



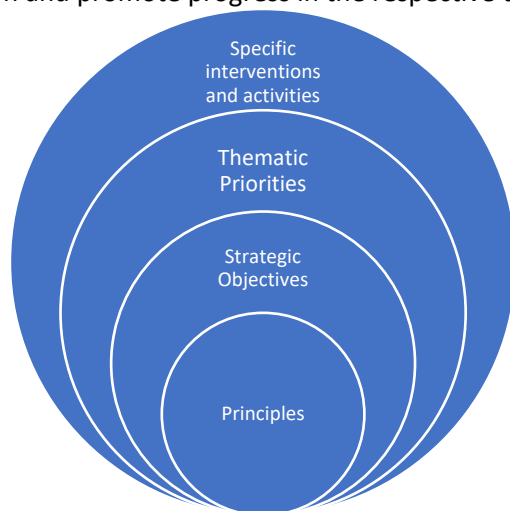
Council of the Baltic Sea States Task Force against Trafficking in Human Beings

Strategic Plan 2020-2025

Background and context

The Council of the Baltic Sea States (hereinafter - CBSS) Task Force against Trafficking in Human Beings (hereinafter – Task Force) Strategic Plan for 2020-2025 is a guiding instrument assisting the CBSS Member States in their joint efforts to counteract all forms of trafficking in human beings in the Baltic Sea Region.

The Strategic Plan outlines a vision for the work of the Task Force, contains an overall objective, key principles and standards which lie at the core of all actions, as well as strategic objectives and thematic priorities that address the key challenges to counteract human trafficking in the Baltic Sea region. This Strategic Plan will guide the development of annual workplans to support implementation and promote progress in the respective thematic priorities.



The Task Force falls under the CBSS long term priority “Safe and Secure Region” and is incorporated in the Policy Area “Secure” of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. It strives to accomplish the overall objective in cooperation with other units and bodies affiliated with the CBSS, strategic partners and other international and regional actors.

Vision

Trafficking in human beings is not tolerated in the Baltic Sea region. Society is aware of the risk factors and vulnerabilities that facilitate human trafficking, perpetrators are vigorously pursued and prosecuted and victims of all forms of human trafficking are adequately assisted.

The Task Force is solidified as an information and resource centre for policy makers and operative staff in the Baltic Sea region.

Overall Objective

Strengthen, build upon and improve current anti-trafficking policies, preventive and protective efforts in the Baltic Sea region through a coherent and multidisciplinary approach.

Key principles and standards

- **A human rights-based approach**

A human rights-based approach should be integrated into all anti-trafficking initiatives and guide the actions of the Task Force. Trafficking in human beings constitutes a gross violation of human rights and undermines the most fundamental beliefs about the dignity of all people. Applying a human rights-based approach means that the rights of victims of human trafficking shall be at the centre of all efforts to prevent and combat human trafficking and to protect, assist and provide redress to victims.

- **Gender sensitive approach**

All policies and actions should adequately consider how men and women are differently affected by human trafficking, including differences and similarities in relation to their vulnerabilities and to the impact on them. All actions should strive to empower and promote gender equality.

- **Multi-disciplinary cooperation**

Multi-disciplinary cooperation is crucial to effectively prevent trafficking in human beings, protect victims and hold perpetrators accountable. This requires that public authorities at national, regional and local level cross the traditional sectoral boundaries and systematically work together with civil society organisations, as well as trade unions, employer associations, businesses, faith-based organisations and other actors, to establish effective ways to collaborate and coordinate their counter trafficking actions.

- **A coherent data-driven and evidence-based approach**

Anti-trafficking policies and interventions should be coherent and based on solid data analysis, empirical evidence and state-of-the-art knowledge from both within and outside the Baltic Sea Region. The Task Force will prioritise an evidence-based approach focusing on documentation of lessons learnt and good practices from anti-trafficking initiatives, both within and beyond the region.

- **Bottom-up participatory processes combined with top-down approaches**

The Task Force aims to involve public officials, various experts and where possible target group representatives in the Baltic Sea region in its activities and projects. The outcomes are then presented to the Member State's line ministries and Ministries of Foreign Affairs through the CBSS Committee of Senior Officials (CSO). The line ministries share results accomplished by the Task Force with relevant national actors and present them to the inter-institutional working group. The line ministries help integrate proposals into national and international policies.

- **Ensuring sustainability**

Ensuring sustainability and long-lasting impact of programmes and activities is instrumental to any effective counter trafficking strategy. The Task Force will build upon previously implemented projects and past achievements throughout the region with a specific focus on effectiveness, impact and sustainability. Sustainability will always be taken into account when the Task Force, upon Member State's request, supports the implementation of anti-trafficking initiatives at the national level. Furthermore, the Task Force will take note of relevant global, regional and national agendas, goals and strategies in order to ensure strategic direction, complementarity and added value in achieving global, regional and national commitments to combat human trafficking.

Sustainability will be founded on the ownership and participation of local governments, social partners, and key stakeholders including target groups and programme beneficiaries. These partners will, to the extent possible, be consulted in the design and preparatory phase of specific projects and will continue to play a role in guiding the direction of activities.

The Task Force and the Baltic Sea region strategies

The European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) is a macro-regional strategy. It aims at reinforcing cooperation within this large region in order to face several challenges by working together as well as promoting a more balanced development in the area. The Task Force activities and projects are in line with the EUSBSR. Pursuant to its overall objective, the Task Force will continue to develop and implement potential flagship projects in the Baltic Sea region in line with the Policy Area Secure in the EUSBSR.

Furthermore, the CBSS is in general focusing on migration and integration, with a holistic soft security approach. Within this framework the Task Force will benefit from and contribute to several specialized CBSS networks and structures. Well-developed cooperation already exists in the fields of law enforcement, including cross-border anti-crime networks, border guards, prosecutors and civil protection professionals, which are all highly relevant in the field of anti-trafficking. The Task Force will collaborate closely with other CBSS Secretariat units and relevant actors in Member States in order to create synergies and ensure mutual benefits wherever possible. In particular, the Task Force will coordinate closely with the CBSS Expert Group on Children at Risk.

Strategic Objectives

The Task Force will support the Member States in curbing trafficking in human beings, directed by the following four strategic objectives, which also outlines the main role of the Task Force:

- 1. Maintaining a regional information and resource centre.** The Task Force will initiate and coordinate human trafficking related data collection and analysis focusing on new trends and challenges, as well as a better understanding of all relevant aspects of human trafficking in the region including, vulnerability, at-risk populations and affected business sectors, the role and modus operandi of perpetrators, victims and their relationships. The Task Force will continue to publish “The Human Trafficking – Baltic Sea Region Round-up report” in order to create an easily accessible macro-regional snapshot which outlines the directions of counter trafficking work in the region. The report will be published triennially.

The Task Force will strengthen a data driven and evidence-based approach to support counter-trafficking policy and programme development including documenting good practices and lessons learnt from anti-trafficking initiatives throughout the Baltic Sea Region and beyond. The data collection should be in line with and complement the data collection activities of other relevant actors such as EUROSTAT and the UNODC. The Task Force will also share and transfer information and knowledge with partners and specific target populations. Finally, the Task Force will prioritize adopting updated strategic and smart information sharing through a wide range of media channels and information dissemination platforms.

- 2. Enhancing policy coherence on anti-trafficking in the context of migration.** The Task Force coherence on anti-trafficking in the CBSS Member States by facilitating regional and international policy discussions and regular dialogues between key agencies and organizations. The Task Force will monitor and review relevant policy and legal frameworks and will to the extent possible arrange conferences and establish platforms for information

sharing and constructive discussions at different levels. In this context, the Task Force will ensure that policy, as well as technical discussions are all based on state-of-the art knowledge, data and operational expertise on migration and human trafficking including all aspects of prevention, protection and prosecution.

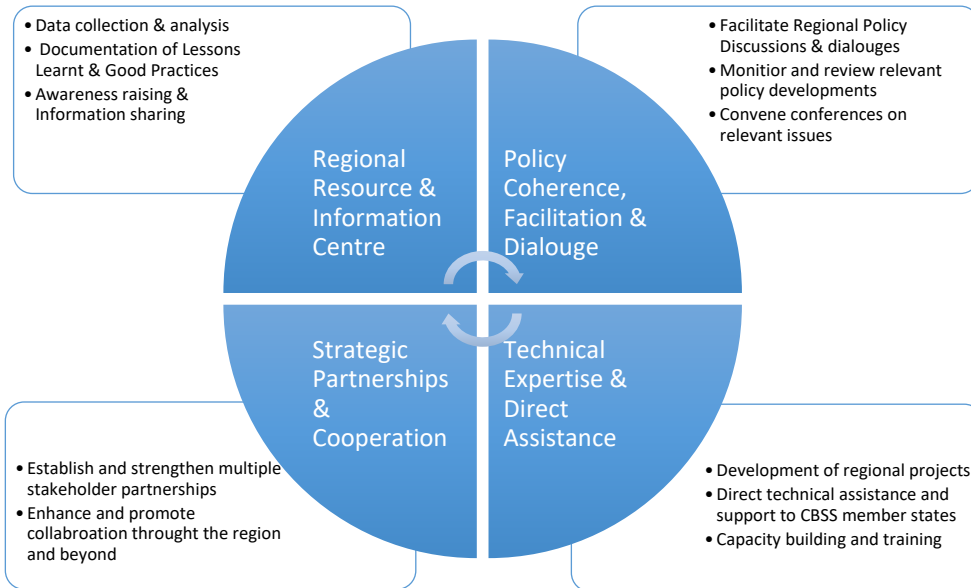
3. **Strengthening international cooperation and strategic partnerships.** The Task Force will heighten cooperation with other units and bodies of the CBSS, as well as with other regional networks affiliated or collaborating closely with the CBSS. The Task Force will also enhance cooperation with CBSS Observer States with regard to migration and counter trafficking activities and projects by exchanging experience, expertise, knowledge and training tools.

Continuous cooperation will be ensured with CBSS strategic partners in the Region, such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and with the Sister Councils, such as the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM), in their relevant migration, security and counter-trafficking activities. Furthermore, the Task Force will where appropriate intensify cooperation and information exchange with international and regional actors, such as the EU Commission and the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) and the Committee of the Parties of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, United Nations agencies such as the Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Special Rapporteur in Trafficking in Persons, as well as the OSCE Special Representative on Trafficking in Human Beings, the OSCE Alliance Expert Coordination Team against Human Trafficking, the European Migration Network and other relevant actors.

Recognizing the importance of a multi-stakeholder approach the Task Force will actively support engagement from relevant government authorities, municipalities, civil-society organisations, the private sector, employers' organisations, trade unions and youth organisations etc. in order to develop and strengthen effective and sustainable responses to eradicate human trafficking in the region through protection of victims and vulnerable groups and prosecuting offenders.

In order to guarantee a solid and proactive approach, the Task Force will cooperate with countries of origin, within and outside the Baltic Sea Region, when this is deemed relevant by the CBSS Member States.

4. **Providing technical assistance on migration management and anti-trafficking.** The Task Force will support both regional initiatives and CBSS Member States efforts to manage migration and curb human trafficking, through direct technical assistance and capacity building. Specific projects, within the thematic priorities will, subject to funding, be developed, in order to accomplish the overall objective focusing on strengthening current anti-trafficking policies and preventive and protective efforts in the Baltic Sea region. Technical assistance and capacity building will depend on identified gaps and needs, but could include joint trainings and workshops for specific authorities and/or other target groups within the region, study tours within and outside the region, developments of regional guidelines and standard operational procedures on specific issues and direct assistance to CBSS Member States in project and programme development.



Thematic priorities

Thematic priorities are areas which serve as a framework and direction for developing an operational work-plan with specific projects and initiatives.



Addressing trafficking for labour exploitation, particularly exploitation in the supply chains

Human trafficking for labour exploitation has become increasingly prevalent in the Baltic Sea Region. In fact, in some member states like Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, labor exploitation is equally common or even more common than sexual exploitation. Although the institutional and policy framework in the countries of the Baltic Sea Region is gradually changing to include all forms of human trafficking, many service providers are still specialized to deal with female victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. Despite the growing number of victims of labor exploitation, widespread impunity surrounds this phenomenon. The number of prosecutions and convictions in the Baltic Sea Region remains low and does not align with the number of identified victims.

Trafficking for labor exploitation does not happen in isolation but is rather closely related to developments in the economy, labour markets, and society at large. It is driven by common market factors and business processes, which are closely associated with inadequate regulatory oversight of exploitation in supply chains.

Globalisation of supply chains, as companies site production in lower cost countries and areas and as workers migrate for better economic opportunities, has created a vulnerable workforce around the world. This is particularly true lower down in supply chains where there are weaker labour rights and less visibility which combined makes forced labour and human trafficking more likely to occur. Businesses, governments and consumer demands within the CBSS region are all part of and intertwined in these global supply chains. As such there is not only ethical reasons to address these challenges, but also real opportunities to reduce trafficking and labour exploitation in global supply chains. More targeted attention should be given also in the CBSS region for the ethical consumption as a way to prevent THB.

Trafficking for labour exploitation, however, also takes place in less complex supply chains within the CBSS region. Several countries have faced a number of new challenges in connection with the use of migrant labour and sub-contracting which has led to working conditions ranging from sub-standard to exploitative. Industries where many unskilled and relatively low-wage foreigners are employed are particularly at risk.

The Task Force will take measures to address the demand for labour exploitation. Increasing public awareness and improving overall policy response to labour trafficking is required.

The Task Force will focus on reducing the risks of labour exploitation and human trafficking in supply chains, both within the region and beyond, and new effective measures to prevent and counter trafficking in supply chains will be explored. This involves looking into new analytical, policy and legal frameworks linked to business and human rights, due diligence, responsible business labour standard compliance, grievance and remedy mechanisms, ethical production and consumption etc. Efforts to address trafficking in supply chains rely on establishing and strengthening business and government partnerships and identifying practical and effective measures for businesses and consumers at all levels.

Focusing on public procurement to prevent trafficking and forced labour

Public procurement has increasingly been recognised as means for states to fulfil their human rights obligations and to help prevent human rights abuses – including human trafficking and forced labour – from occurring within global and Baltic Sea regional supply chains. Such requirements can also be a crucial part of human rights protection and trafficking prevention measures where public services are contracted out to the private sector. Governments can promote responsible business and due diligence to prevent trafficking and forced labour by leading by example, including through ethical public procurement. This can have a positive trickle-down effect on the private sector and be a powerful lever for governments to guide business behaviour and support good practice on responsible business conduct including due diligence.

The Task Force will explore effective measures to prevent and reduce trafficking and forced labour through responsible public procurement within the Baltic Sea region.

Strengthening efforts to address trafficking for sexual exploitation

Although there, in recent years has been an increase of trafficking for labour and other forms of exploitation, trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, is still the most reported form both within the European Union and the Baltic Sea region. Trafficking for sexual exploitation is inter alia rooted in gender inequalities, and it affects women and girls disproportionately. The gender-specific roots and consequences of this crime should amongst other be considered in the way human trafficking for sexual exploitation is understood and addressed. Efforts should be strengthened to also protect victims of domestic human trafficking for sexual exploitation, trafficking in children and trafficking in online environment.

The Task Force is committed to put focus on tackling human trafficking for sexual exploitation and end the violation of women and girls' and boy's fundamental rights, through research, analysis, policy discussions and other actions that will help improve identifying, protecting and assisting victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation.

Improving victim protection and empowerment

Victim protection is a core component of all effective anti-trafficking strategies and full protection and assistance to victims is a fundamental right. At the same time, adequate and high-quality victim protection, including highly vulnerable groups as homeless people, substance users, people with mental disabilities etc., can be challenging especially with regards to successful return and reintegration of victims. Although, there has been significant improvements within victim protection in the region, there is still a need to improve quality assistance and services in countries of origin, especially in the area of rights-based approaches, community-based integration, socio-economic empowerment and real livelihood alternatives. In some cases, victim protection and assistance programs have been difficult to access and led to limited positive impact for returned victims and in the worst cases, ineffective protection programmes have turned out to be counter-productive for some of the very people they were supposed to benefit most directly.

The Task Force will make efforts to support and enhance protection and assistance to victims of trafficking, not only within the region but also upon their return to their home countries. A strong emphasis will be on promoting and supporting a rights-based approach as well as on socio-economic empowerment. Efforts will be made to strengthen third country collaboration and provide capacity building to key stakeholders.

The Task Force will also support anti-trafficking policies and practices which include gender perspectives, address all vulnerabilities and offer better prevention and protection for all victims of human trafficking e.g. female, male, LGBTQIA+ persons, persons with disabilities, children, adolescents, and adults.

Strengthening multi-stakeholder engagement to combat human trafficking and prevention of re-trafficking

Human trafficking can occur in various sectors and within different parts of society. It involves and negatively affects people, businesses, civil society and governments in different ways and with different consequences. In order to effectively address and eradicate human trafficking a long-term multi-stakeholder approach is needed. The aim should be to bring together the key stakeholders such as businesses, civil society, governments, municipalities, trade-unions, employers' organizations,

research institutions and non-government organizations to cooperate and participate in the dialogue, decision making and implementation of sustainable solutions.

Multi-stakeholder engagement is of utmost importance to prevent re-trafficking and to break the circle of exploitation upon victim's return to the country of origin. Victims are frequently re-trafficked within two years or less of having exited a trafficking situation.

The Task Force will promote and strengthen multi-stakeholder engagement both at transnational level and within member states. This includes efforts to identify and mobilize new stakeholders and networks including youth groups and other organizations or segments of society which could help reduce human trafficking and prevent re-trafficking.

Emphasizing the gender dimension of human trafficking

Human trafficking has long been recognised as particularly and disproportionately affecting women and girls. Structural aspects of discrimination and unequal power relations between women and men have historically placed women and girls at a disadvantage and as being more vulnerable to various forms of exploitation including human trafficking. Today, many women and girls still experience the manifestations of gender inequality in all aspects of their lives, including exposure to different forms of violence. It is clear that ending violence against women and achieving gender equality must go hand-in-hand and are key to each other's success. Trafficking in human beings is one of the many facets of violence against women and girls and must be understood and addressed in this context.

Furthermore, it is important to recognize women and men are vulnerable to trafficking in different ways. While women and girls are at higher risk to end up in exploitative conditions in prostitution and specific sectors such as massage parlours, garment production, food processing and in private homes, the majority of victims of trafficking and forced labour in other sectors such as fisheries, construction, mining, forestry and some type of factories are men and boys. Today global estimates indicate that men and boys represent nearly half of the total number of human trafficking victims. Some of the differences between men and women are also seen in the Baltic Sea Region where most of the identified victims are women, but where there has been a significant increase in male victims of trafficking. The identification and proper care of male victims has proved to be a challenge to governments and assistance providers around the world and within the region.

The Task Force will emphasize the gender dimension of human trafficking in all aspects and will make efforts to challenge the gender norms and power structures that allow exploitation to thrive. The Task Force will also support human trafficking policies and practices which include gender perspectives and focus on vulnerabilities and better prevention and protection of all victims of trafficking.

Enhancing inter-regional and third country collaboration

Human trafficking in the Baltic Sea region involves internal migration and trafficking between Member States within the region but does to a high extend also involve migration from third countries outside the region, mainly from Africa, Asia, Middle East, Caucasus and Central and Eastern Europe. Human trafficking is best understood in the context of global mixed-migration patterns and as a transnational phenomenon, which requires international responses based on close collaboration between key stakeholder in sending, transit and receiving countries, to be fought effectively. Effective prevention strategies must consider the "root causes" in countries of origin including, vulnerability, migrants' risk behavior and the recruitment process. Likewise, effective protection and prosecution strategies must build on close collaboration with victim assistance mechanisms and service providers in countries of origin when victims are returned and offered reintegration packages.

The Task Force will support and enhance regional and third country collaboration to counter human trafficking more effectively. This includes exploring synergies and mutual interest between anti-trafficking policies and assistance programmes. It also includes, efforts to establish and/or strengthen direct collaboration with key organisations and stakeholders outside the Baltic Sea region with an emphasis on countries of origin for victims of trafficking.

Addressing human trafficking in a wider migration and soft security context

Mixed migration refers to cross-border movements of people including refugees, asylum-seekers, victims of trafficking and both regular and irregular labour migrants seeking better lives and opportunities abroad. Although, there are clear different legal definitions between various categories of migrants, and people in mixed migration flows have different legal statuses, it is increasingly recognized that various forms of migration are both complex and intertwined. What starts out as asylum migration and human smuggling can later transmute into a human trafficking and forced labour situation during transit or at destination. People in mixed migration flows are motivated or forced to move by a multiplicity of factors, such as wars and conflicts, climate change (drought, flooding, earthquakes), economic circumstances and other factors. These conditions combined increase the vulnerability of millions of people and add to an outward migration pressure and high-risk behavior among affected populations.

The mixed migration pressure Europe and the CBSS member states experienced in the recent years also posed a significant soft security challenge which has impacted national and local authorities with regards to border control, reception and housing of irregular and forced migrants, identification and protection of victims of trafficking, and effective integration among several other issues. Effective migration management is needed to address some of the negative effects of migration including the perceived and potential soft security threats it poses. Safeguarding the rights of migrants should be respected to protect vulnerable groups and reduce the risk for further exploitation. Integration challenges should be addressed to enhance the positive aspects of migration both for migrants and the receiving communities.

Altogether, there is a need to recognize and encompass the complexity and diversity of migration and to carefully balance migration management, human rights and integration issues.

The Task Force will address human trafficking in a wider migration and soft security perspective and will use this framework as a basis for research, data analysis and further dialogue and cooperation between all levels of governance (national, regional and local) and civil society organisations, businesses and academia.

Discouraging demand that fosters all forms of human trafficking

The demand of services and cheap goods is one of the root causes of trafficking in human beings. The need to tackle the full spectrum of contributing factors to human trafficking including both the supply and demand side of the problem, should be addressed. It is important to use a multi-faceted response to demand and combine statutory and voluntary measures. For instance, consumers' pressure can serve as catalyst of action for businesses. Addressing demand also requires a shift in the focus of existing priorities, bringing attention to the places where victims of human trafficking are exploited and to contributing factors that make the exploitation possible.

The Task Force will strive to be at the forefront of delivering tools, research, recommendations, and support to the member states to better understand and address demand that fosters all forms of exploitation.

Implementation

This strategy will guide the development of annual workplans to support implementation and promote progress in the respective thematic priorities. The annual workplans will include clear objectives, activities, expected outcome and deliverables. The annual workplans will be approved by the Task Force.

The Task Force will furthermore monitor and explore emerging, developing and ongoing priorities and initiatives in curbing human trafficking to ensure that the strategy and annual workplans remain relevant and targeted to activities that best represent added value of the Task Force.