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## **Cross-border missing children, helplines for victims, prosecution of offenders: Council of Europe assesses measures taken by states to protect children on the move from sexual abuse and exploitation**

Strasbourg, 13.04.2022 – With Europe facing the second major refugee crisis in less than a decade, the Council of Europe's [Lanzarote Committee](#) has published [ten compliance reports](#) evaluating legislation, services and other measures in place for the protection of children affected by the refugee crisis from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse in 41 state Parties(\*) to the [Lanzarote Convention](#). The reports focus on mechanisms for data collection, protection of child victims, prosecution of offenders, coordination between different actors and agencies, providing information to children, child-friendly proceedings, helplines for victims and measures related to cross-border missing children.

The situation in the European states has been evaluated against the recommendations of the [Special report "Protecting children affected by the refugee crisis from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse"](#). While the recommendations were made in 2017, shortly after the first refugee crisis in Europe, their implementation regain relevance today, with more than 4 mln refugees, half of them children, having fled Ukraine since the start of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine on 24 February 2022.

"When a large number of migrants and refugees arrive in new countries, after undergoing extremely difficult and potentially traumatic journeys, the most vulnerable persons, especially children, are often hit the hardest, and exposed to further risks, including the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse," said the Special Representative of the Secretary General ([SRSG](#)) on Migration and Refugees, Leyla Kayacik. Valuable examples of promising practices that can be replicated elsewhere, especially those focusing on missing children and preventive measures, are an illustration of how the Council of Europe supports member states in improving their responses to the current challenges, she added.

The Lanzarote Committee in its reports has noted significant efforts made in the [exchange of information on awareness raising](#). Equally, the majority of States surveyed propose support services, such as [helplines for child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation](#). Promising practices in this area include multilingual services for children affected by the refugee crisis. For instance, in Sweden, the NGO Save the Children set up a project entitled Listen to me! France designed an online platform for the reception and integration of refugees, which is available in seven languages. In Iceland, there is a helpline exclusively for asylum seekers. In Denmark, the NGO 'Danish Refugee Council' offers interpretation in more than 80 languages and dialects. In Italy, the 114 Childhood Emergency Helpline (Telefono Azzurro) has a simultaneous interpretation service in 20 languages. More than 30 states provide free services to those calling in.

The crucial issue of [cross-border missing children](#) is also covered in these reports. The most widely used tool is the 116 000 hotline for Missing Children, which is used by 29 Parties. Another promising practice in this area is the implementation of identification, documentation, tracing and reunification protocols, as it is the case in Austria, Turkey and the Netherlands. Besides, to prevent and respond to the phenomenon of missing cross-border children, in Austria, flight attendants are trained to identify children who are potential victims of human trafficking, and there are special arrangements for transporting young children to protect them from potential risks on the route, with special checks being put in place in case of suspected abduction and/or sexual exploitation or abuse of a child. Training on unaccompanied children and victims of human trafficking is also organised in Croatia,

Italy and Portugal.

State Parties have highlighted measures adopted to protect unaccompanied children, among other vulnerable groups, from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, through [information and advice](#). Examples include peer training and intercultural and socio-medical advice centres in Vienna (Austria), prevention materials in the form of short comic books adapted to children's age and maturity in Czech Republic, a psycho-social support programme, tailored to the needs of children and implemented in all Child Support Centres in Turkey working with unaccompanied asylum seeker children who are victims of crime, pushed to crime and living on the streets.

The compliance reports also identify gaps that should be addressed to provide effective legislation, programmes and services for the prevention and protection of children affected by the refugee crisis against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. On [mechanisms for data collection](#), the monitored Parties need to improve the efficacy of already available data collection mechanisms and establish new ones, where they do not yet exist; as well as to adopt different data collection methods, both of a quantitative (i.e. statistics) and of a qualitative nature (i.e. focused research studies).

As regards the [prosecution of offenders](#), state Parties need to enhance international co-operation on information exchange; support the investigation and prosecution of crimes occurring outside their territory, and guarantee the initiation of proceedings without the victim's complaint, and their continuation in case of withdrawal of the complaint and/or statement.

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The Council of Europe [Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#) (CETS No. 201) is the most comprehensive international legal instrument on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. In 2022 it counts [48 states Parties](#). The [Lanzarote Committee](#) is the body established to monitor Parties' compliance with the Convention.

These compliance reports contribute to the implementation of the [Council of Europe Action Plan on Protecting Vulnerable Persons in the Context of Migration and Asylum in Europe \(2021-2025\)](#), which is co-ordinated by the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees.

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(\*) The following 41 states were Parties to the Lanzarote Convention in 2016 when the monitoring round was launched: Albania, Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Republic of Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, the Russian Federation, San Marino, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, North Macedonia, Turkey and Ukraine.

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