB swiftly adjusts its projects and priorities to respond to emerging challenges, for instance the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine resulting from the unprovoked Russian aggression.

Key principles

- **A Member State oriented cooperation**

The TF-THB is an enhanced cooperation of experts from the Member States facilitated by the TF-THB Unit at the CBSS Secretariat. The primary role of the Secretariat is to assist the Member States and presidencies in their efforts, and when relevant implementing projects and other activities that offer clear added value for the Member States, and to enhance collaborative anti-trafficking efforts in the Region. Cooperation under possible projects and other activities are meant for sharing knowledge on common trends and challenges and on that ground developing tools and establishing anti-trafficking responses in the Region which have meaningful benefits for several States.

- **Responding to developments in the Region**

The TF-THB will address human trafficking for all forms of exploitation in its cooperation. The approach will be agile and flexible to not only ensure allocated focus on the main human trafficking forms, but also new emerging forms of exploitation which might pose a threat to the individuals exploited as well as to our States and institutions. In this regard, the TF-THB may adapt its scope and focus in relation to current challenges and depending on for example geo-political and technological developments such as the surge of Artificial Intelligence (AI), migration flows, armed conflicts and other crises affecting the Region.

- **Innovative approach**

It is essential to identify new technologies, work methods and collaborative techniques in the modern anti-trafficking actions, just as we need to know how perpetrators use technology to commit trafficking crimes. Member states should be encouraged to share the latest experiences of using technology, AI and other innovations to prevent and react to human trafficking and related crimes. The goal is to share best practices, knowledge and experiences responding to the use of modern technology and other methods with the purpose of facilitating human trafficking and to get in touch with potential victims.

- **A human rights-based approach**

A human rights-based approach should be incorporated in all anti-trafficking efforts and serve as the guiding principle for the actions of the TF-THB. This approach places the rights and voice of human trafficking victims at the core of all measures. It is aimed at preventing and addressing human trafficking, while ensuring victims of human trafficking their rights, protection, assistance, and access to justice and remedies.

- **Gender sensitive approach**

All activities must account for the gendered characteristics of the human trafficking crime and how it may differently affect men, women and LGBTQIA+ individuals, recognising both their unique vulnerabilities and shared experiences. Efforts should be aimed at promoting gender equality throughout all anti-trafficking initiatives. When relevant, initiatives can also include an intersectional perspective in relation to groups that are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking.

- **Multi-disciplinary cooperation**

Multi-disciplinary cooperation is essential to successfully counter the complex human trafficking crime and for ensuring comprehensive support for victims. It strengthens the overall response and enhances the impact of anti-trafficking initiatives. The TF-THB will therefore, when relevant promote multi-disciplinary cooperation between diverse sectors and stakeholders in its activities and projects – both among the States in the TF-THB and internationally.

- **Ensuring sustainability**

Actions will build upon previously implemented projects and past achievements with a critical focus on implementation and sustainability. The TF-THB will refrain from taking on projects with small prospects for effective implementation and dissemination. Empowerment of key stakeholders, and a practice-driven approach in sharing experiences will be given priority.

- **Evidence-based approach**

The TF-THB will enhance evidence-based approach in anti-trafficking policy which will rely on research, government statistics, reports from NGOs, data of high-risk sectors, case studies, victim and survivor insights, risk factor identification, and evaluation of existing programmes.

Strategic objectives for 2025-2030

1. A Regional expertise center

The TF-THB and its Secretariat will serve as an information and resource center producing knowledge and *know-how* on anti-trafficking in the Baltic Sea Region. This includes, for instance, identifying new trends, understanding vulnerabilities of at-risk populations, and outlining the modus and operations of traffickers and criminal networks in the Region and Europe. Knowledge-production may entail the development and implementation of trainings, handbooks, reports, policy briefs and studies relating to the topic of human trafficking.

2. A broad reach

The TF-THB will address all forms of exploitation of human trafficking. Human trafficking for sexual exploitation and labour exploitation remain to be the most frequently reported human trafficking forms in the Baltic Sea Region and globally. While labour exploitation is becoming increasingly prevalent, sexual exploitation is the main form of human trafficking recorded in the Region. The TF-THB will adopt an agile approach to respond effectively to the main forms of human trafficking that pose a threat to the Region and to those exploited.

The TF-THB will further monitor and when relevant respond to current and emerging forms of exploitation such as forced begging, forced criminality, forced marriage and the exploitation of illegal adoption and of surrogacy. It will also consider specific phenomena such as tech-facilitated or child-related trafficking as well as related aspects, such as supply chains, in the context of human trafficking.

3. Targeting the key factors enabling and driving human trafficking

The TF-THB will work to address demand as a driver behind human trafficking, as well as supporting efforts to reduce demand for all forms of exploitation. By focusing on both the supply and the demand sides of trafficking, the TF-THB will deliver tools, research and recommendations to assist the Member States in countering human trafficking.

4. Understanding human trafficking in the context of organised crime and criminal networks

Human trafficking is a serious form of organised crime generating considerable profits. The perpetrators, schemes and businesses may operate in both cross-border and domestic settings, and sometimes intertwined. Different crime structures generate profits through various human trafficking schemes where others are exploited; forced criminality, labour exploitation, sexual exploitation, online exploitation, benefit fraud and financial fraud.

Developments in the Region indicate that young persons, including children, may be particularly vulnerable to being recruited by criminal networks to commit both petty and serious crimes. The TF-THB recognises the poly-criminal nature of human trafficking and will support activities and efforts to address these serious threats in the Region.

In this regard, the TF-THB will work to enhance the overall knowledge about this form of organised crime in the Region as well as to promote a victim-centered approach in the criminal justice systems to safeguard the rights of those exploited in this serious crime.

5. Ensuring synergies and strategic partnerships

The TF-THB will coordinate and cooperate with other units and areas in the CBSS Secretariat, including the Children at Risk Unit, when relevant in order to ensure synergies. Moreover, the TF-THB will coordinate and cooperate, when relevant, with regional networks and

international stakeholders, such as, but not limited to, the Council of Europe, EU, IOM, Nordic Council of Ministers, OSCE, UNODC and UN ICAT.

In addition to regional collaboration, cooperation with third countries may contribute to the fight against human trafficking. This may contribute to enhancing victim protection efforts and promote increased cooperation and dialogue between countries of origin and countries of destination. It is within the mandate of the Secretariat to pursue or maintain cooperation with entities referenced above.

6. Improving victim protection and empowerment

Victim protection is a cornerstone of effective anti-trafficking strategies. The TF-THB will support efforts to enhance protection and assistance for all trafficking victims, including highly vulnerable groups such as homeless individuals, substance consumers and addicts, unsupervised, unaccompanied children, individuals with mental and/or physical disabilities, and children and youth exploited by criminal networks.

The TF-THB will to the extent possible also support victim reintegration and empowerment, also taking place in countries of origin. Promoting a rights-based approach and considering third-country collaboration can be central to these efforts.

7. Emphasizing the gender dimension of human trafficking

Human trafficking is deeply influenced by gender dynamics, with women and girls disproportionately impacted through sexual exploitation. In contrast, men and boys are more frequently subjected to labour exploitation.

The TF-THB will give priority to the gender perspective in its approach to human trafficking, focusing on challenging power structures that enable such exploitation. The TF-THB will work to advance policies and practices that target the unique vulnerabilities of all victims, regardless of gender, age or identity, ensuring a comprehensive and inclusive response to this serious crime.

In this effort, the TF-THB will also focus on addressing and supporting initiatives related to LGBTQIA+ individuals who are exploited, or under the risk of being exploited, in human trafficking, recognising and responding to the unique vulnerabilities and challenges that this community faces in our Region and beyond.

8. Human trafficking in a wider migration context

The TF-THB will continue to address human trafficking within a wider migration context, recognising the topical connections between human trafficking and migration.

Human trafficking is closely intertwined with mixed migration flows, where refugees, asylum-seekers, and labour migrants are at heightened risk of exploitation during their journey or upon arrival to their country of destination. Migration flows emerging from armed conflicts and wars, for instance because of the Russian unprovoked aggression and war against Ukraine, has an impact on the prevalence of human trafficking risks and related exploitation forms in the Region. In this respect, the TF-THB will approach the issue of migration in relation to human trafficking from a perspective addressing the root causes, rights and vulnerabilities of migrants.

Implementation

The implementation of the strategic plan and objectives set will be carried out through the strategic priorities and concrete projects set by the presidencies in collaboration with the members of the TF-THB Expert Group and with support of the CBSS Secretariat. The presidencies will guide activities, in accordance to the thematic priorities within the framework of relevant projects and activities planned and implemented. The TF-THB Expert Group will contribute to shaping these priorities and help identify opportunities for collaborative efforts.

Through this approach, the TF-THB will continuously adapt to emerging issues, leveraging discussions within the Expert Group and utilizing potential projects to refine its focus. These activities will ensure that the priorities are responsive to evolving trends in human trafficking and represent the most impactful initiatives for progress. Regular reviews and discussions will help maintain the relevance of these efforts, ensuring the TF-THB's strategy remains aligned with its objectives. Whenever possible significant changes are required regarding the duration and content of the strategy, the matter is discussed in the TF-THB in close cooperation with the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) of the CBSS.