

**Conference on “Preventing sexual abuse of children”
(Madrid, 10 and 11 December 2013)**

Conclusions

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Preventing sexual abuse of children is a very broad, difficult and sensitive issue that takes diverse forms. The conference that is now coming to an end has been very instructive from many points of view.

After a reminder of the legal context of the Council of Europe with regard to preventing sexual abuse of children, the conference provided the opportunity to present and highlight numerous examples of good practice in various fields of prevention in different European countries on the basis of four main themes:

- Sex tourism
- How to involve children in preventing sexual abuse
- Educating children
- Measures concerning sex offenders

Sex tourism

Two speakers in particular placed emphasis on projects to prevent sex tourism. One is being carried out in the Netherlands where an action plan combines a whole raft of measures such as supervision of sex offenders, the withdrawal of passports, the collection of data, drawing the public's attention to the problem in airports, and co-operation with NGOs and countries of destination. The other good practice presented to us was the code of conduct for the protection of children from sexual exploitation in travel and tourism, which, to a large extent, draws on the involvement of NGOs (for example ECPAT) and of the private sector, in particular air transport companies and hotels.

How to involve children in preventing sexual abuse

The Lanzarote Convention provides for the involvement or the association of children in the framing and implementation of policies, in particularly those concerning the prevention of sexual abuse. For many of those who negotiated the Convention, the ways in which children could be associated in preventing their sexual abuse remained a mystery. The Conference provided the opportunity to learn about good practices in taking account of children's opinions on the implementation of prevention measures. This should be very useful for the Lanzarote Committee's future work.

Educating children, in particular with regard to sexuality, and making them aware of the risks to which they may be exposed, in particular the risk of sexual abuse

I have no intention of attempting to draw up an exhaustive list of the different projects that were presented as they will subsequently be published on the Council of Europe website. But I have identified a number of elements common to the different contributions, demonstrating an approach that should be taken when addressing issues relating to the sexual education of children and making them aware of the risks.

The first element I noted was partnerships between different ministerial departments and more particularly between the health, education, justice and police services. Several of the projects presented showed the need to combine these different public policy sectors.

Secondly, I noted an approach based on prevention and not simply on taking action once the offence has been committed or on caring for victims. This is particularly important when working on issues of prevention and the need to make children aware of the risks to which they are exposed.

Thirdly, it is important in this field to involve parents through activities that are designed to encourage and facilitate dialogue with children, particularly with a view to encouraging children to speak out. I was very struck by what one speaker said about one child in three neither reporting nor ever revealing the sexual abuse to which he or she has been subjected. This shows how important parental education is in ensuring that children feel that they can speak about such matters.

The fourth element that I noted was the interest shown in an approach that was targeted more closely at certain forms of crime that are increasing and to which children are particularly exposed. These, for example, include activities to raise awareness of the dangers of cybercrime and cyber space, in the broadest sense of the term; we all know that children often have a much better command of the different technical aspects of cyber space than the adults around them. Another carefully targeted approach I would mention is the need for prevention programmes geared more particularly at the most vulnerable populations, for example children with disabilities, and the need to talk about the problem in an appropriate manner.

The last element I noted, in terms of approach, which seemed to apply to all the contributions to the conference, is the importance of the work done in co-operation with NGOs and the private sector in all areas of prevention. The origin of the speakers who took the floor over the two days shows that there are activities in the private sector which are extremely important and make a major contribution to prevention.

The perpetrators and potential perpetrators of sexual abuse

The last subject discussed during the conference, was dealing with the perpetrators of sexual abuse of children and by perpetrators I mean both potential perpetrators – those who have not yet committed such an offence – and actual perpetrators.

Ways of dealing with such persons were proposed during the Conference, all of which attempted to identify the reasons why and wherefore of such acts and consequently the risk factors, with a view to adapting the prevention measures that need to be taken. I think this is a point that must be borne in mind not only when dealing with actual or potential perpetrators with regard to their particular problem but also with a view to prevention through regulating access to certain professions. I was very impressed by the presentation made on behalf of the British *National Crime Agency* as the approach taken is an overall, integral and centralised approach to such problems. I would point out that, under the Lanzarote Convention, the states parties are free to decide on how they implement the provisions concerning prohibiting access to certain professions, which, for some of them, is a very complicated matter. I believe that many states could draw on this example.

Method

In addition to these fundamental questions, I would like to say a few words about the method used as I have particularly appreciated the way in which this Conference has been organised.

Firstly the multidisciplinary origins of participants, which have included experts, representatives of member states, of health, education and social welfare services, of the courts and the police. I firmly believe that a collective cross-sectoral debate produces the best results.

Secondly, the highlighting of activities that are based on a partnership approach involving experts in the different public sectors concerned, NGOS, the private sector and children themselves. This is all perfectly in keeping with what the Lanzarote Convention seeks to promote in terms of states' commitment.

Thirdly, the practical and pragmatic approach taken to the organisation of the conference, not only the highlighting of a number of good practices during the sessions but also the "Good Practice circuit" presented in connection with the conference.

Finally, I particularly appreciated something that does not occur at all conferences – the fact that the way in which our discussions were organised provided the opportunity for interactive exchanges with a large number of people in the room, which was excellent.

One last thing concerning the method: I particularly liked the fact that the conference was illustrated by the film "*No tengas miedo*", which was extremely interesting. The

exchange of views with Montxo Armendáriz, the producer, was also very instructive and contributed to the success of the event.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Council of Europe and its secretariat for organising this conference and for the large amount of work involved, to thank the Spanish authorities and in particular our colleagues from the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs as well as the CaixaForum for providing the venue and for its contribution to our discussions, and, last but not least, the interpreters.