PROMOTING GOOD PRACTICES IN PROTECTING UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN AND FINDING SOLUTIONS FOR THE CHILDREN, FAMILIES, SOCIETIES AND STATES

Stockholm, 8 and 9 December 2016
Venue: Council of the Baltic Sea States, Slussplan 9, Stockholm

**Target oriented cooperation:**

The situation of unaccompanied children during the migration process is an important concern for the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) and the Central European Initiative (CEI). By organizing this conference in close collaboration, the CBSS and the CEI aspire to enhance the protection of unaccompanied children transiting and arriving in their member States and to safeguard their human rights as afforded under international, European and national law.

Representatives from 29 countries in North, Central and South-East Europe will share experiences and lessons learned from the reception of unaccompanied children and service provision. The representatives will elaborate on why and how children move from their families and societies to find safety in other countries, and discuss ways to strengthen good practices.

Representatives of unaccompanied children will take part in the discussions and present their recommendations. In some countries, they have established their own associations or are represented through child rights advocacy centres. Increasingly, their life journeys are documented in film, books and the media. Their voices are important for policy development and the public discourse.

The situation of unaccompanied children keeps attracting attention at policy and research levels and the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the United Nations are addressing the issue. These efforts in standard setting are highly relevant as nearly 100,000 unaccompanied children sought asylum in the EU in 2015 – and many more are considered not to be registered. In addition, the numbers increase substantially when adding all migrant and refugee children moving through Europe.

The outcomes of the conference will be a set of conclusions that will guide the CBSS and CEI in 2017 and beyond, the setup of an international network to continue the dialogue as well as the launch of guidelines for promoting the human rights and the best interests of the child in cross-border cases and a wiki online portal on transnational child protection.
Objectives:

- Exchange national experiences and good practices, including the perspectives of countries of origin, transit and destination countries
- Develop a common understanding of key child rights and protection themes such as the best interests of the child and provisions for durable solutions that are safe and dignified
- Assess lessons learned in safeguarding the right of the child to be heard and their right to guardianship, legal representation, education and health services
- Identify good practices in multi-agency cooperation including across borders for care and continuity planning
- Assess lessons learned in reception, accommodation and care as well as asylum investigations including age-assessment
- Identify safety issues and protection at reception facilities, impact on local communities and violence and hate speech against migrant and refugee children
- Highlight situations where migrant and refugee children may fall victim to violence, abuse, exploitation and trafficking
- Give unaccompanied children a platform to express their views and communicate their recommendations
- Identify challenges in (re-)integration at the different stages of the migration process

Outcomes:

- Develop a set of conclusions to guide the work of the Council of the Baltic Sea States and the Central European Initiative in 2017 and beyond
- Strengthen professional networks to enhance the practical cooperation at national level and across borders
- Launch guidelines for promoting the human rights and the best interests of the child in cross-border cases
- Launch a Wiki on transnational child protection
- Develop a summary of the presentations, discussions and outcomes

Funding:

The conference is co-funded by the Council of the Baltic Sea States and the Central European Initiative
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<td>12.00</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>Welcome and introduction of participants</td>
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<td>Guðmundur Árni Stefánsson, Ambassador, Icelandic Presidency, Council of the Baltic Sea States</td>
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<td>Milos Prica, Ambassador, BiH Presidency of Central European Initiative</td>
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<td>Bernd Hemingway, Deputy Director General of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat</td>
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<td>Margot Klestil-Loeffler, Alternate Secretary General of the Central European Initiative</td>
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<td>13.30</td>
<td>Opening speech</td>
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<td>Sara Roxell, Political Advisor to the Minister for Children, the Elderly and Gender Equality, Sweden</td>
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<td><em>Session 1: Moderated by Turid Heiberg, Head of Children at Risk Unit, Council of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat</em></td>
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<td>13.45</td>
<td>Recommendations from unaccompanied children</td>
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<td>Hamza Ibrahim, Chair of the Association for Unaccompanied Children, Sweden</td>
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<td>14.10</td>
<td>Action plan for migrant and refugee children including unaccompanied children in Europe</td>
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<td>Cagri Cakir, Office of the Secretary General’s Special Representative on migration and refugees, Council of Europe</td>
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<td>14.30</td>
<td>Good migration governance as a tool to empower migrant youth and prevent exploitation: the OSCE/OCEEA experience.</td>
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<td>Teresa Albano, Office of the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities</td>
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<td>15.30</td>
<td>Coffee</td>
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<td>16.00</td>
<td>Challenges and good practices in the reception of unaccompanied children – Perspectives from Norway</td>
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<td>Professor Berit Berg, Department of Social Work and Health Science, Norwegian University of Science and Technology</td>
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16.30 Supporting sustainable return in safety and dignity: European Red Cross Return Initiative, a joint initiative involving the Red Cross in UK, Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland

Ewa Jonsson, Senior adviser, Swedish Red Cross

17.00 End of the first day

19.00 Reception and buffet in the Icelandic Embassy hosted by Ambassador Brekkan. Address: Strandvägen 15

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Friday, 9th of December 2016

8.45 Summing up discussion from Thursday

*Session 2: Moderated by Ms Gisela Thater, Senior Regional Legal Officer, UNHCR*

9.00 Protecting the safety and needs of children in reception, accommodation, care and integration: Considerations and solution

*Speakers:*
Mr Bragi Guðbrandsson, Director, National Child Protection Authority, Iceland
Ms Lisa Wolfsegger, Director, Asylum-coordination, Austria
Mr Pippo Costella, Director, Defence for Children, Italy
Ms Karin Fagerholm, Lawyer, the Ombudsman for Children in Sweden

- Good practices in providing safety and care
- Age-assessments and asylum investigations
- Guardianships and legal representation
- Highlighting special needs such as exposure to exploitation and trafficking, drug and alcohol misuse, mental challenges and criminality

Conclusions and recommendations for future action

10.30 Coffee

*Session 3: Moderated by Ugo Poli, Project Manager, Central European Initiative*

11.00 Challenges and good practices for transit countries in protecting unaccompanied children

*Speakers:*
Mr Jovan Andonovski, Deputy Ombudsman, Macedonia
Mr Rados Djurovic, Executive Director, Asylum Protection Center, Serbia
Ms Anesa Agovic, Director Center for Social Research, Bosnia & Herzegovina
Mr Katja Vukotić, Senior Adviser, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
Montenegro

- Responding to multiple needs and risks of unaccompanied children in transit: How to reach out to children in transit who stay only very little time
- Coordination of national / local services with those coming in from abroad
- Transition from emergency response to more stability in service provision: Addressing the changes after the closure of the borders

Conclusions and recommendations for future action

12.00
Lunch

Session 4: Moderated by

13.00
Protecting unaccompanied children abroad: The perspectives of countries of origin on transnational cooperation in child protection cases

Speakers:
Ms Tanya Stihari, Child Rights Information Center, Moldova
Mr Altin Hazizaj, Director, Children’s Human Right’s Centre, Albania
Mr Radoslav Stamenkov, Head of Office, IOM, Bulgaria
Mr Mihai Sebe, Project Coordinator, European Institute of Romania

- Cooperation and information exchange with countries of destination
- The role of countries of origin in feeding into best interests assessments and determinations conducted for their national children abroad
- The special situation of EU citizens and the freedom of movement
- Receiving children back, including preparations and follow-up of returns

Conclusions and recommendations for future action

Session 5: Moderated by Maia Rusakova, Director, Stellit, Russia

14.30
Feedback from unaccompanied children

15.00
Discussing and adopting the conclusions from the conference

- Develop a set of conclusions
- Strengthen informal professional networks

16.00
Closing and coffee