

## **Good Practices in Identifying Children at Risk of Exploitation and Trafficking, 29-30 May 2018**

### **Challenges and opportunities**

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It is a privilege for the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs to host this meeting organized by the Council of the Baltic Sea States and the Nordic Council of Ministers, and we are very happy to welcome you all to Oslo. We are glad that so many excellent speakers have chosen to come to Norway, and we would like to extend a special welcome to you.

International cooperation and exchange of experiences are of particular importance in the work with this group.

It is helpful for services and NGO's to look to other countries for inspiration and in order to increase the general knowledge of trends and understanding of the phenomenon and legal framework.

Within this field, Norway is mainly a country of destination, and the minors that we meet will have stayed for shorter or longer periods in other countries in Europe prior to their arrival in Norway.

We welcome the initiative taken by the organizers to produce recommendations in this area based on the current challenges that the international community faces. We look forward to the discussions on the Oslo conclusions; the summary of a series of meetings with experts mainly from the CBSS area and your work over the last years. We are glad that you have chosen to present them during this event in Oslo.

The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs is a State Agency under the Ministry of children and equality, and our work covers different areas, mainly in the policy areas of equality and children, children`s rights and child welfare.

One of our main tasks is to promote high quality services in the child welfare system and contribute to the continuous development of these services in Norway. We work to support and improve the local child welfare services by providing research reports, and recommendations and guidelines.

The Directorate is also the Central Authority for the 1996 Hague Convention on Child Protection. The 1996 Hague Convention entered into force in Norway on 1 July 2016, and I am the head of the Norwegian Central Authority. The convention has 47 contracting states, including all EU-states and Russia. Each of these states have designated a central authority, and through the use of the 1996

Hague Convention we experience a good international cooperation with other states within the field of child protection. It is important to note that this convention can be a useful tool in trafficking cases where the victim is under the age of 18.

From 1 September this year, I will be responsible for the work on human trafficking in the Directorate. We are establishing a new department with the aim to strengthen the work within the field of international child protection to see international child protection in a broader perspective, whether it relates to international cooperation in cross border child welfare cases, cases regarding forced marriages, or trafficking cases with child victims. I am therefore grateful to be present here today to learn from the experts and to listen to your experiences.

I would like to thank the deputy minister for presenting the ongoing initiatives taken by the government, and I take this opportunity to deliberate upon the situation in Norway and existing challenges and opportunities, as we see it.

### **Main challenges**

Recent research reports indicate that the main challenges in Norway are to ensure sufficient knowledge of exploitation and human trafficking in the first line services, and to ensure efficient interaction between the different responsible stakeholders in the case handling of individual cases.

It is a challenge to maintain even a general knowledge of the phenomenon of human trafficking at all times in the first line services all over the country. The number of cases is low, the chances that a case handler will have experience from similar cases, when confronted with a potential victim, is equally low. Potential victims of exploitation and human trafficking can be identified in all parts of the country, but the competence is today situated mainly in the main cities. However, it is important that the children are identified and followed up according to their rights and needs, regardless of where in Norway they are, and sufficient knowledge must be available at all times within the first line services. The understanding of the term of human trafficking requires understanding of the general phenomenon, routines for cooperation with other actors, as well as relevant case law.

It is a challenge that there is little available case law on minor victims of trafficking, and that there is limited knowledge of the assessment of different forms and situations of exploitation from a legal perspective. It is also necessary to be aware of the trends at the international level, in order to predict the forms of exploitation that can be expected in our own country.

We experience that the communication and cooperation between different stake holders is inefficient in many cases. The knowledge of the other instances` role and areas of responsibility, as well as the child`s rights and obligations according to other legal frameworks, is limited. This is a challenge.

Migrant children challenge our systems. Children on the move are not necessarily granted a leave to stay, and some of the children return to their home countries. Child welfare interventions tend to have a more long term perspective and to be adapted to individuals that are part of the Norwegian welfare system over time. It is not possible to ensure a long term following up in Norway in all cases involving migrant children.

We also experience that the transition from child welfare to systems of protection for adults, pose challenges. Young adults that are no longer underage, can be vulnerable, and some individuals will go from highly protected environments to situations where they are in a situation of responsibility when they turn 18, without necessarily having the tools to make good decisions for themselves and understand the systems they are confronted with.

The use of involuntary measures in order to protect the children is sometimes required. It is difficult to strike a balance between the need to let children make decisions for themselves, and the need for adults to protect them against their will. Some of the children we identify have been living under difficult situations for a longer period of time and are victims of neglect and abuse from early childhood. The fact that victims of exploitation can have strong emotional ties to the perpetrators present a particular challenge in these cases, as it can be traumatic for the children to experience that they are separated from the people they consider as care givers. It is important to monitor the use of non-voluntary measures, to ensure that it is used in the best interest of the child.

### **Opportunities**

The government and the Parliament have promoted important initiatives to combat human trafficking in Norway, also human trafficking with children. It is strengthening both the police force, the child welfare services and the health services in this field.

One of the measures in the Norwegian Action Plan from 2016 against human trafficking is to increase the competence in the child welfare services. It is required that all child welfare services have sufficient general knowledge of human trafficking to identify signs of human trafficking in minors. When it comes to more in depth knowledge, a relevant measure to improve the competence nationwide when a case emerges, is to develop and improve existing resources on the internet, that they can access when needed.

It is an important aim to reduce the presumed protection gap, especially with children on the move, as it has been assumed that there are children that are left undetected and go under the radar of the public authorities, and that are subjected to exploitation in Norway.

Recent research reports indicate that a valuable approach to close the protection gap is to avoid too narrow a focus on the minors who are potential or verified victims of trafficking, as opposed to other children at risk.

The fact that a child is in a situation of vulnerability that exposes them to a risk of exploitation, is of importance from a child care perspective. This approach could lead to an increase in the number of cases of human trafficking being identified, as it may take time to get to know the true situation of some minors. The main focus must be to protect and help minors in vulnerable situations, taking into account the best interests of the children both in a short and long term perspective.

We recognize the need to listen to those who know the support systems from personal experience. We value the participation of Angelica Kjos at this meeting. Her participation is an important reminder of the overall purpose of our efforts, and of the children's inherent resources.

We are sure that this meeting will be as successful as the previous meetings in the project. I wish you all a good meeting here in Oslo.