



**Report from the Work of the WGCC and
the Children's Unit
2002**

by Senior Advisor Lars Lööf

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Introduction

The Working Group for Co-operation on Children at Risk, WGCC, was constituted at the meeting in Vilnius on the 28th to 29th of January 2002. The work of the WGCC is seen as a direct continuation of the work of the Reference Group attached to the project Children at Risk in the Baltic Sea Region. Members in the Working Group are with one exception the same as the members of the reference group.

At the meeting in Vilnius 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. At the meeting of Heads of State in June 2002 the issue of Children at Risk and the ongoing co-operation was specifically mentioned in the Chairman's Conclusions. An urgent appeal for the states in the region to look at how to co-operate on Unaccompanied and trafficked children was also made in the Chairman's Conclusions coming out of this meeting. During the year 2002 president Putin made an urgent call to all Russian citizens regarding the difficult situation many Russian children find themselves in. The Duma had one special session on the situation for children in Russia in February 2002.

The Working Group for Co-operation on Children at Risk 2002

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

Chair:

Iceland

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

Vice Chair:

Latvia

Ms Inete Ielite. Director, The National Centre for the Rights of the Child.

Denmark

Mr Bryan Nichols. Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Social Affairs. (January - August 2002)

Ms Dorte Bindselev. Senior Advisor, Ministry of Social Affairs. (January - August 2002)

Ms Margit Knudsen. UFC Boern og Familier. (September – December 2002)

Estonia

Ms Aive Sarias. Head of Department of Social Welfare, Ministry of Social Affairs.

Finland

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

Germany

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

Lithuania

Ms Audra Mikalauskaite. Head of Family, Children, Youth and Women's Unit, 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.

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

During the year 2002 the WGCC has had three regular meetings. The first meeting was the meeting in Vilnius in January when the WGCC constituted itself as a working group under the auspices of the Council of the Baltic Sea States. The Terms of Reference were adopted with agreements on electing a chair and a vice chair. Mr Bragi Gudbrandsson, General Director of the Government Agency for Child Protection in Iceland was unanimously elected Chair of the Working Group for Co-operation on Children at Risk for the year 2002. Ms Inete Ielite, Director of the Centre for the Rights of the Child in Latvia was unanimously elected as vice Chair. The Swedish and Norwegian ministries responsible for children's affairs committed themselves to continue funding the staff of the secretariat until the 30th of June, by which time it was estimated that the Senior Advisor who should be recruited during the spring of 2002, would be in place to take over the work and form the internationally funded Children's Unit.

The meeting in Reykjavik was held in April of 2002. At this meeting the WGCC decided to recommend the CBSS secretariat to hire Mr Lars Lööf for the post as Senior Advisor to the Children's Unit.

The third meeting of the year 2002 was held in Helsinki in September 2002. Priority Paper and Activity Plan along with a Policy paper outlining the responsibilities of the National Co-ordinators and the Competence Centres in relation to the national ministries were agreed on.

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

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

Recruitment of the Senior Advisor

The Committee of Senior Officials at their meeting in February 2002 decided on the inclusion of the co-operation on Children at Risk into the international secretariat of the Council of the Baltic Sea States. The recruitment process to hire a Senior Advisor was initiated after this and at the second meeting of the Working Group for Co-operation on Children at Risk, a decision was reached to recommend the head of the CBSS secretariat to hire Mr Lars Lööf for the post of Senior Advisor. He took up his position on the 15th of June 2002.

Priority Paper

The Priority Paper has been elaborated for some time during the project period, and as the WGCC was constituted it became evident that the group would benefit from putting the priorities on paper that would be recognised by all participating member states. The priority paper was finalised after the Helsinki meeting in September 2002 and sent to the ministries responsible for children's issues for their approval. As of today, only a few ministers have officially recognised the priority paper. The double recognition of papers that was decided upon in Helsinki in September is somewhat time consuming and may benefit from the WGCC considering a paper as adopted by the responsible ministries through the representation in the WGCC. The members of the WGCC do come to meetings with a mandate extending to commit themselves to adopting policies and activities. The priority paper will be submitted to the CSO for their information in February 2003.

Activity Plan

The Activity Plan is an ongoing working tool where different activities that the WGCC and the Children's Unit strive to implement are noted. The plan includes references to responsible partners and funding ideas. The activity plan is constantly revised and updated but each version is communicated to the WGCC so that the Working Group may follow the development of activities.

Childcentre web site

<http://childcentre.baltinfo.org>

The Childcentre web site is now an established tool for exchange of information in the field of children at risk within the Baltic Sea Region. Postings of reports and information are made on a regular basis by the National Co-ordinators in the participating countries. A questionnaire on how user friendly for the National Co-ordinators the site is has been sent out and responses show that all National Co-ordinators now deem that they know how to post articles, events and book reviews on the site. The major obstacle for making postings is lack of time and language difficulties. Many of the National co-ordinators find it difficult to find materials translated to English that could be posted on the site.

The secure part of the site is reached and used by approximately 25 different institutions and professionals in the area. A discussion forum allows for continuous ex-

change of ideas, new reports, requests for assistance and active search for partners in different programme endeavours. The secure part also holds an archive.

In October, 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 been built on a combination of hardware and software solutions enabling the highest possible secure communications. The high security however, was very expensive to maintain and difficult for the users to manage. It put high demands on the computer hardware and the operating systems on the computers. 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 site will be reduced this year due to the simplified log on procedure.

The web site has approximately 400 visitors per week.

Meetings of the National Co-ordinators and the Competence Centres

In June 2002 a meeting with the National co-ordinators and the National Competence Centres was held in Oslo, Norway. The meeting discussed co-operation in the areas of: Trafficking of Children and unaccompanied children in the region; Statistical comparisons between the countries in the region regarding sexual exploitation and abuse of children; Children in Institutions; Children living in the streets and Research on young persons' attitudes and experiences of sexual exploitation, Forensic interviewing and interdisciplinary approach to investigations of child sexual abuse.. The meeting resulted in a joint commitment to work with implementing the Activity Plan and for some of the national centres to take on a leading role in implementing activities or in preparing activities. A full report from the meeting is available at <http://childcentre.baltinfo.org/archive/car/dbafile2123.html>

Other meetings

In November 2002 researchers from nine of the 11 countries in the co-operation met in Vilnius, Lithuania to start discussing how a joint research initiative where young persons' experiences and attitudes regarding a number of issues related to child sexual exploitation and commercial sexual exploitation could be implemented. The meeting resulted in an ongoing work where the Norwegian National Co-ordinator, the Swedish Competence Centre and the Senior Advisor apply for funding to continue the development of this interesting research. The research, if carried out in the countries that so far have shown an interest to participate, will be groundbreaking since such a major endeavour has not up until now been achieved in any region of the world.

Contacts with other relevant organisations

The Children's Unit has kept a high profile in maintaining and developing the institutional network along with the network of non-governmental organisations. Members of the WGCC have also been instrumental in introducing the Children's Unit and the WGCC to actors in the field both of governmental initiatives, intergovernmental initiatives such as the South East Europe Stability Pact, NGO initiatives and other IGO activities. As can be seen from the event list below the Children's Unit and the Senior Advisor is actively invited to attend conferences and seminars as a contributor and the fact that an intergovernmental organisation like the CBSS has implemented in its structure a specific unit that emphasises the co-operation on Children at Risk, is seen as a major achievement by many important actors in the field such as UNICEF.

The WGCC and the Children's Unit have developed contacts with the Nordic Council of ministers, the Council of Europe and parts of the European Commission.

The US Embassy to Finland has initiated a co-operation with the Finnish government, and the Swedish Embassy to Finland on arranging a "Meeting on Best Practices in Combating Trafficking of Children in the Region". The Finnish government and the Swedish embassy to Finland have invited the Senior Advisor to be a member of the programme planning committee of this event. The committee has had one meeting in 2002 and the work continuous in the spring of 2003. The programme committee will also be looking at whom to invite to the meeting. The competence centres and other professionals that the Children's Unit is in contact with may thus both be invited to contribute as speakers and as participants in the meeting planned for the beginning of June 2003.

Participation of the Children's Unit in events

11 th of September	the Senior Advisor and the chair of the WGCC each made presentations at the Roundtable meeting on children in prison, organised by the CBSS Commissioner in Helsinki, Finland.
1 st of October	the Senior Advisor participated in a videoconference organised by the Centre for the rights of the child in Riga, Latvia
9 th of October	the Senior Advisor made a presentation at the Swedish Child Ombudsman seminar for government officials and NGO representatives from Central and Eastern Europe in Stockholm, Sweden.
10 th of October	the Senior Advisor had a one-day seminar on Children at Risk for professionals in Denmark, Copenhagen, Denmark.
22 nd of October	the Senior Advisor and the Chair of the WGCC both made presentations at the meeting on Children and the Law, organised by Save the Children. Copenhagen, Denmark.
25 th of October	the Senior Advisor made a presentation at the Swedish Crime Compensation Authority's seminar on Children, Body and Culture. Umeå, Sweden.
4 th - 5 th of November	the Senior Advisor implemented a two day training seminar at Dardedze, Centre for Abused Children. Riga, Latvia
22 nd of November	the Senior Advisor made a presentation on "Children's reactions to appearing in child pornography pictures" at the Expert

meeting organised by the Victim Identification Project, Childnet. London, UK

28th of November the Senior Advisor made a presentation on “Trafficking of Children” at the meeting “Action for the Future” organised by the Nord Baltic Campaign against trafficking in Women. Riga, Latvia.

Organisation of events

The senior advisor has been a part of the organising committee of the “Conference on TB and HIV in prisons and detention centres” organised by the Task force on Communicable Diseases, the Swedish Institute for Infectious Disease Control (SMI) and the Swedish Ministry for Health and Social Affairs. The conference was held in St Petersburg on the 25th - 27th of November 2002.

The Senior Advisor and the WGCC is, together with the Swedish ministry for Foreign Affairs, organising the meeting of senior officials on “Intergovernmental and inter-agency co-operation for improved assessment, care and reintegration of Unaccompanied Children in the region of the Baltic Sea States”. The meeting is funded by the Swedish government and could be seen as a starting point for more co-operation on the issue of Unaccompanied children in the region from the region.

Secondment to the Children’s Unit

The Swedish Foreign ministry has, to facilitate the organising of the meeting in February 2003 on Unaccompanied Children in the region, seconded an assistant to the Children’s Unit on a part time basis for the four last months of 2002. The first two months of 2003 a full time secondment will be in place to take care of all practical details around the organisation of the meeting.

Children at Risk within the CBSS structure

The integration of the Children’s Unit within the secretariat of the CBSS has meant that more sharing of information between the WGCC and the other working groups and task forces within the CBSS structure has been made possible. The WGDI for example and the Commissioner have mandates that in some areas coincide with and strengthens the work of the WGCC and vice versa. The Task Force on Communicable Diseases is one example of where an activity primarily aiming at improving the situation for adults may be more comprehensively implemented by including issues having to do with children. The Youth Secretariat is another body under the CBSS that the Children’s Unit has co-ordinated with. As the integration and the work of the WGCC and the Children’s Unit progresses, more and more synergy will be gained. Many of the ministries responsible for children’s issues in the member countries are contact points for the WGCC and for other CBSS working bodies, making integration easier.

Secretariat issues

The Children’s Unit was integrated into the secretariat on the basis that funding should be voluntary. This is of course a serious limitation to the effectiveness of the

work. In 2002 all countries except Poland, Russia and Estonia made contributions to the work of the Children's Unit. Thus, almost all countries are contributing to the work. For 2003 Estonia will also be a financial contributor, while it remains uncertain whether Russia or Poland will be able to contribute financially. The WGCC have decided to use the agreed funding model of the CBSS, i.e. big countries contribute 12% and small countries 4%. It is the strong recommendation of the WGCC that the CSO reconsider its position on this in order for the co-operation on children at risk to be the priority the heads of state regularly state that it is. The Swedish government, as host government, committed itself to fund not only the rent for the secretariat but also the administrative costs. The Swedish government thus carries the shared costs of administrative staff and the joint IT costs.

Other important issues

The close co-operation with the national and international NGOs active in the field of children at risk should continue. This will also encourage the use of the web site and the future co-ordination of activities will be encouraged. The involvement of the WGCC and the Children's Unit in programme activities is inevitable. The Children's Unit and the WGCC will therefore actively pursue a role as contributing to events and organisation of programmes that will build competence and capacity in the area of Children at Risk. The Children's Unit will more and more develop into a focal point with knowledge and contacts in the region on the issue of children at risk. This development should be seen as beneficial to the member states. A focal point needs to retain some expertise in the area in order to develop into a useful resource for the member countries.

Future

At the future accession of most of the states within the co-operation to the EU, the WGCC recognises the new challenges this will bring to the co-operation. On the EU level there is no co-ordination of activities relating to children at risk. Several of the EU directorates run programmes and initiatives targeting children and children at risk but there is no co-ordination. Sometimes these are programmes incorporated in other structures, like the eSafe programme, sometimes they exist as time limited initiatives coming out of parliamentary suggestions, sometimes they are time limited programmes with a small budget, constantly changing their remit and responsibilities, like the Daphne programme. The WGCC recognises that this will put the regional co-operation in an even more favourable position since both policy making and programme implementation call for more and better flow of information between the actors working to improve the situation for children at risk. The existing IT tool is specifically designed to handle the need for more information exchange. The existing networks of professionals and experts on rehabilitation and research are also a solid resource that will bring added value to all EU based projects and budget lines targeting children and children at risk.

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 will include interacting with the expert groups on the prioritised issues of the WGCC and to enhance and facilitate contacts between professionals in the region and the relevant Council of Europe departments.

Stockholm on the 30th of January 2003