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

## REPORT

**Implementation review of Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)10 on Council of Europe policy guidelines on integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence**

*Adopted by the CDENF during its 10<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting (3-5 December 2024)*

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights or the Convention (full name: Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms)
EU	European Union
Istanbul Convention	Convention on Preventing and Combatting Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence
Lanzarote Convention	Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
Policy Guidelines	Policy Guidelines on Integrated National Strategies for the Protection of Children from Violence
Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)10	Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)10 on integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence
UK	United Kingdom
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2009, in response to the pervasive nature of violence against children, the Council of Europe developed the *Policy Guidelines on Integrated National Strategies for the Protection of Children from Violence*<sup>1</sup>. The Policy Guidelines were developed to assist member states in designing and implementing integrated and holistic approaches that encompass prevention, protection, and prosecution measures.

In a survey carried out between December 2023 and March 2024, the Council of Europe member states were asked a number of closed and open-ended questions to provide insights into how the Policy Guidelines have been implemented into their legal and policy frameworks, and to assess how well state practice aligns with the key messages of the Policy Guidelines.

This report contains a comparative quantitative and qualitative analysis of the member states' replies to the survey. It shows how states, in their own words, are working to tackle all forms of violence against children, what they consider to be the main persistent and emerging challenges in this work, and what they see as the most significant and effective developments they have made.

Some comparisons are made with the previous implementation report on the Policy Guidelines<sup>2</sup>, which was published in 2019, ten years after their adoption, showing in particular that states today appear to be taking a wider perspective on violence against children and focusing on a broader range of both forms of and settings for violence. Importantly, there appears to have been a shift in the perception of children as witnesses of violence, with a growing recognition that they are also victims of violence.

Globally, the data collected for this report indicate that the multi-dimensional nature of violence against children is today recognised in a majority of the Council of Europe member states, although the explicit focus on specific forms and settings of violence still varies somewhat, as do the exact measures states have adopted to tackle violence against children.

The report shows that the totality of responding states are in full consensus on the importance of interagency co-operation between different Ministries, Government departments and other relevant actors, as well as on the involvement of different professional groups through a multidisciplinary and multi-stakeholder approach in the work to tackle violence against children.

With regard to the existence of solid vetting systems for professionals working with and for children, reporting mechanisms for cases of violence, and referral mechanisms for child victims of violence, the data provides a more nuanced picture with greater variety in the state replies.

It is noteworthy that when states were asked to assess factors of ineffectiveness of their work to prevent and detect violence and protect children, they often replied with very similar factors as those indicative of effectiveness. This shows that states appear to have a similar appreciation of what the indispensable features of a solid child protection system are, only in some states such elements are success factors, in others they represent weaknesses or challenges that still need to be overcome.

Another interesting finding is that certain measures, such as awareness raising and training, were considered by many states as representing examples of what they have done, while at the same time acknowledging that more is needed and that existing

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<sup>1</sup> Adopted by the Committee of Ministers through recommendation CM/Rec(2009)10. Available at:

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/integrated-strategies>

<sup>2</sup> "A life free from violence for all children", available at: <https://rm.coe.int/a-life-free-from-violence-for-all-children-report-on-action-taken-by-t/168098b166>

measures are not yet implemented as well as they should be in terms of frequency, regularity, target groups, or focus and content. This shows that although there is a broad understanding in the member states of what measures are needed, it is not always clear how such measures should be implemented successfully in practice. In addition, the reports shows that resources to effectively tackle all forms of violence against children are still insufficient in almost all member states, and funding was listed as one of the key persisting challenges.

Fifteen years have passed since the adoption of the Policy Guidelines, and during this time, manifestations of violence against children have evolved. While violence against children continues to represent a pervasive element in our societies, the rapid evolution of digital technologies, but also a changing social and political climate in Europe, are arguably having an impact on how and where violence is committed.

The Policy Guidelines, while they do insist on the need for prevention and protection measures, stop short of providing Council of Europe member states with clear guidance on how they could get there. They also stop short of informing states about the variety of forms of violence against children and the numerous settings in which they occur, including in the digital environment. Lastly, the Policy Guidelines do not, in their current state, address different groups of children who may, due to specific and intersecting factors, such as age, gender identity, or cultural and societal contexts and backgrounds, be more at risk and/or exposed to violence and need specific attention and assistance. For these reasons, the report ends with a recommendation for the Council of Europe and its member states to consider the possibility of revising the Policy Guidelines to ensure an up-to-date version in line with the more recent knowledge, data and recommendations in the field.

## 1. Introduction

### a. Background and the need for an implementation review

1. The protection of children from violence constitutes a fundamental human rights obligation recognised by international legal instruments such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>3</sup> and its three Optional Protocols<sup>4</sup>. The Council of Europe has contributed to strengthening the legal protection of children through landmark instruments such as the Convention on the Protection of children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (Lanzarote Convention)<sup>5</sup>, the Convention on Cybercrime (Budapest Convention)<sup>6</sup>, the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)<sup>7</sup>, but also through relevant provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights<sup>8</sup> and the European Social Charter<sup>9</sup>.
2. The Council of Europe has underscored the importance of safeguarding children through comprehensive and cohesive strategies since the launch of its Programme “Building a Europe for and with children” in 2006<sup>10</sup>, and has developed a series of strong policy commitments to guarantee the rights of the child and the protection of children from all forms of violence.
3. Through its actions, the Council of Europe is fully committed to supporting the 2030 Agenda and the fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular 16.2 to end all forms of violence against children. This work takes the form of supporting the development of benchmarks and indicators at national level to measure progress; promoting the implementation of European and global standards through changes to national legal frameworks and the adoption of integrated policies and other measures; and providing monitoring, guidance and support for the implementation of these standards through assessment reports, recommendations, guidelines and resolutions.
4. In 2009, in response to the pervasive nature of violence against children, the Council of Europe developed the Policy Guidelines on Integrated National Strategies for the Protection of Children from Violence, which were adopted by the Committee of Ministers through recommendation CM/Rec(2009)10<sup>11</sup> (hereinafter the **Policy Guidelines**). The Policy Guidelines were developed to assist member states in designing and implementing integrated and holistic approaches that encompass prevention, protection, and prosecution measures.

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<sup>3</sup> Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

<sup>4</sup> [Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography](#), [Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict](#), and [Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure](#)

<sup>5</sup> Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=treaty-detail&treatynum=201>

<sup>6</sup> Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/1680081561>

<sup>7</sup> Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=treaty-detail&treatynum=210>

<sup>8</sup> Available at: [https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/Convention\\_ENG](https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/Convention_ENG)

<sup>9</sup> Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=treaty-detail&treatynum=163>

<sup>10</sup> See: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/children-s-strategy>

<sup>11</sup> Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168046d3a0>

The aims of the Policy Guidelines are to:

- i. protect the rights of children, in particular those who are victims of violence;
- ii. prevent and combat all forms of violence against children;
- iii. promote the adoption, implementation and monitoring of integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence;
- iv. reinforce international co-operation to safeguard the rights of the child and to protect children from violence.

5. The Policy Guidelines are based on a set of general and operational principles, the recognition of which are essential to understand both how violence against children unfolds and how to effectively work against it. These principles should be mainstreamed throughout national, regional and local action, education and awareness-raising measures, legal, policy, and institutional frameworks, research and data collection to tackle violence against children. The principles will be recalled throughout this report and the responding states' actions will be measured against them.

General principles		Operational principles
1. Protection against violence	5. Child participation	1. Multidimensional nature of violence
2. The right to life and maximum survival and development	6. A state's obligations	2. Integrated approach
3. Non-discrimination	7. Other actors' obligations and participation	3. Cross-sectoral cooperation
4. Gender equality	8. Best interests of the child	4. Multi-stakeholder approach

6. In 2019, a first implementation report, "A life free from violence for all children"<sup>12</sup> was published, assessing ten years of existence of the Policy Guidelines. The report highlighted that, beside the abovementioned principles, three core elements of the Policy Guidelines also stand out as of particular importance:
7. The first is the development of an **integrated national strategy for the protection of children from violence**. This means that the strategy should have a specific time frame, outline realistic targets, be supported by adequate human and financial resources, and be co-ordinated and monitored by a single agency. By "integrated" (Operational Principle 2), it is intended that the approach to address violence against children be holistic, taking into account the combination of different factors in society which make it possible for violence to occur in different forms (Operational Principle 1), and also providing a comprehensive response to violence that includes all relevant disciplines and sectors, and all levels of society (local, regional, national) (Operational Principles 3 and 4).
8. The second core element is the setting up of **child-friendly services and mechanisms**. Such services and mechanisms shall safeguard the equal rights of all children (General Principles 3 and 4) and pursue the best interests of the child (General Principle 8). They should also listen to and take into account the point of view of children (General Principle 5). Only by engaging in a true dialogue with children and building a culture of respect for their views can services and mechanisms respond to the actual needs of children.

<sup>12</sup> Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/a-life-free-from-violence-for-all-children-report-on-action-taken-by-t/168098b166>

9. The third core element is the establishment of **mandatory reporting of violence against children**. Any mandatory reporting mechanisms should include all relevant professional groups working with and for children and cover all forms and incidents of violence against children. In national contexts where mandatory reporting procedures are controversial, reporting should at least be strongly encouraged, including through legislation to protect reporting professionals where needed, and appropriate tools to identify relevant referral mechanisms and expertise on specific types of violence. The general public should also be regularly informed through awareness-raising campaigns about the availability of support services in the case of violence or abuse against children.
10. 38 Council of Europe member states replied to a survey underlying the 2019 report. Key findings<sup>13</sup> based on the states' replies showed that member states had made significant progress since the adoption of the Policy Guidelines on integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence ten years earlier. A majority of the member states had measures in place both at the legislative and at policy level to protect children from violence, and in many states existing strategies and other policy measures had been inspired by the Policy Guidelines and contained clear targets to be reached within an established time frame.
11. In terms of strengths, the greatest progress could be seen in the domestic setting and the school environment, and member states placed a strong emphasis on measures to combat domestic violence. There was also an emerging trend to focus on the digital environment in many member states. States appeared to place particular focus on sexual violence, physical violence (including corporal punishment) and psychological violence.
12. A true understanding appeared to have developed regarding the need to have a multi-stakeholder approach to be able to provide children with adequate responses.
13. In terms of weaknesses, the 2019 report showed that violence against children in alternative care settings had not received the same attention as violence occurring in the home or school environment. In general, gaps were shown with regard to professional training. The most problematic area identified in the work to tackle violence against children was that of data collection. Although limited progress could be seen, the member states shared a number of observations concerning the difficulties they encountered in this area. The persistent lack of a clear and coherent methodology for data collection, as well as the frequent lack of one co-ordinating agency with a clear mandate to collect data, led to incomplete, inconsistent and/or overlapping data which are difficult to rely upon as a basis for improving child protection policies.

### ***The 2024 survey and the present report***

14. The 2024 survey showed that, still today, only very few states have adopted laws and policy documents that explicitly refer to the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)10 on integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence<sup>14</sup>. Nevertheless, progress in the work to tackle all forms of violence against children continues, and many Council of Europe member states are implementing measures that align with the Policy Guidelines. In 2019, a large majority of the states having adopted a national or regional Strategy to tackle violence against

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<sup>13</sup> Council of Europe, A life free from violence for all children – Report on action taken by the Council of Europe member States, 2019, p.59-60.

<sup>14</sup> Of the 33 responding states to the 2024 survey, only Armenia, Greece, Portugal and Slovenia provided legal and policy references mentioning the Policy Guidelines, and the Netherlands provided a reference to a policy document.



children indicated that such strategies had been at least partially inspired by the Policy Guidelines<sup>15</sup>.

15. The present report, prepared under the supervision of the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF) and in particular its subordinate body, the Committee of experts on the prevention of violence (ENF-VAE), aims to take stock of the continued progress made by Council of Europe member states over the past five years to implement the Policy Guidelines and to keep strengthening the protection of children from all forms of violence. **It examines the extent to which member states have adopted laws and national strategies to protect children from all forms of violence, what content such strategies cover, how they are co-ordinated, implemented and evaluated, and how states have gone about key challenges such as ensuring reporting of instances of violence against children.**
16. By critically analysing these aspects, the report seeks to assess the effectiveness and impact of the Policy Guidelines in fostering safer environments for children across Europe. In addition, the report provides an opportunity to reflect on how the manifestations of violence against children have changed since the adoption of the Policy Guidelines, taking into account, for example the increasing use of technology to facilitate and perpetrate violence against children, the rise in violence committed by children against other children (so called peer violence), but also the increased levels of armed violence and numbers of children on the move in the region, making them potentially vulnerable to trafficking, exploitation and other forms of violence. Based on this “reality check”, the report concludes with some recommendations on how the Policy Guidelines could be updated to remain relevant in today’s context.

## b. Methodology for the review

### **Data and sources**

17. The analysis in this report is based on primary data provided by the Council of Europe member states through a questionnaire (Survey Monkey) between December 2023 and March 2024<sup>16</sup>. The questionnaire contained a quantitative part with 39 closed questions and a qualitative part with 14 open questions. A final additional open question was added at the end, inviting the responding states to add any details they wished to provide with regard to the closed questions.
18. In total, 34 of the 46 Council of Europe member states (74%) replied to the questionnaire<sup>17</sup>. This represents a somewhat lower response rate than for the 2019 report “A life free from violence for all children” (for which 38 member states provided information), but can still be considered a fairly high response rate, indicative of the interest towards the topic of violence against children within the region.
19. Furthermore, the analysis takes into account the existing international and regional standards relating to the rights of the child and child-friendly justice, such as the CRC and the Lanzarote Convention, as well as other relevant policy documents<sup>18</sup> and recent

<sup>15</sup> Council of Europe, A life free from violence for all children– Report on action taken by the Council of Europe member States, 2019, p.28-29.

<sup>16</sup> The report does not cover any change that might have occurred in the respondent member states after this time frame.

<sup>17</sup> Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Monaco, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovak republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Türkiye. It should be noted that Georgia did not reply to the quantitative part of the questionnaire, which contained closed questions, and is therefore not counted in the percentages presented in this report. All quantitative information is based on a total of 33 states.

<sup>18</sup> Notably the Council of Europe Child-friendly Justice Guidelines. It can also be noted that the European Commission adopted, on 23 April 2024, the Commission Recommendation on developing and strengthening

reports on violence against children, in particular the 2019 report “A life free from violence for all children”<sup>19</sup>.

## Analysis

20. The report presents a comparative analysis among the 33 responding Council of Europe member states which replied to the quantitative part of the survey<sup>20</sup>, as well as a global assessment of the implementation of the Policy Guidelines, with the aim of providing an overview of how Council of Europe member states are working at the national and sub-national levels to tackle violence against children and implement relevant child rights standards as set out in the Policy Guidelines.
21. To support the assessment, an implementation benchmark has been set at 80%, whereby an indicated rate of 80% or above of the responding states implementing a certain principle or focusing on a certain area of relevance means that implementation is considered strong.
22. A second implementation benchmark is set at 70%, whereby an indicated rate of less than 70% of the responding states implementing a certain principle or focusing on a certain area of relevance means that implementation is considered weak and the matter in need of further attention. Nevertheless, it should be noted that for some specific key principles, nothing but an implementation level close to 100% should be considered sufficient. This is the case, for instance, regarding legal provisions criminalising violence against children and underpinning every child’s right to be protected from violence.
23. These benchmarks, which will be referred back to repeatedly throughout this report, have no other objective than to guide the reading of the 2024 survey results and provide an overview in terms of current levels of implementation of measures to tackle violence against children. Based on this overview, some conclusions can be drawn and recommendations made to close the persisting gaps. It should be recalled that benchmarks are not static and should be reviewed and updated regularly. The benchmarks used in the present analysis have no further bearing beyond the scope of this report.

**>80 % implementation rate = strong**

**<70 % implementation rate = weak**

## Limitations

24. The analysis can be seen as objective since it is based mainly on information and data provided by the states themselves. At the same time, self-assessments by states may be considered a limitation, because where a state’s replies are insufficient or missing, no other information is provided about that specific country. This does not necessarily mean that no efforts are being made to tackle violence against children or to implement the Policy Guidelines, but merely that no information has been collected.
25. The questionnaire was drafted in as neutral language as possible, avoiding requesting states to self-assess achievements, and focusing rather on what they see as persisting and emerging challenges, as well as documenting the existence of policy instruments aimed at tackling violence against children. Nevertheless, it cannot be guaranteed that

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integrated child protection systems in the best interests of the child, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32024H1238>

<sup>19</sup> Council of Europe, A life free from violence for all children– Report on action taken by the Council of Europe member States, 2019.

<sup>20</sup> Georgia replied only to the open questions in Part II of the questionnaire and could therefore not be counted for the quantitative analysis.

all countries understood or interpreted the questions in the same way, and their assessment of their own efforts to protect children from violence may therefore differ.

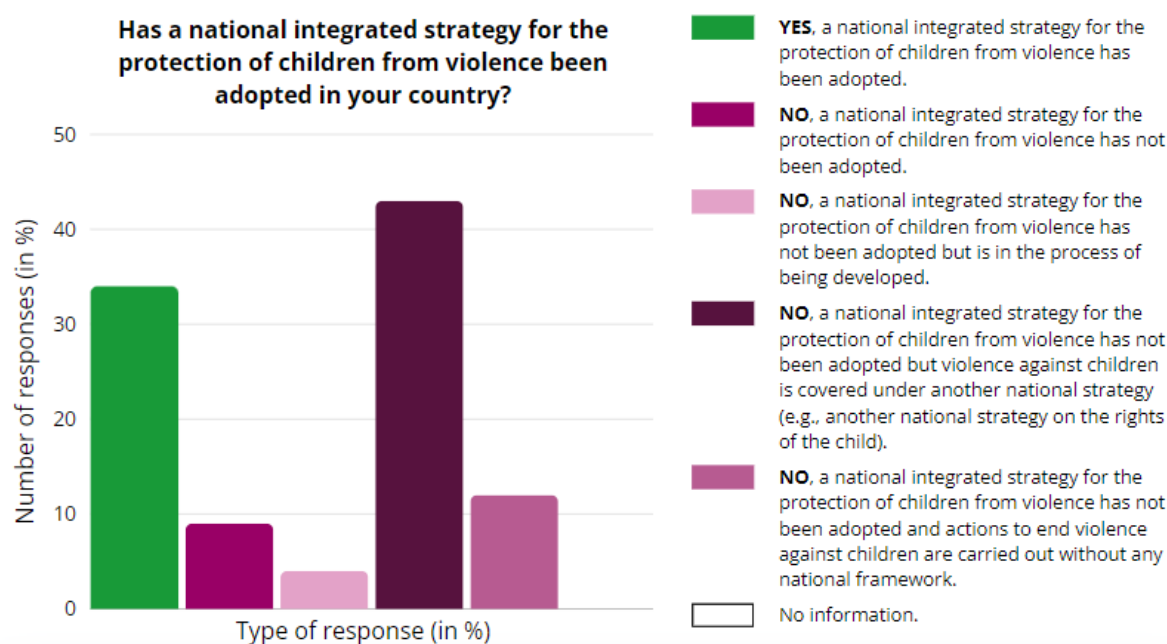
26. Finally, it should be noted that while this report focuses on national and regional strategies to protect children from violence, it also looks at other state initiatives to tackle violence against children, even if such efforts are not formally included in a strategy or similar policy document. Therefore, any correlation between what the Policy Guidelines state and what Council of Europe member states implement does not necessarily show a link of causality between the two.

## 2. Analysing Council of Europe member states' implementation of the Policy Guidelines

### a. Adopting a National Strategy for the protection of children from violence

#### *Existence of strategies to tackle violence against children*

27. Firstly, the Council of Europe member states were asked if they have adopted a national or regional strategy for the protection of children from violence.



28. 11 of the 33 responding states (33%) replied in the affirmative, and one state indicated that it is in the process of adopting a national integrated strategy for the protection of children from violence. Of the remaining 22 responding states, one did not reply to the question, seven replied that they did not have any strategy in place, while 14 states indicated that violence against children is covered by another national strategy.

29. In order to make sure states with a more decentralised structure could also respond, a question was asked if any states had adopted a regional strategy for the protection of children from violence. To that question, four responding states<sup>21</sup> (12%) replied in

<sup>21</sup> Belgium, Slovak Republic, Switzerland, The Netherlands.

the affirmative, while the remaining states either skipped this question or provided a negative reply<sup>22</sup>.

30. To the question if the protection of children from violence is part of a broader national strategy on the rights of the child and/or child protection, 21 out of the 33 responding states (64%) replied that it is. Nine states (27%) indicated that the protection of children from violence is part of a broader regional strategy.
31. The overall picture that emerges is one of a European region<sup>23</sup> where 29 out of 33 responding states (88%) cover violence against children either in a dedicated national or regional strategy or as part of a broader national or regional strategy on the rights of the child.

### Highlight

**Sweden** provides an example on the process to develop an integrated national strategy on violence against children. The (former) Government appointed a Committee of Inquiry (January 2021-May 2023) to develop proposals for a national strategy on preventing and combating violence against children. The Committee report contains proposals concerning cross-sectoral goals and objectives, an action plan of nearly 60 measures as well as an organisational plan for implementation and follow-up. The report has undergone public consultation and the proposals are now being considered by the (current) Government Offices. The proposed objectives, for instance that children's exposure to violence should be detected, are critical and well-known challenges in themselves. Potential forthcoming challenges include achieving coherence between different cross-sectoral national strategies and finding effective ways of involving and supporting key sectors, in particular the social services and health care services, for which the largely autonomous local and regional authorities are responsible.

### Challenges to strategies to tackle violence against children

32. The states were then asked to identify the **main challenges** in their respective countries with regard to the adoption of, implementation of, evaluation of, and/or updating of the national/regional strategy to protect children from violence. The question was closed and had multiple reply options.
33. By far, the main challenge that the responding states pointed to was the challenge of guaranteeing sufficient funding to effectively reach the goals/objectives set forth in the strategy, which 16 states (50%) indicated.
34. Furthermore, nine states (28%) replied that evaluating the Strategy and integrating children's views and opinions into the Strategy were the main challenges, along with lack of sufficient knowledge about violence against children.
35. Eight states (25%) replied that adopting a strategy and implementing a strategy represent the main challenges, and six states indicated that updating the strategy regularly and timely is a challenge.
36. In an open-ended question, the states were asked to expand on the main challenge(s) in their country with regard to the adoption of, implementation of, evaluation of, and/or updating of the national/regional strategy to protect children from violence.

<sup>22</sup> It can be noted that of the four states with a regional strategy for the protection of children from violence, two also have a national strategy (i.e. overlapping with the previous question). In total, this means that 13 of the responding states have either a national or a regional strategy for the protection of children from violence, or both.

<sup>23</sup> The mention "European region" is aimed at the 46 Council of Europe member states.

37. Recurrent issues mentioned by the responding states included political and administrative instability, notably relating to frequent changes in political and administrative leadership, which affect the continuity and focus of child protection strategies; lack of resources, in particular financial and human resources dedicated to the implementation and updating of such strategies; and insufficient levels of training for relevant professional groups.
38. Other challenges related to legislative and regulatory issues concern the difficulty to align national laws with international standards and ensuring effective implementation and enforcement; difficulties to update laws and policies in a timely manner to adapt to new challenges and societal changes.
39. Some states also mentioned issues relating to the co-ordination between different governmental and non-governmental entities involved in child protection, or the lack of effective collaboration across sectors and regions, leading to inconsistencies in policy implementation.
40. Data and evaluation represented another challenge, both with regard to the collection of comprehensive and reliable data and limitations in the capacity to utilise data for evaluating, improving, and updating strategies. This also relates to a final challenge mentioned by several responding states, namely the limited or insufficient awareness among relevant professionals around strategies and similar policy documents to protect children from violence and lacking training on the latest methodologies and practices in child protection.
41. These issues are repeatedly mentioned by multiple countries, indicating common challenges faced globally in enhancing child protection strategies.

### ***Focus of strategies to tackle violence against children***

42. With regard to the **focus** of national and regional strategies or other state initiatives to tackle violence against children, combating violence against children was the most frequent priority, with 31 responding states (94%) selecting this answer. The second most frequent priorities in the work to tackle violence against children are to prevent and to detect violence against children, as well as to safeguard the rights of children who are victims of violence. 29 states (88%) indicated these as priority areas.
43. Furthermore, 28 responding states (85%) indicated that their national or regional strategies or other initiatives to tackle violence against children cover the promotion of actions at national, regional and/or local level to tackle violence against children, as well as to reinforce national co-operation to protect children from violence. In 27 responding states (82%), monitoring the implementation of actions to tackle violence against children is also part of the national or regional strategy.
44. Less frequently mentioned focus areas of national or regional strategies or other state initiatives to tackle violence against children are addressing children who display harmful behaviour (75%) and prosecuting offenders committing violence against children (75%), as well as reinforcing international co-operation to protect children from violence (64%).

#### **Highlight**

In **Norway**, a new “Intensification Plan Against Violence and Abuse Towards Children and in Close Relationships (2024–2028): Ensuring Security for All” has been adopted to increase the effort to prevent and combat violence and abuse. It spans across various government departments and is coordinated through interdepartmental collaboration. The Ministry of Justice has spearheaded this effort and developed the escalation plan in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Inclusion, the Ministry of Children and

Family, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The plan encompasses over 100 measures aimed at enhancing prevention, protection, uncovering more cases, and ensuring a more compassionate care for those at risk. Violence and abuse constitute a significant public health issue, with potentially severe and enduring health consequences for individuals, especially children, youth, and adults who experience such violence. Health and care services play a pivotal role in preventing and uncovering violence, as well as addressing the health problems that may arise from it.

The plan also focuses on the police's preventive activities, investigation, and prosecution. Measures include the wider implementation of the RISK model in handling cases of violence in close relationships across multiple police districts. The investigation of internet-related offenses against children will be strengthened, and minors under 16 suspected of sexual offenses will be interviewed at child advocacy centres.

Recognizing that violence and abuse can have intergenerational impacts, affecting vulnerable children and youth and increasing their susceptibility to further violence or criminal behaviour, the plan targets family and child welfare, health and school health services, the police, and the voluntary sector.

Those subjected to violence and abuse should not bear the burden alone, particularly children. Public services need to improve their ability to identify those at risk, and everyone should be aware that help is available through contacting the police, crisis centres, and child welfare services.

The escalation plan aims to facilitate a more holistic and coordinated effort against violence and abuse, reducing the number of victims and ensuring that more individuals receive necessary assistance and protection. To address cases involving violence, abuse, or severe neglect towards children and youth, a dedicated investigative commission has been established. Additionally, there is increased support for grant programs for parenting support initiatives in municipalities and for the appointment of diversity advisors (formerly minority advisors) in schools.

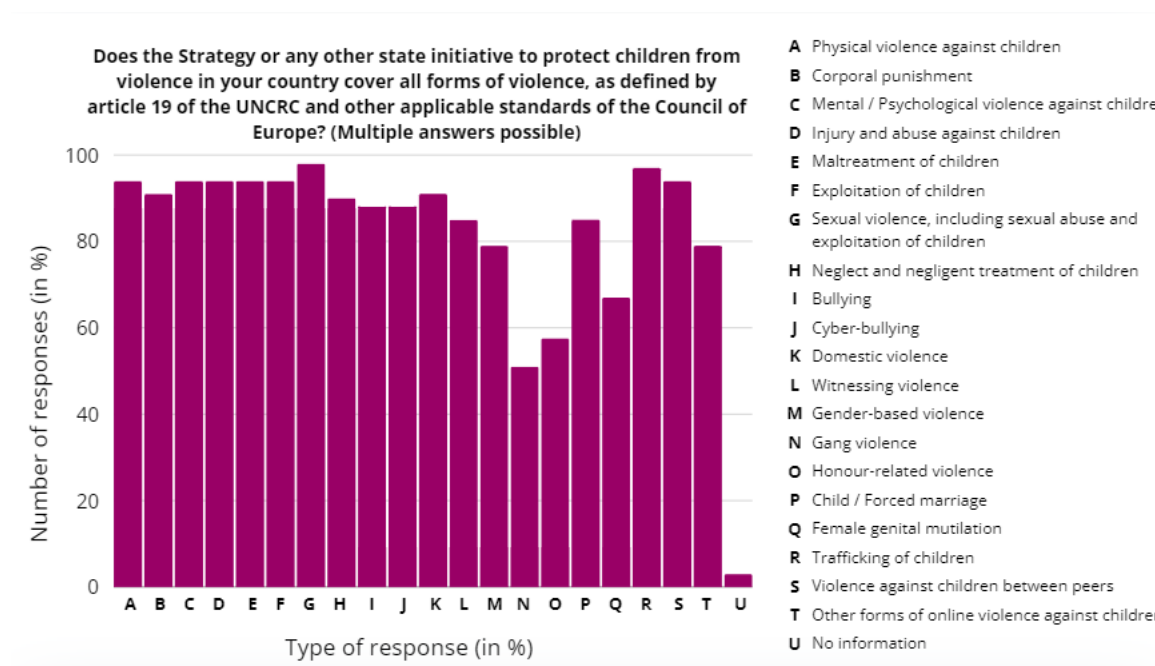
The plan includes a dedicated chapter on violence and abuse in Sami communities. In collaboration with the Sami Parliament, measures have been developed to strengthen language and cultural understanding in the police and support apparatus, establish a specialised child advocacy centre for Sami children, and ensure that victims of violence in the Sami population receive equitable assistance.

#### **b. Content of national strategies for the protection of children from violence**

45. Violence against children exists in many forms and takes place in all spaces where children live and spend their time. Nevertheless, states have gone about tackling violence against children in different ways, focusing more or less on certain forms of violence, and paying more attention to certain environments than others. While the reasons for such differences go beyond the scope of the present report, it is essential to identify which forms of violence may need increased attention, and which environments may require additional efforts to prevent violence and protect children.
46. As mentioned in the introduction to this report, Operational Principle 1 of the Policy Guidelines recognises this multidimensional nature of violence against children, underscoring the importance of considering the many different manifestations that violence can take.



47. To understand how the Council of Europe member states look at this issue, the 2024 survey contained questions to the states asking them to indicate which **forms of violence** they focus on in their strategies and/or other work to tackle violence against children.



48. From the figure above, it is clear that Council of Europe member states take a broad approach to violence against children. For most forms of violence against children, more than 80% of the responding states indicated that they take some form of action<sup>24</sup>.
49. However, the data also shows that certain specific forms of violence against children still receive comparatively less attention. This is the case for gender-based violence (79%), female genital mutilation (67%), honour-related violence (58%) and gang violence (52%).
50. This can be compared to the 2019 implementation report, which showed that sexual violence, physical violence and psychological violence were the most frequently mentioned forms of violence that states were paying attention to<sup>25</sup>. Compared to the numbers shown in the figure above from the 2024 survey, it would appear that states are, today, taking a much wider perspective and are focusing on a much broader range of forms of violence.
51. In particular, there has been a significant shift in the perception of children as witnesses of violence, with a growing recognition that they are also victims of violence. In the 2024 survey, 80% of the responding states indicated that they identify children who witness violence as victims of violence, compared to only one state in 2019<sup>26</sup>.
52. With regard to the different **settings in which violence against children can take place**, states also appear to have made significant progress in terms of their understanding of different settings and the attention they pay to a diversity of settings.

<sup>24</sup> See the implementation benchmarks presented above in paragraphs 21-23.

<sup>25</sup> Council of Europe, A life free from violence for all children – Report on action taken by the Council of Europe member States, 2019, p. 31. At the time, about half of the responding states provided such answers.

<sup>26</sup> N.B. Some caution in the interpretation of this data is called for, because the questionnaires were not formulated identically in 2019 and in 2024, and the differences in how certain questions were asked may also, to some extent, have influenced the outcomes.

Compared to the 2019 review, responding states tend to address violence in a much broader variety of settings in 2024.

53. The main settings of violence against children, which receive the attention of 97 per cent of the responding States, are 1) the home / private sphere / family; 2) school / educational settings; and 3) institutional / alternative care settings (including family-based alternative care), which all receive attention from 97%<sup>27</sup>.
54. These settings are closely followed by violence against children online (94%) and violence in sports (91%). It is noteworthy that the Council of Europe, along with many other international stakeholders working for the rights of the child, has paid significant attention to these particular settings when it comes to violence against children over the past few years<sup>28</sup>. This may have contributed to raising the attention of member states to look deeper into violence against children in these particular settings.
55. Among the least common settings for states to address are violence against children in religious settings (61%) and violence against children in the context of travel and tourism (70%). With regard to the first issue, this may be explained by the fact that, historically, states have not addressed the issue of violence against children in religious settings, although this has begun to change with the recent uncovering of the high number of children sexually abused in the context of the Catholic church<sup>29</sup>. Bearing that context in mind, 61% of states addressing violence against children in religious settings appears far too low, and this is an area that states would still need to pay more attention to. Regarding the second issue, violence and exploitation in the context of travel and tourism often tend to be perceived more as something that European tourists and travellers contribute to outside of Council of Europe states and not necessarily as an issue affecting children in Europe<sup>30</sup>. Nevertheless, studies have shown that the phenomenon exists also within the European region<sup>31</sup>, and Council of Europe member states would do well to address it jointly, bearing in mind its transnational character.
56. Areas that the responding states would need to pay more attention to in relation to violence against children are the cultural / artistic environment (which 73% of the responding states currently consider), violence against children in the streets (76%) or in the community (79%)<sup>32</sup>.
57. A specific question also focused on violence between peers, and the replies showed that 82% of the responding states have broad focus on this form of violence, while 9% said that they do focus on it, but only in the specific setting of the school/educational environment. As examples of concrete actions taken, states referred for instance to specific programmes or protocols such as school harassment protocols, peer mediation programmes, or educational programmes.

<sup>27</sup> In 2019, the most frequently mentioned settings were the digital environment, the home/family setting and the school environment, followed by alternative care institutions.

<sup>28</sup> See for instance the Council of Europe campaign "Start to talk": <https://www.coe.int/en/web/sport/start-to-talk> and the joint CoE-EU project "Child safeguarding in sport" (2020-2022): <https://pip-eu.coe.int/en/web/pss>. Other initiatives are for example: <https://worldathletics.org/news/news/new-research-child-abuse-in-sport> and: <https://www.uefa-safeguarding.eu/index.php/>

<sup>29</sup> See for instance: "Why faith? Engaging the mechanisms of faith to end violence against children", Section 5 "Tackling faith-related abuses and violent practices", available at: [https://www.end-violence.org/sites/default/files/paragraphs/download/JLI%20Brief%2002\\_draft.pdf](https://www.end-violence.org/sites/default/files/paragraphs/download/JLI%20Brief%2002_draft.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> See for instance: Koning, A., & van Wilsem, J. (2023), "The Context of Sexual Exploitation of Children by Tourists and Travelers: A Cross-National Comparison of Destination Countries and Non-Destination Countries", in: *International Criminal Justice Review*, 33(4), p.349-366. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10575677221081875>

<sup>31</sup> See for instance : ECPAT International, Global Study on sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism – Regional report Europe, 2016 . Available at : [https://ecpat.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/SECTT\\_Region-EUROPE.pdf](https://ecpat.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/SECTT_Region-EUROPE.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> See benchmark definitions in paragraphs 21-23 of this report.



58. The replies showed that while focus on violence between children is common in the Council of Europe member states, the extent and manner of coverage of such violence vary, with some states limiting the focus to specific environments like schools. While peer violence may indeed be prevalent in schools and other educational settings, it is also increasingly seen in the digital environment, for instance in the form of cyber-bullying<sup>33</sup>

### Highlights

In **Luxembourg**, Project « *S-Team: Setz dech an!* » was launched in the autumn of 2021, with the objective to contribute to a better school climate in primary and secondary schools, as well as in day-care centres, by teaching children about their own responsibilities in preventing peer violence. The students are encouraged to implement awareness raising activities for the prevention of violence in their schools. The project also foresees the rolling out of a peer mediation practice<sup>34</sup>.

In **Slovenia**, the Ministry of Education has commissioned a targeted research project entitled “Handling Peer Violence” which is to be carried out between 2023 and 2025. The project aims to provide an updated analysis of the current situation and update the methodological framework for the study of peer violence.

The research will explore whether certain categories of students (e.g. students of a specific gender, social class, race, ethnic background, social status, disability, special needs) are more or less represented as perpetrators and/or victims of peer violence. The study will also examine whether the roles of perpetrator and victim overlap among specific categories of students. The project will also investigate how peer violence is perceived, prevented, and addressed in individual primary schools.

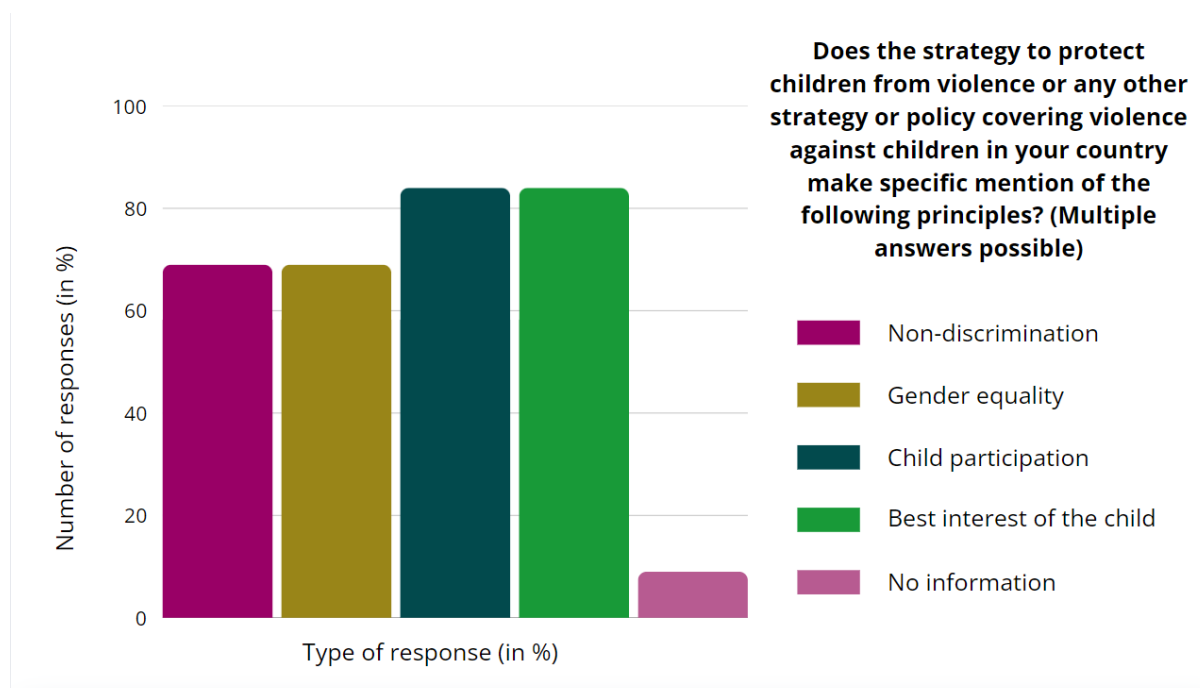
59. Globally, the data indicates that the multi-dimensional nature of violence against children appears to be recognised in a majority of the Council of Europe member states, although the explicit focus on specific forms and settings of violence still varies somewhat.

### ***Inclusion of key principles in the work to tackle violence against children***

60. As illustrated in the introduction to this report, the Policy Guidelines contain eight general principles. For the 2024 survey, four of those principles were selected for a more in-depth review.
61. The Council of Europe member states were asked if, in their national or regional strategies, or any other state initiative to protect children from violence, they make specific mention of certain key child rights principles, such as the principle of the **best interests of the child** (article 3 CRC and general principle 8 of the Policy Guidelines), **child participation** (the child’s right to be heard, article 12 CRC and general principle 5 of the Policy Guidelines), the principle of **non-discrimination** (article 2 CRC and general principle 3 of the Policy Guidelines) and **gender equality** (general principle 4 of the Policy Guidelines).

<sup>33</sup> See for instance: World Health Organization and HBSC, A focus on adolescent peer violence and bullying in Europe, central Asia and Canada: Health Behaviour in School-aged Children international report from the 2021/2022 survey, Volume 2, available at: <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/376323/9789289060929-eng.pdf> ; I. Carvalho Relva et al., “Cyberbullying: A Form of Peer Violence in the Digital Era” in: Handbook of Research on Bullying in Media and Beyond ;

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.script.lu/fr/activites/projets-conclus/s-team-setz-dech>



62. 27 responding states (82%) replied that they make specific mention of the principles of the best interests of the child and child participation, showing a strong commitment to these two core principles of the rights of the child across the region<sup>35</sup>.

63. It can be noted that the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027) includes child participation as one of the six pillars of the Strategy, under the title “Giving a voice to every child”, and as a cross-cutting issue throughout the Strategy,<sup>36</sup> and child participation has been a priority area in all Strategies of the Council of Europe<sup>37</sup>.

64. 22 of the responding states (67%) also mentioned the principles of non-discrimination and gender-equality<sup>38</sup>. This is a significantly lower outcome, illustrating that ten years after the entry into force of the Istanbul Convention<sup>39</sup>, Council of Europe member states still need to mainstream these principles and work more actively to tackle violence committed against specific groups of children. With regard to gender equality, the Council of Europe has just adopted its new Strategy for 2024-2029, which includes as a priority area preventing and combating violence against girls<sup>40</sup>. One responding state skipped this question and three provided no information.

65. In addition, a further in-depth question regarding **child participation** was asked, namely if the strategy to protect children from violence or any other strategy or policy covering violence against children includes child participation, whereby children should be empowered to and actively engaged in the planning, implementation and evaluation of actions and programmes to prevent violence.

66. To this question, 30% of the responding states (10)<sup>41</sup> replied with a full yes, while 27% (9) replied with a partial yes, indicating that child participation is included but does not

<sup>35</sup> See benchmark definitions in paragraphs 21-23 of this report.

<sup>36</sup> Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/strategy-for-the-rights-of-the-child>

<sup>37</sup> See for instance: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/children-s-strategy>

<sup>38</sup> See benchmark definitions in paragraphs 21-23 of this report.

<sup>39</sup> Convention on Preventing and Combatting Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention>

<sup>40</sup> The Strategy was adopted in March 2024 and is available at: <https://rm.coe.int/prems-073024-gbr-2573-gender-equality-strategy-2024-29-txt-web-a5-2756/1680afc66a>

<sup>41</sup> Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Türkiye.

comprehensively cover all elements of planning, implementation and evaluation of actions and programmes. Two responding states replied that child participation is mentioned but without specifying when and how it should be integrated. Eight states replied that child participation is not included, although two of those states indicated that, in practice, child participation is implemented. Three states provided no information and one state skipped the question.

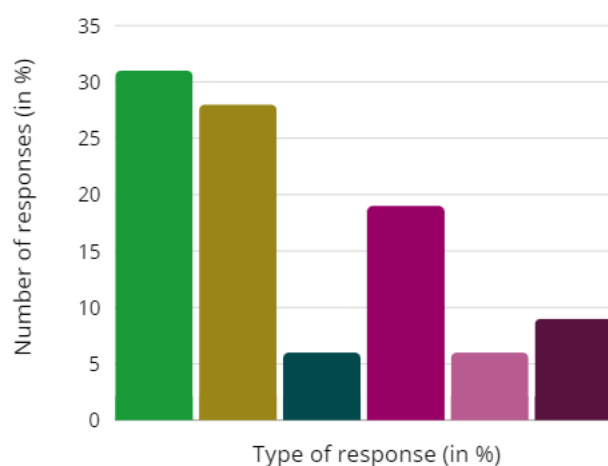
### Highlights

In **Germany**, the Children and Youth Strengthening Act, which came into force on June 10, 2021, implemented a comprehensive reform of child and youth welfare. For example, the professional standards in child protection, particularly in the context of cooperation between the various stakeholders in child protection, but also in the area of risk assessment and taking children into care have been significantly improved.

The right to counselling of a child or an adolescent introduced with the Federal Child Protection Act (*Bundeskinderschutzgesetz*) in accordance with Section 8 (3) SGB VIII was further strengthened. The counselling centre or youth welfare office no longer has to check whether an emergency and conflict situation exists before the child or young person can receive help independently of their legal guardians. The access to counselling for children and young people has thus been expanded, their rights strengthened and barriers removed.

In the **Czech Republic**, the strategy includes a set of measures directly related to violence against children, such as the development of methods of social work with children at risk, especially risks in the digital environment, domestic violence and gender-based violence. Other measures aim at empowering children and involving them in processes that concern them through child participation.

Does the strategy to protect children from violence or any other strategy or policy covering violence against children in your country include child participation, whereby children should be empowered to and actively engaged in the planning, implementation and evaluation of actions and programmes?



- **YES**, child participation is included in the strategy to protect children from violence, and covers the planning, implementation and evaluation of actions and programmes.
- **YES**, child participation is included in the strategy to protect children from violence, but does not comprehensively cover all elements of planning, implementation and evaluation of actions and programmes.
- **YES**, child participation is included in the strategy to protect children from violence, but it is not specified when and how.
- **NO**, child participation is not included in the strategy to protect children from violence, but in practice child participation is promoted and implemented.
- **NO**, child participation is not included in the strategy to protect children from violence.
- No information.

### Prevention measures to tackle violence against children

67. The 2024 survey sent to the Council of Europe member states further included questions to map what type of actions are included in national or regional strategies or

other state initiatives to tackle violence against children, as foreseen by the Policy Guidelines.

### **Building a culture of respect for the rights of the child**

“The strategy should have as its main objective the qualitative change in the perception of children and childhood, and of violence against children. This objective can only be achieved when all segments of society have become sufficiently aware of the rights of the child and of the harmful impact of violence on children; when organisational cultures and practices have been strengthened in this regard, and bridges built across professions to afford more and better protection to children; when mindsets have been transformed, including through the means of information and communication technologies; when the underlying economic and social conditions associated with violence have been addressed – in other words it is only possible when a genuine culture of respect for the rights of the child has permeated the fabric of society.”

The Policy Guidelines foresee three key areas to build a culture of respect for the rights of the child, namely:

Education and awareness raising

Professional training

Media and the information society

68. Preventing violence and protecting children from violence requires awareness about how such violence manifests, not only among professionals or within specific groups of society but at all levels of the population, including the general public. In the 2024 survey, the Council of Europe member states were asked if the national or regional strategy to protect children from violence, or any other policy document covering violence against children, includes awareness raising and education.
69. The 33 responding states were in full consensus on this matter and all replied that awareness raising and education activities are part of their efforts to tackle violence against children. Four of those states nuanced their answers somewhat by indicating that this is done only in a limited manner and/or in certain specific areas, and in the open questions where states were able to provide more detailed information, some pointed to awareness raising still representing a challenge.
70. The data from the survey indicate that, with regard to awareness raising and education as measures to prevent violence against children, states fully adhere to, directly or indirectly<sup>42</sup>, what the Policy Guidelines set forth. Nevertheless, the survey replies showed that implementation is not always considered sufficient, and that greater awareness is still needed<sup>43</sup>. This is particularly the case among the general public<sup>44</sup>, where insufficient interest and knowledge risks hampering the effective prevention and protection of children from violence<sup>45</sup>, and where too many still think it is acceptable to punish children and do not report violence against children<sup>46</sup>.
71. Training professionals working directly and indirectly for and with children represents another important element for the prevention and protection of children from violence. States were asked if their strategies or other policy documents to protect children from violence include training of all relevant professional groups.

<sup>42</sup> As stated in the introduction of this report, it should be noted that the correlation between what the Policy Guidelines state and what Council of Europe member states implement does not necessarily show a link of causality.

<sup>43</sup> Reply from Bosnia & Herzegovina.

<sup>44</sup> Replies from France and Slovenia.

<sup>45</sup> Replies from Slovak Republic and Spain.

<sup>46</sup> Replies from Andorra and Estonia.

72. 32 out of the 33 responding states (97%) replied that training for professionals working with and for children are part of their policy frameworks to tackle violence against children. In 18 responding states, such training exists for all relevant professional groups, while in eight of the responding states it does not cover all relevant groups but only some. Six states showed particularly promising practice, indicating that their trainings for professionals include not only all relevant professional groups but also explicitly include volunteers working for and with children<sup>47</sup>.

### Highlights

**Andorra, Estonia, Luxembourg, Spain, Switzerland and Türkiye** indicated that their trainings for professionals include not only all relevant professional groups but also explicitly include volunteers working for and with children.

73. Lastly, states were asked if any Strategy or other policy document to tackle violence against children refers to the role of the media, whether online or offline. The replies to this question were more nuanced, with only 19 responding states replying in the affirmative for both online and offline media, and one additional state replying yes with regard to online media, making up a total of 61% of the 33 responding states. 11 states (33%) replied that the role of the media is not considered in strategies or other policy instruments to tackle violence against children, and two states skipped this question.
74. The data collected on this question indicates that more efforts may be necessary to underscore the importance of the role of the media in preventing violence against children and, as stated by the Policy Guidelines, in building a culture of respect for the rights of the child<sup>48</sup>.

## c. National legal frameworks for the protection of children from violence

### Legal frameworks

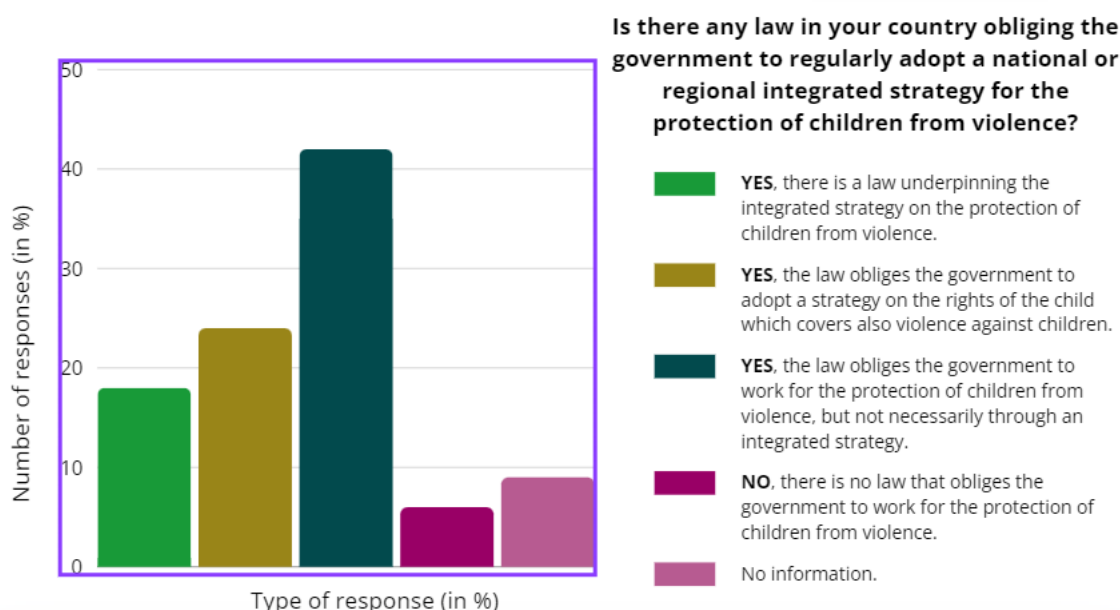
The Policy Guidelines insist on the importance of solid frameworks to tackle violence against children, and underscore the need for a comprehensive legal framework to ensure compliance with international child rights standards, as well as to address the prevention and the prohibition of violence, the role of corporate actors, sanctions and measures, aggravating circumstances, matters of jurisdiction, statutes of limitations and effective enforcement of legislation.

75. Beside the policy framework for tackling violence against children that a national or regional strategy can provide, the 2024 survey explored if and how Council of Europe member states have adopted **legal frameworks to prevent violence against children, protect children from violence, and prosecute offenders**, in accordance with what is set forth in chapter 5 of the Policy Guidelines.
76. Firstly, the question was raised as to whether or not member states have adopted any laws obliging the government to regularly adopt a national or regional integrated strategy for the protection of children from violence.
77. The most common answers from the responding states were that the law obliges the government to work for the protection of children from violence, but not necessarily through an integrated strategy (14 states, 42%), or that the law obliges the government

<sup>47</sup> Andorra, Estonia, Luxembourg, Spain, Switzerland and Türkiye.

<sup>48</sup> See benchmark definitions in paragraphs 21-23 of this report.

to adopt a strategy on the rights of the child which covers also violence against children (8 states, 24%). Six states replied that a law underpins the integrated strategy on the protection of children from violence (18%).



78. This gives an overall picture of 28 out of the 33 responding states (85%) having some legal framework supporting and/or underpinning the work to tackle violence against children. Only two states replied that there is no law that obliges the government to work for the protection of children from violence.
79. The questions in the survey then went into more detail, and states were asked how such legal frameworks cover prevention of violence against children on one hand, and prohibition of violence against children, on the other hand.
80. With regard to prevention of violence, a series of elements were listed as part of efforts to prevent violence against children, such a birth registration and the setting of a minimum age for sexual consent and for marriage. The responding states replied to a high degree that this has been done. In particular registering children directly after birth was confirmed as a legal requirement in all 33 responding states (100%), and 32 states (97%) replied that they have national laws in place which set a minimum age of marriage that is not too low and that is applicable to both boys and girls, and which set a minimum age for sexual consent.<sup>49</sup>
81. 88% of the responding states replied that they prohibit, by law, employment into positions involving child supervision of persons convicted of violent, including sexual, offences against children<sup>50</sup>, and 85% replied that the law foresees the development of programmes and measures to evaluate and prevent the risk of violence against children, as well an obligation to respect the right of the child to be heard and to attribute due weight to children's views.

<sup>49</sup> See the [Comparative study of the legal age for sexual activities in the States Parties to the Lanzarote Convention](#) and the [Comparative study of the statutes of limitation in respect of sexual offences against children & Approaches to the legal age for sexual activities](#)

<sup>50</sup> It is recalled that Article 5§3 of the Lanzarote Convention, to which all the respondent states are Party, requires states to ensure that access to professions whose exercise implies regular contacts with children is limited to candidates who have not been convicted of acts of sexual exploitation or sexual abuse of children, including non-violent acts.



82. However, only 73% of the responding states have laws in place that include age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education in the school curricula, aiming at preventing violence against children.
83. On this matter, it is noteworthy that, in 2020, the Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner published a human rights comment entitled “*Comprehensive sexuality education protects children and helps build a safer, inclusive society*”<sup>51</sup>, followed by a report in 2024 on “*Sexual and reproductive health and rights in Europe: Progress and challenges*”<sup>52</sup>. The report points to important progress made by some member states in recent years towards ensuring the provision of age-appropriate, evidence-based comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in school settings. However, the report also underlines that, “in many parts of the region, deficits and challenges in CSE programming and implementation persist, and harmful misconceptions about CSE remain at play, depriving many children and young people of access to this important form of education”.
84. The ENF-VAE approved, in March 2024, a feasibility study on age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education to strengthen responses for preventing and combatting violence against children, including sexual violence and harmful or risky behaviour<sup>53</sup>. At its plenary meeting in May 2024, the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF) further instructed its expert group to work on a draft recommendation on the basis of this study, for adoption by the Committee of Ministers.
85. The weakest point identified regarding the legal framework to prevent violence against children was identified in the element of devising a system to vet fully those working directly and indirectly for and with children, in any capacity, that ensures an appropriate balance between the child’s right to protection from violence and the individual’s right to a good name. 67% of the states have legal provisions in place for persons working directly for and with children, while only 33% have such a system in place for persons working indirectly for and with children.
86. This analysis highlights that while certain foundational elements such as birth registration and setting minimum ages for sexual consent and marriage are widely covered across Council of Europe member states, areas related to vetting systems and comprehensive sexuality education in schools are less commonly addressed. This shows a need for greater focus on these crucial aspects to enhance the legal framework for the prevention of violence against children.
87. With regard to a legal prohibition of violence against children, 97% of the responding states replied that adequate legal provisions exist to prohibit all forms of sexual violence and abuse, corruption of children and solicitation of children for sexual purposes; all forms of exploitation of children, including through prostitution, child sexual abuse material, sexual exploitation in travel and tourism, trafficking, sale of children, illegal adoption, forced labour or services, slavery and practices similar to it, removal of organs, for any purpose or in any form. All other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of children, both physical and psychological, are also adequately covered by law.
88. Furthermore, 32 of the responding states (97%) confirmed that adequate legal provisions exist to prohibit all forms of violence in residential institutions and in schools.

<sup>51</sup> Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/comprehensive-sexuality-education-protects-children-and-helps-build-a-safer-inclusive-society>

<sup>52</sup> Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/follow-up-report-on-the-2017-ip-on-srhr-sexual-and-reproductive-health/1680aea9b4>

<sup>53</sup> Available at <https://rm.coe.int/cdenf-2024-08-draft-feasibility-study-on-comprehensive-sexuality-educa/1680b0d4d0>

Other educational settings are covered by the law in 30 of the responding states (91%), as are the family and home settings.

89. 29 of the responding states (88%) replied that they have a legal prohibition of all corporal punishment in place<sup>54</sup>.
90. The exposure of children to violent or harmful content, irrespective of its origin and through any medium, is regulated by law in 31 of the responding states (94%), and 29 states (88%) have laws prohibiting all forms of exploitation of children through the use of technologies.
91. Lastly, the responding states showed a somewhat lesser tendency to prohibit by law all forms of recruitment or involvement of children in armed conflict. 82% of the responding states indicated that they have laws in place prohibiting this practice.
92. This analysis highlights that while there is a significant level of legal regulations for many forms of violence against children, there are still certain specific areas that may require additional legal reinforcement to ensure comprehensive protection. Despite decades of advocating for a full legal ban on corporal punishment of children, the data show that some states still need to legislate on this matter. In addition, although there is increased focus on technology-facilitated violence and on the digital environment as a setting for violence against children, not all states have updated their legal frameworks to adequately cover all forms of exploitation and violence against children in the digital environment.
93. Following the question on the legal prohibition of all forms of violence against children, the states were asked if their existing legal provisions adequately cover all children who find themselves on their territory, regardless of legal status of the child. Only one responding state, replied in the negative to this question.
94. Violence against children is not only committed or facilitated by natural persons<sup>55</sup>, but also by legal persons such as corporate actors. The Council of Europe member states were asked if their national legal frameworks adequately cover the possibility of holding legal persons liable for offences related to violence against children. While three states skipped this question, 25 responding states replied that this is fully possible, and three replied that it is partly possible. Only one state replied in the negative.
95. Regarding sanctions for offences relating to violence against children, the states were then asked if their national legal frameworks establish adequate sanctions for criminal offences related to violence against children, which take into account the gravity of these acts and their potential long-lasting consequences on child victims. 28 of the responding states replied that this is indeed the case, while three states stated that it is the case for some relevant offences but not for all.
96. When it comes to the children who are victims of violence, experience and research have shown how difficult it can be to report violence and to go through judicial proceedings to gain justice<sup>56</sup>. Many children remain silent until far into adulthood before they feel ready to speak up about what happened to them and, in some cases, report it.

<sup>54</sup> It should be noted that, in total, as of August 2024, 34 of the Council of Europe member states have achieved prohibition of corporal punishment in all settings, including the home, and governments of at least five others have expressed a commitment to enacting full prohibition. 36 states have prohibited corporal punishment in all alternative care settings, 37 in day care, and all 46 states have prohibited corporal punishment in schools and as a sentence for crime and in penal institutions. See: "[Progress and delay in achieving universal prohibition and elimination of corporal punishment in Council of Europe member states](#)", produced for the Council of Europe Committee of Experts on the prevention of violence (ENF-VAE) by Sonia Vohito and Bess Herbert at End Corporal Punishment (World Health Organisation).

<sup>55</sup> The term "natural person" refers to a living human being, with certain rights and responsibilities under the law.

<sup>56</sup> More details on reporting violence can be found in section e. of this report.



97. In the framework of this report, the Council of Europe member states were asked if their national legal frameworks establish sufficiently long periods of time for statutes of limitations for all offences relating to violence against children to allow the efficient starting of proceedings after the child victim has reached the age of majority and which are commensurate with the gravity of the crime in question<sup>57</sup>. Three of the responding states chose not to reply to this question. Among the remaining 30 states, 17 (52%) stated that their national legal framework establishes sufficiently long statutes of limitations to allow the efficient starting of proceedings after the child victim has reached the age of majority for all offences relating to violence against children, and 11 states (33%) indicated that this is the case for sexual offences against children. One state provided no information, and one state replied in the negative.

**d. Co-ordination of stakeholders for the protection of children from violence, including data collection**

98. An essential feature of the work to successfully tackle violence against children is to have an integrated approach, which establishes a clear co-ordination of relevant stakeholders through interagency co-operation and multidisciplinary approaches.

Operational Principle 2 of the Policy Guidelines sets forth the “**integrated approach**”.

By “integrated” it is intended that the approach to address violence against children is holistic, taking into account the combination of different factors in society which make it possible for violence to occur in different forms (Operational Principle 1), and also providing a comprehensive response to violence that includes all relevant disciplines and sectors, and all levels of society (local, regional, national) (Operational Principles 3 and 4).

99. Elements of an integrated approach include bringing together all stakeholders in cross-sectoral co-operation and co-ordination mechanisms, where an agency with primary responsibility for the protection of children against violence assumes (where possible and in conformity with national regulations) a key co-ordinating and monitoring role. The capacity of the lead agency to involve multiple sectors in a broad-based action is crucial for the strategy’s long-term success.

100. All actors concerned with the promotion and protection of the rights of the child, such as national, regional and local authorities, independent human rights institutions, professionals working for and with children, researchers, civil society and the media, representatives of families and caretakers, and – last but not least – children themselves, should be involved in this multi-stakeholder action.

101. In the 2024 survey, the question was asked to the Council of Europe member states if they have appointed a specific Ministry or Government department to carry the main/lead responsibility for the work to protect children from violence.

102. The most frequent answers are that the Ministry with children in its portfolio has the lead in this work, or that the Ministry of Social affairs is responsible (both answers were selected by nine states each)<sup>58</sup>. It should be noted that where the first answer was selected, several states provided further detail into the name of the relevant ministry, which turned out to correspond, in most cases, with the Ministry also having social and/or family affairs in its portfolio. In two states, it is the Ministry of Justice that

<sup>57</sup> See in this respect the Lanzarote Committee’s [Opinion on Article 33 of the Lanzarote Convention](#) (concerning statutes of limitations for sexual offences against children) adopted on 13 June 2024.

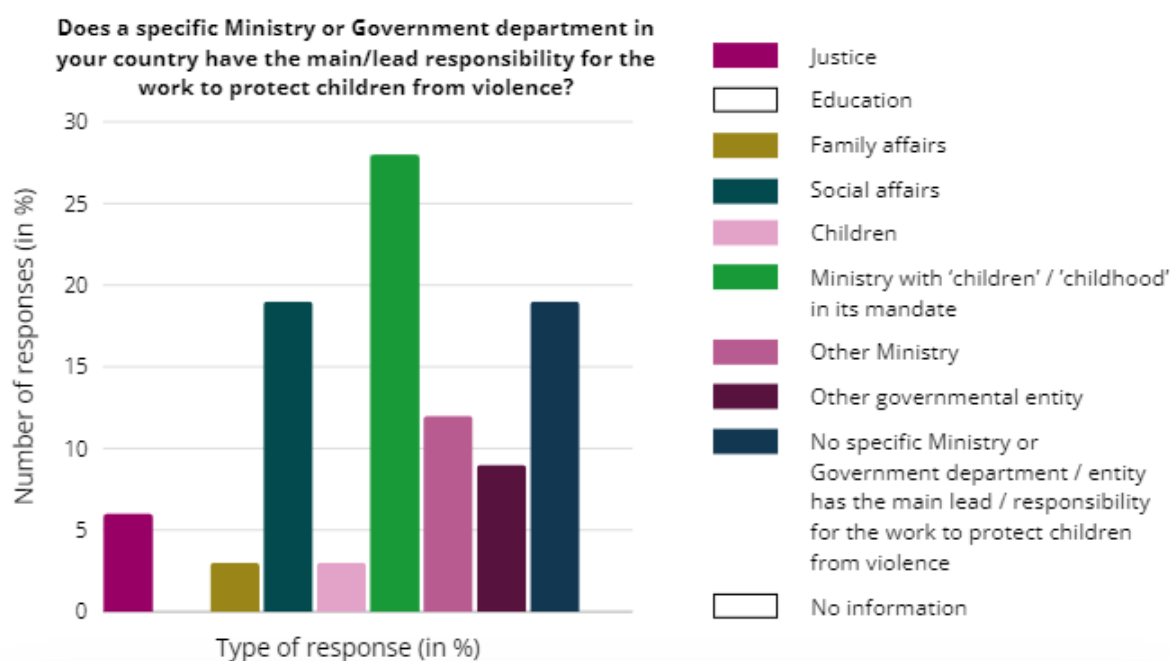
<sup>58</sup> Note that the exact names of Ministries with social affairs in their portfolio varied somewhat, including for instance social affairs and health or social affairs and labour.

has the lead responsibility<sup>59</sup> and in one state it is the Ministry of Family<sup>60</sup>. Only one of the responding states, Spain, has set up a specific Ministry of Youth and Children, which leads this work. In theory, such a Ministry does not link children's rights and situation to a specific sector, such as "education" or "family", but addresses children as rights holders and members of society in all environments in which children live their lives and spend their time.

### Highlight

**Spain** has set up a specific "Ministry of Youth and Children". The functions of the Spanish Ministry of Youth and Children is to assume the Government's policies related to the protection, promotion and comprehensive defence of the rights of children and adolescents, as well as the prevention of situations of need in which minors may be involved<sup>61</sup>.

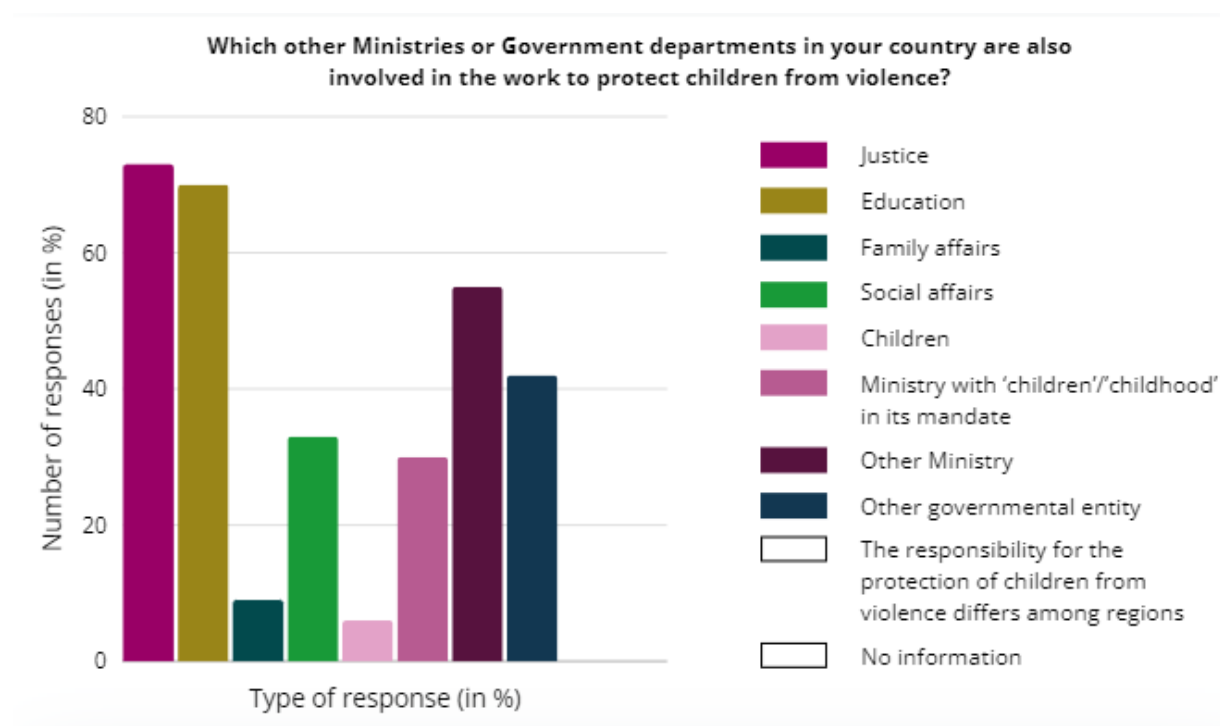
103. It is noteworthy that six responding states indicated that no Ministry or department has the main/lead responsibility for the work to protect children from violence. No specific reasons for this absence were provided.
104. To the question of which other Ministries or Government departments that are also involved in the work to protect children from violence, the most common replies by the responding states were the Ministry of Justice (24 states) and the Ministry of Education (23 states), suggesting a significant role for these ministries in child protection efforts across multiple countries. The Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Health, and Ministries of Sport, of Labour, of Higher education and science, and of Foreign affairs were also mentioned, although less frequently.



<sup>59</sup> Norway and the Netherlands.

<sup>60</sup> Germany.

<sup>61</sup> See: <https://www.juventudeinfancia.gob.es/es/ministerio/funciones>



105. To the question of whether the national or regional Strategy, or any other state initiative to protect children from violence, is based on interagency co-operation between different Ministries, Government departments and/or other actors, all responding states replied in the affirmative, although one state pointed out that it does not work in practice.
106. This analysis highlights that while social and family affairs, justice and education ministries are central to protecting children from violence, a variety of other ministries and government entities also play significant roles, reflecting an interagency approach towards child protection.
107. With regard to the involvement of different professional groups in the work to tackle violence against children, the Council of Europe member states were asked if their national or regional Strategy, or any other state initiative to protect children from violence, is based on a multidisciplinary and multi-stakeholder approach, bringing different professionals into the picture to respond to the child's needs (e.g. justice professionals, psycho-social support professionals, child carers and educational professionals, medical doctors, etc.). To this question, all responding states replied in the affirmative, with one state pointing out that in practice the work is not always carried out that way.

### Highlights

All responding states replied that they base their work, at least in theory, on **interagency co-operation** between different Ministries, Government departments and/or other relevant actors, and on a **multidisciplinary approach** involving different relevant professional groups.

In **Monaco**, all relevant professional groups, such as child protection services, police, the education and health sectors and different associations, meet regularly and remain in permanent contact. The shared knowledge of all involved professionals greatly facilitates the interagency and multidisciplinary work and enables very fast interventions whenever needed.

In **Andorra**, the strong coordination and cooperation between multidisciplinary teams made up of social workers and educators, psychologists, pediatric psychiatrists and other health professionals, police, and education professionals to protect children makes it possible to implement necessary measures and interventions in an integrated manner as soon as violence is detected.

108. To complete the picture regarding interagency and multidisciplinary approaches to tackle violence against children in the Council of Europe member states, the question was asked if the national or regional strategy or any other policy document to tackle violence against children outlines which actors are responsible and/or involved in specific actions to protect children from violence.
109. In 13 states, such policy instruments point out one main co-ordinating or leading Government agency. In addition, 25 of the responding states (76%) replied that several Government ministries or departments are mentioned as responsible for actions to protect children from violence, and 18 of those states also mention public entities other than Government agencies.
110. Civil society actors are mentioned in policy instruments in 17 of the responding states (52%), as are regional and local authorities. Only eight states (24%) include mention of private actors as responsible for actions to protect children from violence<sup>62</sup>. One state replied that no specific actors are outlined as responsible, one state provided no information, and one state skipped the question.
111. The data provide insight into the breadth of involvement from different sectors in the strategies to protect children from violence, indicating a preference for multi-sectoral involvement, mostly from Government ministries or departments, partly from civil society, and with a lower emphasis on private actors.

### **Data collection**

112. An issue intimately related to the question of integrated approaches to tackle violence against children, based on interagency and multidisciplinary co-operation, is that of **data collection**.

#### **Data and research**

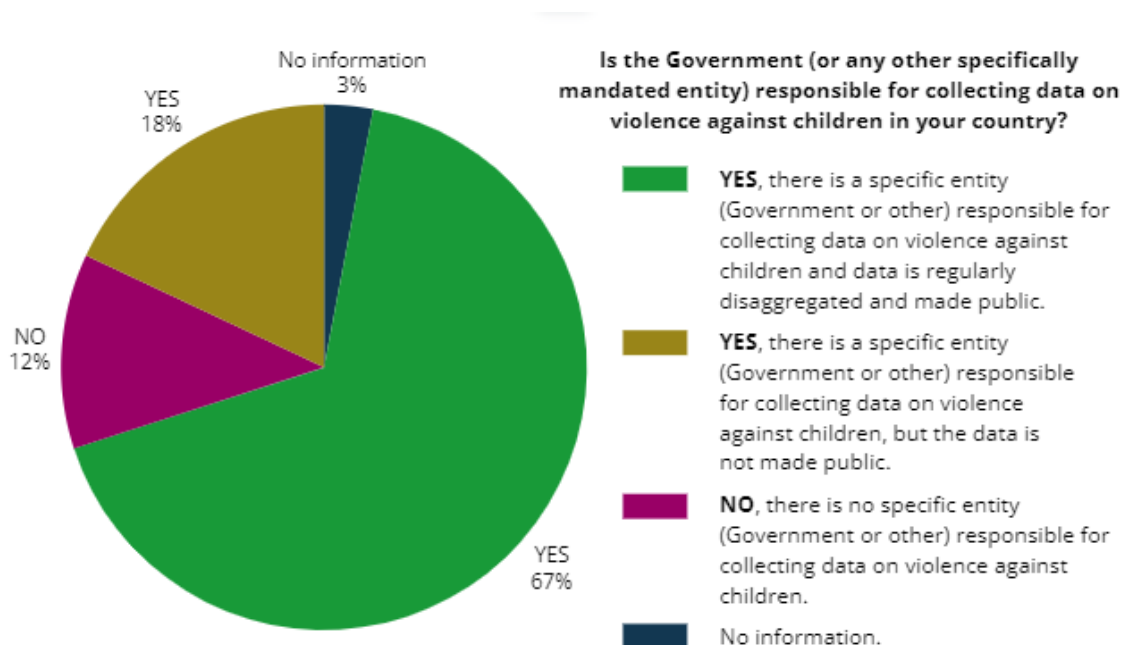
According to the Policy Guidelines, the identification of an effective strategy for the protection of children from violence depends on the availability and proper analysis of data at national, regional and local levels. The adoption of a national research agenda represents the most appropriate way of promoting an integrated and systematic approach to data collection, analysis, dissemination and research.

This approach should include research, statistical monitoring, establishment of national databases, and co-ordination.

113. In order to successfully monitor and evaluate the work to tackle violence against children and assess if existing measures are adequate and effective or need to be changed or strengthened, data is absolutely essential. The same thing is true to ensure dissemination of correct and meaningful information around the issue of violence against children. These are all elements that are foreseen by the Policy Guidelines, but that cannot be achieved without quality data.
114. In the 2024 survey, the Council of Europe member states were asked if a specifically mandated entity (Government or other) is responsible for collecting data on violence against children. Out of the 33 responding states, 22 (67%) replied that there is a specific entity responsible for collecting data on violence against children, and the data

<sup>62</sup> Andorra, Croatia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland.

is regularly disaggregated and made public. Six states replied that there is a specific responsible for collecting data on violence against children, but that the data is not made public. Only four responding states answered that there is no specific entity responsible for collecting data on violence against children, and one state provided no information.



115. In an open-ended question, states were then asked to explain in more detail if data is collected systematically, analysed and disaggregated per sex and per different forms of violence, and if such data is made public and disseminated on a regular basis. It was also asked if states have adopted any national research agenda with regard to violence against children, which may contribute to the analysis of available data.
116. Most responding states were able to provide detailed information which show a global picture of a data collection system which often remains fragmented, with several different entities collecting data but without streamlining such data collection into one centralised system. Therefore, statistical data tends to be divided by sectors, is not always connected and uniform, not always shared across relevant sectors, and not published or disseminated. The most frequent divide in data on violence against children appears to lie between the justice sector and data collected in connection with children's involvement as victims in the justice system, and the health sector and children's involvement as victims in the health system as receivers of health care measures. As a result, existing information is fragmented and it is difficult to get a state-of-the-art overview of the issue of violence against children in most countries.
117. Some states publish annual reports with relevant data, but it is not clear if such data is comprehensive and covering all aspects of violence against children. Not one single state provided information on how data is checked and assessed for quality, although a few states mentioned that their national statistical office is in charge of collecting/receiving data on violence against children, which should mean that quality checks are appropriately carried out.

118. Regarding disaggregation of data, the information provided by the responding states shows that there is no one approach to disaggregation, and that data on violence against children is sometimes included into data on domestic violence or is not disaggregated by sex or gender, by age, or by form of violence.
119. Regarding data sources, next to administrative data from the justice, social, and health care systems, many states referred to regular surveys, but the scope and coverage of such surveys are mostly not comprehensive.
120. Few states have a national research programme in place on violence against children, and research is conducted by different individual actors without a coherent programme developed and agreed at a higher level or in a coordinated manner.
121. Overall, the information provided by the responding states showed a clear need for improvements in obtaining more systematically organised data on violence against children.

### Highlights

In **Spain**, organic Law 8/2021 on comprehensive protection of children and adolescents against violence sets forth that the primary care social services must establish, in accordance with the procedure regulated in each region, a system for monitoring and recording cases of violence against children and adolescents, which includes notifications and communications received, confirmation of cases, and the different measures implemented.

Statistical information on cases of violence against children and adolescents from primary care social services, together with that from the public child protection entity, will be incorporated, with the established disaggregation, into the Unified Registry of Social Services on Violence against Children (RUSSVI), which operation is currently being configured.

In addition, an information centre on violence against children and adolescents is being created, to which the General Council of the Judiciary, the Law Enforcement Agencies, the RUSSVI and the different public administrations must provide the data required for registration. A royal decree will indicate the information that must be notified – anonymised – to the Registry. At a minimum, it will include: a) With respect to the victims: age, sex, type of violence, severity, nationality and, where applicable, disability. b) Regarding the aggressors: age, sex and relationship with the victim. c) Police information (complaints, victimisation, etc.) and judicial information. d) Measures implemented to combat violence against children and adolescents.

In **Latvia**, the Law on the Protection of Children's Rights sets forth that the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Health, the Child Protection Centre and local governments, according to their competence, must all provide statistical information on the protection of children's rights in the country, on children who have become about victims of neglect and violence, and street children, as well as other relevant information to the Central Statistical Office. The Central Statistical Office collects the aforementioned information once a year and submits it to the Ministry of Welfare and the Office of the Ombudsman.

In addition, a support information system for children has been established, which includes the necessary information for the protection of children's rights, integrating state and local government institutions, as well as medical personnel's information about children who need support and cases where preventive measures are needed for the protection of children's rights. The purpose of this information system is to promote the protection of children's rights and interests by ensuring the processing of necessary



information and promoting inter-institutional cooperation in various issues, including the prevention and detection of criminal offenses and other violations of the law.

In **Croatia** there is a national research agenda with regard to violations of children's rights, followed by the national Bureau of Statistics, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Health. All data are collected systematically and analysed.

122. A question that naturally follows is how the data that is collected is used, for instance in monitoring and evaluating efforts to prevent and detect violence and to protect children. The Council of Europe member states were asked to explain by whom and how such monitoring and evaluation is done, how often it is done, and if results are made public and disseminated.
123. The analysis of the states' responses to this question revealed several key insights. Firstly, 12 of the responding states mentioned the role of government bodies, including ministries and other national institutions, in the oversight, implementation and monitoring of policies related to child protection. This suggests a significant reliance on governmental agencies to manage these functions. Only five states<sup>63</sup> referred to the involvement of **independent bodies** in the monitoring process, which is considered very important to ensure unbiased evaluations of child protection systems.
124. Eight states<sup>64</sup> explicitly mentioned that they conduct **evaluations** in a regular manner, although these are sometimes partial and focus on specific sectors only (e.g. education or sexual violence), with some specifying annual or biannual assessments. This indicates an ongoing commitment to reassessing the effectiveness of child protection measures. None of the responding states directly mentioned a complete lack of monitoring, and it appears that most countries have at least some form of monitoring mechanism in place, though the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of these systems may vary. Importantly, such mechanisms do not appear to be systematic and well anchored in legal or policy frameworks in many of the responding states, and are sometimes carried out in a punctual manner and upon specific demand.
125. Very few states referred to specific indicators or indicator frameworks underpinning the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, leaving it unclear if clear indicators are defined and measured<sup>65</sup>. Furthermore, the same fragmentation that was found in data collection systems in the responding states could be observed in some of the states' monitoring and evaluation practices.
126. Very few of the responding states also made reference to making the outcomes of monitoring and evaluation exercises public<sup>66</sup>. Ensuring public access to such outcomes would be crucial for transparency and public accountability, as well as and for informing the community about child protection efforts.

## Highlights

The National Plan for Children's Rights in **Croatia** 2022-2026 is aligned with all other relevant national plans for the same or similar time period, which goals are directly or indirectly related to protection of children's rights, such as: the National plan for equalizing opportunities for people with disabilities for the period from 2021 to 2027; the National plan

<sup>63</sup> Albania (Ombudsman), Germany (Independent commissioner on child sexual abuse issues (UBSKM) – limited to sexual violence against children), Portugal (National Commission for the Promotion of the Rights and the Protection of Children and Young People and the Ombudsperson), Sweden (The Children's Welfare Foundation, the Swedish Ombudsman for Children and the Swedish Institute for Human rights), Türkiye (Ombudsman).

<sup>64</sup> Finland, Georgia, Germany, Latvia, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Spain, Türkiye.

<sup>65</sup> Croatia and Ireland are among the exceptions.

<sup>66</sup> Andorra and Bulgaria are among the exceptions.

for the fight against poverty and social exclusion for the period from 2021 to 2027; the National plan for the development of social services for the period from 2021 to 2027; the National plan for the Suppression of Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment for the period until 2027; the National sports program 2019-2026; the National plan for the development of the education system until 2027; and the soon to be adopted National plan for protection against domestic violence and violence against women until 2028.

In order to improve the rights of children in Croatia, the Children's Council is formed as the advisory body of the Government of Croatia, with the task of monitoring the achievement of the goals of the national strategic document relating to the rights and protection of children, monitoring the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other accepted international documents, monitoring the implementation of existing national regulations that relating to children and, accordingly, proposing measures to the Government of Croatia to improve the work of bodies that have tasks related to the protection of children and the realization of their rights, as well as for the improvement of legal regulations in the field of child protection and the realization of their rights.

According to an established set of indicators, all measures foreseen in strategic documents are followed and their results are monitored and evaluated. Competent authorities implement and follow their activities, prepare reports on their influence in relation to the set goals, and are monitored throughout the foreseen period.

In **Ireland**, the child and family agency Tusla is the dedicated State agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children. Tusla has ongoing internal audits through the Practice Assurance and Service Monitoring team (PASM) and governance and oversight measures in place nationally. There is an ongoing review and audits of Tusla case management systems. Tusla audit and monitoring teams are in place, and HIQA (The Health Information and Quality Authority) is in place for inspections of Tusla services.

In **Portugal**, the National Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2021-2024), approved by the Council of Ministers Resolution no. 112/2020, includes, among its five priorities, Priority IV - Preventing and Combating Violence Against Children and Young People. The Strategy is implemented through biennial Action Plans (2021-2022) and (2023-2024), both including strategic objectives on this priority, as well as operational objectives to implement them and measures to be taken accordingly. The Strategy has a monitoring mechanism on all priorities and will have a final report corresponding to the full period of implementation.

#### **e. Reporting violence against children, child-friendly justice and services**

##### **Reporting of violence**

Reporting mechanisms are a crucial feature of child-friendly services and mechanisms as set forth by the Policy Guidelines. To be truly effective, reporting mechanisms should be child-friendly and part of a broader system comprising reporting, referral and support services. Such a system should respect the rights of the child and offer children (and, where appropriate, their families) the necessary protection, including the protection of their privacy, without undue delay.

127. As pointed out in the 2019 implementation report “A life free from violence for all children”<sup>67</sup>, under-reporting of violence against children, in particular of sexual violence, remains one of the major challenges to effectively protect children from violence and guarantee their healthy development. Often, children do not disclose that

<sup>67</sup> Council of Europe, A life free from violence for all children – Report on action taken by the Council of Europe member States, 2019, p.15.



they are victims of violence and having adults around who can detect the signs of violence and take the responsibility to report it is fundamental to protecting children.

128. Yet it has been noted that all Council of Europe member states continue to face challenges in the identification of cases of violence against children<sup>68</sup>. Importantly, any legal and policy measures established to protect children from violence should also clearly set forth the states' and other relevant stakeholders' responsibility in effectively implementing such measures, notably through obligations to report, and guaranteeing that the impact of such measures is being monitored and evaluated.
129. In September 2023, Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)8 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on strengthening reporting systems on violence against children was adopted by the Committee of Ministers<sup>69</sup>. The Recommendation acknowledges the fact that many forms and incidences of violence against children remain largely underreported and undetected and that children in vulnerable situations are at a heightened risk of experiencing violence. It sets forth that member states should "clearly define a legal and policy-based obligation to report for professionals and institutions and organisations working for and with children, or establish a mandatory code for specific professions, to report concerns or suspicions of violence against children" (paragraph 8), and that professionals should be encouraged and supported to report violence against children, including by removing barriers that professionals could encounter when reporting (paragraph 12), and by considering anonymous reporting possibilities (paragraph 13)<sup>70</sup>.
130. In the 2024 survey, the Council of Europe member states were asked how they have handled the issue of reporting of violence against children, and what types of reporting mechanisms and obligations they have established. Attention was paid to if and how states have attempted to put in place effective reporting mechanisms for different parts of the population, ranging from the professionals working with and for children, the general public, parents and caretakers, and children themselves.

**Mandatory reporting:** Professionals have an obligation to report violence against children and can, in some states, incur legal consequences if they do not report.

**Voluntary reporting:** Persons may choose whether or not to report and incur no legal consequences if they do not.

131. Firstly, the question was asked if the national or regional strategy, or any other policy instrument covering violence against children, foresees or establishes adequate **reporting mechanisms for professionals** on violence against children. 27 out of the 33 responding states (82%) replied that they have mandatory reporting in place for professionals working directly with and for children. 22 states (67%) replied that their mandatory reporting mechanisms for professionals cover also professionals working indirectly with and for children.
132. Four states indicated that they have voluntary reporting for professionals working directly with and for children, while two states replied that such voluntary reporting mechanisms cover also professionals working indirectly with and for children.

<sup>68</sup> See: Simona Florescu (2022), Reporting mechanisms and practices concerning violence against children in several Council of Europe Member States, CDENF(2021)19rev., <https://rm.coe.int/vac-reporting-mechanisms/1680a5c2c3>

<sup>69</sup> Available at:

[https://search.coe.int/cm/#{%22CoEReference%22:\[%22CM/Rec\(2023\)8%22\],%22sort%22:\[%22CoEValidationDate%20Descending%22\],%22CoEIdentifier%22:\[%220900001680ac62b1%22\]}](https://search.coe.int/cm/#{%22CoEReference%22:[%22CM/Rec(2023)8%22],%22sort%22:[%22CoEValidationDate%20Descending%22],%22CoEIdentifier%22:[%220900001680ac62b1%22]})

<sup>70</sup> See also Article 12 of the Lanzarote Convention requiring States to ensure that confidentiality rules do not prevent professionals from reporting any situation of suspected child sexual exploitation or sexual abuse and to encourage any person knowing of or suspecting, in good faith, such a situation to report it.

133. With regard to volunteers working with and for children, nine states (27%)<sup>71</sup> replied that they have mandatory reporting in place, while five states indicated that they have voluntary reporting for volunteers working with and for children.
134. The question was then asked if the national or regional strategy, or any other policy instrument covering violence against children, foresees or establishes adequate **reporting mechanisms for children and/or the general public** on violence against children. 25 of the 33 responding states (76%) replied that child-friendly mechanisms exist for children, and two states mentioned that such mechanisms are in the process of being set up.
135. With regard to the general public, 12 states (36%) replied that voluntary reporting mechanisms exist, while 11 states (33%) replied that reporting mechanisms are in place for the general public and that it is mandatory for the general public to report any knowledge of violence against children. One state replied that no reporting mechanisms exist for the general public and two states did not provide any information on this question.
136. What did not become clear from the 2024 survey is whether professionals are encouraged, or even obliged, to report all cases of *suspicion* of violence, even where no clear evidence exists. Without very clear guidance and training on what constitutes reasonable suspicion, it can be complicated for professionals to determine if a certain situation requires reporting. On this matter, the abovementioned Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)8 clearly states that “concerns and suspicions” of violence against children should be reported, and that professionals who wish to report need adequate protection enabling them to report without fear of reprisal.

### Highlight

In **Austria**, reporting violence to the child and youth welfare authorities is mandatory for professionals working with children. In addition, in September 2023, the Council of Ministers adopted a mandatory child protection policy for schools. A child protection policy is an organisational development process in which organisations address potential risks to children in their services and define measures to address these identified risks. The existence of a child protection policy helps organisations take a clear stance against violence by facilitating the identification of possible risks, the definition of clear responsibilities and procedures including recruitment criteria, the formulation of behavioural guidelines or a code of conduct, the development of a complaints' management system, and the creation of an intervention plan. Children and young people are involved in this process.

In addition, a separate, non-governmental, independent and professionally qualified quality assurance body has been set up for the child protection policies. This body is to award seals of approval for child protection policies of other institutions and associations that work with children.

In **Portugal**, the National Commission for the Promotion of the Rights and the Protection of Children has in place, since 2018, the “Protective Seal” measure. It constitutes an integrated risk and danger management system and represents an opportunity for self-diagnosis and training to the professionals of entities with competences in childhood and youth, and in the promotion and protection of children's rights. Receiving the Protective Seal means that the organisation focuses on children's rights, creating proactive methodologies to promote those rights. Since 2018, there have been seven editions of the Protective Seal, with a total of 240 organisations certified.

<sup>71</sup> Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Hungary, Iceland, Portugal, Romania

### ***Under-reporting***

137. The 2024 survey acknowledged that underreporting of violence against children is often mentioned as a major challenge, and asked the Council of Europe member states to explain if violence against children is estimated to be underreported in their countries and, if yes, what the main barriers to reporting violence are and how they could be overcome.
138. The data collected on this question confirm that violence against children is considered to be under-reported in the responding states, with some states indicating a disparity between actual incidents of violence against children and reported cases. According to some of the states, a lack of awareness among the general public and professionals about what constitutes violence against children and how to report it are among the main barriers, but issues such as fear of reprisal or stigma associated with reporting, both for the victim and the reporter, were also mentioned.
139. Some states mentioned bureaucratic hurdles and the lack of straightforward, accessible reporting channels, indicating that complex reporting procedures may deter individuals from reporting. Inadequate training and resources for professionals, such as teachers, healthcare workers, and law enforcement, were also evoked as barriers which hinder the ability of such professionals to identify and report violence effectively.
140. With regard to the solutions proposed to overcome these barriers, different measures were mentioned, such as enhanced public education campaigns to raise awareness about violence against children and reporting mechanisms, education in schools to inform children about their rights and how they can seek help, simplifying reporting processes by making them more accessible and less intimidating, including the establishment of hotlines and online platforms.
141. It was also suggested that ensuring anonymity for reporters may be a solution to under-reporting. However, anonymity can raise other issues and, as stated by the Policy Guidelines, it may be better to ensure that the legislative framework grants protection to those who report or initiate complaints from liability in cases of reasonable mistakes<sup>72</sup>. Indeed, some states suggested policy and legislative changes to provide clearer guidelines on reporting and to protect both the reporters and the victims from negative consequences.
142. Another suggestion was made to improve the training for professionals to recognise and identify signs of abuse and better understand the process of reporting. Such trainings should also address the emotional and psychological aspects of handling such cases, including receiving sensitive information from a child.
143. As a way to tackle under-reporting and creating a favourable context for reporting violence against children, the abovementioned Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)8 sets forth, in paragraph 19, that member states should “ensure that child safeguarding policies are in place both for public and private institutions and organisations whose professionals have regular or occasional contact with children” and that “reporting mechanisms and protocols [be included as a] key element of such policies”<sup>73</sup>. Indeed, the adoption of child safeguarding policies<sup>74</sup> by all actors working with children can

<sup>72</sup> Policy Guidelines, chapter 6.4 Reporting of violence. It can be noted, however, that the recently adopted Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)8 does indicate in its paragraph 13 that states may consider anonymous reporting possibilities as a way to encourage reporting, indicating a certain shift in the thinking around this issue.

<sup>73</sup> Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)8 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on strengthening reporting systems on violence against children, paragraph 19.

<sup>74</sup> Also sometimes referred to as child protection policies.

ensure that there are clear internal procedures in place. When coupled with the nomination of a “child safeguarding officer” who receives special training and can act as a point of reference for staff within an institution or organisation, chances that reporting is effectively done may increase.

144. The data from the 2024 survey showed that, while containing differences in detail and specificity, the abovementioned themes recur across multiple country responses, indicating a common understanding of the problems and potential solutions in addressing the under-reporting of violence against children.

### Referral mechanisms

Following reporting of violence against children, referrals must be made so that children affected or at-risk can access necessary services. In accordance with the Policy Guidelines, procedures for the referral of child victims of violence and the modalities for interagency and multidisciplinary co-operation should be clearly defined (between relevant actors such as social services, education, health, police, prosecution authorities, voluntary and private agencies). An assessment of the specific circumstances of each particular victim should be conducted, giving due weight to the child’s views and, when it is in the child’s best interests, also to her or his parents’ or guardian’s views.

145. The Council of Europe member states were asked, in an open-ended question, if they have adequate and well-defined referral mechanisms in place for child victims of violence or children at risk of violence, and asked to explain any strengths and weaknesses in their country’s referral mechanism.
146. The analysis of the responses highlights several recurrent themes regarding the strengths and weaknesses of referral mechanisms for child victims of violence across the responding states.
147. Among the strengths mentioned were the **accessibility and effectiveness of the referral system**, with multiple states reporting that their systems are generally accessible and are effectively addressing the needs of child victims. It was also mentioned that an **integrated approach**, with notable co-ordination between various agencies and organisations involved, helps in providing comprehensive care to child victims. Some countries also highlighted the presence of **well-trained staff** as a key strength, which enhances the effectiveness and sensitivity of the responses to child victims.
148. Among the main weaknesses mentioned were the insufficiency of measures or resources, indicating that while systems are in place, they may not be adequate to meet all needs or scenarios. In particular, resource limitations related to the availability of financial, human, or material resources, which can limit the effectiveness and reach of the referral mechanisms.
149. These findings suggest a mix of well-developed practices and areas needing improvement. The issues of resource limitations and insufficiency of referral mechanism for child victims of violence are particularly concerning, as they directly impact the capability to serve all children in need effectively.

### Recovery and rehabilitation

The state should take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and rehabilitation of child victims and witnesses of violence and, if need be, of

their families. Such services should be provided without delay and in an environment which fosters the child's health, self-respect and dignity.

150. States should take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and rehabilitation of child victims and witnesses of violence. The Council of Europe member states were asked which services are responsible for the recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration of child victims and witnesses of violence in their countries. They were also asked to confirm if such services follow a multidisciplinary and interagency approach, and to explain any strengths and weaknesses in their systems.
151. Several key themes and common issues were mentioned regarding services for the recovery, rehabilitation, and reintegration of child victims and witnesses of violence. In particular, many responding states emphasised **the importance of a multidisciplinary and interagency approach** involving various sectors like health, social services, education, and legal systems. Such collaboration was highlighted as a strength, which facilitates comprehensive support for children.
152. The key role of **health – including mental health – services** were frequently mentioned, indicating their crucial role in the recovery process of child victims of violence. The replies from the responding states indicated that psychological support and medical care are often provided through national health services or specialised centres.
153. Several states also pointed out the significant role played by **social services** in ensuring the protection and rehabilitation of child victims. This includes child protection services and social workers who are regularly involved in the rehabilitation process.
154. In addition, several responses mentioned specific and comprehensive victim support centres or systems, dedicated to supporting child victims of violence and offering an integrated and holistic range of services, from counselling to legal aid. Such centres often operate with a focus on child-friendly practices, and can take the form of Barnahus or Barnahus-type services<sup>75</sup>.
155. Other related strengths mentioned by some of the responding states were the fact of having strong Government commitment and dedicated ministries or agencies working towards child protection and rehabilitation.
156. Among the main weaknesses mentioned by the responding states were the variability and inconsistency in the availability and quality of services across different regions within one same country, meaning that child rights standards cannot always be upheld consistently for all children. Resource limitations, including lack of sufficient funding and lack of trained personnel were also mentioned as significant barriers to providing effective support to child victims of violence.
157. Some states also pointed out that, despite the prevalence of multidisciplinary approaches, there is still a need for better co-ordination among different agencies and services to streamline support and avoid overlap or gaps in service provision.
158. This analysis reflects the shared concerns among the responding states in addressing the complex needs of child victims and witnesses of violence. These insights can be instrumental in informing policy enhancements and collaborative efforts to strengthen child protection systems across the region.

<sup>75</sup> For more information on Barnahus and Barnahus-type services, see: Council of Europe, Barnahus: a European journey Mapping study on multidisciplinary and interagency child-friendly justice models responding to violence against children in Council of Europe member states, 2023, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/barnahus-a-european-journey-mapping-study-on-multidisciplinary-and-int/1680acc3c3>

159. As mentioned in the previous sections, reporting and referral mechanisms as well as recovery and rehabilitation services must be **child-friendly**. These aspects are all part of a more global system of justice for children, and as set forth by some of the key legal and policy instruments of the Council of Europe<sup>76</sup>, including the Policy Guidelines, every state should have a child-friendly justice system in place, which provides adequate and age-appropriate measures for all children in contact with the system.
160. With regard to violence against children, in the 2024 survey the Council of Europe member states were asked if their justice systems provide sufficient/adequate child-friendly justice measures for child victims and child witnesses of violence. They were also asked to identify what they see as the main strengths and weaknesses of their justice systems with regard to child-friendly measures.
161. The replies from the states to these open-ended questions varied in nature, but some recurrent issues could be identified. For instance, several of the responding states replied that they have specific sections within their criminal or criminal procedure codes dedicated to children, which outline measures and protections for child victims and witnesses. Some states mentioned having established special procedures or made reforms aimed explicitly at enhancing the protection and rights of children within the justice system. For some, this has been part of their efforts to integrate international standards and guidelines into their national laws and practices to improve child-friendly justice measures.
162. A few responses highlighted the importance of training judicial and law enforcement professionals to handle cases involving children sensitively and appropriately, and a few states mentioned specific practices aimed at reducing the trauma experienced by children during the justice process, such as using child advocates/guardians ad litem, special child-friendly interviewing techniques and rooms, audio-visual recordings to reduce the number of child interviews, special protections of identity and privacy, creating specialised teams of judges, and ensuring speedy hearings and proceedings when children are involved.
163. Overall, the replies of the responding states indicated strong commitment to child-friendly justice, and continued efforts appear to be made to keep improving the conditions for children participating in criminal investigations and proceedings (Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Sweden). It was clear from the data that children who are victims of sexual offences represent the group for which child-friendly justice has come the furthest, while for other groups of child victims of violence the scope and extent of child-friendly justice measures were less detailed.
164. As a key strength of the system, several states mentioned the establishment of Barnahus (Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Slovenia) and similar practices, such as Family Justice Centres (Belgium), Blue Rooms (Bulgaria, Poland), Centers for Psychological and Social Services for the Children Victims of Sexual Violence (Georgia), and Child monitoring centers/Children justice centers (Türkiye)<sup>77</sup>.
165. Others mentioned guardianship judges in charge of family disputes, educational assistance and criminal matters for children (Monaco), the provision of psychosocial and legal support for children in judicial proceedings (Austria), the adoption of legal provisions (Portugal) and policy strategies on justice for children (Albania), and the fact

<sup>76</sup> For instance the Lanzarote Convention and the Child-friendly Justice Guidelines.

<sup>77</sup> Article 10§1 of the Lanzarote Convention requires states to ensure the coordination on a national or local level between the different agencies in charge of the protection from, the prevention of and the fight against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, and Barnahus specifically has been recognised as a promising practice by the Lanzarote Committee.



of allowing only specialised professionals to administer justice proceedings involving children (Georgia).

166. Yet other examples included having the local child protection authorities accompanying the child during the process (Romania), ensuring child participation in an appropriate environment, respecting the privacy and security of the child (Andorra), and deploying a victim-oriented structure to ensure that victims receive continued psycho-social support and are not traumatised by the judicial process (Türkiye).

### Highlights

In **France**, the law of February 7, 2022 on child protection includes a number of provisions to promote the rights of children who are victims of violence, such as the widespread use of the national reference framework for the overall assessment of the situation of children in danger or at risk of danger, drawn up by the French National Authority for Health (HAS). This measure is aimed at harmonising practices across the country, ensuring equal treatment for children and their families. The support mechanism for child victims of criminal offenses is designed to take account of the child's vulnerability and the need for specific processes to ensure their security throughout the proceedings: prior to the hearing, during the hearing and after the hearing. Some jurisdictions have also signed agreements allowing the use of a legal assistance dog to accompany child victims through all stages of the proceedings. Moreover, the 2023-2027 plan to combat violence against children also calls for increased training and awareness-raising in the detection and reporting of situations of violence against children for professionals working with children.

In **Poland**, the amendment to the Family and Guardianship Code, colloquially designated as the Kamilka Act, was enacted in Poland on 15 February 2024 and contains a number of solutions aimed at better protecting children from violence and providing them with comprehensive assistance. The amendment establishes the mandatory implementation of standards for the protection of children in all institutions and facilities working with children. It also mandates the hearing of the child in court proceedings, thereby ensuring that the child's voice is heard and understood in the courts. Furthermore, it introduces the Child Safety Assessment Questionnaire, which helps police officers, social workers and healthcare professionals to assess whether a child's health and life is at risk. It imposes the implementation of a "Serious Case Review Procedure", which is an analysis of serious and fatal cases of child abuse in order to prevent further tragedies. The Act introduces the institution of a child representative, performed by professionals who have been trained to work with children in cases where a guardian or parent is unable to perform this role. It also requires judges who are adjudicating family and guardianship law cases to attend specialised training to equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary to better protect the welfare of children in disputes between parents or guardians and to enhance their ability to identify and respond to child abuse. The Act also lays out the foundation for the Minister of Justice to establish a Multidisciplinary Team for the Protection of Minors, which includes representatives from government institutions, academia, non-governmental organisations, churches and religious associations.

The **Slovak Republic** has introduced the concept of presumption of victim status into its legislation, which allows someone to be considered a victim and to be granted all the necessary protection if they identify themselves as a victim – regardless of whether the perpetrator was identified or arrested.

**Switzerland** underscored the strength of ensuring good legal training for professionals working with and for children, with additional skills in developmental psychology, child communication and conflict management, especially for children's legal representatives.

167. Among the **challenges** mentioned were to effectively implement and operationalise existing child-friendly justice measures as well as to ensure consistent application of standards across national territories and ensure equal treatment and services to all child victims of violence. It was pointed out by some responding states that issues such as repeated interrogations, lengthy procedural delays, and incorrect procedures still persist despite the existence of child-friendly legal provisions. It was also mentioned that the child's right to have their opinion heard, especially children under 12 years of age, is not always respected in practice, or that children's participation in decisions that concern them would still need strengthening.
168. Several responding states also highlighted the challenge to ensure comprehensive geographic coverage of child-friendly justice services, and the lack of material and human resources. This included insufficient number of professionals such as magistrates, legal representatives, and expert psychologists, insufficient numbers of specialised facilities like proper child-friendly hearing rooms, and financial constraints limiting effective operations. It was also mentioned that child-friendly justice services are not always available around the clock.
169. A few responding states also mentioned the challenge to building up a solid knowledge base among professionals, especially in small countries, or the absence of specialised institutions or professionals, in particular for children in need of specialised psychiatric care.
170. Lastly, a few of the responding states indicated that the interdisciplinary approach still needs strengthening and that it is necessary to improve the coordination and cooperation of courts and social work centres, as well as other institutions involved in cases related to children. In terms of capacity building, it was also mentioned that it would be important to reinforce the training for law enforcement professionals with regard to ensuring the rights of child victims of violence.

**f. Other indispensable elements for an adequate protection of children from violence**

171. A crucial element of the Policy Guidelines, which is not a stand-alone principle per se, but without which none of the objectives of the Policy Guidelines can be reached, is the human and financial resources allocated to tackling violence against children.

**Funding and resources for integrated strategies on violence against children**

A multidisciplinary and systematic framework (hereinafter referred to as “the strategy”) integrated into the national planning process, rooted in the CRC and bringing together all stakeholders, represents the most effective response to violence against children that is sustainable over time.

The strategy's core element should be a complex of effective and comprehensive primary, secondary and tertiary prevention measures that are child-centred, families-focused, multidisciplinary and oriented towards fulfilling children's and families' needs.

The strategy should contain realistic and time-bound targets, **be supported by adequate human and financial resources**, be based on current scientific knowledge (with regard to what works) and be systematically evaluated.

172. In the 2024 survey, the Council of Europe member states were asked about funding, both for actions to prevent and detect violence against children, and for actions to protect children from violence. While the question was separated into two parts, one on prevention and detection and the other on protection, the states provided almost identical replies to these two questions, which is why they are analysed jointly here.



173. Of the 33 responding states, two states skipped the questions. Four states provided no information at all regarding prevention and detection actions, and three states provided no information regarding protection actions. Two states replied that there is no specific funding allocated to the prevention and detection of violence against children, nor to the protection of children from violence. With regard to the protection of children from violence, one state replied that no specific funding is allocated, and that actors working on violence against children have to apply for punctual (public) funding or fund raise on their own. One state replied that specific funding covers part of the activities included in the strategy (or other policy framework), – both for prevention and detection and for protection – but actors working on violence against children have to complement the funding.
174. 12 of the responding states (36%) replied that funding is allocated to the prevention and detection of violence against children as well as to the protection of children from violence, but it is intended for a broader set of programmes and measures, of which activities regarding violence against children form part.
175. Eight states (24%) replied that there is specific funding allocated to the prevention and detection of violence against children as well as to the protection of children from violence, but it is not sufficient to cover the costs of implementing all activities included in the strategy and/or aimed to tackle violence against children in a given time frame.
176. Only three states (9%) replied that specific funding is allocated both to the prevention and detection of violence against children as well as to the protection of children from violence, and it is adequate and sufficient to cover the costs of implementing all activities included in the strategy and/or aimed to tackle violence against children in a given time frame<sup>78</sup>.
177. An analysis of the answers shows that in 24 of the 33 responding states (73%) some form of state funding exists to tackle violence against children. However, such funding comes with limitations with regard to sufficiency and specificity, as it is not always targeted exclusively towards actions to tackle violence against children.
178. This reflects the concerns of many of the responding states in other parts of the survey, such as with regard to child-friendly justice measures but also more in general as a persisting and long-term challenge, where several states indicated that insufficient human and financial resources represent a serious challenge.

### **International co-operation**

Member states of the Council of Europe should co-operate with each other, in accordance with these guidelines and through application of relevant international and regional instruments and arrangements agreed on the basis of uniform or reciprocal legislation and internal laws, to the widest extent possible, for the purpose of:

- a. preventing and combating all forms of violence against children;
- b. protecting and assisting child victims and witnesses;
- c. investigating or prosecuting criminal offences involving violence against children.

179. The last chapter of the Policy Guidelines draw the attention to the need for international co-operation to adequately tackle violence against children.

<sup>78</sup> Croatia, Norway, Türkiye. Also, Lithuania indicated that funding is adequate and sufficient for the prevention and detection of violence against children, while Austria mentioned that funding is adequate and sufficient for the protection of children from violence.

180. The 2024 survey included a question regarding the Council of Europe member states' effective co-operation with each other, and more broadly outside the region, to prevent and combat all forms of violence against children, to protect and assist child victims and witnesses of violence, and to investigate and prosecute criminal offences concerning violence against children.
181. In their replies, many of the responding states emphasised the importance of cross-border co-operation and the sharing of information and best practices. Examples included participation in the Lanzarote Committee as well as co-operation with international bodies like Europol, Eurojust, Interpol, and various other European networks, committees and working groups (ENOC, EU cooperation EMPACT (European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats), INHOPE, WeProtect Global Alliance). The responding states also mentioned the incorporation of Council of Europe and European Union guidelines<sup>79</sup> into national legislation and implementation of the European Union acquis, indicating an ongoing effort to align with broader European standards on child protection.
182. Several states reported having robust legislative frameworks that facilitate international judicial co-operation, including laws that enable mutual recognition of judicial decisions and measures across member states. This legal infrastructure supports effective investigation and prosecution of crimes against children.
183. A few state responses highlighted the participation in international training programmes and workshops, which enhance national capabilities to tackle violence and exploitation against children. This includes for instance training on new technologies for tracking and prosecuting online child sexual abuse material. Some also mentioned study visits, for instance to visit Barnahus in other Council of Europe member states and learn best practices, as well as bilateral agreements, notably on child trafficking.
184. It is noteworthy that several of the examples made by the responding states concern cyber criminality and/or a focus on child sexual exploitation and in particular (online) child sexual abuse material, indicating that international co-operation has grown strong on these particular issues.
185. A few states replied that they co-operate on a case-by-case basis on certain specific procedures when required, but not on a systematic basis, or provided few concrete examples of co-operation frameworks and practices. Nevertheless, the responding states appear to show strong overall commitment to the international co-operation in matters relating to crimes against children.

### **3. Conclusions and recommendations**

#### **a. Conclusion and learnings**

186. In 2009, in response to the pervasive nature of violence against children, the Council of Europe developed the Policy Guidelines on Integrated National Strategies for the Protection of Children from Violence, which were adopted by the Committee of Ministers through recommendation CM/Rec(2009)10. The Policy Guidelines were developed to assist member states in designing and implementing integrated and holistic approaches that encompass prevention, protection, and prosecution measures.

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<sup>79</sup> Notably in light of the Commission Recommendation (EU) 2024/1238 of 23 April 2024 on developing and strengthening integrated child protection systems in the best interests of the child (OJ L, 2024/1238, 14.5.2024).

187. In a survey carried out between December 2023 and March 2024, the Council of Europe member states were asked a number of closed and open-ended questions to provide insights into how the Policy Guidelines have been implemented into their legal and policy frameworks, and to assess how well state practice aligns with the key messages of the Policy Guidelines.
188. Fifteen years have passed since the adoption of the Policy Guidelines, and during this time, manifestations of violence against children have evolved. While violence against children continues to represent a pervasive element in our societies, the rapid evolution of digital technologies but also a changing social and political climate in Europe, are arguably having an impact on how and where violence is committed.
189. The 2024 survey showed, as this report has illustrated, that the Council of Europe member states have taken enormous steps to adopt solid legal and policy frameworks to tackle violence against children. Today, states invest in prevention and detection actions to avoid children falling victims of violence. They have established solid and child-friendly mechanisms – in particular in the form of Barnahus or Barnahus-type services – to protect child victims of violence, and an increasing understanding of the need for interagency and multidisciplinary approaches to violence can be seen. The Council of Europe will further support its member states to develop such approaches, including through its cooperation projects. It will also work on the development of policy guidance in the form of a Recommendation on multidisciplinary and interagency services for child-friendly justice, including operational guidelines, to be adopted by the end of 2026. This will be complementary to the International Workshop Agreement (IWA 49) on Guidelines for Barnahus, a child-friendly multidisciplinary and interagency (MDIA) response model to violence against children being developed by Icelandic Standards and the Swedish Institute for Standards, within the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO)<sup>80</sup>.
190. Legislation prohibiting violence against children and ensuring criminalisation, prosecution and sanctions for violent behaviour is strong in most member states, with 28 out of the 33 responding states (85%) having legal frameworks supporting and/or underpinning the work to tackle violence against children. Nevertheless, the Council of Europe will continue to support member states to ensure that every single of the 46 member states have a solid legal framework in place to adequately protect children from all forms of violence.
191. The data showed that sexual violence against children still represents the form of violence that states have made the biggest efforts to tackle, and also for which child-friendly services have come the furthest. At the same time, it became clear from the state replies that the Council of Europe member states today take action on a wide range of forms of violence against children in many different settings.
192. The survey also showed that most member states co-operate through regional and international networks, committees and other fora, including a number of committees within the Council of Europe, to exchange good practice, ensure mutual recognition of criminal sanctions, and tackle cyber-crime and other cross-border forms of violence against children together.

### ***Challenges, old and new***

193. Still, some old challenges persist, and new challenges arise. When asked about **persisting challenges**, several of the responding states mentioned a lack of adequate

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<sup>80</sup> ISO/IWA 49 Guidelines for Barnahus, a child friendly multidisciplinary and interagency response model for abused children - Swedish Institute for Standards, SIS available at [www.sis.se/en/standards/iso-iwa-49/#RegisterJune](http://www.sis.se/en/standards/iso-iwa-49/#RegisterJune)

budget and resources dedicated to programmes and initiatives aimed at combating violence against children. This included both financial constraints and a lack of human resources needed to effectively implement and sustain relevant actions and programmes. Among the emerging challenges, resource limitations were also mentioned, and included the need for appropriate infrastructure as well.

194. Another recurrent persisting challenge across the responses was the need for greater awareness and training among professionals and the general public. This includes training for professional groups like teachers, law enforcement, and social workers to better detect and respond to instances of violence against children. It is noteworthy that this is seen as a persisting challenge despite professional trainings having become more frequent and are mandatory in many of the member states.
195. Interagency and multidisciplinary co-ordination and co-operation have increasingly, at least to some extent, become the standard in many of the member states. Nevertheless, the replies to the 2024 survey showed that challenges in co-ordinating efforts between various government bodies and non-governmental organisations persist.
196. Some state replies also highlighted persisting gaps in legislation and policies, and underlined the slow pace of legislative reform, which hinders effective prevention and protection measures. Interestingly, legal and institutional frameworks were also indicated among emerging challenges by some states, suggesting that these need to evolve to effectively address new types of violence and changing societal conditions.
197. With regard to reporting of violence, some states pointed out how cultural and societal norms still represent barriers to the reporting of violence or to the acceptance of preventive measures. This includes stigma associated with reporting violence and, in some places, traditional views on child-rearing.
198. One of the main gaps identified in this report relates to data collection, and this was also a persisting challenge mentioned by some of the responding states. Gaps exist with regard to the availability and reliability of data on violence against children, but also on how data can be shared, analysed, and is used in a meaningful way in monitoring and evaluation processes. Improved data collection and evaluation mechanisms are crucial for informed decision-making and policy development. It is noteworthy that data collection and monitoring were also among the emerging challenges mentioned by the responding states, which underscored the need for better data collection systems and monitoring mechanisms to effectively track incidents of violence against children and evaluate the success of existing protective measures.
199. It became clear from the analysis of the survey replies that countries still have varying degrees of data collection and analysis capabilities and that there is a strong need for systematic approaches to handle data related to violence against children. Standardised data collection methods should be promoted to ensure consistency in data collection and high-quality data which can be used to inform public decision making. Moreover, public dissemination of data is not uniformly practiced, and there appears to be little clarity on how, when and why data should be shared and disseminated. There is a need to enhance the understanding of how data can and should be used, the importance of transparency and public access to data. A clear framework for data collection should be part of any national strategy to tackle violence against children and, in turn, national strategies should be developed and/or refined based on systematically collected and analysed quality data. In order to achieve this, data collection must be effective at all administrative levels, including at regional and local levels.
200. The absence of full and consistent statistical evidence on violence against children was confirmed also by the Conference of European Statisticians in 2022, which pointed

out that the gaps and challenges include “lack of data sharing and coordination among different ministries within a country”, as well as “difficulties with linking and integrating different data systems, due to both a lack of a commonly-used software and the highly fragmented and multisectoral nature of VAC”.<sup>81</sup>

201. Lastly, although it was not the main focus of the 2024 survey, a few states also pointed out specific challenges related to protecting vulnerable groups of children from violence, including children with disabilities, migrant children, and children in rural areas<sup>82</sup>.
202. In terms of **emerging challenges**, online safety was a recurring issue mentioned by several of the responding states. Notably, the increasing challenge of cyberbullying and the risks associated with children's increased online presence, necessitating enhanced protective measures in digital environments, were mentioned.
203. While awareness and training were mentioned as persisting challenges with regard to professionals and the general public, awareness and education for children were mentioned among the emerging challenges, as essential to prevent violence and teach children about their rights and existing safety measures.
204. Lastly, emerging challenges relating to inclusivity and accessibility of protection services for all children, particularly those from marginalised groups or in remote areas, were emphasised.

### ***Factors of effectiveness and ineffectiveness***

205. When states were asked to assess the **effectiveness** of their strategy (if any) or the work for the prevention, detection and protection of children from violence, they pointed to several different factors.
206. Firstly, many replies emphasised the strength of multidisciplinary approaches involving various stakeholders, including governmental bodies, NGOs, and community organisations, which enhance comprehensive child protection efforts.
207. Some countries highlighted their robust legal frameworks, which they consider to effectively protect children from violence. In some cases, these included updated laws and regulations that are adaptable to new challenges, such as cyberbullying.
208. A few of the responding states also mentioned effective community engagement and school-based programmes as critical strengths. Such programmes often focus on education, awareness, and early intervention, which are essential in preventing violence against children.
209. A small number of states referred to adequate funding and resource allocation for child protection initiatives, allowing for sustained and effective protective measures, and a few replies pointed to strong data collection systems and research as strengths, facilitating better monitoring of violence against children and the effectiveness of various interventions. It was unclear in some cases if these measures are uniformly and comprehensively implemented across the relevant countries.
210. Lastly, effective public awareness campaigns that educate the community about child rights and protection from violence were also indicated by a few of the responding states as a significant strength, increasing the community's ability to prevent and detect violence against children.

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<sup>81</sup> United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, Conference of European Statisticians, “Statistics on Children: Spotlight on children exposed to violence, in alternative care, and with disabilities”, 16 June 2022, Paragraph 74, 75.

<sup>82</sup> The 2019 report A life free from violence against children looked more into the states' work with regard to particular groups of children.

211. It is noteworthy that, when states were asked to assess factors of ineffectiveness (weaknesses) of their strategy (if any) or their work for the prevention, detection and protection of children from violence, they replied with very similar factors as the ones indicative of effectiveness. This shows very clearly that states have a similar appreciation of what the indispensable features of a solid child protection system are, only in some states such elements are success factors, in others they represent weaknesses or challenges that need to be overcome.
212. A few of the responding states highlighted that the services intended to protect children from violence are often fragmented and suffer from poor co-ordination among various agencies and departments. This results in inefficient resource use and reduced effectiveness in preventing and addressing cases of violence.
213. Some states pointed out that an absence of a specific legal framework dedicated to child protection from violence represents a major weakness. Without such a framework, consistent application of laws and policies becomes challenging, leading to gaps in enforcement and protection.
214. Financial constraints or insufficient budget allocation for child protection programs were also noted as critical barriers. This limitation impacts the implementation of effective programmes and initiatives aimed at preventing and detecting violence against children.
215. Several of the responding states indicated a lack of systematic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms as a significant issue. This deficiency hampers the ability to assess the effectiveness of existing strategies and to make informed adjustments to improve outcomes.
216. Lastly, some states noted a need for greater public awareness and training for those involved in child protection. The lack of awareness and inadequate training of relevant professional groups can lead to poor detection rates of violence and inadequate support for affected children.

#### b. Recommendations for future efforts to tackle violence against children

217. Despite years of efforts to ban corporal punishment against children, 12 of the 46 Council of Europe member states have yet to adopt a **full legal ban on corporal punishment**<sup>83</sup>. It is imperative that the Council of Europe continue to draw attention to this harmful practice and support states towards such a ban in all settings, including in the home. Council of Europe member states should move urgently and resolutely towards a full legal ban of corporal punishment without exception.
218. With regard to prevention of sexual violence against children, the analysis in this report showed that while certain foundational elements such as minimum ages for sexual consent and marriage are widely covered across Council of Europe member states, **comprehensive vetting systems for individuals working in contact with children** are less commonly in place, with only 67% of the responding states having such systems established by law. There is urgent need for greater focus on mandatory vetting mechanisms as a crucial aspect of prevention of violence against children.
219. Similarly, the 2024 survey showed that **comprehensive sexuality education** in schools currently exists only in 73% of the 33 responding states. The Council of Europe should continue, through the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF)

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<sup>83</sup>End Corporal punishment, "Progress and delay in achieving universal prohibition and elimination of corporal punishment in Council of Europe member states", produced for the Committee of Experts for the prevention of violence ENF-VAE(2024)06 by Sonia Vohito at End Corporal Punishment (World Health Organisation), available at <https://rm.coe.int/enf-vae-2024-06-e-end-corporal-punishment/1680b17bcb>



and its expert group on the prevention of violence against children (ENF-VAE), to work on a recommendation on comprehensive sexuality education for children, for adoption by the Committee of Ministers.

220. While the 2024 survey did not ask specific questions about children in conflict with the law who are also victims of violence, it is important to acknowledge the often-present link between victimisation and delinquent behaviour. In addressing children in conflict with the law, and in particular children who display harmful sexual behaviour, member states should be mindful of the risk that such children may have been exposed to violence or abuse, and make sure to assess this risk in any social or criminal investigation.<sup>84</sup>
221. With the fast development of digital technologies, **violence against children in the digital environment** represents both a persisting and emerging challenge. Today, practically any form of violence against children can be committed also in the digital space and the numbers of victims are daunting. It is necessary for both the Council of Europe and its member states to keep addressing this extremely dynamic setting as closely as possible, and stay up to date on necessary legal and policy adjustments to prevent and combat violence against children in the digital environment.
222. More in general, the analysis presented in this report showed that certain forms of violence against children, as well as certain settings in which violence takes place, receive comparatively less attention. Member states are encouraged to reflect upon why this is the case, and to work actively towards engaging different communities and actors to commit to tackling violence against children, including for instance religious and cultural communities where focus on violence against children appears to be lower.
223. With regard to **training of professionals** working with and for children, only six of the responding states indicated that their trainings include not only all relevant professional groups but also explicitly include volunteers working for and with children<sup>85</sup>. This practice should be expanded to more states, ensuring that anyone working in contact with children is adequately trained on how to detect and respond to potential situations of violence against children. Existing training courses and modules such as the HELP training course on Children's Rights<sup>86</sup> could be further disseminated and new training modules developed where needed. Importantly, training should begin early and be provided already during basic education and within university curricula. Too often, training of professionals in topics such as children's rights, trauma-informed care, and detecting and reporting violence against children, is provided in the form of continued training once professionals are already active in their respective fields, but the basic skills (including soft skills) provided as part of the educational curricula for legal, social and educational professions are missing.
224. **Awareness raising** continues to represent an issue in a number of member states and despite continued efforts to inform the general public about the harmful and long-lasting consequences of violence against children, few states believe that the level of knowledge and understanding about violence and how to detect and report it are sufficient. Joint reflection on how to better inform and raise the awareness about violence against children in the Council of Europe member states would be beneficial, and a new region-wide campaign such as the "One in five" campaign to stop sexual

<sup>84</sup> Simon Hackett (2020), Sexual violence and harmful sexual behaviour displayed by children: Nature, causes, consequences and responses, revised in 2024: ENF-VAE(2024)06 soon available at [www.coe.int/en/web/children/committee-of-experts-on-the-prevention-of-violence-enf-vae](http://www.coe.int/en/web/children/committee-of-experts-on-the-prevention-of-violence-enf-vae)

<sup>85</sup> Andorra, Estonia, Luxembourg, Spain, Switzerland and Türkiye.

<sup>86</sup> See HELP website, for instance: [Children's Rights in digital environment and protection against sexual exploitation/abuse](https://www.help-project.eu/childrens-rights-in-digital-environment-and-protection-against-sexual-exploitation/abuse) | Council of Europe HELP

violence against children<sup>87</sup> might contribute to lifting this issue at a higher level. It is also recommended to reflect upon the methodology and focus of awareness raising campaigns and initiatives, to better understand how such actions might be made more effective and gain a wider absorption.

225. Member states should make the adoption of **child safeguarding policies** mandatory for all institutions and organisations working with and for children, including sports, leisure and cultural institutions. Such policies should be developed through a consultative process with members of staff, and include clear guidance and procedures for detecting and reporting violence against children. They should also clearly guide professionals on how to behave and interact with children, for instance through a code of conduct, and foresee specific training for any members of staff in charge of child safeguarding issues. As part of child safeguarding policies, professionals working with and for children should also be informed of existing support services such as help lines or similar where they can seek help and support in case of questions or concerns.
226. In the work to prevent violence against children, Council of Europe member states are encouraged to actively include children and to ensure their views are heard and taken into consideration. The Council of Europe Child Participation Tool<sup>88</sup> offers a method to facilitate and support the implementation of the **child's right to participate**.
227. The perhaps biggest challenge for Council of Europe member states in their efforts to tackle violence against children continues to be linked to **resources and funding**. This persistent challenge is, and will probably remain, an inherent factor to child protection work. Nevertheless, there are ways to address funding shortages at least partly, and it involves addressing violence against children from a systemic perspective<sup>89</sup> in need of long-term state funding. This implies including the issue of violence against children directly into the state budget, limiting the risk for punctual or fluctuating funds, and enhancing stability and sustainability. Ensuring adequate resources is a prerequisite for any of the recommendations included in this report.
228. In addition, by **collecting and disaggregating data which can be analysed over time**, states would get a clearer overview of the actual costs of prevention and protection versus not intervening and having to tackle higher rates of other societal issues *à posteriori*, such as long term mental and physical health issues, unemployment, or criminality. While the links between violence in childhood and severe consequences later in life are well documented, they often remain underestimated. Evidence clearly confirms the idea that investing in child protection is a smart investment for any state<sup>90</sup>. The Council of Europe and its member states should continue to push for and support research into the long-term economic, societal and health consequences of violence against children. To switch from an intervention to a prevention perspective, it is also necessary to push further the reflection on what constitutes a "child-friendly space" or a safe environment for children and implement changes to enhance safety for children in all spaces where they spend time.
229. The information provided by the responding states showed a strong and widely felt need for **better systems to obtain, process, share and evaluate more**

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<sup>87</sup> The campaign was launched in 2010:

[https://www.coe.int/t/dg3/children/News/Sexual%20violence/Campaign%20outline\\_261110\\_en.pdf](https://www.coe.int/t/dg3/children/News/Sexual%20violence/Campaign%20outline_261110_en.pdf)

<sup>88</sup> Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/child-participation-assessment-tool>

<sup>89</sup> In this regard, see also the recently adopted Commission Recommendation (EU) 2024/1238 of 23 April 2024 on developing and strengthening integrated child protection systems in the best interests of the child.

<sup>90</sup> See for instance: World Health Organization <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/child-maltreatment> ; Child Welfare Information Gateway <https://www.childwelfare.gov/resources/long-term-consequences-child-abuse-and-neglect/> ; Center to advance trauma informed health care <https://cthc.ucsf.edu/why-trauma/#:~:text=Key%20Research%20Findings%20About%20Adverse,more%20likely%20to%20smoke%20cigarettes> ; UNICEF [https://www.unicef.org/media/64141/file/HLPF\\_2020\\_2PAGER\\_FINAL\\_Investing\\_in\\_children.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/64141/file/HLPF_2020_2PAGER_FINAL_Investing_in_children.pdf)

**systematically organised data on violence against children.** A Council of Europe wide approach to data collection and handling, which takes into account EU law and national legislation on the matter, could enhance a more systematic way to regularly collect data on violence against children, hence enabling better monitoring and evaluation of the situation. This becomes particularly relevant as child protection systems grow stronger and more effective. With the gradual improvement of aspects such as professional trainings and reporting mechanisms, more cases of violence against children are likely to be detected, meaning that data will continue to grow. This will, in turn, require strong data collection and processing systems, as well as more resources to handle detected cases.

230. Subject to availability of funding, Council of Europe member states could be further encouraged **seek technical assistance through co-operation projects.** This would enable them to review legal and policy frameworks in the areas of child protection from violence and would also facilitate capacity building and awareness raising by the Council of Europe to support member states in the dissemination and implementation of existing Council of Europe standards, tools and resources.
231. The Policy Guidelines, while they do insist on the need for all of the above issues, such as awareness raising, training and data collection, stop short of providing Council of Europe member states with clear guidance on how they could get there. They also stop short of informing states about the variety of forms of violence against children and the numerous settings in which they occur, including in the digital environment. Lastly, the Policy Guidelines do not, in their current state, address different groups of children who may, due to specific and intersecting factors, such as age, gender identity, or cultural and societal contexts and backgrounds, be more at risk and/or exposed to violence and need specific attention,<sup>91</sup> or address different-level authorities and stakeholders who are the duty-bearers or facilitators of more effective child protection policies, including authorities and civil society organisations at national, regional and local levels. The Council of Europe itself has some of the tools at hand to better promote the Policy Guidelines, via the Parliamentary Assembly for future legislative action to be taken, and via the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities to translate the Policy Guidelines into specific regional and local policies. could provide member states with better tools to tackle violence against children. **Adding such context and nuance to the Policy Guidelines** in an updated version and assigning clear responsibilities to different levels of governance and different stakeholders, could provide member states with better tools to tackle violence against children. At age 15, the Policy Guidelines are no longer up to date with some of the more recent recommendations in the field<sup>92</sup> and may also for that reason benefit from a revision.

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<sup>91</sup> See for example: Nadan, Y., Korbin, J. "Cultural Context, Intersectionality, and Child Vulnerability", in: *Childhood Vulnerability* 1, 5-14 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41255-019-00003-7> ; Etherington, N., & Baker, L., From "Buzzword" to Best Practice: Applying Intersectionality to Children Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence", in: *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, 19(1), 58-75 (2018): <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27010961>

<sup>92</sup> This report shows, for example, how thinking around reporting child abuse anonymously may have evolved since the adoption of the guidelines. See for example the recently adopted Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)8 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on strengthening reporting systems on violence against children.