



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

T-ES(2016)RFG-CYP

## 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 the State)

Replies registered by the Secretariat on 4 October 2016

## DATA (Lanzarote Convention, Chapter III)

- 1) How many migrant and asylum-seeking children (accompanied and unaccompanied)<sup>1</sup> 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,<sup>2</sup> and specify how many of these children are victims or presumed victims of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse;
  - 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;

As a result of the refugee crisis, for the period 1 July 2015 to June 2016, the Asylum Service registered 704 children in new applications for asylum, out of which 165 were unaccompanied minors.

The Police of the Republic of Cyprus keeps a database of sexual abuse of children cases. However the data is not segregated according to ethnicity and therefore no information is available on children victims or presumed victims of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, who are migrant and/or asylum seeking children. There is also no statistical distinction between victims prior and after entry in the Republic of Cyprus.

Victims of sexual exploitation/abuse are identified either at the point of entry in the Republic of Cyprus (as part of interagency screening for vulnerable/high risk persons) or at a later stage while in the Republic of Cyprus through the process of interviews or due to a referral.

According to legislation, when the age of a victim is uncertain and there are reasons to believe that the victim is a child, or if that person states that he/she is a minor, article 31(3) of the L.91(I)/2014 provides that the Social Welfare Services ensure that, the above provision is adhered to so that the person presumed to be a child has immediate access to assistance, support and protection in accordance with the provisions of the above mentioned Law.

If there are reasonable doubts concerning the age of the minor, the age assessment procedure is activated which includes non-medical and medical examinations for age determination.

- 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;

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

At the point of entry there is a multiagency team for registering migrants. The coordinating agencies for registering all migrants are the Migration Department and the Asylum Service. The Social Welfare Services register unaccompanied minors and vulnerable families with children.

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

The Migration Department is responsible to collect data on all migrants and the Asylum Service is responsible to collect data on asylum seekers.  
The Police collect data on child sexual abuse.

#### 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;
  - 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.

Due to the refugee crisis and the increasing number of people in need of protection arriving in the Republic of Cyprus, an action plan has been developed and is being implemented since 2014, by the Ministry of Interior in cooperation with all the relevant Ministries/Departments. This Action Plan determines the procedures and how to prepare, equip, provide training to professionals, and the interagency cooperation (government departments, services and international organisations and NGOs), to address the situation caused by a massive influx of persons in need of protection, arriving in the territory of the Republic of Cyprus.

Through this Action Plan early detection of vulnerable groups of people, including unaccompanied minors, and families and children at risk, is possible since all the relevant actors (i.e. Social Welfare Services, Asylum Services, Immigration Office, Health Services, Civil Defence, Red Cross, etc.) come together from the time of their entry to the Republic of Cyprus. At the point of entry persons in need of protection are provided with the essentials, a registration takes place and an initial screening is undertaken, aiming towards the identification of persons that possibly belong to such vulnerable groups, so that any special needs are taken into consideration during later procedures.

Unaccompanied minors are taken in care of the Director of Social Welfare Services, who acts as a guardian safeguarding access to their rights (i.e. education, health, activities, asylum application, etc.) based on the best interest of the child. Unaccompanied minors are placed in foster or residential care.

The Social Welfare Services continue their cooperation with families and children that might have been detected as being at risk in order to further examine the cases and provide support and counselling services. Also they are in close cooperation with the Asylum Service and the Kofinou Reception Center.

All Officers who come into contact with children (including unaccompanied children), receive training on issues concerning children in migration, children at risk, etc. Specifically the Republic of Cyprus participates in EASO Support Plan, which includes training of professionals on issues of migration. For example in 2015 NIDOS had performed a training of the relevant stakeholders, due to the existing need for identifying best practices and for training staff entrusted with the guardianship and representation of children in need of international protection. The objective of the training was to improve knowledge and expertise in safeguarding unaccompanied minors in need of protection and the further development of the guardianship system.

#### 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;
  - 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);
  - 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.

Further to the measures mentioned under Prevention, several measures are in place concerning the further protection of migrant children and asylum seeking children. As mentioned earlier, unaccompanied minors are taken in care of the Director of Social Welfare Services, who acts as a guardian safeguarding access to their rights (i.e. education, health, activities, asylum application, etc.) based on the best interest of the child. Unaccompanied minors are placed in foster or residential care. All unaccompanied minors have access to the following:

1. Psychological support, when required.
2. Health services.
3. Education, extra curricular activities, etc.

Furthermore, an NGO ("Hope for Children") has been subsidized by the government for specialization in the area of unaccompanied minors. This NGO operates two private Homes for unaccompanied minors providing care services and other supportive services in close cooperation with the Social Welfare Services.

As mentioned in 1(b), training is provided to officers who come into contact with migrant children and asylum seeking children, including unaccompanied minors.

General protection measures concerning sexual abuse and/or sexual exploitation of children:

Cases of sexual abuse and/or sexual exploitation of children are handled based on the best interest of the child and according to the specific needs of the child. The Social

Welfare Services, based on article 31(2) of the Prevention and Combating of Sexual Abuse and Sexual Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography Law of 2014 (L.91(I)/2014), ensure that assistance, support and protection are provided to a child as soon as they or any other service involved have good reason to believe that a sexual offense has been committed against the child.

For further and better protection of children, in July 2015, the Council of Ministers appointed an Ad Hoc Interministerial Committee for the development of a National Strategy on the Prevention and Combating of Sexual Abuse and Sexual Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography. The National Strategy was adopted by the Council of Ministers on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2016.

Within the framework of the National Strategy, the Minister of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance announced the intention of the Republic of Cyprus to create a Children's House for handling cases of sexual abuse and/or exploitation of children. The Children's House is expected to operate in 2017 by an NGO ("Hope for Children" CRC Policy Center).

#### 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.

The competent authorities of the Republic of Cyprus are in the process of establishing a Children's House in close cooperation with experts from other Parties to the Lanzarote Convention (i.e. Barnahus, Iceland, Institute of Child Health, Department of Mental Health and Social Welfare, Greece and others).

Furthermore the NGO "Hope for Children" CRC Policy Center will operate the Children's House in close cooperation with the Social Welfare Services. The organization also participates in several programmes concerning migrant children and asylum seeking children, such as Terre des Hommes (Destination Unknown Campaign Assembly), NIDOS, Separated Children in Europe, Save the Children's Freedom, Arsis, etc.

#### 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.