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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

CYPRUS

(Replies sent by “Hope For Children” CRC Policy Center)

Replies registered by the Secretariat on 19 September 2016

Country specific information: Cyprus

The replies are based on the knowledge and experience of staff (lawyers, psychologist and social workers) of the "Hope For Children" CRC Policy Center based in Nicosia, Cyprus. "Hope For Children" CRC Policy Center in July 2014 has undertaken the establishment and operation of the private children's shelter "Home For Hope" which accommodates unaccompanied minors under the legal guardianship of the Director of the Social Welfare Services and provides multi-disciplinary and holistic services for them. The children's shelter operates with the approval and close collaboration of the Social Welfare Services of the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance. The children's shelter is staffed with officers specialized in the fields of psychology, social work, law and education. The shelter provides services based on models considered good practices in European countries, adapted to the needs and special circumstances of Cyprus. The services offered could be grouped under three main pillars that actually frames the operating mechanism of the shelter. Currently, "Hope For Children" CRC Policy Center is operating 2 private children's shelters for unaccompanied minors.

In all the responses we refer to the 2 private children's shelters "Home For Hope". However, there are 2 state run shelters providing accommodation and services, one for male and one for female unaccompanied minors. In general, the officers working there lack training on how to recognize the signs of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. As a result, they aren't equipped to identify this kind of issues, and that is why the handling of the case is totally depended on the social welfare officer.

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?

According to article 2 of the Refugee Law of 2000 (L. 6(I)/2000) as amended, the definition of the term "unaccompanied minor" is the following "a minor who reaches the areas effectively controlled by the Republic of Cyprus, not accompanied by a responsible, by law or custom, adult for however time no such person undertakes in practice their care or a minor who becomes unaccompanied after they have entered the areas effectively controlled by the Republic of Cyprus.

Unfortunately, there aren't any available statistics on the numbers of children who are present in Cyprus due to the migration crisis. There are statistics available by the Asylum Service and UNHCR on the number of applications for international protection. However, the applications do not indicate the number of children affected since an entire family, regardless of number of members, is considered one unit for the purposes of the statistics kept. Additionally, it is not indicated in the existing data which applications are directly related to the migrations crisis. It could be inferred by looking at the countries of origins but still this would have a large margin of error.

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.

- 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;

In light of the lack of statistics, as described in the question above, even an estimation would bear a large margin of error that is not at all representative of the actual numbers.

Sexual abuse and exploitation is one of the elements that is/should be taken into account upon making the assessment of the child but no concrete evidence can be found on the manner and effectiveness of the assessment.

- 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;

Based on the data from the private shelter for Unaccompanied Minors of “Hope for Children” CRC Policy Center, there are no identified victims of sexual exploitation/abuse currently residing at the shelter or ex-residents. However, based on the procedures followed, the minors once they arrive at the private shelter pass through a two-stage comprehensive interview:

1) Care plan and 2) Psychological Assessment. In the first stage, all the necessary information on the minors individual and family history is gathered while specific questions on traumatic experiences are included. This information is used to form the minor’s individual care plan with short-term and long-term goals regarding the minor’s adjustment in several domains e.g. education, health, skill acquisition etc. Next, the psychological assessment is conducted during the first month after the minor’s admission in the private shelter. During this more specialised interview, the minor is assessed for various psychological symptoms including post-traumatic stress or symptoms of any type of abuse e.g. sexual, physical, emotional, and neglect. The private shelters’ specialised staff provide their daily observations and impressions regarding minors’ every-day behaviour and emotional state while the minor’s personal officer has weekly meetings where various issues and incidents are discussed. Through these observations and weekly meetings, the minor’s psychological state is systematically followed and any signs of abuse can become evident.

There are no identified victims of sexual exploitation/abuse prior to the entry in our country (Group 1) and therefore this distinction is not applicable.

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

- 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;

If the minor is identified as sexual abuse victim at the private shelter, the Director of the Social Welfare Services who is the legal guardian of all the unaccompanied minors in Cyprus, is notified. The appointed Social Welfare Officer is then responsible to contact the Police for further investigation in the case that the victim claims that he/she was subjected to sexual exploitation/trafficking or in case that the victim was sexually abuse during his stay in Cyprus. The Social Welfare Officer will also refer the minor at the Mental Health Services for psychological support or treatment.

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

Social Welfare Services
Cyprus Police
Mental Health Services

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?

During their stay at the private shelter, the minors have the opportunity to participate in lectures and workshops offered by specialised staff on matters such as personal hygiene, sexuality, personal boundaries and ways to protect themselves and seek help in case of abuse. These matters are discussed in depth in the weekly meetings that the minors have with their personal officer.

- a) Highlight in particular the measures (e.g. awareness raising material, specialised training, screening of professionals, etc.) which have proven to be effective;

The most effective measure is the professional relation that the minor develops with the officers and more specifically with his/her personal officer. In the context of this relation, ongoing screening is conducted and consultation is provided to the minor regarding his interpersonal/romantic relations that could possibly prevent incidents of sexual abuse and exploitation.

- 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.

One of the major challenges is the cultural specificities of the minors that relate to cultural or religious beliefs regarding sexuality, interpersonal conducts etc. These beliefs often create feelings of shame or uncomfortableness and guilt to the minor about discussing such matters. Thus, these cultural specificities hold them back from participating in raising awareness activities or individual discussions on sexual violence and related themes. Through the provision of workshops, lectures, games, art activities

at the private shelter, the minors have the opportunity to process their cultural specificities and explore ways of adjusting in a European society like Cyprus.

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?

The coordinated child protection approach entails the cooperation between the shelter officers with the Social Welfare Services, Cyprus Police and Mental Health Services. Through this cooperation the minor's needs are met in terms of psychological support, legal assistance and protection.

- 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;

There is no specialized placement for minors that are victims of sexual abuse/exploitation in Cyprus. Therefore, the minor once identified as a victim he/she remains at the private shelter and support is provided by the specialised staff of the shelter on a daily basis. Services of a translator are also provided to facilitate the minor's communication with the private shelter's staff. Visits of the minor to the Mental Health Services and Cyprus Police are provided with the services of translation also.

- 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 issue of redress has not been addressed in relation to the targeted population. Any incidents identified or brought to the authorities would follow the existing procedure, which is two tier. The one concerns the criminal aspect, where the Police ex officio prosecutes the accused and the Attorney

General's Office acts as the Prosecution against the accused. The civil aspect can be initiated by the victim or the parent/guardian and aims at reparation, in the form of financial payments to the victim.

- 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.

The experience in handling cases of sexual abuse to children illustrate that there is poor coordination between the services that handle cases of such nature, delays resulting from understaffing and procedural requirements, little expertise. Victims often are required to go through lengthy investigation procedures, be interviewed by a number of different professionals and relive the trauma all over again. If the case reaches the court, then again there are delays resulting from backlog. There were instances where

sensitive information of the victim leaked which led to stigmatisation and further victimisation.

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;

Sexual abuse and exploitation is one of the elements that the first contact personnel ought to take into account. There are no data on the extent, measures and effectiveness of this.

- b) Protecting and providing assistance to victims;

Our Organization is the coordinator of a European Project entitled “JudEx+ Towards a child-friendly justice in cases of sexual violence against children”. Through these project various activities are implemented in cooperation with other five EU state members to improve the services provided to children that are victims of sexual abuse/exploitation and their families. More specifically it addresses the communication between the relevant stake holders that intervene in cases of child abuse (social welfare services, police, judicial system, education system), and the communication between the above mentioned stake holders with the child and the family.

- c) Investigations or proceedings concerning the offences established in accordance with the Lanzarote Convention.

Overall there has been a slight improvement of the cooperation between the authorities involved, yet still there are many gaps in the system. There are still significant delays in investigations that are attributed to different stakeholders, the police, the courts, the psychiatric services.

A very positive development in the issue has been the initiative of the Social Welfare Services to set up and run a child safe house in accordance to the Icelandic model. The SWS opened a call for proposals and the successful applicant to set up and run the safe house is “Hope For Children” CRC Policy Center. The safe house will house representatives of all the public services and actors involved in the procedure (police, judiciary, social welfare services, psychiatric services). The safe house is expected to start its operation in the beginning of 2017.

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.