



Expert Group for Cooperation on Children at Risk (EGCC) & the Children's Unit

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Composition of the group

The Expert Group for Cooperation on Children at Risk, EGCC, consists of eleven members; all member countries to the CBSS have appointed senior officials to the group. The EGCC consists of representatives from the line ministries dealing with children's issues, mainly ministries of social affairs, ministries of education and designated child ministries. The group consists of seven women and four men. The European Commission has not assigned a member to the EGCC. The period the EGCC is chaired by each country is rotated among the members to the group and does not follow the CBSS presidency.

Meetings of the EGCC

The EGCC has had two meetings, one in Vilnius on October 7th and 8th 2009 at the invitation of the Lithuanian Ministry of Social Security and Labour and one in Warsaw on April 15th and 16th at the invitation of the Polish Ministry of National Education. Reports from the meetings of the EGCC are published on the Childcentre website.

The EGCC priority document¹ guiding the work for the period 2009 – 2011 focuses on

- **The protection of children from all forms of sexual exploitation** including -
Unaccompanied and trafficked children
Children abused by being offered money or other forms of remuneration in exchange for sex
Children and online sexual exploitation
- **The protection of children from all forms of sexual abuse and sexual violence**
- **The rights of children in institutions and in other forms of out of home care.**

¹ <http://www.childcentre.info/priority-paper-for-the-work-of-the-egcc-until-2011/>

During the year the following major activities have been arranged by the EGCC. Many of the activities have been made possible through the close cooperation with governmental agencies, NGOs and IOs. The EGCC sometimes takes on the role of facilitator or coordinator, allowing organisations to join with other experts and organisations in the region. The EGCC aims at supporting professionals in the region with new tools and the most recent knowledge available.

Protecting Children from all Forms of Sexual Exploitation

Preventing the trafficking of children and protecting unaccompanied migrant children

Project: The EGCC has been awarded an EU grant via the Daphne III programme for the project **BSR IMPT** – Baltic Sea Region Information Management to Prevent Trafficking.² This is a 12 month project conducted in partnerships with three NGOs in the region: Save the Children Denmark, Caritas Lithuania and Tartu Child Support Centre in Estonia.

Expert seminars: The BSR IMPT consists of three expert seminars and will result in a written report building on interviews with stakeholders in the region. The first expert meeting held in Vilnius looked at links between sexual exploitation and abuse of children and trafficking. The second expert seminar in Copenhagen looked at links between asylum seeking children and children in migration and trafficking.

Time frame: December 2009 – December 2010

Financing: EUR 100 000. European Commission 80%, EGCC and project partners 20%

Outcome: Reports from the expert seminars. Final report published in December 2010.

Conclusions from Expert seminar 1 out of 3: Sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and links to trafficking³: The description of the situation in the participating countries including the multi-sector approaches and multi-national composition of expert participants accounted for the inspiring and interesting outcome from the meeting. Face-to-face interaction proved to be a key facilitator – knowledge sharing and mutual inspiration flourished across sectors and borders. Knowledge generation in this field builds on inductive reasoning and is inductive in nature, as we only see few signs and cases – the tip of the iceberg. This in particular calls for recognizing the value of focused professionals meetings in real-time.

The seminar shared experiences of challenges and constraints and methods to confront these were outlined and shared. Among the most significant challenges were the following:

- The diverging interests among stakeholders and the politicization of the issue: non-conforming numbers and statistics, diverging approaches, some working with a social viewpoint others entirely related to the crime
- State level with decisions, coordination and aligned measures versus municipality level that holds responsibility and undertake protection services: communication forth and back
- Rules of secrecy makes sharing and tracing a major challenge
- Problems in evidence and proof, few cases being taken through to conviction

² For full project description <http://www.childcentre.info/expert-group-for-cooperation-on-children-at-risk-new-project-fighting-child-trafficking/>

³ For the report from the meeting <http://www.childcentre.info/expert-seminar-children-and-sexual-abuse-and-sexual-exploitation-links-to-trafficking/>

- Differences among countries in definitions and services: Trafficking is what where? How to deal with cases across borders with varying legal frameworks?

New “alarm-areas” were paid attention to, the most noteworthy being:

- Women trafficked for the purpose of men exploiting their children makes children of for instance Thai women a highly vulnerable group. If Thai women are prostitutes, their children are at risk of ending up working as assistance to the prostitutes.
- Children of prostitutes born in countries of residence are at risk as their rights and status will often be hard to establish, therefore at times left by the mother.
- Emerging tourist areas in Europe, Black Sea and Baltic Sea areas for instance
- Babies that illegally become part of a commercial market for adoption

Conclusions from Expert seminar 2 out of 3: Migrant children and children in the asylum system at risk of exploitation and possible victims of trafficking⁴:

- The numbers; how to get the figures and facts on children victims of trafficking? Many have described the different interests from different stakeholders. There is a need to ensure trust between sectors and to avoid duplicate reporting.
- Differences between the various countries in identification procedures seem a challenge.
- Disappearances of children from asylum centres seem to be a major problem. What is happening to the children when disappearing? Disappearances may at times be related to the Dublin II convention, in some cases children disappear to avoid being sent back to first receiving country.
- The asylum centres are under pressure. Inadequate resources to assist the unaccompanied children lead to inadequate fulfilment of rights.
- International law related to national procedures: Followint international commitments, is a country mandated to assist a child victim if the crime of trafficking took take place in another country?
- Problems of children in ‘false families` - should DNA be used for identification? What do we know about these children? Are the social authorities able to monitor?
- Assessing the best interest of the child when planning a safe return is a challenge, how?
- We need to know more about street children and migrant children living in the streets.
- Minors staying within ethnic minorities, for instance Vietnamese communities in Lithuania and Poland, we lack knowledge about the pull and push factors, likewise mechanisms to establish whether there are links to trafficking.
- Is detention in centres protection or violation of the child? Can you lock up children to protect them?
- Age assessment has a bearing on various rights issues – further interesting how it fluctuates whether it is sometimes useful to be younger than ones real age and in other cases advantageous being older.
- Discussion about the distinction between children and teenagers especially regarding asylum seekers, where there are hardly any small children.

⁴ For full report from the meeting <http://www.childcentre.info/expert-meeting-children-in-the-asylum-system-and-children-in-migration-links-to-trafficking/>

- Children exploited for drug crime and robberies: How do we manage this when we talk about hard crime vis-à-vis possible cases of trafficking?
- Information about the same individuals moving from country to country: There is a need for better information processes across borders, in order to combine, test and share information to be made useful. However, cases based purely on suspicions are difficult and probably questionable to share.

National Contact Points on Unaccompanied and Trafficked Children⁵ are appointed in all CBSS member states except Germany and Russia. Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova take part in the implementation of the programme and have also appointed National Contact Points, NCP. The National Contact Points have been used in individual cases where informal information has been provided between professionals in the member countries.

Expert input: The EGCC through its secretariat gives expert input to three actions in the Swedish government's plan against prostitution and human trafficking. One of the actions is supporting the group of Swedish experts that were trained in the 2-year training organised during 2005 - 2007 by the EGCC. Through targeted seminars the Swedish experts disseminate their knowledge to colleagues in the child protection services, migration centres and youth institutions. Swedish UNICEF has as another part of the Swedish governmental plan organised training seminars across Sweden at which the EGCC has contributed with the regional knowledge on child trafficking. The Swedish Crime Compensation Authority has also invited the EGCC to present at the seminars organised for legal professionals on the topic of trafficking.

Financing: Swedish government.

Time frame: November 2008 – December 2010

Expert input: The EGCC has also been a member of the advisory group for the NCM financed project preventing trafficking in North-Western Russia by media productions, a project implemented by Save the Children Denmark.

Financing: Nordic Council of Ministers.

Time frame:

Sexual Exploitation of Children

Conference: Child Safety on the Internet – Prevention, Education and Cooperation. Moscow.

Time frame: 12 – 13 November 2009

Financing: EUR 150 000. The European Commission Safer Internet Programme, 100%.

Outcome: 120 Russian experts and 50 experts from the region and from EU member states presented and discussed research, legislative approaches, preventive work making the Internet safer for children. Presentations and full report from the conference available at www.childcentre.info/child-safety-internet-conference/

Conclusions by theme:

On legislation

The Russian legislation as well as European legislation are all in transition and discussions on how children's welfare and protection in the online environment can best be ensured and the best way to use legal means to protect children will continue. The discussions during the conference clearly show that there is much to learn from different countries' experiences of

⁵ Contact details of the National Contact Points can be found at <http://www.childcentre.info/ncp/>

legislation. In Russia, the Duma is presently close to the final reading of suggested new legislation moving towards a stronger protection of children both with regard to online and offline safety. In Europe the same is true in different countries where the EU's new Framework Decision puts it to member states to criminalise behaviours that have so far in most countries not been illegal, most notably grooming.

Way forward: The EGCC will closely follow the developments on this in its member states, including Russia, and will actively promote the sharing of legislation between countries. The EGCC also welcomes the stronger involvement of child expertise and researchers in developing legislation. With reference to the CRC the EGCC encourages all nations to recognise that the child's best interest should always guide matters regarding children. The EGCC recognises the different contexts in which protective legislation is discussed in Europe and in Russia. The conference gave a strong push towards more contacts between legislators in Russia, the Baltic Sea Region and in the rest of Europe. The EGCC will continue to support improved protection of children in line with the Council of Europe's recent convention⁶ and with the best interest of the child as guidance.

On child protection services and child rehabilitation services

Conclusion: This area is one where there is an urgent need to develop more knowledge and more expertise. There is all over Europe and in Russia alike a strong need for updated knowledge on the impact of abusive online experiences on children and on young people in order to inform policy makers and legislative actions. The assistance programmes that were presented showed interesting results and a strong need to disseminate their findings in order for child expertise to develop models of intervention built on young people's own perceptions of online dangers and online abuse.

Way forward: The EGCC will continue to support initiatives and projects aiming at increased knowledge on support mechanisms for young people and on how professionals meeting with children and young people may become aware of how to include young peoples' online world in their discussions and supportive contacts with children. This area is one where the strong network of NGOs in the region and in Russia that the EGCC has developed over the years can be especially useful.

On Industry involvement in safer internet initiatives

Conclusion: The EGCC was impressed by the strong interest shown by Russian telecom industry in child safety on the Internet. The questions the industry has on how cooperation can promote their interests need to be responded to. A few industry representatives from the EU member states were at the meeting.

Way forward: The EGCC does not work directly with the industry sector. Within the relevant CBSS bodies the EGCC will raise the topic and see how the questions the Russian industry has can best be answered.

On law enforcement cooperation

Conclusion: There is a strong need for improved cooperation between law enforcement and all other actors working to improve child safety on the Internet. This area is one where members of the Russian Duma, child rights ombudsmen, child protection NGOs and researchers alike need to demonstrate to law enforcement and ministerial representatives the advantages that lie in a stronger cooperation.

Way forward: More law enforcement involvement in strategic planning of projects and programmes, ensuring that their specific concerns are being met.

⁶ Council of Europe's Convention on the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, 2007.

On research

Conclusion: Researchers in Europe and in Russia seem to do much of their work without contacts with each other. A lot can be gained for all involved if relevant and interesting research becomes available for all active researchers. The conference was for many an eye opener and a first contact. Exchange of material and results across language barriers must be supported.

Way forward: The EGCC to establish and maintain closer ties with colleagues in Russia, ensuring their access and possible participation in new research projects.

Concluding remarks: The EGCC and the CBSS welcome this focused approach to a topic that is complex and where no country or region has found the perfect response. The conference was an excellent way of putting the regional cooperation at work making the special standing of the CBSS especially useful in inviting all the different stakeholders and creating the necessary bridge between the European member states and Russia. The EGCC especially welcomes the strong participation from the side of the Russian regional ombudsmen for the rights of children as well as the excellent interest shown by members of the Duma, Russian and European industry, law enforcement and NGOs and civil society organisations in Russia and in the rest of Europe. The conference contacts and conclusions drawn from the conference will be part of the EGCC input to the Baltic Sea Regional Summit held in June in Vilnius.

Expert input: The secretariat is part of the advisory board on the UNICEF Innocenti Centre's research on child protection in the converged online and offline world.

Financing: Innocenti Research Centre

Outcome: EGCC input to the research report. Contacts between the study and professionals in different part of the region is facilitated.

Project preparation: ROBERT – Risktaking Online Behaviour – Empowerment through Research and Training.

Financing: EUR 400 000. The European Commission Safer Internet Programme, 100%

Time frame: June 2010 – June 2012

Partners: EGCC coordinates in partnership with four universities and four NGOs

Outcome: Project is accepted for funding⁷.

The Rights of Children in Institutions and in Other Forms of out of Home Care

Conference: Keeping the Door Open – Support to Young People Leaving Care⁸

Time frame: Vilnius, 6-7 October 2009

Partners: EGCC, Lithuanian Ministry of Social Security and Labour, Council of Europe, SOS Children's Villages, UNICEF

Financing: Lithuanian Ministry of Social Security and Labour, the EGCC, the Council of Europe, SOS Children's Villages International and SIDA Baltic Sea Unit.

⁷ For full descriptions of ROBERT project <http://www.childcentre.info/robert/>

⁸ For reports from the conference <http://www.childcentre.info/keeping-the-door-open-2/> and for presentations <http://www.childcentre.info/presentations-from-the-conference-keeping-the-door-open-support-to-young-people-leaving-care/>

Outcome: 100 participants from all over Europe, including some 20 young people with care experiences presented best practices concerning support to young people leaving care when it comes to education, employment, housing and social and psychological wellbeing. Report from the meeting and presentations are published on the website, continued cooperation with SOS Children's Villages is underway.

Conclusions: The conclusions from the conference are organised around the four conference themes

- Emotional stability and social wellbeing
- Education
- Employment
- Housing

- **Emotional stability and social wellbeing**
 - Young people in care are individuals with different background and individual needs and this should and must be reflected in the pathway plan
 - There should be flexibility in the support services assessing the needs of the young person in each individual case
 - Continuity and availability of support persons need to be ensured
 - Life skills education is an important part of the education of a young person
 - Young people leaving care should be encouraged to come out of the "comfort zone" and enter the "growth zone" in order for them to reach their full potential
 - Support must take into account how gender influences young people's transition to independence
 - It is important to support parenting skills in foster families

- **Education**
 - Good education is one of the main indicators for reaching one's life goals and this is especially true for young people with care experiences
 - More focus must be given to education for children and young people while in care
 - Each child in care needs an individual plan regarding education to be able to make the best of her/his talents
 - Education should be an integral part of the pathway plan
 - Care workers and foster parents tend to have low expectations regarding achievements in the education system and these tend to de-motivate the young person
 - The young person should be motivated to study in order to raise her/his self esteem and increase his/her employment perspectives
 - Education efforts for young people in care must be improved
 - Financial measures need to be in place for care leavers so that they can access higher education

- **Employment**
 - Improved quality of care impacts on the chances of care leavers to find jobs
 - Important to recognise the link between education and finding and keeping employment

On employment the young people participating presented a list of useful provisions:

1. Provide adequate training to
 - a) Write a cv
 - b) Write an application letter
 - c) Do job interviews
2. Support in planning careers
 - a) Give guidance
 - b) Strengthen the skills
 - c) Promote talents and creativity
3. Take measures against discrimination by employers due to:
 - a) Care background (Social stigma of having been in care)
 - b) Gender
 - c) Race
4. Give subsidies
 - a) Create job opportunities
 - b) Ensure job stability
 - c) Support the financial independence
5. Strengthen the positive influence of care givers who need to motivate and encourage the young person and support the building of self-confidence.

• Housing

- Transition period can be supported by institutions setting up houses where young people can stay after 18 years of age
- The transition period to independent life may be long
- Funding for housing assistance should be in governments' budgets
- Minimum standards for adequate accommodation should be set up
- Housing is an important part in the success and motivation of the young person as it is one of the main areas of autonomy and independence
- Stable housing should be seen as one important right for young people
- Should be supported but NGOs should be careful not to take over responsibility of duty bearers
- Housing is or should be an integral part of the pathway plan

Throughout the discussions and the presentations at the conference a recurring theme was the need for recognition and support for professionals supporting young people by decision makers and responsible authorities.

Children's Unit

The Secretariat function of the EGCC is carried by the Children's Unit staffed by the Head of Unit 100% and until January 2010 also with a Project Officer 20%.

The Children's Unit operates on a separate budget built on member states' voluntary contributions. During 2009 all Member States except Latvia and Russia contributed to the Children's Unit and in 2010 all Member states except Russia have contributed. The Project

Officer was a part of the follow up process to the Oslo ministerial meeting which is financed partly by the Norwegian Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion.

The Childcentre web site

The website www.childcentre.info has been continuously updated and used for presenting material coming out of the cooperation and other reports and studies of interest for professionals in the region. The Secretariat and the National Coordinators in the different countries are responsible for the updating of information on the site.

Associated Expert Group to the NDPHS

The EGCC has during the year been an associated expert group to the Northern Dimension Partnership on Health and Social Wellbeing.