



## Celebrating 20 years of promoting children's rights in the Baltic Sea Region

### The success story of the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk

By political decision in 1998, the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) initiated regional cooperation activities implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Member states have for 20 years shared knowledge, models and good practices. With the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk as the hub of cooperation, the region has developed ground-breaking research on young people's attitudes to sexual behaviour and online risk-taking behaviour. Furthermore, the Expert Group has developed the European Barnahus Movement, guidance to support the implementation of laws against violence, a child-rights and system-based approach to audit and monitor child welfare facilities and guidelines to promote the human rights and best interests of children in transnational situations.

The Expert Group's Regional Strategy for Cooperation on Children at Risk is based on these achievements. It has a future oriented approach and continues the good work implemented thus far. The Regional Strategy supports the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its target to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and violence against children.

**The Mandate and Regional Strategy (2017-2020)** prioritise the support to the member States in bolstering their child protection and welfare systems in the following areas:

- Prevention, early intervention, parenting and family support
- Child-friendly justice
- The wellbeing and best interests of children in alternative care
- Protecting children from sexual violence and exploitation
- Preventing trafficking and exploitation of children
- The best interests of children in migration

**Post 2020 and up to 2030**, the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk intends to continue the work to end violence against children by highlighting the lifelong impact on children of sexual violence and exploitation, trafficking and other forms of violence and the correlated substantial costs for the society. While the Expert Group will maintain its focus on the Baltic Sea Region, it will continue to encourage cooperation and sharing of experience with other regions.

**A significant development in the fields of education, health and social welfare** has taken place in each of the 11-member States of the Council of the Baltic Sea States during the past 20 years. Many children are relatively well informed and live in safety and security in their family setting.

**However, too many children still experience different forms of violence** and feel that they have few reliable adults to turn to. To fulfil the vision of the Baltic Sea Region as a violence-free zone for children, the Expert Group highlights key learning from recent years as important for future work:

- Listening to the child
- Rapid follow-up of signs of harm in a responsible and confidential manner
- Tailor made support to the child and the family
- Investment in early childhood education and care
- Taking children's recommendations into account for the development of preventive strategies and interventions
- Promoting the inclusion of children from a diversity of backgrounds and situations
- Integrated strategies with comprehensive and sustainable measures

### **The history**

The Council of the Baltic Sea States decided already in 1997 that the CBSS should work to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. At the 1998 Summit in Riga, the Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers supported CBSS initiated cooperation activities on children at risk, which firmly established the regional work and commitment to protect children at risk under the auspices of CBSS. In 2002, the CBSS Senior Officials established the Expert Group as a formal group of the CBSS and the Children at Risk Unit as part of the Secretariat.

The CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk has through its history addressed areas of common interest, including transnational issues relevant to all member States, by engaging ministries and national agencies, ombudsmen for children, academia, organisations, as well as children.

Today, the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk is acknowledged as a notable actor at the national and regional levels and by the Council of Europe, the EU and the United Nations. The Expert Group will continue to renew itself by listening to the cooperating partners, including children, and strengthen its role in the Baltic Sea Region - as a model region.