

**BSR IMPT Project: The Expert seminar in Tallinn on 14/15th September 2010:
Child trafficking – child labour – children committing crimes – children begging
- information and intelligence management -**

Welcoming words

Ms. Anniki Tikerpuu, Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs

On behalf of the Ministry and as member of the Expert Group for Cooperation on Children at Risk, (EGCC), Ms. Anniki Tikerpuu welcomed participants. She gave a brief introduction to the efforts set up by the Council of the Baltic Sea States, CBSS, such as systems to promote protection of children, e.g. by appointing National Co-ordinators and National Contact Points for Unaccompanied and Trafficked Children (NCPs). Systems to facilitate information flows are vital, she stressed, and CBSS has organised a considerable number of events and meetings in order to facilitate discussions and information addressing various issues such as child rights violations linked to trafficking and exploitation, new trends, various return systems and others. Ms. Anniki Tikerpuu pointed to a CBSS training series, lifting the competency at region level, underlining CBSS as an important regional source in child protection. She concluded, concerning civil security for the children, that the situation has improved in the region as a whole. In closing, Anniki Tikerpuu emphasized the cooperation of networks of professionals and NGOs at all levels as pivotal to further improve and sustain child protection.

Introduction to the BSR IMPT project

Mr. Lars Lööf, Head of Children's Unit, Council of Baltic Sea States, Secretariat

Lars Lööf introduced the BSR IMPT Project (Baltic Sea Region - Information Management to Prevent Trafficking) and initiated his introduction by underlining the importance of focusing on the 'before' and 'after' when it comes to trafficking in children. Before it occurs, for instance, how do we spot particular patterns and situations that lead to trafficking, he asked – and in breaking up the process of trafficking, how do we identify and collate those small bits and pieces of information, that being compiled and puzzled together will eventually constitute vital information.

Such questions and inquiry had led the Steering Group, consisting of Save the Children, Denmark, Caritas Lithuania and Tartu Child Support Centre, Estonia to formulate the entry point to the present project: How do we manage information so it becomes useful and how do we make the information available to those groups that deal with children at risk. Mr. Lars Lööf accounted for some of the achievements so far: A range of interviews has been conducted in Baltic Sea countries and further inputs from the seminars: One on prostitution in Vilnius and a Copenhagen seminar on

migration. Eventually it will all be incorporated into a final report, hopefully presenting “Good Practices”.

Mr. Lars Lööf ended his introduction by directing attention to the issue of prerequisites for identifying trafficking or criminal act: The recruitment, control by others, deception or other traits. However, such aspects as traditionally defining trafficking are all in many countries under change, he noted.

Ultimately he stressed that participants present should all consider themselves part of the seminar by virtue of their own capacity – not representing their home institution.

Child labour, children in criminality and begging. Estonian experiences in supporting children at risk

Ana Baum, Police and Boarder Guard, Criminal Police Department

Crime in terms of forced labour is non-existent in Estonia, Ana Baum initiated her talk. She continued to set the frame regarding statistics as Estonia doesn't have special laws on trafficking, but only “neighbouring laws”, that cater for data being collated on for instance slavery, unlawful selling, deprivation of liberty and forced labour. The country has no proof of forced labour, nor cases involving minors. Last year one case appeared on deprivation of liberty: A grand parent was accused of taking children to another country by a divorced parent. However, Estonia has a few cases linked to prostitution, the year before as well a case on illegal boarder crossing involving a group of minors. Ana Baum concluded that trafficking is not a prominent problem in Estonia – it is a small country, everyone knows each other, rumors for instance on bad employers move very quickly, she said.

Ana Baum continued by stating that social provision has improved by force of both government and NGOs, implying there are no children in the street anymore with comprehensive control and close monitoring taking place. However, cases exist during summertime, where children are taking advantage of work opportunities on very poor conditions, but these cases will be settled by social authorities without reporting and hence no data will enter into criminal statistics. More over, she noted, social welfare is not comprehensive enough to be attractive to foreigners, meaning Estonia has no significant influx.

Estonia has large Russian non-Estonian speaking population in the eastern part of the country, one third in total, who in that sense is not immigrants, but however without any citizenship. Due to Ama Baum, risks are in general linked to poverty but as well neglect by busy and apparently resourceful families, both leading to delinquency and petty thefts, often organized by older children engaging younger children to steel, for instance.

The problem of children left by parents going abroad for work, primarily Norway and Great Britain, is an emerging problem. It seems increasing but no clear figures exist as yet. Children staying back are often without proper control and care, which affects their school performance and attendance and ultimately leading to crime and delinquencies, it is feared.

Particular findings:

What kind of information: A trend is merging of parents going abroad, leaving their children behind and putting these at risk.

Information bearers: Neighbours, family members and friends, all ordinary citizens together with school teachers will be those best informed.

How to make it useful: Citizens and school teachers need to share such information with social authorities in order for support and monitoring to be established. Further more information on the phenomenon should be shared with countries in the region in order to allow them to take precautionary measures.

Outreach work and environmental screening

Tine Lindebjerg Jensen, The Danish Centre against Human Trafficking

Tine Lindebjerg is assigned by the Danish Centre against Human Trafficking. The national centre is governmental run and set up to implement the Danish Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings. She has been an outreach worker for several years, primarily focusing on outreach to vulnerable young people.

She is now pursuing a study on minors in the streets who could be in risk of trafficking. Information from other Nordic countries indicates, as this is the case in these countries, there could be children and young people in the streets, who are not reached by other services. Therefore this project has been set up in order to identify trafficking among minors and further establish which measures and services would be adequate. The study methodology builds on observation, screening and mapping in various city areas in order to establish trends, particular groups in risk and further what kind of provision could be relevant. Tine Lindebjerg interview homeless people, rickshaw drivers, toilet guardians and other outreach workers to collect information about the phenomenon of trafficking in minors. They appear not to be many, but however insignificant, a few groups of children and young people pop up at times. Romanian or Roma groups have been accounted for, begging or collecting bottles at festivals. Mobility patterns are interesting, but hard to track – before July a number of foreign youngsters were reported in major Danish cities. Now they are gone, but why, where and under which circumstances?

A private shelter for foreigners has accounted for “probably not any minors”. Existing services for adults don’t fit with the needs of minors, as these are most often too rough places. Moreover, services like shelters do not address children and young people, who seem to be a rare target group and often, they fall outside existing mandates and funding schemes. We run separate

centers for adults and children, the latter providing residential care. However, often we lack proper services designed for youth. Youth can not stay with adult because of too rough environments, nor can they stay with children as they themselves will be too rough for children. Systems are often separate systems with sometime rigid divides between adults and children and between nationals and internationals. The same shelters can apparently not accommodate for mixed nationalities, national and foreigners?

A discussion took place, questioning why we find only shelters for adults. Further procedures were discussed among participants: What possibilities exist if a teenager comes by and asks for help? Finding adequate protection measures and services effective in addressing youth appeared to be a shared challenge. Apparently interesting pilot projects are pursued and tested in Lithuania, St. Petersburg and Berlin.

The open Schengen borders constitute an incentive for vulnerable groups to move around and seek their fortune. Rights are in principal the same whether minor are national or foreign, implying each country must develop the necessary expertise. For various reasons authorities will often not strictly comply with this obligation.

Outreach work identifies children and young people involved in criminality, because of visible events are taken place. However, vulnerability might remain concealed and family based violence will hence stay hidden. With non-residents, authorities often lack procedures to investigate and pursue a screening if foreign families treat their children badly.

Particular findings:

What kind of information: Studies gives concrete outputs in terms of specific information on gaps: Youth are underprovided compared to adults – children are often catered for at institutions, but youth friendly provision as shelters and alike is lacking.

Information bearers: Outreach workers together with others in the streets – being it homeless or rickshawdrivers will hold most information.

How to make it useful: Information should be shared between outreach work specialists and social authorities in order to fill the gap. Further advocacy will probably need and hence NGOs worjing with vulnerable groups should be engaged.

Film: “Bogdan – can it be trafficking?”

After lunch, the seminar participants were introduced to a film made by UNICEF, Sweden: “Bogdan – can this be trafficking”. The movie presents us with a young boy, whom we meet as a pickpocket thief in a large Swedish city environment. A presumed uncle seems also to be part of the frame. Bogdan is traveling around - on a regular base he is caught in steeling, then handed over to police, who together with social guardians every time investigate the case due to suspicions of trafficking, but as it can't be proven, Bogdan will be released and leave for yet another city together with this adult, whom might be or might not be Bogdan's uncle.

An extensive discussion among seminar participants followed with a number of issues being raised, one being a quite heated discussion whether the Swedish social system could just let Bogdan go, although he is a minor and presumably in trouble, however refusing all offers for help and support. Participants as well discussed incentives for children and young to decline help: They can be governed by real or fake uncles, they can be debt-migrants, their family might be threatened, they may be main providers in the family etc.

In terms of trafficking, the challenge in the case of Bogdan, obviously is to establish whether the uncle is a relative or not. A similar case from Bergen in Norway was presented, here further investigations in a case with Lithuanian children stealing ultimately revealed a hidden network governed by adults, and eventually it was identified as a trafficking case.

Particular findings:

What kind of information: Children and young peoples motives are multiple but should however be respected as it their reasons will be all individual, specific and meaningful even they often refuse all offers.

Information bearers: All specialist groups coming into contact with a boy like Bogdan will gain some knowledge, but even puzzled together it will probably not provide us with anything useful in regard to solving the situation, Bogdan faces.

How to make it useful: The film is extremely useful for training purposes as it provides a useful platform for a number of observations and discussions.

Outreach work identifying children at risk of exploitation

Johanna Ek Westerlund, Stockholm City Outreach Social work division

Johanna Ek Westerlund works in the division of Youth Emergency Unit, Sweden, which pursues outreach work in “negative environments”. The county administration has commissioned the division to undertake a pilot study aiming to find new ways of identifying possible victims of trafficking. Outreach workers therefore screen and map possible trafficking by walking the streets and interviewing people present in a certain area on a daily base, for instance café staff and shop owners. Johanna Ek Westerlund explained that procedures laid out establish that the team shall only identify suspicions – information will subsequently be handed over to social workers. Mapping in practice means that places are identified where children are observed to beg, play music or sell flowers. In Sweden such children will often be coming from Bulgaria and Rumania.

Various aspects linked to such a mapping exercise were discussed, for instance it was questioned whether walking the streets in daylight will at all provide useful information opposed to approaching more challenging environments such as strip-clubs, certain gay bars and drug environments? Moreover, information on procedures by the social system to follow after the first contact with the outreach worker, was asked for.

Participants discussed variations that highly impacts on what is regarded suspicious cases or just an ordinary phenomenon. For instance, one will always see plenty of young people selling whatever in the streets in Poland during summer time. Regulations allow that for over children 15 years old. It was stressed by a number of participants, that our effort to identify whether actions can be linked to something exploitive, should not interfere with children doing lawful work, which is supported and accepted by the local environment. In Poland, it was explained, labour inspectorates check in more industrialised areas. A story from Lithuania was brought forward: Children from an orphanage were offered holiday at farms in the country side, and in a few cases children were being exploited.

Particular findings:

What kind of information: A mapping study in itself provides us with new knowledge on the phenomenon and experiences are accumulated on the use of certain methodologies.

Information bearers: Informants in such screenings are once again those present in certain environments on a daily base due to work or whereabouts.

How to make it useful: Outreach workers have proved to be vital due to their capacities as collectors of information – however, usefulness ultimately depends on the impact on decision makers.

Cooperating with police in cases of children and young people involved in criminality

Ann Susanne Dueholm, Danish National Police

Ann Dueholm informed about procedures undertaken by Danish police in approaching a case of suspicion. She emphasized the importance of undertaking the full range of questioning every time in order to pursue exhaustive investigation. She further pointed to a number of challenges – faced not only by police but the whole system. Concerning police as a professional group in trafficking, we must acknowledge the fact that it is extremely difficult to keep the force updated, Ann Dueholm underlined: Single police officer can not be experienced or particular well informed as they extremely seldom run into a suspicious case.

When cases are established as suspicious, it is however not the single police officer, who takes the case the whole way through. The Centre against Human Trafficking is in Denmark always called and very helpful, she underlined. The Centre is also present whenever police undertakes planned raids. She continued by stressing that the judicial systems play a significant role: It is not only down to police and the Centre against Human Trafficking whether to establish cases of trafficking. Ann Dueholm gave an example of how law systems could be too reluctant to test allegations by explaining about a Turkish minority group from Rumania who had been facilitated to go to Denmark and all being free but at the arrival, they were stripped of all documents and subsequently forced into depth. Unfortunately the prosecutor – and prosecutors are often also inexperienced due to the few cases, she noted, turned down the case which was not considered robust enough to stand a trial. In this case, which is hardly ever the case, one from the group

provided vital intelligence that subsequently led to investigations in the sector of newspaper distribution in the Copenhagen areas – a sector employing many foreigners and also young people.

As a police officer, she stressed, the issue of trafficking basically comes down to two criteria for success: Trial and conviction. However, despite the differences in professional approaches, all stakeholders involved are basically driven by concern – everyone wishes to help the person in question.

Various aspects were discussed by the plenary: The process of inquiry, how can we make it optimal? Some argued that trafficking easily becomes much too much about identification – less the process as a continuum. More over the issue of victims was touched upon: The very notion of victims should be specified as victims are something different to each sector, and noteworthy to observe: The most abusive person can be a victim at the same time. Possible victims will at times refuse to talk and disappear from our reach, there is not much to do and it is their right to reject all offers and turn away. Some challenged this viewpoint, others questioned whether children and young people maybe have substantial arguments, when refusing to cooperate – because can we in fact protect them, it was asked.

A particular issue was on “divide” between professions – between general protection and conviction aims basically. It was argued that social workers sharing offices with police could set up a unified effort and make things more effective, as both sectors concurrently will be involved in same cases. This was opposed by others who claimed we shall cherish the particularities – police fundamentally differs from NGO’s and we should ensure young people have the opportunity to relate to somebody outside the “police frame”.

Particular findings:

What kind of information: We are challenged by the fact that modus operandi and approaches differs between sectors and professionals – between “the soft people and the hard people”. However, both approaches should be there and both cherished as important.

Information bearers: All involved bear important information

How to make it useful: The question is all about dialogue and sharing information – from sector to sector without losing our sector-specificity.

Child protection and child begging – dilemma?

Kristina Stepanova, Save the Children, Lithuania

Kristina Stepanova accounted for the number of Lithuanian children involved in begging is decreasing due to various efforts from a range of stakeholders. However, she stated, begging is still a challenge as shared understanding of the dynamics of the phenomenon is lacking among specialists. For instance, is begging simply a question of economic gains or rather a sign of

vulnerability? A study has been pursued by the municipality in Vilnius, showing the average income per day to be 15 Euro. Begging is a very complex problem, she stressed, it is linked to poverty and dysfunctional families, and money earned in begging provide for alcohol to parents and remediate own hunger for children at the time. The study further showed that quite some children state they are in the streets simply to avoid being at home. Those begging are Lithuanian children, minorities are Russians or Polish but they are few.

Kristina Stepanova pointed to problems with family priorities and dynamics. Referring to a recent study, Lithuanian children spent only 7 minutes a day talking parents. Comparing with UNICEF studies in other countries, children are less happy in Lithuania than other places, they miss parent's attention. Social services are in place, social workers are checking families quite carefully and the social system provides a considerable service programme. Such programmes include daycare centers and youth clubs, free of charges, which all pursue the task of getting children re-integrated. According to Kristina Stepanova, the social system does not sustain welfare interventions by addressing root causes by trying to remedy family dysfunctions. As a result, children from poor families end up approaching service as a right they can demand, indicating these children are will never learn how to cope in terms of having a job and care for own life and future.

Unfortunately NGOs are not recognized in Lithuania, nor trusted as advocates in promoting child development and welfare. However, Save the Children and others have attempted to promote public awareness and launching a campaign encouraging people not to give money, but rather contact authorities. To support this, a helpline to the municipality was established.

Information on legislative aspects of begging in different countries was shared: For instance, begging is not illegal in Norway but as beggars they must register, implying authorities hold an overview and suspicious cases are easily be investigated. This summer, for instance, a 10 years old girl begging in a park could easily be checked and identified as not registered and consequently immediately investigated. She turned out to be part of a Rumanian family, who just stayed for the summer and according to Rumanian authorities, it was a well settled family and children attended school back in Rumania. The family had just gone to northern Europe to make some extra money and as ID and information were checked, everything appeared okay.

In Poland begging is legal, however as in other countries, beggars must obey to public order, and not act aggressively, otherwise police will interfere. Begging is only allowed for minors 15 years old and older. However, during summertime streets are full with Polish minors begging, and police is not able to control the age of all. Moreover a few Rumanian families bring small children and here we see really atrocious stories: For instance a child was taking away from his Rumanian mother who had since been gone. He was left with an assumed false birth certificate, had no language and is examined to be younger than stated. Moreover, there were indications, he had been drugged.

He has been given a guardian and stays in an institution, however the Court can't do anything to settle his situation and future: They need the legitimate mother to allow for adoption and basically, the child stays illegally.

Particular findings:

What kind of information: A cultural sensitive approach should always be applied when addressing children begging as it might in some cases be part of a legal and culturally recognised, however it is often linked to their childhood in dysfunctional families.

Information bearers: NGOs, social workers and not least day care centers and youth clubs are vital informants.

How to make it useful: Collaboration between day care centers and social authorities is of outmost importance in order to respond to the real needs of the child. Moreover, information of this kind should also in a generalised form be handed over to NGOs to keep them properly informed on trends.

A critical look at protecting children in minority groups when collecting information on possible links to trafficking? Barbara Lech, La Strada, Poland

Lars Lööf introduced the issue of minorities by stressing that we have minorities in all countries – and Baltic states along with others has each their challenge in seeing to that the rights of minorities are addressed and monitored. More over, he noted, national systems are all build to cater for nationals but with mobility and migration being an ever growing phenomenon, these systems are seriously challenged. Apart from strong governmental protection systems, one should always look for perspectives linked to involving community alliances, associations and NGOs, Lars Lööf pointed out.

Barbara Lech introduced to the Polish la Strada Foundation, a foundation focusing on trafficking in women. Their work comprises public information, awareness leaflets in a number of languages, lectures, school visits, telephone hotline etc. A prominent part is social assistance campaigns supporting trafficked, which includes a 24 hour emergency assistance.

Concerning minorities, Poland faces some problems. Roma children begging in the street is also known in Poland, some being from Rumanian and Bulgarian. A group of these are Roma of origin but Polish citizens. This group causes problems such as early and forced marriages, but money and family interests involved suggest it is challenging for the girls, as they tend to claim it is all taking place with full consent. The situation for this group indicates we need new ways of working as the legal situation is very complicated. Also Chechenians were mentioned as often living in closed communities and here we should suspect forced marriages, it was claimed, and internal marriages or family related violence within Chechenian communities will never come to our knowledge.

Handling information in a safe and effective way is a challenge and was discussed by participants. Everybody agreed that data collected should be handled carefully. In Poland, NGOs that receive

public funding need to hand in forms that to a certain extent assure anonymity but at the time contains so much personal information, that it could eventually be used to track and identify the person. La Strada as other NGOs assigned to undertake a certain service, will legitimately be claimed to hand in data, as this is the only way authorities can monitor any line of intervention. In particular NGOs and La Strada will often be the only reliable sources when speaking of cases on suspicion as authorities fail to set up systems that cater for collection of such data.

In Sweden both conviction and ongoing cases are registered. Police in Sweden gets most information from social workers. Investigation is of course only police business. In Lithuania, the dialogue between authorities and civil society is deficient: Information is withheld from NGOs due to anxiety they will launch critical and public debates. For instance, when Vietnamese children were coming in from Russia, it was held secret to NGOs because they would have questioned the services provided. In Poland, data are collected from various sources, one being NGOs, police, prosecutor and all regions social systems provide information. In Latvia, information is only available at state level, but confidential, however yearly reports containing data and global figures will be published.

Particular findings:

What kind of information: Data is the significant challenge in trafficking. How much data and what type? Shared by whom? Handling data is a sensitive thing – also when discussing certain close communities – anecdotes are easily established as myth.

Information bearers: In terms of closed foreign communities, hardly any of the traditional specialist groups can claim to be information bearer as real information is extremely limited.

How to make it useful: All specialist groups should in general be humble when claiming to be informed – often incidents and phenomena are very complex – such humbleness should be developed into a multi-sector shared marker.

Discussion and conclusions – recommendations and gaps where more knowledge is necessary:

Due to time constraints, it was a brief summary stating that we could all benefit from more knowledge on various issues and challenges, however, Lars Lööf noted, a significant finding from the present seminar was that it evidently differs a lot whether sectors including NGOs are all informed at the same level.

Closing words

The Seminar report, Lars Lööf stated will be sent soon together with a revised participants list, the latter being useful as it allows participants to contact each other bilaterally. Later in December the final report – based on the seminars and interviews undertaken in each country – will be launched.