



CBSS Expert Group on
Children at Risk



**Nordic Council
of Ministers**



**Barne-, ungdoms-
og familiedirektoratet**

IDENTIFYING CHILDREN AT RISK OF EXPLOITATION AND TRAFFICKING

Strengthening child-sensitive communication
and best interests determinations

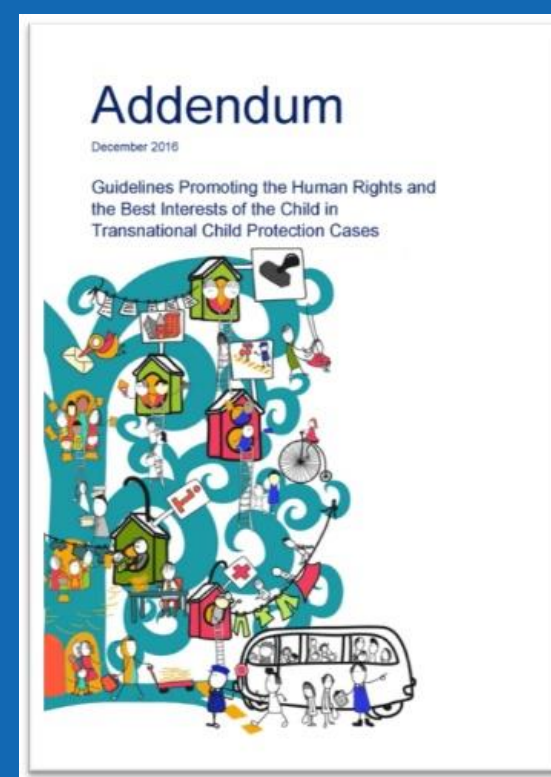
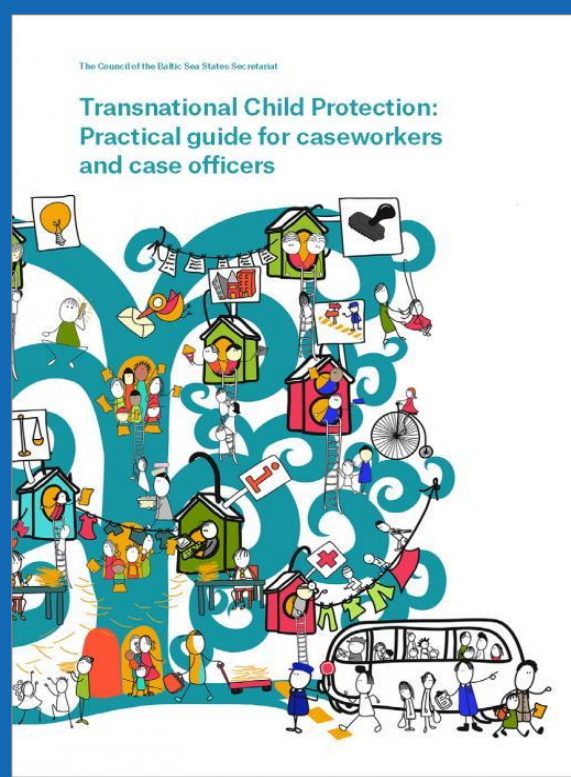
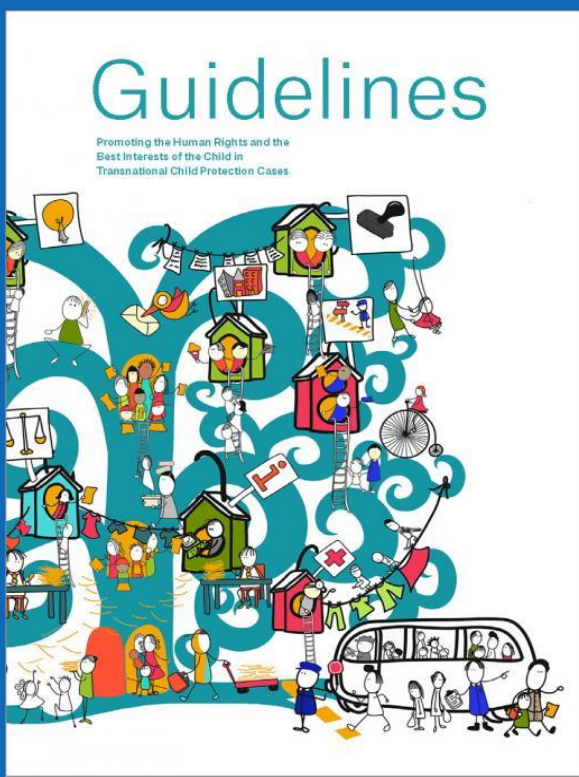
Oslo Conference

29-30 May 2018

Background and context

PROTECT Children on the Move CBSS Regional Initiative





Council of the Baltic Sea States, Children at Risk Unit

Protect Children on the Move Project

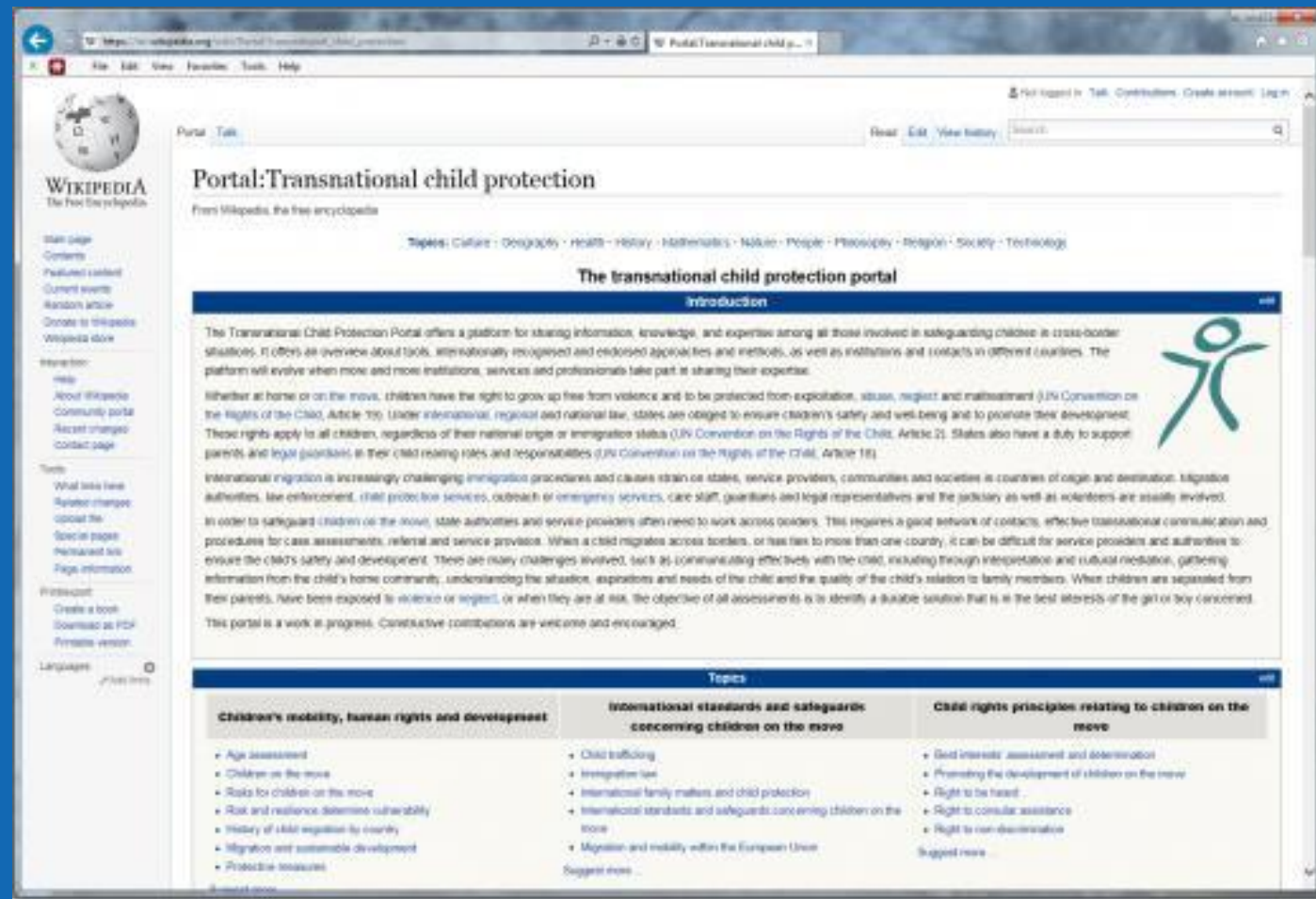
Guidelines on the human rights and the best interests of the child in transnational child protection cases

Practical Guide for Caseworkers and Case Officers (2015) and Addendum (2016)

<http://www.childrenatrisk.eu/projects-and-publications/protect-children-on-the-move/>

Transnational Child Protection Wiki

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portal:Transnational_child_protection
<http://childcentre.info/wiki>



Regional Programme

Council of the Baltic Sea States and Nordic Council of Ministers

2016

Training on transnational child protection and best interests determination (Riga, Tallinn, Helsinki, Stockholm)

2017 and 2018

Consultations on good practices in identification and referral of children at risk of exploitation and trafficking (St. Petersburg, Vilnius, Oslo)

Participants

Officials and professionals from social services and child protection, childcare staff, guardians, law enforcement, prosecutors and judges, immigration and asylum officers, lawyers, medical professionals, as well as NGOs

Regional Programme

Council of the Baltic Sea States and Nordic Council of Ministers

Promoting child-sensitive communication

- Avatar-based training for professionals interviewing children
- Training on evidence-based interviewing protocols and principles of child-sensitive communication
- Methodology for ethical consultations with children at risk

Oslo Conclusions on Identifying Children at Risk of Exploitation and Trafficking

Strengthening child-sensitive communication
and best interests determinations

Hearing the Child's Story

Background

- Political attention to child trafficking remains high
- Challenges continue to hinder identification and referral
- Only few children benefit from anti-trafficking responses
- Many more are exploited or at risk
- Identification and referral are essential to intercept the continuum of violence and exploitation
- Oslo Conclusions build on available documentation and analysis and reaffirm previous recommendations
- Oslo Conclusions guide the continued work of the Council of the Baltic Sea States in this field

Consultations with children and youth

- Consultations with child victims of trafficking
 - St. Petersburg: 2 girls, 4 boys, 9-11 and 15-17 years
 - Vilnius: 3 boys, 15-16 years
- Children had exited from exploitation and were in assistance programme
- Children were not asked about personal experiences but to engage in narrative sessions telling the story of a fictitious child
- Asked to advise the fictitious child how to exit a difficult and risky situation and to find help and support
- Informed consent from child and guardian
- Trusted psychologists and caretakers conducted individual or group sessions with children
- Feedback from children and facilitators was highly positive

Consultations with children and youth

Objectives

- Awareness-raising of sources of risk and resilience
- Increase the feeling of importance of children by encouraging them to develop recommendations for other children and for parents, professionals and officials
- Involve children in the regional work of the Council of the Baltic Sea States and the Nordic Council of Ministers

Advice from children and youth

- Persons who could offer help: other children and adults exploited in the same place, friends, caring parents, hospitals and medical staff, shops and shop guards, taxi drivers
- People could recognise a child was in difficulty when a child looked sad and tired, had bruises or injuries, could hardly work and spends free time alone
- After escaping, they advised that children like to get back home to their family, where there is a caring family home, to go back to school and consider moving to a different town for safety and to escape stigmatisation
- Important to find a job and become independent
- A shelter should provide the child a comfortable bed and some privacy, access to school, sports, creativity in arts and theatre, the possibility to play with pets and be out in nature

Lessons learned from children and youth

- Children need to be resourceful, inventive and courageous to escape
- Children have mixed feelings about the police: Possible source of help but also risk to be detained and prosecuted
- Children were not aware of shelters or assistance services
- Low level of trust in state authorities, childcare facilities and child protection services
- Best interests determinations prior to the child's return to the family
- Monitoring the child's safety and wellbeing after return to the family, including support for families at risk
- More proactive support for rehabilitation of children, including through reintegration support in school, vocational training and employment
- Reduce social stereotypes against child victims, protecting their privacy, to regain a feeling of dignity and respect

Experts call for renewed efforts to find solutions to known challenges

- The child's status and identification determines referral rather than individual case assessment
- Identification is still often a precondition for accessing support
- In practice, identification works as a process that requires time, trust and support
- Children do not trust services
- Services benefit children more when they are considerate of their needs and aspirations
- Few children have the opportunity to tell their stories
- Professionals feel many times powerless in light of threats, debts and other pressure against the child and family

Solutions rooted in basic child rights principles

Child-sensitive communication

- Hearing the child's story is key to identification and referral
- Identification of acts of violence, exploitation and trafficking in the child's present or past
- Interviewing children requires trained professionals and a child-friendly setting
- Evidence-based interviewing protocols are useful for all situations where children are heard
- Consulting children to hear their views, suggestions and recommendations

Solutions rooted in basic child rights principles

Best interests determination procedures

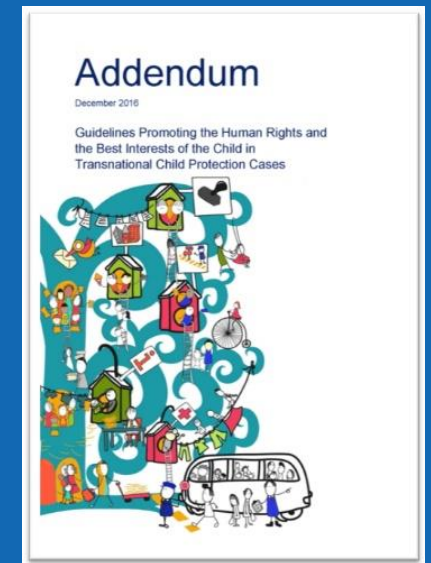
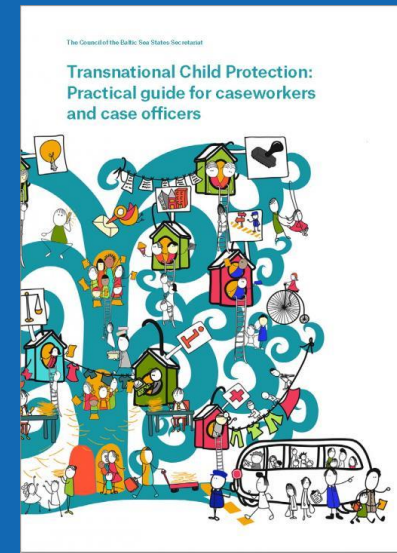
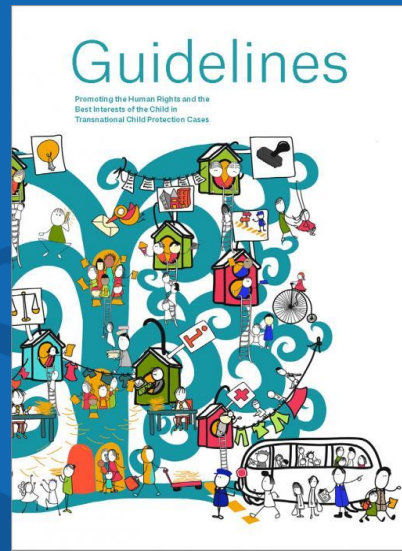
- Two-step procedure: Best interests assessment and decision making
- Comprehensive and structured procedure oriented by the rights and needs of the child
- Opportunities for understanding the child's risks and resiliency and identifying experiences of violence or exploitation
- Structured approach for balancing different interests, rights and priorities
- Formal process with procedural safeguards
- Foundation for ensuring a continuum of services for prevention, protection and empowerment

Reorientation of approaches

- Trafficking is often the culmination of a continuum of violence, exploitation and neglect of children – Enable early response
- Reorientation of focus: Stepping up measures to identify and address the exploitation of children in any form
 - Includes but is not limited to cases of child trafficking
- Children who are exploited are recognised as victims of crime
 - Access to safeguards and entitlements as victims of crime
- More inclusive response measures leaving no child excluded

Coordination and cooperation of different actors and procedures

- Local child protection networks mobilise everyone to identify children at risk and contribute to their referral
- Child-centred services create a safety net around the child
- A single identification procedure facilitates the gathering of personal data, hearing the child's story and assessing the child's case
- Collaboration between authorities and service providers in best interests determinations provide for increased opportunities to identify risks and experiences of exploitation



Council of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat Children at Risk Unit

Protect Children on the Move Project

Guidelines on the human rights and the best interests of the child in transnational child protection cases

Practical Guide for Caseworkers and Case Officers

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