

Ms Gabriella BATTAINI-DRAGONI  
Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe

10th Anniversary of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children  
Against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a privilege to be here with you for this Conference.

Let me begin by extending our gratitude to Ms Pilar Hernaiz for donating to this cause the wonderful handmade dolls – the “Pilucas” – that you will have seen here in the meeting room.

They are a heart-warming and generous gesture for which we extend our warm thanks.

Our Convention on the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse ranks as one of the most crucial instruments that we have ever developed.

The purpose of democracy, human rights and the rule of law – the three pillars on which the Council of Europe rests – is to protect every citizen against injustice and when we speak about children, we are speaking about those who are often most vulnerable.

This Convention not only facilitates that action, but it does so in order to tackle a terrible scourge.

As you know, the best estimate is that one in five children at some point faces sexual exploitation or abuse.

And the trauma of such an experience can last a lifetime: disrupting formal education, marring career prospects and resulting in a whole variety of mental health problems.

So when the Convention came into force ten years ago, we were all – as we remain – rightly proud.

This was, and is, the most ambitious and comprehensive international legal instrument of its kind.

It identified the dual problem of sexual abuse within the child’s family or “circle of trust” as well as acts carried out for commercial or profit-making purposes.

The Convention also made clear that states should establish specific laws criminalising sexual exploitation and putting in place the means to prosecute it, as well as taking practical measures to prevent and to protect against these practices.

International cooperation was encouraged too and, in all of these measures, the interests of the child were put at forefront of the process.

So now, ten years later, how successful has the Convention proven?

The headline numbers tell a positive story.

Every single Council of Europe member state has signed it, forty two out of forty seven have ratified it – with more on the way – and a number of non-European countries are soon to become parties or are considering ratification.

In addition, the Convention is now being used as an international benchmark by countries outside the Council:

The WeProtect Global Alliance; international cooperation projects; and capacity building with partner international institutions such as Europol, Interpol, the Fundamental Rights Agency of the European Union and United Nations agencies – all of these are vehicles that deliver the Convention's aims to the benefit of children both within and outside Europe.

It is positive to see the way in which the Convention has raised awareness, laws have changed, and capacity to prevent and respond to sexual offences against children have improved in those countries that have signed.

But member states have not simply been left to implement the Convention on their own.

On the contrary, the Council of Europe has built on the Convention in order to provide a dynamic means for further progress.

Our monitoring body, the Lanzarote Committee, has been central to achieving this.

Since beginning its work in 2013, it has of course ensured the effective implementation of the Convention.

More than that however, it has also improved cooperation, facilitated good practice and provided solutions for the gaps and challenges that have become apparent.

Among its many significant achievements are two specific reports.

The first was the monitoring report on the protection of children against sexual exploitation in the circle of trust.

It drew lessons from a capacity-building visit to the Barnahus in Reykjavik where parties saw for themselves the value of a multiagency approach and recommended it in the report conclusions.

This in turn has led to the launch of Children's Houses across Europe.

The second report – a special report - was on Protecting children affected by the refugee crisis from sexual exploitation and abuse.

Responding to the increased numbers of refugees coming to Europe in recent years, it identified the dangers to children affected by the refugee crisis can face, notably those arriving unaccompanied or who go missing after arrival.

It also recommended practical measures that can be put in place to mitigate these problems, including screening children for signs of exploitation, ensuring that their rights are explained to them, making sure that the adults with whom they come into contact are properly trained, equipping reception centres so that they are safe spaces and cause no trauma, and putting in place protocols to reduce the numbers who disappear.

These are important steps and what they share in common is expertise, determination and a relentless drive to share and learn from best practice.

That, ladies and gentlemen, is really what this event is about.

We have come far over the last ten years, but there is further still to go.

The One in Five campaign has yielded success but we all know that we cannot rest until the number of children being abused is none at all.

That means a readiness to be frank and open about the challenges we have not yet met and the way in which sexual exploitation and abuse of children is changing, not least in the context of rapidly changing technical capability.

It is an opportunity also to consider together how we rise to those challenges.

So many people in this room, from the Council of Europe, from member states and from NGOs have made a vital and tireless contribution so far.

Here, this week, is an opportunity to lay the ground for further progress.

This conference is an opportunity to pool your diverse experiences and expertise, to share ambitions and ideas and strengthen the "circuit of good practices" that will help tackle the scourge of child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Every child who can be spared that experience is worth every effort we can make.

I thank you for being here and look forward to hearing your conclusions.

Link: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/deputy-secretary-general/-/dixieme-anniversaire-de-la-convention-du-conseil-de-l-europe-sur-la-protection-des-enfants-contre-l-exploitation-et-les-abus-sexuels>