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LANZAROTE CONVENTION

Council of Europe Convention on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse

FOCUSED QUESTIONNAIRE

Protecting children affected by the refugee crisis from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse

SERBIA

(Replies sent by the State)

Replies registered by the Secretariat on 10 October 2016

DATA (Lanzarote Convention, Chapter III)

- 1) How many migrant and asylum-seeking children (accompanied and unaccompanied)¹ are in your country as a result of the refugee crisis?
 - a) Please provide estimates, if exact data is not available, for the period between 1 July 2015 and 30 June 2016,² and specify how many of these children are victims or presumed victims of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse;

According to Ministry of Interior (Border Police) statistics, in most intensive period of migrations (2015-2016): 10 500 accompanied children (children without legal guardianship) crossed Serbian borders. The majority of these unaccompanied children were in-group of grownups, that were of same origin: relatives, or neighbors, treating child/children as member of a family, and were due to this facts let trough toward their final destinations. Above figure represents 25% from total number of persons that enter Serbian territory as migrants at that time. Smaller group of accompanied children stayed for a while in prepared facilities, under supervision of social services and with NGO's services. In 2015, the numbers of children in reception centers were 64. In first hundred days of 2016, the numbers in reception centers were also 64. Countries of origin were: Afghanistan 55; Syria 6; Pakistan 2 and Iraq 1 (in 2015); and Afghanistan 47; Morocco 17; Algeria 1; Pakistan 2; and Bangladesh 1 (in 2016). The number of asylum seekers among them is unknown. UN Commissioner for Refuges and several (state) structures (health, social) providing services for migrants agreed with this statistics. Among them, no one had reported that child/children are identified as victims of sexual abuse. The problem of migrant is not new in Serbia. According to a statistic of a State Shelter, which is established to host young accompanied migrants in 2009, some 650 were hosted. For the period of 7 years (2009/2016), not a single case of sexual abuse among young migrants was reported.

On the other side, NGO "Atina" (Athens) have reported (or put remarks), that while working on the field "noticed some number of children", whose behavior was indicating "possible sexual abuse". As a concrete example, field worker identified a group of seven children (age between 8-12), which were escorted by their "17 years older brother". Indicators for such conclusions were that children (girls) were performing "erotic dance", discussing "marriage issues and how to please a man", talking about "body shapes" etc. Their brother explained their behavior is result of "maltreatment" they experienced from extremists. Some remarks were also made that these children were manifesting "anxiety".

The same NGO is claiming that among children they met, few girls were wearing a "sign" on the forehead. This mark (sign) was, according to "cultural mediators" (people originating from the same countries/culture, and which are translating), was interpreted as "custom" among certain "tribes". It speaks those girls (age of 12) are "married", which brought field workers to assumption many of these girls are, in fact, married for a grownup man.

¹ Please provide the definition of accompanied/unaccompanied children in your country and, if available, provide separate figures for accompanied and unaccompanied children. If such data is not available, please provide data on migrant and asylum-seeking children.

² If figures for this period are not available, please provide the most recent annual data.

- b) Describe how the victims of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse were identified or describe the challenges faced to identify them. Specify whether a distinction is made between victims of sexual exploitation/abuse prior to the entry on your territory (Group 1) and after entry (Group 2) and provide data/estimates of the two groups of victims. Please also explain how the age is determined in case of doubt;

A brief period of maintenance in Serbia was influencing that children were not asked if they have (or previously had) some negative experience with sexual abuse. Focus was put on their basic safety (while passing through Serbia); on their existential needs (food and medical protection); personal and legal protection. Officially, cases of sexual abuse were not reported to State Shelter.

On the other hand NGO "Atina" also runs a shelter, which is predominately for protecting the victims of trafficking. Among them, in unidentified period of time (and length of the placement), NGO has identified few victims of sexual abuse. They are claiming to have uncertain number of both: boys and girls, which were victims of sexual abuse in their country of origin. Perpetrators were parents/relatives (father and uncles, mostly). They have also reported a few cases of sexual abuse (from "entering into a child private space", up to "making pornographic images" and "rape"), where the perpetrators were "smugglers" (in Macedonia and in Turkey).

- c) Indicate also how the data collected is used to offer a coordinated response between the different agencies in charge of the protection from, the prevention of and the fight against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children;

As mentioned above, while migrant-children were crossing through Serbia, focus was put on their basic safety. There are no data available about specific kind of psycho/social (or other kind of support) related with experience of sexual abuse. As "basic preventive measure" girls were divided from boys in separate (State) facilities.

NGO "Atina" confirms that "preventive measures" were not organized systematically. Most of the spaces within the "shelters" were adjusted to the needs of women with smaller children (age of five), while "confidential spaces for teenagers" are missing. Also insufficient numbers of "experienced and trained professionals" on the field were obstacle for more organized and targeted reaction.

- d) Identify the institution(s) responsible for the collection of above data.

Ministry of Interior (Border Police); State Shelter in Belgrade; NGO "Atina" (Athens).

PREVENTION (Lanzarote Convention, Chapter II)

- 2) What are the specific measures taken to prevent that children affected by the refugee crisis fall victims of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse?
 - a) Highlight in particular the measures (e.g. awareness raising material, specialised training, screening of professionals, etc.) which have proven to be effective;

Unfortunately, coordinated preventive measures were missing due to the lack of interpreters, “cultural mediators” and professionals able to do screening. (Both State and NGO agrees upon this). The same was influencing early (informal) “education” and start of formal school inclusion. (In majority of cases children (and their relatives), did not expressed intention to go schools, or it was possible to organize lectures in their native language).

- b) Underline any lessons learnt from specific challenges (e.g. in raising awareness on sexual violence amidst other urgent priorities, etc.) that had to be faced to improve prevention.

NGO “Atina” comes to conclusion, which imposed through the practice, with the aim to prevent further abuse of children, that after moving children from one country to other, cross boarder information exchange should follow.

PROTECTION (Lanzarote Convention, Chapter IV)

- 3) Has a coordinated child protection approach been put in place to cater for the specific needs of migrant and asylum-seeking children victims of sexual exploitation and/or sexual abuse?
 - a) Describe the measures taken to address the situation and cater for the children’s specific needs (multiple traumas, language/cultural differences, etc.), including with respect to guardianship/placement;

The truth was that (only) basic needs and safety of children, after crossing the (Serbian) border was put in focus (State). Even the NGO “Atina”, who said to identify “few cases” of sexual abuse, did not described “specific measures taken”, when multiple trauma (of sexual abuse at home and/or after smuggled over the boarder) were reported.

- b) Indicate also what measures have been taken to protect the children concerned from further exploitation/abuse and to assist the victims in seeking redress (please highlight any differences between Groups 1 and 2 of children as outlined above);

The basic security measure among accompanied children who were “asylum seekers” was to separate boys and girls in different facilities.

- c) Underline any lessons learnt from specific challenges (in reporting suspicion of sexual exploitation and abuse, in tailoring assistance to the victims, etc.) that had to be faced to improve protection.

Unfortunately, we could not highlight any form of practice as particularly useful. But, we could be critical toward it, because on both side (State and/or NGO), activities were run only to occupy children, rather than to “heal the wounds”.

COOPERATION (Lanzarote Convention, Chapter IX)

- 4) Provide examples of successful cooperation with other Parties to the Lanzarote Convention for the purpose of:
 - a) Preventing and combating sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children affected by the refugee crisis;
 - b) Protecting and providing assistance to victims;
 - c) Investigations or proceedings concerning the offences established in accordance with the Lanzarote Convention.

Again, we could not provide examples on this part for the reasons mention above. Most of the countries that are on the “Balkan route”, were coping with the migrant crises (due to the political circumstances and implications) alone, financially supported from other (mostly EU) countries.

ANY OTHER ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- 5) Please provide any other additional information which may be useful to identify areas for targeted cooperation aimed at ensuring that children affected by the refugee crisis are effectively protected from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse and in guaranteeing their human dignity and physical and psychological integrity.