



Mandate July 2025 - June 2030¹

1. Vision & Mission

1.1. The vision of CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk (hereinafter 'the Expert Group') for the Baltic Sea Region is to provide equal opportunities for all children, especially those at risk of harm, to grow, develop and thrive free from all forms of violence, as defined in UNCRC article 19².

Achieving this vision requires concerted efforts to build inclusive, resilient, and efficient national systems dedicated to the protection and support of children at risk. We envision a Baltic Sea Region where every child is given opportunities for participation and active engagement in creating a sustainable, safe, and secure society.

1.2. Our mission is to facilitate knowledge exchange to strengthen the protection and rights of children across the Baltic Sea Region. By deepening cross-border cooperation, building trust and driving joint initiatives, we work to provide children in the Baltic Sea Region with equal opportunities to grow, develop and thrive free from all forms of violence.

1.3. In line with the CBSS Child Safeguarding Policy, 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.

1.4. The mandate is complemented by a Regional Strategy for Cooperation on Children at Risk (hereinafter – regional strategy).

2. The role of the Expert Group on Children at Risk

2.1 The role of the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk encompasses the two pillars of CBSS – political dialogue between states and practical cooperation based on concrete exchange of experiences and research, and practical initiatives.

- Arrange exchange of experience on cross-border problems, to strengthen cooperation, learning and enabling new projects.

¹ In case of changing circumstances, the CBSS CSO may introduce modifications to the validity period of the EG CAR strategy and mandate, in consultation with the Expert group on children at risk.

² UNCRC ARTICLE 19:

1. STATES PARTIES SHALL TAKE ALL APPROPRIATE LEGISLATIVE, ADMINISTRATIVE, SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL MEASURES TO PROTECT THE CHILD FROM ALL FORMS OF PHYSICAL OR MENTAL VIOLENCE, INJURY OR ABUSE, NEGLECT OR NEGLIGENT TREATMENT, MALTREATMENT OR EXPLOITATION, INCLUDING SEXUAL ABUSE, WHILE IN THE CARE OF PARENT(S), LEGAL GUARDIAN(S) OR ANY OTHER PERSON WHO HAS THE CARE OF THE CHILD.
2. SUCH PROTECTIVE MEASURES SHOULD, AS APPROPRIATE, INCLUDE EFFECTIVE PROCEDURES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SOCIAL PROGRAMMES TO PROVIDE NECESSARY SUPPORT FOR THE CHILD AND FOR THOSE WHO HAVE THE CARE OF THE CHILD, AS WELL AS FOR OTHER FORMS OF PREVENTION AND FOR IDENTIFICATION, REPORTING, REFERRAL, INVESTIGATION, TREATMENT AND FOLLOW-UP OF INSTANCES OF CHILD MALTREATMENT DESCRIBED HERETOFORE, AND, AS APPROPRIATE, FOR JUDICIAL INVOLVEMENT.

- Cooperation with representatives from national authorities, civil society, international and regional organizations, professionals, academia and with other units of the CBSS Secretariat.
- Exchange with national, regional and global actors for learning and collaboration in new projects.
- Promote children's participation by exploring concrete methods for ethical and meaningful children's participation in our work.
- Contributes to a strengthened children's rights perspective, trust in child protection systems and to spread knowledge about:
 - 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

3. Members of the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk

3.1. 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.

3.2. The member states will strive to maintain consistent membership so that the participants remain active over longer periods to foster deeper understanding and trust among members.

3.3 When specific topics arise that would benefit from additional expertise, the representative may, with the agreement of the Chair, invite relevant national experts to participate in EG CAR meetings.

4. Expert Group Chair and Vice-Chair

4.1. 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.

4.2. The EG CAR TRIO (previous, current and incoming Presidency) meet regularly. The EG CAR TRIO decide together on relevant strategic, governance and management issues and advise the Children at Risk Unit when to consult all the members of the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk for their opinion about principal and urgent issues.

4.3. The Chair develops the agenda and chairs the meetings of the Expert Group. The Chair shall be briefed by the Children at Risk Unit (hereinafter the 'CAR Unit') 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.

4.4. 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.

5. The Children at Risk Unit at the CBSS Secretariat

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

5.2. 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 further keeps the Expert Group informed about developments in the ongoing projects, new project and funding opportunities and alerts the Chair to other principal and urgent issues. The Role of the CAR Unit is further elaborated in Annex 1.

5.3. Before applying for new projects and financing opportunities, the Expert group must be consulted and approve new projects by use of the simplified written procedure (silence procedure, see 7.3) and in accordance with the CBSS Guidelines for participation in projects (also see 10.2 and 10.3). This requires that the members actively take responsibility during consultation rounds.

6. Expert Group Meetings

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

6.2. 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. Online or blended meetings, including extraordinary meetings, may be organised exceptionally if necessary and approved by the Chair.

6.3. Expert Group meetings may include a Tour de Table where the country representatives present recent national developments and country-specific information related a specific topic that the Chair has selected, usually in line with their Presidency Priorities. A questionnaire with relevant questions concerning challenges, best practices and suggestions for key topics to be discussed in the EG CAR is circulated before the EG CAR meetings. Each member is invited to make a presentation, for a maximum of 10 minutes, based on the questions in the questionnaire.

7. Decision-making

7.1. Expert Group meetings are the principal fora for adopting decisions relating to the strategy, annual work plans, budget, projects, and other relevant issues.

7.2. 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.

7.3. A simplified written procedure, called the “silence procedure” can be applied in-between the Expert Group meetings for decisions regarding urgent issues, including new projects.

Decisions to be taken by silence procedure are communicated by email to the expert group members, at a minimum 10 days prior to the end of the silence procedure.

The subject of the email shall clearly indicate that it concerns a silence procedure for action by the experts. Each expert is responsible for taking action to read and consider the proposal, and to respond before the end of the silence procedure if the expert objects or would like to suggest amendments.

If no objections or amendments are proposed before the deadline of the procedure, the decision is considered adopted by all participants. The CAR Unit is responsible for immediately after the expiration of the silence period, by email, informing the experts that the decision has been adopted through silence procedure.

The silence shall be regarded as broken if an objection or an amendment has been communicated by an expert. The CAR unit is responsible for informing the experts by email, if the silence procedure is broken, and in collaboration with the Chair, propose a new decision-making procedure.

Decisions of a major strategic nature that have not been discussed in previous meetings and that cannot be taken at the regular meeting require an extra meeting (online) before a silent procedure takes place.

8. Tasks of the Expert Group Members

8.1. The members of the Expert Group will serve as a liaison with their respective national Ministries. The members will consult on, and share information about the decisions, actions, achievements and other issues of interest including the advantages of regional cooperation in the area of children at risk.

8.2. The Expert Group members ensure that relevant information from the Expert Group is shared with Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) and other relevant Ministries, state agencies, and key stakeholders in society regarding the work of the Expert Group.

8.3. Where appropriate, the Expert Group members can establish, informally or formally, a 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.

8.4. If capacity allows and when there is an interest of the Member State, the Expert Group members inform the CAR 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.

8.5. National engagement by the Expert Group members in project activities is voluntary.

9. Regional Strategy and Priorities

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

9.2. 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 Presidency work plans shall contain concrete activities and progress indicators to support the implementation of the strategy.

9.3. The CAR Unit supports the Presidency Chair of the Expert Group to develop an annual Presidency work plan, which is shared with the Expert Group. The CAR Unit develops an annual budget, for adoption by the Expert Group, to support implementation of the action plan. The CAR Unit further writes an annual report on the implementation of the Presidency action plan, for approval by the Presidency. The annual report is shared with the Expert Group.

9.4. The Children at Risk Unit supports the Expert group to develop broad and strategic partnerships to implement the strategy.

10. Funding and resources

10.1. 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 used by the

Council of the Baltic Sea States. The 6 larger member states each contribute 13.7% of the budgeted costs, and the 4 smaller countries each contribute 4.5%. The Children at Risk Unit accounts are audited yearly, with the report available in April/May of each year.

10.2. The Children at Risk Unit continuously explores possibilities and applies for external funding for projects which provide a strategic opportunity to promote the priorities of the Expert Group, and make progress on achieving its strategy, in accordance with the CBSS Guidelines for participation in projects. Projects should have a positive impact on the financial standing of the CAR Unit. Projects should not pose risks to sound financial management and/or risks of overspending of the core budget. Co-financing or other financial obligations, including costs for additional staff, may not incur potential risks of overspending on the core budget. Furthermore, project commitments/deliverables must be reasonable and may not have a negative impact on the ability of the CAR Unit to implement its core activities to support implementation of the EG CAR core strategic priority.

10.3. 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.

11. Transparency

11.1. Reports and updated information about the work and activities of the work of the Expert Group and the CAR Unit are publicly available on the websites: childrenatrisk.cbss.org (www.cbss.org).

11.2. The CAR 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.

11.3. 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.

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

Adopted *Date Month Year*

Annex 1. Role of CAR Unit

Annex 1. Role of the Children at Risk Unit ('CAR Unit') in the CBSS Secretariat

1. **Central Coordination:** The unit operates as a central body that coordinates communication and collaboration among members. It ensures that important information is distributed effectively and that all parties remain informed and aligned with the Expert group's mandate, strategy and activities.
2. **Administrative Support:** The unit provides essential administrative support, including organising meetings, preparing agendas, handling documentation, and maintaining records of meetings, action and decisions. This organisational role is fundamental for the smooth operation of The Expert Group on Children at Risk ('the Expert group').
3. **Project Management, Funding and Coordination:** The unit monitors project opportunities, and initiates applications in line with the Expert group mandate and guidelines and procedure for projects. It further manages and implements projects in line with donor regulations. Project initiation and management constitute a critical function for advancing the group's strategic priorities and initiatives.
4. **Preparatory Work:** The unit supports preparation of the Expert group meetings, and is updated on the issues, decisions and themes of each meeting to allow the meetings to be more focused and productive.
5. **Proactive Role in implementing the Expert group strategy:** The unit supports the group by being proactive and working towards achieving strategic objectives, which is essential for the group's forward momentum and effectiveness.
6. **Dynamic and Safe Group Atmosphere:** The unit contributes to a permissive, safe, and positive Expert group dynamic, which is fundamental for collaborative and open engagement among members.
7. **Information Dissemination:** Apart from organising the work of the expert group, the Secretariat takes on the responsibility of disseminating information about relevant activities both within the Expert group and in the broader context of the CBSS and other organisations.
8. **Financial Management:** The unit keeps track of funding and financial management, ensuring accountability and proper resource allocation.
9. **Documentation and Online Presence:** The unit is responsible for summarising meeting materials, drafting documents, and maintaining the Expert group website and social media, which are important resources for members, partners and the public to access current information.
10. **Networking and Advocacy:** Finally, the unit is instrumental in forming networks and giving the Expert group a strong voice in international settings.