**Strasbourg, 29 September 2019**

**Contribution of the Secretariat of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Division to the final Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material**

The present document was prepared under the responsibility of the Secretariat of the Gender Equality Division of the Council of Europe. It aims at contributing to some of the questions raised in the call for input, through relevant standards and experience gathered in the implementation of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023.

**i. *Context, awareness and attitudes underpinning the sale and sexual exploitation of children:* What are the current challenges, trends and emerging threats defining the scope and extent of the sale and sexual exploitation of children? What progress has been made in shifting the language and the narrative around these issues by the wider community of experts and practitioners? What are some of the good practices of raising public awareness and sensitisation on issues of sale and sexual exploitation of children at the local, national regional and global level?**

It is a challenge to collect and consolidate the information available on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, and to make it available to all actors to help them identify trends and emerging threats, and the best responses to these. It is however crucial to have a strong gender perspective in this area as the situation and needs of girls and boys is different. For example, in Europe the majority of girls falling victim of trafficking are for the purpose of sexual exploitation (Thematic Chapter of the 6th General Report on GRETA’s Activities on Trafficking in Children: <https://rm.coe.int/6gr-extract-web-en/16808b6552> ).

It has also been pointed out that new technologies (internet platforms, possibly combined with on-line payments etc.) are used for the purpose of prostitution, sexual exploitation and for pornographic purposes in a way which is challenging traditional concepts and approaches, as well as the legal safeguards established over the last decades. At a recent Council of Europe conference held in Helsinki, a researcher underlined a number of problematic trends and developments[[1]](#footnote-1) : growth of the pornographic industry (36% of the Internet use would now be linked to porn) and capacity to influence/ challenge policies and legislation including in respect of safeguards against child pornography; an estimated 20% of pornographic material on the internet involves juveniles (or persons allegedly juveniles); increasing use by the industry of adult performers posing as juveniles; aggressive techniques employed by the industry to get in touch with internet and mobile phone users as young as 9 to 11 etc. These are factors that not only increase the risks of sexual exploitation of children via IT technologies, but which also make the future generations “accustomed” to that kind of content and thus more tolerant to violent and abusive sexual behavior and to the sexualization of children.

**ii. *Risk factors, root causes and demand for the sexual exploitation of children*: What are the root causes and origins of demand for the sale and sexual exploitation of children? What tools are available to States and non-State actors to effectively address the underlying causes of sale and sexual exploitation of children, beyond training and awareness raising? What are the remaining challenges and obstacles in overcoming this scourge?**

As highlighted above, new technologies risk allowing the wider spread and use of child pornography, and facilitating the sexual exploitation of children. The early exposition of children to pornography is also a new risk factor. The sexualization of girls in media, advertising and everyday life is on the raise, despite efforts. Strong measures for the promotion of gender equality by all actors (state authorities, educational system, parents, private sector) would help deconstructing gender stereotypes and preconceived ideas, notably regarding the sexual availability of women and girls.

In relation to current trends in the pornographic industry and on-line products and services, the Internet has clearly been a facilitating factor, including by putting sometimes the end consumer and the “supplier/performer” in virtual direct contact without the classical risks connected with physical encounters, street activities etc. The anonymized use of the Internet, with limited age control mechanisms, and the possibility to use it both for communication, the sale of products, the broadcasting of movies etc. have abolished most of earlier safeguards.

Poverty is certainly a factor increasing the risks of getting involved in forms of sexual exploitation. However, recent trends involving the use of new technologies imply that the juveniles concerned are at least wealthy enough to afford such technologies.

**iv. *The overarching legal-normative framework, commitment and institutional capacity*: What progress has been made in global, regional and national legislative frameworks to address children’s vulnerability to sale and sexual exploitation, and to address impunity? To what extent do these frameworks adequately address or take due account of the challenges posed by transnational internet and financial flows, and their implications for accountability and challenging impunity?**

Bearing in mind the factors mentioned above, it would appear that a more robust set of initiatives are needed at the international level with regard to the use of juveniles or performers posing as such in the porn industry.

The Council of Europe Recommendation on Preventing and Combating sexism stresses the need to “Promote a gender equality perspective, as well as the development of critical thinking for the countering of sexism in (…) online content and films, including pornography, which shape the attitudes, behaviour and identity of girls and boys” (point I.B.7). It also states that “sexism in the media (…) contributes to an environment that tolerates and trivialises “everyday” sexism” and that “it is manifested through: sexual, sexualised and racialised depictions and objectification of women, men, girls and boys, including in advertising, films, television, video games and pornographic material” (point II.C). The Recommendation proposes a series of measures to address these phenomena. See: <https://rm.coe.int/cm-rec-2019-1-on-preventing-and-combating-sexism/168094d894> ).

1. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/helsinki-conference-march-2019>, see video and presentation of Mrs Sári Halász, Hungarian Women’s Lobby [↑](#footnote-ref-1)