



**Report from the Work of the WGCC and
the Children's Unit
July 1st 2003 – June 30th 2004**

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Introduction

The Working Group for Co-operation on Children at Risk, WGCC, has now been in existence for two years. The WGCC has during this time established itself as a node for different activities and programmes in the area of the Baltic Sea.

At the meeting in Vilnius in January 2002, the WGCC adopted its terms of reference in which the development of a yearly report was one part. The development and agreement on a priority paper was another and the development of an activity plan for the year was the third.

Even though the issue of Children at Risk is now high on the agenda in many of the member states within the CBSS co-operation, the situation for children living in difficult circumstances in the region is generally poor. A number of circumstances have presented themselves as especially important to achieve progress on and the WGCC has during the year somewhat changed its priorities in order to incorporate emerging threats to children.

The Working Group for Co-operation on Children at Risk 2003 - 2004

Members of the working group for Co-operation on Children at Risk has been:

Chair

Latvia

Ms Inete Ielite, Director, Children's Forum of Latvia.

Vice Chair

Finland

Ms Anne Hujala, Senior Advisor, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health

Denmark

Ms Margit Knudsen, UFC Børn og Familier. (Until April 2004)

Ms Lise Færch, Director of UFC Børn og Familier, (From April 2004)

Estonia

Ms Monika Luik, Advisor, Department of Social Welfare, Ministry of Social Affairs.

Germany

Mr Ulrich Paschold, Senior Principal, Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth.

Iceland

Mr Bragi Gudbrandsson, General Director, The Government Agency for Child Protection

Lithuania

Ms Audra Mikalauskaite, Head of Children and Youth Division, Ministry of Social Security and Labour.

Norway

Mr Björn Bredeesen, Deputy Director General, Ministry of Child and Family Affairs.

Ms Siw Ellefsen, Advisor, Ministry of Child and Family Affairs.

Poland

Ms Magdalena Wantola, Ministry for National Education and Sports.

Russian Federation

Ms Galina Kupriyanova, Director, Ministry of Education.

Sweden

Ms Agneta Björklund, Senior Administrative Officer, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs.

Meetings of the WGCC

The WGCC has had two meetings during the year:

Copenhagen, October 2003. During this meeting the Working Group also took the opportunity to visit the Julianne More centre at Rigshospitalet where a specialised group of experts work with research and clinical treatment of sexually abused children. The WGCC also had a chance to visit the JANUS centre, a recently established treatment and research centre for young persons with a history of having been sexually abusive to other children. The centre is one part of the Danish government's action plan to fight child sexual abuse

Vilnius, April 2004. At this meeting half a day was used for deliberations and expert interventions on the issue of Children in the legal process. Interventions were made by regional experts and from Lithuanian expertise.

Reports from the meetings of the WGCC are published on the Childcentre web site and are available at

<http://childcentre.baltinfo.org/archive/workinggro>

Senior Advisor to the Children's Unit

Mr Lars Lööf has during the year worked as Senior Advisor and Head of Unit. During the year Ms Eva Ekmehag, Deputy Director at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs has been seconded to the Children's Unit as Senior Advisor. Her tasks specifically related to the activities in relation to unaccompanied and trafficked children in the region.

Priority Paper

The Priority Paper for the WGCC was adopted after the Helsinki meeting in September 2002 and was developed and amended in Copenhagen in October 2003. The priority paper is one tool in communicating the mandate of the WGCC to both external stakeholders and other organisations.

For full text version of the priority paper please go to

<http://childcentre.baltinfo.org/archive/workinggro/ifid2552.html>

Activity Plan

The Activity Plan for the work of the WGCC and the Children's Unit is an ongoing working tool where different activities that the WGCC and the Children's Unit strive to implement are noted together with responsibility to make the planned intervention or activity happen, the timeframe and the timing of the evaluation. The plan also includes references to responsible partners and funding. The activity plan is constantly revised and updated at WGCC meetings and it is also posted on the Internet.

<http://childcentre.baltinfo.org/archive/workinggro/ifid2603.html>

Childcentre web site

<http://childcentre.baltinfo.org>

<http://www.cbss.st/childcentre>

The Childcentre web site has continuously over the year been used, updated and become a visible presence on the web. Postings of reports and information are made on a regular basis by the National Co-ordinators (NC) in the member countries where some National Co-ordinators are more active than others in posting objects on the site. The name and contact details of the National Co-ordinators are posted on the site in order for them to be accessible for professionals, organisations and researchers. <http://childcentre.baltinfo.org/nationalco/> Some NCs have actively involved new users into the secure area. The secure area is a forum where professionals working in the different prioritised areas in the co-operation may discuss relevant issues in a cost-effective way. Most of the forums are kept in English but national discussion forums have been added where professionals from the same country may use their mother tongue to discuss national issues. Some new areas of interest to professionals in the region have been added as discussion forums. The site can easily handle forums accessed by only a few of the registered users and is thus possible to use both for smaller groups that want to discuss a specific topic and for groups involving all the registered users. The number of registered users varies very much between the countries. In total, the secure part of the site is reached and used by approximately 200 different professionals in the region. The discussion forum allows for continuous exchange of ideas, new reports, and requests for assistance and active search for partners in different programme endeavours. The secure part also holds an archive.

In October 2003, following a decision taken by the WGCC, the access to the secure part of the web site was changed. The secure part had until then built on a combination of hard ware and soft ware solutions enabling the highest possible secure com-

munications. The high security however, was expensive to maintain and difficult for the users to manage. It put high demands on the computer hardware and the operating systems on the individual user's computer. At present the secure part of the site is reached via a simple log on procedure. This makes the secure part more accessible for the users and also enables the Children's Unit to add new users with no additional cost. The lessened security is met by a heightened awareness from the users on what could be posted on the site and in the discussion forum. The Children's Unit also intends to review how the change works in relation to the goals for the co-operation set out by the WGCC. The costs of maintaining the web has been considerably reduced during 2003 due to the simplified log on procedure and the fact that we do not have to pay expensive license fees. The updated version of the site is also less cumbersome to maintain and update why a minimum of external services for this is required.

Since the change of platform for the Childcentre web site the statistics of the way the site is used has been made accessible and possible to use in evaluating the site's effectiveness in reaching some of the goals set out.

The web site has approximately 5 200 unique visitors per month, a figure which includes visitors both to the open part of the site and to the secure part. The number of visitors has increased over time with approximately 10% each month since October 2003. The visitors stay on average about 6 minutes on the site and approximately 25% of the visitors are repeat visitors.

An evaluation of the web site is planned for 2004 – 2005.

Meetings of the National Co-ordinators and the Competence Centres

The National Co-ordinators are the backbone in the co-operation on Children at Risk. Each National Co-ordinator is appointed by the ministry responsible for children's issues in the country and is given the authority to approve the connection of new users to the secure part of the web site. The National Co-ordinator is also responsible for posting reports, research and events available from their national perspective. The overarching goal of the co-operation is that professionals, wherever they are in the region, shall have access to the best available knowledge on rehabilitation, research and education on children at risk of abuse, violence and exploitation. The Childcentre web site works as the hub of this co-operation and this hub in turn is fuelled by the participating professional's dedication and willingness to share their respective findings from their fields of expertise.

The online activity however must always be fed through meetings in person. Conferences on the issue of children and violence and how to assist them is one way of making networks of professionals continue to function. The web site of the Childcentre forms a basis for continuing discussions and ventilating ideas sprung out of meetings and conferences. The offline meetings are a prerequisite for the online activities to develop and flourish. In the budget of the Children's Unit a sum is set aside to be able to finance one meeting of the group of National Co-ordinators and representatives of the Competence Centres. The yearly meeting is considered a minimum to keep up the momentum of the co-operation why the Children's Unit have applied for funding

from other sources to finance more meetings of this dynamic group. This year this application was turned down, why we have only had the opportunity to meet once.

Meeting in Helsinki

The yearly meeting of the National Co-ordinators and Competence Centre representatives took place outside Helsinki at Hanaholmen, a beautiful conference venue right on the shores of the Baltic Sea. The meeting was organised by Pelastakaa Lapset, Save the Children Finland, and was made possible by financial assistance from the Finnish ministry for Social Affairs and Health. The meeting gathered some 30 representatives from all 11 countries in the co-operation and included discussions on issues related to forensic examination of children that may be victims of sexual abuse. Tampere university hospital forensic team under the leadership of Dr Kaija Puura gave a presentation of their work on this issue including the challenges they presently are faced with. The participants from all countries were given ample opportunities to put questions and to discuss the aspects of this relevant to their national setting.

Activities out of the priorities set for the co-operation

- a. The protection of children from all forms of sexual exploitation, abuse and trafficking*

Research on young persons' attitudes and experiences in relation to child sexual abuse and commercial sex

Within the IT-Network Children at Risk under the Council of the Baltic Sea States there is now an established network of researchers from seven different countries: Estonia, Iceland, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia and Sweden. The co-ordination of the project is appointed to one institute, NOVA in Oslo Norway, where senior researcher/associate professor Svein Mossige, is project co-ordinator. The project is connected to one research institute in each of the participating countries with the responsibility of implementing the study in that country.

The implementation of the questionnaire is finished in Estonia and Sweden the other countries are implementing the questionnaire during spring and early autumn 2004.

In a process that has involved all the research network, but particularly Estonia, Norway and Sweden, the original questionnaire has been revised and extended to include more questions about experiences of and attitudes towards commercial and so called

survival sex. More questions about and alternative answers to the respondents sexual experiences have also been included.

Each national sample is approximately set to 5000 young people with the smaller countries having a smaller sample. The ages of the respondents are around 18.

The project and its results will be presented in national reports and at least in one report covering and analysing the results from every country. The aim is also to publish articles in international scientific journals. The results will be available on the IT-network Children at Risk. The application of the results in relation to possible preventive measures will be discussed with the participants within the IT-network Children at Risk within the restricted areas of the network. The project and its results will also be presented and discussed within the WGCC and will be an important tool in its efforts to identify, support and implement co-operation especially in relation to addressing prevention of the demand for children in sexually abusive relationships.

The different research teams have been able to find funding for the work from several sources. Some research is funded through the ministry for children's issues, some from local or regional councils and some through private foundations. The Russian part of the research is entirely funded by Childhood Foundation.

Meeting with researchers in Tarttu, Estonia

On the 15th to 17th of December, the group of researchers involved in the research project on Young persons' attitudes and experiences of child sexual abuse and commercial sexual exploitation had the opportunity to meet at Leigo farm outside Tartu in Estonia. The meeting was organised by the Estonian Competence Centre, Tartu Child Support Centre, in cooperation with the research group at Tartu University and was made possible by a contribution from the Estonian Ministry for Social Affairs. At the meeting, researchers from the seven participating countries: Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Russia discussed methodological issues, ethical issues and how best to disseminate the findings from the research. The research is now underway in all countries with data collection. The common database with all data from the participating countries will be collected by NOVA in Norway in the late spring and early autumn of this year with a few sub groups being reported slightly later.

Child Pornography on the Internet and dangers to children related to new techniques

In October 2003, the WGCC and the Children's Unit were invited to co-organise a seminar on Victim Identification. The seminar was held in Stockholm and was part of an ongoing EU funded Daphne project where Cork University in Ireland, the NGO Childnet in London and Rädde Barnen, Save the Children Sweden have co-operated to look at best practices in addressing the issue of children that have had images of the

abuse they have suffered posted on the Internet. The Victim Identification Project have looked at how police in successful cases have managed to support and cooperate with child protection services and child psychological expertise in making certain that children have received support.

The meeting in Stockholm was chaired by the Senior Advisor to the Children's Unit and prosecutors, police officers and NGO representatives were invited. A number of these had their travel and accommodation funded through the project. The plan is to make a follow up of this seminar so that each country in the cooperation may discuss how best to continue the fight against child abusive images on the Internet and how best to assist children victimised in this way. Contacts with European and US initiatives are underway in order for the region to benefit from different training activities that is underway in Europe and in the US. One such opportunity was the invitation to several police investigating officers to come to a week's training course in Lyon, France, a training implemented by Interpol and made possible through the US government's funding. A number of seats at the training including travel and accommodation for police officers from the region were made available. The Children's Unit is continuously in contact with a number of programmes in Europe on this issue in order for the member countries to participate in activities and to remain updated on current issues on the subject. The Web site contains a number of reports and descriptions both on the fight against child abusive images on the Internet and on how to make Internet safer to use for children.

Internet with a Human Face – A Common Responsibility

The EU-funded SafeBorders consortium, in the framework of its Safer Internet awareness campaign and in collaboration with the Council of Europe, organised a European conference in Warsaw on March 26th and 27th 2004. The Senior Advisor to the Children's Unit made a plenary presentation on important issues for children in relation to this and the CBSS through the Children's Unit was a partner in organising the workshop looking at child exploitation using the new technologies.

At the conference Nobody's Children Foundation from Poland also made presentations on their ongoing campaign addressing safety for children using the Internet. Save the Children Denmark also presented their activities on the subject. These presentations were made in the context of the workshop co-organised by the CBSS and the Children's Unit.

Meeting in Cork on NGO role in fighting child abusive images on the Internet

The Children's Unit has continued to keep a working relationship with the Copine project at the University College of Cork in Ireland. Copine is the world's leading authority on child abusive images and maintains a worldwide network with police authorities, child protection services, child psychologists and NGOs. In the beginning of March a meeting was held with NGOs, some from the region, in order to look at how the NGO community could respond to the increase in child abusive images available

on the Internet. The meeting was made possible through financial assistance from the Oak Foundation that has an interest in the issue and that also funds several projects on children at risk in the region of the Baltic Sea States.

Psychological and Legal Issues of Internet Abuse Images - Conference on future directions

In May the Head of Unit made a presentation at the Copine conference: "Psychological and Legal Issues of Internet Abuse Images - Conference on future directions on child abusive images on the Internet". The plenary presentation was on Global Issues and naturally pointed to the regional co-operation on Children at Risk as a tool in fighting the abuse of children on the Internet.

b. Unaccompanied and trafficked children.

During the year the work of realising an improved co-operation on unaccompanied and trafficked children in the region has been ongoing. The appointment of National Contact Points in the 14 countries in the region has proved to be more difficult than foreseen. Mainly because the task involves a number of ministries in each of the participating countries. Several administrations have had difficulties in finding the best position for such a person. In the meantime several cases of trafficking of children have been discovered and reported on in the media, calling for more operational co-operation regarding the possibilities for the regional co-operation to offer support to the young persons affected. The Children's Unit through the seconded Senior Advisor has supported the involved ministries if called for. Meetings in the capitals with the affected ministries have been organised in order to find the optimal national structure for the co-operation. The plan of action to be adopted by the WGCC has been developed and was finally adopted at the WGCC meeting in April.

Secondment to the Children's Unit

During the year the secondment to the Children's Unit of a full time Senior Advisor has been in place. The Senior Advisor is seconded from the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs for a period of two years.

NGO Conference on Separated and Trafficked Children – Best Practices and Co-operation

An NGO conference on best practice and co-operation regarding Separated and Trafficked Children within the Baltic Sea Region took place in Vilnius, Lithuania 14-16 of September 2003.

The conference was a response from the NGO community to one of the commitments made at the meeting of senior officials in Stockholm in February 2003, regarding the importance of involving NGOs in the struggle against trafficking in children and in

finding appropriate solutions to the problem of separated children crossing borders in the Baltic Sea Region.

The aim of the conference was to strengthen the co-operation between different NGOs in the region regarding national as well as international co-operation for all Separated and Trafficked children.

The conference was attended by 90 participants from more than 50 NGOs representing nearly all the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) countries and also Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Italy and Romania. The conference was the fruit of co-operation between several NGOs in Sweden, Red Cross, Kvinnoforum, ECPAT-Sweden, and Caritas working for the rights of these vulnerable children. The CBSS Working Group for co-operation on Children at Risk participated in the preparations of the conference.

A number of significant conclusions and recommendations were formulated by the Conference addressing the issues and rights of Separated and Trafficked Children in the Baltic Sea Region. The conference was made possible through financial support from the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The State Secretary addressed the conference in an opening speech on behalf of the Minister for Migration and Development Co-operation.

First meeting of National Contact Points, Stockholm

In December 2003 the first meeting of National Contact Points was held in Stockholm. Director of the secretariat Ambassador Hannu Halinen opened the meeting and the chair of CBSS, Ambassador Tit Naber addressed the participants in a lunch speech. The meeting discussed the ongoing co-operation and ways to clarify the role of the NCP and the other actors in the regional co-operation. The meeting was made possible through financial support from the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

Contacts with other relevant organisations

The Children's Unit has established contacts with the groups working on the issue of trafficking in human beings in the region: The task force on organised crime and its expert group on human trafficking, the prosecutors network, the Nord Baltic 8 initiative and the Euro Arctic group on trafficking. On national level there are also programmes and work groups that the unit keeps close ties with. All this so that efforts are not duplicated and that the national processes set in motion through the co-operation may feed into already existing structures of co-operation. Regional initiatives are in place both on governmental co-operation in South Eastern Europe and a few NGO co-operational networks are in place in Europe.

c. Street children and children without a family

The work of the WGCC and the Children's Unit on this topic has been restricted to the follow up of the meeting in Moscow on the subject held in April 2003. The report

of the meeting is in progress and a few new organisations specifically dealing with children living in the street have been added as competence centres in the co-operation. The issue is also a part of the networking on the Childcentre web site.

d. The rights of children in institutions and in other forms of protection.

Regularly posting of reports and presentations on children in institutions on the Childcentre web site. The WGCC has been kept updated on the work conducted by the Council of Europe expert group on the rights of children in institutions as well as the work of the Norwegian/Swedish joint research on best practices regarding institutional treatment of young persons with social behaviour disorders. The seminar on children in institutions planned for the autumn of 2003 has been postponed.

e. Young offenders and self-destructive behaviour of children.

Regularly updating posting of reports and presentations on the issue of young offenders. The senior advisor also participates in conferences on the issue and maintains contacts with the European network of professionals working with sexually abusive young persons, ESSAY. The WGCC had a thorough presentation of the work of the Danish experts at JANUS centre in Copenhagen at the WGCC meeting there in October 2003. The experts at the JANUS centre are naturally part of the professionals using the secure part of the Childcentre web site.

Participation of the Children's Unit and the WGCC in events

2003

August 29th to 31st: ISPCAN conference Warsaw. Presentation

September 14th to 16th: NGO conference: "Separated and Trafficked Children in the Region of the Baltic Sea States - Best Practices and Co-operation"

September 26th to 28th: Transnational Conference on Domestic Violence, Kiel, Germany. Presentation

October 8th to 11th: Meeting with ECPAT Europe group on Trafficking of Children, St Petersburg, Russia

October 13th: Children at Risk. Meeting in Vilnius. Presentation.

October 27th to 28th: Meeting with Working Group for Youth Co-operation. Tarttu, Estonia.

December 15th to 17th: Meeting with researchers, Tarttu, Estonia.

2004

January 14th to 16th: Meeting with Save the Children regional representatives working on trafficking prevention programmes. Rome.

March 1st to 2nd: Meeting with COPINE research team and European NGOs on fighting child abusive images on the Internet. Cork, Ireland.

March 25th: Trafficking of Children, Seminar organised by Save the Children, Malmö, Sweden. Presentation.

March 26th to 28th: Conference: "Internet with a Human Face – A Common Responsibility". Warsaw. Presentation.

May 12th to 14th: Nordic Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect, Turku, Finland.

May 23rd to 26th: COPINE Conference: Psychological and Legal Issues of Internet Abuse Images. Cork, Ireland. Presentation.

June 6th to 11th: FBI National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime: International Online Child Sexual Victimization Symposium

Children at Risk within the CBSS structure

The Children's Unit is one of three separate units within the secretariat of the CBSS. The integration of the units into the work of the secretariat is a process where differences in the role of the Working Groups, funding and also in reporting and the differences in budgets are the major obstacles towards a total integration. The evaluation made of the secretariat points to some of these obstacles. The Children's Unit and the WGCC find the integration of the Children's Unit into the secretariat beneficial to the work and priorities set for the co-operation on Children at Risk.

Secretariat issues

Contributions to the Children's Unit are voluntary. For the year 2003 all member countries except Latvia, Poland and Russia contributed to the work. For 2004 all countries except Latvia and Russia has up until now paid the voluntary contribution. The Swedish government, as host government, pays the rental costs for the Children's Unit and also the Unit's part of the administrative and overhead costs shared by the units and the core secretariat at CBSS.

Other important issues

Through a number of international conventions and agreements, governments have committed themselves to implement strategies both within the legal sphere and within the social sphere in order to assist children victimised by abuse, violence and exploitation. The ongoing co-operation on Children at Risk within the CBSS is a regional response to these commitments. The evaluation of how regions, nations and the international community at large have managed to live up to the commitments made is ongoing and will in the near future put focus on existing initiatives. The co-operation on Children at Risk in the region will then be one example of how regional initiatives may increase the flow of knowledge between professionals and the indeed the flow of

knowledge from professionals and NGOs to the political level both nationally and regionally.

Future

The 1st of May has seen the accession of four of the member countries within the CBSS to the EU. Children's issues are not within the EU mandate why the co-operation on Children at Risk does not overlap with EU policies or EU programmes. Even though two letters have been sent to the European Commission representative to the CSO, there is so far no EU representation in the WGCC which reflects the fact that the EU does not have a mandate within the area of Children at Risk of abuse or exploitation. The European Parliament and indeed the European Commission has on several occasions however issued framework decisions and recommendations in relation to crimes against children. These decisions and recommendations are important to look at when the regional co-operation on Children at Risk will develop and take on challenges facing the children of the region in the near future. Issues relating to improving the situation for Children at Risk are high on the agenda of the Council of Europe where several expert groups have been formed. These groups remain important for the Children's Unit and the WGCC to retain close contacts with. The groups regularly formulate good practices and recommendations that are important sources for information and national actions. Contacts with the Council of Europe continue to include interacting with the expert groups as well as with the relevant departments of the Council of Europe headquarters.

Stockholm in June 2004