Friday 11 March 2022

**Contribution of the Secretariat of the Committee of the Parties to the Convention on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (Lanzarote Committee)**

**further to the call for input from the**

**Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material:**

**Addressing the vulnerabilities of children to sale and sexual exploitation in the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals**

**Collected data, including updated data on vulnerable groups of children and information pertinent to the reporting examples of vulnerable groups of children under the framework of SDGs.**

The Committee of the Parties to the Convention on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse ([Lanzarote Committee](https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/lanzarote-committee) / [Lanzarote Convention](https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/convention)) emphasises since its [1st implementation report on the Protection of children against sexual abuse in the circle of trust](http://rm.coe.int/1st-implementation-report-protection-of-children-against-sexual-abuse-/16808ae53f), that **it is essential to have reliable data on child sexual abuse** in order to frame, adjust and evaluate policies and measures in this field and assess the level of risk for children.

The Lanzarote Committee thus urged Parties to take the necessary legislative or other measures to set up or designate mechanisms for data collection or focal points at national or local level and in collaboration with civil society, for the purpose of observing and evaluating in terms of quantitative data collection the phenomenon of the sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children in general and child sexual abuse committed in the circle of trust, in particular ([1st implementation report](https://rm.coe.int/1st-implementation-report-protection-of-children-against-sexual-abuse-/16808ae53f) p. 23,Recommendation R13).

It also requested them to (Recommendations R14 to R21):

* ensure that existing general data collection mechanisms are able to produce accurate and reliable data on the phenomenon of child sexual abuse committed in the circle of trust by means of specific sub-totals extrapolated from overall data on abuse;
* set up a national or local system for recording case-based data for child sexual abuse in the circle of trust cases in the various sectors liable to come into contact with children victims in such instances; such administrative data collection systems should be implemented allowing to compare and cross-check the data thus collected at national level and avoid duplication;
* consider elaborating and subsequently implementing guidelines establishing a minimum set of variables and procedures to collect data on child sexual abuse cases, which could subsequently make data collected in different Parties internationally compatible and comparable between them;
* disaggregate data on the basis of the gender of the child victim and of the perpetrator, should this not be already the case;
* establish a comprehensive system of reporting of cases of child sexual abuse committed in the circle of trust, which will ensure the completeness of the data collected;
* to improve the extensiveness and quality of collected data, consider setting up data collection systems integrated with specific points of comprehensive management of child sexual abuse cases at the level of specialist centres such as, for example, the Children’s Houses;
* appoint a national or local agency tasked with providing periodic reports on aggregated data or recording information on child sexual abuse committed in the circle of trust;
* ensure ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of their mechanisms or focal points with regard to their ability to depict the actual situation on the ground and produce accurate and reliable data.

The Lanzarote Committee also identified **promising practices** put in place by Parties with regard to data collection (see the [1st implementation report](https://rm.coe.int/1st-implementation-report-protection-of-children-against-sexual-abuse-/16808ae53f) pp. 20-21, promising practices P1 to P4) such as:

* In France, the National Observatory for Children at Risk (*Observatoire national de l’enfance en danger - ONED*) is mandated to collect from all country’s Departments case-based data of child abuse and neglect cases in all its forms.
* In Spain, the social services, schools, healthcare services and the police in each region report cases of child sexual abuse to the social health centres and public bodies responsible for the protection of minors. The Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality, in conjunction with the autonomous communities, manages a national online database containing the transferred data (Unified Child Abuse Register (*Registro Unificado de Maltrato Infantil - RUMI*).

The Lanzarote Committee identified the challenge involved in having compatible and comparable data collected by various agencies in the same Party, and in drawing up a more complete and reliable statistical picture of the phenomenon of child sexual abuse and identifying trends over time. It noted as a promising practice in this regard that the European Union DAPHNE III programme (DG Justice of the European Commission) developed a minimum set of variables and practicable procedures to collect data on registered cases of child abuse, entitled “Co-ordinated Response to Child Abuse and Neglect (CAN) via Minimum Data Set (MDS)”.

The Lanzarote Committee highlighted that data derived from judicial interviews or any other overall assessment of child victims carried out by specialist centres responsible for dealing with any cases notified to them are a very good source of information having both disaggregated and aggregated data that can be made available in a variety of ways. For instance, in Iceland, the *Barnahus* collects data on child sexual abuse committed in the circle of trust deriving from interviews conducted there.

With specific regard to **children affected by the refugee crisis**, the Lanzarote Committee dedicated an [urgent monitoring round](https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/urgent-monitoring-round) to address the issue of protecting these children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse as it acknowledged the particular vulnerability of these children. In the Special report ["Protecting children affected by the refugee crisis from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse"](http://rm.coe.int/special-report-protecting-children-affected-by-the-refugee-crisis-from/16807912a5) adopted in this context, the Lanzarote Committee specifically invited Parties to take certain measures regarding data collection in order to develop an efficient mechanism for helping and supporting the child victims of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (see the [special report](https://rm.coe.int/special-report-protecting-children-affected-by-the-refugee-crisis-from/16807912a5) p. 14, Recommendation R5) which were to collect data on the following three categories of children: asylum-seeking children; unaccompanied children; overall estimated number of children affected by the refugee crisis in transit; and share the practices of how to effectively collect data concerning children affected by the refugee crisis who are not seeking asylum in their country.

**Information how vulnerable children are at exacerbated threats to sale and sexual exploitation with links to the situation of deprivation of other SDGs. (SDG 1 poverty, SDG 4 education, SDG 5 gender equality, SDG 8 decent work and economic growth, SDG 10 reduced economic inequalities and SDG 11 sustainable cities and communities, SDG 13 climate action, SDG 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions and SDG 17 partnerships for the goals).**

On 23 February 2022, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted the new [Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027) “Children’s Rights in Action: from continuous implementation to joint innovation”](https://search.coe.int/cm/pages/result_details.aspx?objectid=0900001680a5a064)which will guide the Council of Europe work over the next six years.

The Strategy identifies six strategic objectives which are linked up with specific targets of the UNSDGs. The objectives “Freedom from violence for all children” and “Access to and safe use of technologies for all children” are linked with Target 16.2 of the SDGs, and are of particular relevance for the work of the Lanzarote Committee.

As discussed throughout this contribution, the Lanzarote Committee issues regular reports on the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention by its Parties, and facilitates the collection, analysis and exchange of information and good practice to build States’ capacity regarding protecting children from sexual violence, in any context.

**The manifestations of sale and sexual exploitation in relation to targets 5.3: which provides to end all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage; 8.7: which provides to take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms; and 16.2: which provides to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children. These manifestations may include children on the move (migrants, conflict-affected, refugees, asylum-seekers, street situations, displaced including climate and disaster related), children from marginalized groups (indigenous, minorities, rural and urban settings), and children with disabilities.**

As mentioned above, the Lanzarote Committee adopted a [Special report entitled "Protecting children affected by the refugee crisis from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse"](http://rm.coe.int/special-report-protecting-children-affected-by-the-refugee-crisis-from/16807912a5) which includes many detailed promising practices and a full set of recommendations on what States could do to better prevent and protect children on the move against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. It also adopted a [Declaration on protecting migrant and refugee children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse](https://rm.coe.int/declaration-on-protecting-migrant-and-refugee-children-against-sexual-/16808b78d9).

In the Special report, the Lanzarote Committee highlighted, in particular, that it is necessary to envisage targeted actions to ensure that, because they are in an increased risk of becoming victims, children affected by the refugee crisis are effectively protected against sexual exploitation and abuse children. The Lanzarote Committee thus asked parties to encourage the co-ordination and collaboration of the different actors who intervene for and with children affected by the refugee crisis to ensure that preventive measures in regards to protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse are in place and protective measures are taken as speedily as possible; and to ensure that the different agencies involved in the coordination and collaboration concerning the protection of children affected by the refugee crisis who are victims of sexual abuse or sexual exploitation be allowed to share personal information as appropriate in accordance with national law (see the [Special report](http://rm.coe.int/special-report-protecting-children-affected-by-the-refugee-crisis-from/16807912a5), pp. 19-20, recommendations R13 and R14).

In terms of prevention, the Lanzarote Committee stressed that the main aim of the Lanzarote Convention is to prevent sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, including children affected by the refugee crisis. Once children reach the Lanzarote Convention Parties’ jurisdictions, several factors contribute to them continuing to be at risk of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. The Lanzarote Committee issued a list of detailed recommendations in this regard (see the [Special report](http://rm.coe.int/special-report-protecting-children-affected-by-the-refugee-crisis-from/16807912a5), pp. 20 to 28, Recommendations R15 to R24).

In terms of protection, the Lanzarote Committee issued a list of recommendations on the steps to be taken to improve the effective implementation of the Lanzarote Convention with regard to a various range of subjects and tools, such as guardians and legal representatives, family reunification, psychosocial assistance, assisting child victims of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse in seeking redress, and helplines (see the [Special report](http://rm.coe.int/special-report-protecting-children-affected-by-the-refugee-crisis-from/16807912a5), pp. 30 to 34, Recommendations R25 to R32).

The Lanzarote Committee also recalled Parties on the need to cooperate with each other, in particular urged them to use the tools made available in the framework of Europol/Interpol, invited them to join efforts to elaborate specific toolkits and to agree on common strategies/procedures to effectively deal with the phenomenon of cross-border missing children. It also invited Parties to pay particular attention to the work aimed at combating and preventing female genital mutilation and child forced marriage (see the [Special report](http://rm.coe.int/special-report-protecting-children-affected-by-the-refugee-crisis-from/16807912a5), pp. 35 to 37, Recommendation R33 to R36).

**Protection needs and contextual challenges amid the efforts to combat sale and sexual exploitation of children such as; COVID-19, climate change and disasters, safety in digital space, and increasing conflict outbreaks.**

As discussed in the [6th activity report of the Lanzarote Committee](https://rm.coe.int/6th-activity-report-of-the-lanzarote-committee-covering-the-period-19-/1680a36f14) (see pp. 12 -13), the **COVID-19 pandemic** has had a significant impact on children’s rights. To maintain schooling and friendships during the COVID-19 pandemic, being online became the new norm for many children across the world, with its increased risks of being groomed, bullied, and coming across inappropriate and/or sexually explicit content. In addition, lockdown meant additional danger and limited support for those who are victims of neglect and abuse at home or who live in out-of-home care. On 3 April 2020, the Lanzarote Committee Chairperson and Vice-chairperson published a [Statement on stepping up protection of children against sexual exploitation and abuse in times of the COVID-19 pandemic](https://rm.coe.int/covid-19-lc-statement-en-final/16809e17ae), calling on all Parties to the Lanzarote Convention to:

* ensure that children are informed of their right to protection against sexual violence and of the services and measures in place to achieve this goal;
* organise child-friendly awareness raising initiatives to inform children of their right to assistance and support services;
* uphold the human resources and logistical support to helplines and hotlines, including online platforms, to ensure that they are able to respond to increasing demand by children at heightened risk of abuse, neglect and sexual violence;
* support parents and caregivers in preventing the risks children may face online and offline and in responding to potential situations of abuse and violence;
* share the initiatives taken during the COVID-19 pandemic to protect children against exploitation and sexual abuse.

Following this statement, the Lanzarote Committee’s Bureau asked its Parties and relevant stakeholders for more specific information on the effect of the crisis response. All replies, relevant initiatives and important efforts to ensure the protection of children against sexual violence during the COVID-19 pandemic were shared on a [special dedicated webpage](https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/covid-19).

As regards **safety in the digital space**, the digital space provides children with a wealth of opportunities, but also exposes them to risks that may have an impact on their rights. Some of these risks include online grooming, child sexual exploitation and child sexual abuse material.

Because of the increasing risks children face in the digital environment, the Lanzarote Committee decided to focus its [second monitoring round on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse facilitated by information and communication technologies (ICTs)](https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/2nd-monitoring-round). It adopted its implementation report 10 March 2022 which focuses on addressing the challenges raised by child self-generated sexual images and/or videos. It includes promising practices and recommendations that the Lanzarote Committee encourages Parties to follow.

In addition to analysis carried out within the context of its monitoring rounds, the Lanzarote Committee has adopted the following texts highlighting specific challenges and formulating recommendations on good practices to adopt to respond to these challenges:

* + an [Opinion on child sexually suggestive or explicit images and/or videos generated, shared and received by children](https://rm.coe.int/opinion-of-the-lanzarote-committee-on-child-sexually-suggestive-or-exp/168094e72c) (6 June 2019);
  + an [Interpretative Opinion on the applicability of the Lanzarote Convention to sexual offences against children facilitated through the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs)](http://rm.coe.int/t-es-2017-03-en-final-interpretative-opinion/168071cb4f) (12 May 2017);
  + an [Opinion on Article 23 of the Lanzarote Convention - Solicitation of children for sexual purposes through information and communication technologies (Grooming)](http://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168064de98) (17 June 2015).

**Practical measures taken to address the vulnerabilities in institutional, family and online settings to ensure no child is left behind with respect to protection against sale and sexual exploitation.**

With regards to **family settings**, the Lanzarote Committee focused its [first monitoring round on the Protection of children against sexual abuse in the circle of trust](https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/1st-monitoring-round). Two reports were issued in this context and both include a series of promising practices of raising public awareness and sensitisation:

* + on the legal/judicial framework: [1st implementation report - Protection of children against sexual abuse in the circle of trust: The framework](http://rm.coe.int/1st-implementation-report-protection-of-children-against-sexual-abuse-/16808ae53f);
  + on the policy strategies: [2nd implementation report - Protection of children against sexual abuse in the circle of trust: The strategies](https://rm.coe.int/2nd-implementation-report-protection-of-children-against-sexual-abuse-/16808d9c85).

The Lanzarote Committee also organises public awareness-raising activities. For instance, each year, to mark the European Day on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (18 November), the Council of Europe invites its partners to focus on a specific topic and encourages activities and initiatives to raise awareness among children and adults of the risks and the steps that they can take to protect victims and prevent child sexual abuse. The [2021 edition](https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/2021-edition) focused on “Making the circle of trust truly safe for children”. The Council of Europe partnered with a wide audience to celebrate it, including member states, civil society organisations and national parliaments, to organise various initiatives. A [Detailed concept note on sexual abuse of children in their circle of trust including recommendations by the Lanzarote Committee as well as promising practices which can be easily replicated](https://rm.coe.int/detailed-concept-note-on-sexual-abuse-of-children-in-the-circle-of-tru/1680a4f37e) was published on this occasion.

As regards **institutional care**, the Lanzarote Committee adopted a [Declaration on protecting children in out-of-home care from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse](https://rm.coe.int/declaration-of-the-lanzarote-committee-on-protecting-children-in-out-o/1680985874). The Declaration calls upon the State parties to take practical measures to address the vulnerabilities of children in out-of-home care such as:

* support families and strengthen their capacity before resorting to out-of-home care settings;
* ensure that, when it is necessary to resort to out-of-home care settings, all of these settings have:
  + comprehensive screening procedures for all persons taking care of children;
  + specific measures to prevent abuse of children’s increased vulnerability and dependence;
  + adequate mechanisms for supporting children to disclose any sexual violence;
  + protocols to ensure that, in the event of disclosure, effective follow-up is given in terms of assistance to the alleged victims and investigation of the alleged offences by the appropriate authorities;
  + clear procedures to allow for the possibility of removing the alleged perpetrator from the out-of-home care setting from the onset of the investigation;
  + effective monitoring of the practices and standards, to prevent/combat child sexual abuse;
* provide victims of sexual abuse in out-of-home care settings with long-term assistance in terms of medical, psychological and social support, and also provide them with legal aid and compensation;
* provide children who sexually offend in out-of-home care settings with access to intervention programmes or measures which are developed or adapted to meet the developmental needs of children who sexually offend, with the aim of addressing their sexual behavioural problems;
* ensure that professionals working in the public, private or voluntary sectors either committing or failing to report offences, as well as legal persons failing to protect children in their care, are held liable.

With regard to **online settings**, please refer to the information provided above.