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## **Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF)**

### **Opinion by the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF) on PACE Recommendation 2274(2024) on “The protection of children against online violence”**

Adopted by the CDENF during its 9<sup>th</sup> Plenary meeting (Strasbourg, 28-30 May 2024)

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## **Opinion by the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF) on PACE Recommendation 2274 (2024) – “The protection of children against online violence”**

1. Following the adoption, at the 2nd part of its 2024 Session (Strasbourg, 15-19 April 2024), of [Recommendation 2274\(2024\)](#) on “The protection of children against online violence” by the Parliamentary Assembly (PACE), the Committee of Ministers agreed, at its [1497th meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies](#) on 30 April 2024 “*to communicate it to the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF), [...] for information and possible comments by 21 June 2024*”.
2. The CDENF examined Recommendation 2274(2024) during its 9<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting (Strasbourg, 28-30 May 2024) and adopted the following opinion concerning those aspects of the Recommendation which fall under the scope of its terms of reference.
3. The CDENF welcomes the PACE’s Recommendation on this topical issue, which falls under two priority areas of the [Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child \(2022-2027\)](#), namely priority area 1. “Freedom from violence for all children” and 3. “Access to and safe use of technologies for all children”. In view of the rise of digital technology and children’s unhindered access to potentially harmful materials, whether intentionally or unintentionally, the CDENF shares the concerns expressed by the PACE and agrees on “the urgent need to protect children from violence in the digital environment, especially in view of growing dangers on the internet and new forms of online violence” as referred to in PACE Resolution 2547 (2024).
4. With regard to PACE recommendation 1.2 inviting the Committee of Minister to take “online violence into account in its feasibility study on age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education”, the CDENF points out that, during its 9<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting, it welcomed a “Feasibility study on age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education to strengthen responses for inter alia preventing and combatting violence against children, including sexual violence and harmful or risky behaviour”, as approved by its Committee of Experts on the prevention of violence ([ENF-VAE](#)) (main CDENF deliverable 4). This study underlines the importance of providing age-appropriate, comprehensive sexuality education in fulfilling children's human rights and in preventing, combating, and eradicating all forms of violence against children, including sexual violence and other harmful conduct when it occurs online. This type of education, to be provided in formal, informal and non-formal educational settings, should help children identify the risks to prevent online violence, as well as provide children with the right skills to recognise violence when it occurs and to report it. The study also identifies the main elements of a non-binding instrument on age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education to strengthen responses for inter alia preventing and combatting violence against children, including sexual violence and harmful or risky behaviour, to be developed by the CDENF by the end of 2026. The CDENF would welcome cooperation with the PACE in due course in the context of the development of the instrument.
5. The CDENF furthermore draws attention to the recently adopted [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2023\)8](#) of the Committee of Ministers to member States on strengthening reporting systems on violence against children, adopted in September 2023, and its particular relevance to the need of states to ensure safe reporting of violence against children, including violence inflicted through digital technologies.
6. With regard to PACE recommendation 2.2: “providing children and parents with tools to raise awareness of the dangers of the internet”; the CDENF reaffirms the commitment to “actively promote [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2018\)7](#) of the Committee of Ministers to member States on Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment” and to “take specific measures regarding its implementation in order to enable all children to fully exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms online” as spelled out in the [Declaration by the Committee of Ministers on the need to protect children’s privacy in the digital environment](#). A number of tools have been developed to support this process, including the child-friendly version of the Guidelines,

[“Learn about your rights in the digital environment”](#), translated in many languages and the checklist for parents and caregivers in the document [“Parenting in the digital age - Positive parenting strategies for different scenarios”](#). The storybook and video entitled [“Kiko and the Manymes”](#) on the misuse of pictures in the online environment have been developed to support children and parents by raising awareness on the dangers of the internet. The [Internet Literacy Handbook](#) is a more general tool for children, parents, teachers and policy makers to be able to use the Internet safely and confidently by being aware of opportunities and risks. For teenagers, the leaflet [“So, this is sexual abuse?”](#) addresses sexual abuse, including online abuse and the circulation of sexual images.

7. Recognising that additional measures should be taken to protect children from harmful online content, the CDENF carried out a Mapping Study on the rights of the child and artificial intelligence (AI), focusing on the legal Frameworks that Address AI in the Context of Children’s Rights. The study, approved during the CDENF’s 9<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting (28-29 May 2024) underlines the responsibility of public authorities “for protecting and empowering children to enjoy their rights and be made aware of the risks posed by AI systems” and the importance of “awareness-raising campaigns on educational paths for children and young people” on the challenges related to the use of AI. During its 9<sup>th</sup> Plenary meeting, the CDENF also organised a [thematic exchange to explore ways to protect children from the risks of accessing pornographic content online](#). The issues of online age-verification, education, digital literacy for children and parents and the role of policy makers, technology companies and social media platforms were underlined as essential elements to protect children from the risks associated with accessing pornographic content online. As a follow-up to this thematic exchange, and in line with its mandate, the CDENF will develop a thematic guidance note on this issue.

8. The CDENF will continue its work to enhance the implementation of international and Council of Europe standards on the protection of children against all forms of violence, including the [Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#), also known as “the Lanzarote Convention”. The CDENF recalls that the 2024 edition of the annual Day on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (18 November) will focus on Emerging technologies: threats and opportunities for the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. The CDENF would welcome the engagement of the Parliamentary Assembly and encourage Council of Europe national Parliaments to seize the opportunity given by the 2024 edition to discuss and draw attention at national level to the risks associated with online technologies and online violence.

## **Annex**

### **Recommendation 2274 (2024)**

## **The protection of children against online violence**

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly refers to its Resolution 2547 (2024) “The protection of children against online violence”. It invites the Committee of Ministers to take into due consideration, in its work, the dangers posed by the internet to children, who are more exposed to violence and new forms of violence in the online environment, in particular by:

1.1 considering and incorporating the best interests of the child in the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence, Human Rights, Democracy, and the Rule of Law, including the protection of children’s human rights from the dangers of artificial intelligence;

1.2 taking online violence into account in its feasibility study on age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education;

1.3 strengthening international co-operation with relevant organisations, including the European Commission and relevant European Union agencies such as Europol and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, and Interpol, with a view to focusing attention on the protection of children’s human rights and the best interests of the child.

2. The Assembly calls on the Committee of Ministers to strengthen co-operation with digital industry stakeholders in order to find adaptable and sustainable solutions to protect children from online violence, including by:

2.1 as a first step, assessing the reliability of age verification tools, depending on the content and the age of child users;

2.2 providing children and parents with tools to raise awareness of the dangers of the internet;

2.3 making online tools available to enable easy reporting of incidents of online violence, and providing help and support, particularly psychological care, for child victims.