

Strengthening the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse through evidence-based policy making



REPORT

CONFERENCE
Chişinău, 18 November 2025

Organised by the Children's Rights Division
of the Council of Europe, under the auspices
of the Moldovan Presidency of the Committee
of Ministers on the occasion of the Day for
the Protection of Children against Sexual
Exploitation and Sexual Abuse



Building a Europe
for and with children

Construire une Europe
pour et avec les enfants



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LANZAROTE COMMITTEE

Committee of the Parties to
the Council of Europe Convention
on the protection of children
against sexual exploitation
and sexual abuse

Conference report

Strengthening the protection of children
against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse
through evidence-based policy making

Chişinău, 18 November 2025

Council of Europe

French edition:

Renforcer la protection des enfants contre
l'exploitation et les abus sexuels grâce à des
politiques fondées sur des données probantes

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Introduction

The conference “Strengthening the Protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse through evidence-based policy making”, was held in Chisinau, Republic of Moldova, on 18 November 2025 under the auspices of the Moldovan Presidency of the Committee of Ministers to mark the annual [Day](#) for the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.

The conference built on the [implementation report](#) on data collection mechanisms regarding the sexual abuse and exploitation of children adopted by the Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse ([Lanzarote Committee](#)) in July 2025.

The Convention for the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse ([Lanzarote Convention](#)) requires State Parties to set up or designate mechanisms for data collection or focal points for observing and evaluating the phenomenon of sexual exploitation and abuse of children. This requires data to be collected and collated across multiple sectors to provide a holistic understanding of the nature and trends in child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. Without robust data States cannot develop evidence-based policies to prevent and respond to these crimes.

Gathering and analysing data enables governments, institutions and civil society to identify risk factors, allocate resources efficiently, monitor progress, and ultimately implement informed measures that safeguard children.

Throughout the day, experts, practitioners, researchers and civil society representatives took part in thematic sessions on:

- Evidence-based policy making;
- Harnessing data from Barnahus and other multidisciplinary and interagency (MDIA) services to inform policies and practice;
- Engagement and consultation with children, including victims and survivors;
- Enhancing data collection and sharing across different agencies, at state and international levels;
- Strengthening policies to prevent re-offending abroad.

Key messages:



Daniella Misail-Nichitin, Minister of Internal Affairs, Republic of Moldova: Inter-ministerial co-operation and collaboration with civil society are key to effectively protect children and this also applies to data collection. We need to collect data from all relevant sectors to understand the true and evolving nature of this phenomenon.

18 November is a day to recall that no segment of society can be considered safe unless children are protected. We need increased vigilance and the development of more specialised mechanisms to respond to online child sexual exploitation and abuse. Ensuring

children have every chance to live safely is both a moral imperative and a collective duty, requiring collaboration and unwavering commitment in the best interests of the child. Child protection is a mirror reflecting the values of society.



Natalia Plugaru, Minister of Labour and Social Protection, Republic of Moldova: A strong network of professionals is needed for a timely response to guarantee safety for children. The Barnahus model, inaugurated in May 2022 in the northern part of the Republic of Moldova, is an excellent framework for cross-sectoral co-ordination. Expansion of these services is envisaged by 2027. Hotline services should be strengthened and promoted, and it should be ensured that these services, along with psychological services and referral mechanisms, are widely known and accessible to everyone. In addition to that, Barnahus and other similar services are also a rich source of data to better understand the nature of child sexual abuse.



Agnes von Maravić, Head of Children's Rights Division, Council of Europe: Data and evidence are vital to ensure effective responses to prevent and protect children against sexual offences. Collecting robust, comparable data is a common challenge that can be overcome as shown by the promising practices in the [Lanzarote Committee report on data collection mechanisms on child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse](#).



Falk Lange, Head of the Council of Europe Office in Chisinau:

The protection of children's rights as an absolute priority and the Lanzarote Convention is the foundation of this work. The Republic of Moldova has demonstrated significant commitment and leadership in ratifying and working towards the full implementation of the Lanzarote Convention, and the Council of Europe is proud to remain a reliable partner on this journey. By focusing on evidence-based policy making, States commit to moving beyond assumptions, using reliable data to design systems that are resilient, effective, and prioritise the voice and safety of the child.



Maria José Castello Branco, Chairperson of the Lanzarote Committee:

Child sexual abuse affects children of all ages, in all parts of society, in all cultures and countries around the world. International co-operation including sharing data on convicted offenders is key to prevent offenders travelling to sexually exploit or abuse children in other countries through employment, leisure or volunteering activities. The Lanzarote Committee calls on States to strengthen data collection and research to better understand and combat these crimes so that children can grow up safe from sexual violence. Better data equals safer children.

Evidence based policy making

Lanzarote Committee report on data collection mechanisms

Recommendation 4: The Lanzarote Committee **requires all Parties**, in accordance with Article 10, paragraph 1 of the Lanzarote Convention, to involve different agencies in charge of the protection from, the prevention of and the fight against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children and to engage with civil society in the collection of data to observe and evaluate the phenomenon of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.

Recommendation 12: The Lanzarote Committee **invites all Parties** to ensure that the available data on child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse is used to inform the development of policies and measures and to monitor progress in their implementation.

Key message: We need to build the culture of evidence-based decisions in our public institutions.

Examples of practice

- In the United Kingdom, child sexual abuse is considered a national security risk; this allows for an easier sharing of data between government agencies.
- In the Netherlands, the authorities are preparing to start gathering data on sexual abuse experiences from children below 16, in addition to surveys that are already conducted with those aged 16 and over.

Key takeaways

- ❖ Population surveys are one of the **key measures** to understand prevalence.
- ❖ Data collected by different agencies should be **compatible and comparable**.
- ❖ **Sexual offences against children should be captured separately** in official crime statistics with a breakdown by types of abuse and gender/age of victim.
- ❖ Data supporting the delivery of services in other sectors such as social care, education and health should capture cases of child sexual exploitation and sexual Abuse, via mandatory reporting duty or incentives.
- ❖ **Interministerial co-operation and collaboration with civil society** are key.
- ❖ Coordination of data collection can be ensured by different mechanisms, including **specialised government units or independent bodies**.

Outstanding challenges

In some countries, privacy regulations increasingly impede access to data necessary to form a policy response.

The lack of common definitions complicates data collection and analysis.

Harnessing data from Barnahus and other MDIA services to inform policies and practice

Lanzarote Committee report on data collection mechanisms

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Recommendation 9: The Lanzarote Committee **invites all Parties** to diversify the sources of data collected, beyond administrative data, to understand the phenomenon of child sexual exploitation and abuse, in a comprehensive manner, such as data from helplines, surveys and other relevant sources.

Key message: Barnahus data turns individual experiences into collective insight.

Examples of practice

- In Iceland, Barnahus data revealed an increasing proportion of cases involving children from migration backgrounds. In response, the authorities developed guidance for culturally sensitive interviewing and interpretation, and expanded outreach initiatives.
- In Cyprus, insights provided by Barnahus data on consensual sexual activity among peers underscored the need for comprehensive sexuality education.
- In the Republic of Moldova, Barnahus data identified areas requiring improved child protection and outstanding systemic gaps, which fed into key national law reforms.

Key takeaways:

- ❖ Barnahus and other multi-disciplinary interagency models are rich sources of data to help policy makers **understand the nature** of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.
- ❖ **Civil society organisations** play a crucial role in collecting and analysing data.
- ❖ Data can guide swift timely policy action and ensure that child protection systems remain **resilient under crisis conditions**.
- ❖ **Standardisation of definitions** and classifications across regions enhances the reliability and comparability of data, strengthening cross-country responses.
- ❖ **Disaggregation** of data by age, sex, origin, and disability is essential to **identify disparities**, revealing gaps in protection and guiding more inclusive interventions.
- ❖ **Integration of data within a single agency prevents fragmentation**, facilitates coordinated policy responses, and reduces the risk of duplication.
- ❖ Strong **ethical governance** and **robust data-protection measures** build trust, foster professional cooperation and enhance public confidence in child protection systems.
- ❖ Ongoing **research and continuous analysis** of Barnahus data are key to refining practice and driving improvements across the justice, health, and welfare sectors.

Outstanding challenges

Ethics and data protection must be further addressed to strengthen evidence-based policy. The Barnahus model proves that rigorous safeguards can coexist with effective information use.

Enriching evidence-based policy making through engagement with children, including victims and survivors

Lanzarote Committee report on data collection mechanisms

Recommendation 3: The Lanzarote Committee requires **all Parties**, in accordance with Article 9, paragraph 1 of the Lanzarote Convention, to encourage child participation, in accordance with the evolving capacities of the child, in the development of state policies, programmes or other initiatives to combat sexual exploitation and abuse of children.

Key message: Children are so glad that adults finally have the courage to sit and talk about their experiences of violence.

Examples of participation

- Population wide crime survey, and school surveys on experiences of violence against children.
- In-depth interviews with children, including victims and survivors of child sexual abuse.
- Engaging with victims and survivors of child sexual abuse directly in policy making and advocacy efforts.

Key takeaways:

- ❖ Child participation, including victims and survivors, in the development of policies and programmes can be done in a **safe and meaningful** way to strengthen evidence-based legislation, policy and practice.
- ❖ Participation in **population wide surveys** is a powerful tool to reach children who are “without voice” and may not have other opportunities to disclose abuse.
- ❖ The preparation of the process is crucial to ensure safe and ethical participation that empowers children and does not retraumatise them. **Listening to children can be part of the healing process.**
- ❖ The risks of not listening to children in relation to this topic are far greater than the risks of involving them in a safe participation process. Any risks posed by the participation process can be **identified and mitigated** during the planning and implementation.
- ❖ Practical **safeguards to mitigate risks** during participation include: informed consent, risk assessment, opportunities to opt in and opt out of participation at any time, providing meaningful feedback on the outcomes of the participation process.
- ❖ **Passive safeguards** such as informing children and parents about support services must be in place but these must be complemented with **Active safeguards**. These include: informing and training school staff in advance of the participation process, providing contact details of support services that staff can refer children into, conducting surveys within the wider context of sexuality education, co-ordinating with existing support services to prepare responses in case children contact them in connection with the participation process.

Outstanding challenges

Parents may deny their child the right to participate in surveys or other initiatives due to fear of re-traumatisation or secondary victimisation. Parents that are involved in offending against their own children may also block their child from participating to avoid disclosure.

Enhancing data collection and sharing across different agencies and feeding into international data collection efforts

Lanzarote Committee report on data collection mechanisms

Recommendation 4: The Lanzarote Committee requires all Parties, in accordance with Article 10, paragraph 1 of the Lanzarote Convention, to involve different agencies in charge of the protection from, the prevention of and the fight against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children and to engage with civil society in the collection of data to observe and evaluate the phenomenon of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.

Recommendation 9: The Lanzarote Committee invites all Parties to diversify the sources of data collected, beyond administrative data, to understand the phenomenon of child sexual exploitation and abuse, in a comprehensive manner, such as data from helplines, surveys and other relevant sources.

Recommendation 14: The Lanzarote Committee invites all Parties to align their statistical classification of crimes with the parameters used by the United Nations International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes and International Classification on Violence against Children.

Key message: Policies based on evidence and surveys produce a positive impact in the long-term.

Examples of practice

- The Republic of Moldova is on the path to establishing a unified, operational system for collecting, validating, and reporting data on child sexual exploitation and abuse. This will align national monitoring with the Lanzarote Convention, national legislation, and upcoming personal data protection reforms.
- Violence against children surveys (VACS) and results from the “Power of Data to Action” USAID HEARD review of the VACS Data to Action process in 20 countries show that countries integrated VACS results into broader child-related policies: 21 countries used VACS data to inform policy and programmatic action and 12 countries released national action plans to end violence against children.

Key takeaways

- ❖ **Strong government leadership** and coordination across sectors is needed for the development of plans and policies. Multiple actors (state and non-state) gather reliable and relevant sets of data that needs to be aggregated.
- ❖ **A strong data collection mechanism at national level:**
 - Produces standardised, comparable, and audit-ready national datasets.
 - Reduces reporting gaps and inconsistencies across institutions
 - Strengthens evidence-based compliance assessments and follow-up actions.
- ❖ Once data is collected and collated at national level, it can be used to **feed into international data collection exercises**.

Outstanding challenges

All areas of prevention and research were identified as in need of greater funding.

Transnational sex offenders: strengthening policies to prevent re-offending abroad

Lanzarote Committee report on data collection mechanisms

Recommendation 11: The Lanzarote Committee requires Parties that have not yet done so, in accordance with Article 37 paragraph 3 of the Lanzarote Convention, to co-operate with other Parties through the exchange of the identity and the genetic profile of persons convicted of the offences established in accordance with the Lanzarote Convention, in line with data sharing agreements and protocols, for the purpose of prevention and prosecution of such offences.

Key message: Most offenders who travel to sexually abuse children have no previous convictions. Controlling the travel of convicted persons cannot be the only line of defence.

Examples of practice

- INTERPOL notices can be used to share information about persons of interest including persons convicted or suspected of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.

Key takeaways

- ❖ People who travel to sexually abuse children have **mixed profiles** including tourists, business travellers, volunteers and include men and women.
- ❖ Child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse is a **public health issue** requiring a multi-layered prevention approach. States need to also disrupt opportunities for offending at community and societal level through awareness raising and education.
- ❖ When offenders come out of prison they need **monitoring and supervision**.
- ❖ **Robust collaboration and data sharing** across sectors and borders is essential to reduce opportunities for offending at home and abroad.
- ❖ Effective data sharing across borders requires **strong political will and quality data**.
- ❖ Reducing opportunities for offending includes **strengthening child safeguarding** in organisations working with children and **reducing access to children in vulnerable situations**. Multi-disciplinary and interagency co-ordination is key.
- ❖ Actively protecting children against sexual abuse requires **efficient administrative and regulatory procedures to screen and train** those in contact with children, in addition to robust criminal law frameworks.

Outstanding challenges

Sharing of DNA profiles across borders remains a significant challenge. Continued lack of harmonisation of criminal offences continues to provide offenders with opportunities to travel to places where criminal laws are less protective of children or capacities to investigate and prosecute offences are limited.

Highlights



Conference programme:

18 November 2025	
09.00-09.30	Registration of participants
09.30-10.00	High level opening - Daniella Misail-Nichitin, Minister of Internal Affairs, Republic of Moldova - Natalia Plugaru, Minister of Labour and Social Protection, Republic of Moldova - Maria José Castello Branco, Chairperson of the Lanzarote Committee - Agnes von Maravić, Head of Children's Rights Division, Council of Europe - Falk Lange, Head of the Council of Europe Office in Chisinau
10.00-11.00	Evidence-based policy making Questions for discussion: What does "evidence-based policy making" mean? What sort of data is required? How do States do this in practice? Moderator: Elena Botezatu, President International Centre La Strada Moldova - Daniella Misail-Nichitin, Minister of Internal Affairs, Republic of Moldova - Leah Buck, International Lead, Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Unit, United Kingdom Home Office - Conny Rijken, National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Violence against Children, the Netherlands (online) - Elena Martellozzo, Director of European Hub, and Inga Vermeulen, Research Fellow, Childlight – Global Child Safety Institute Discussion
11.00-11.30	Coffee Break
11.30-12.30	Harnessing data from Barnahus and other MDIA services to inform policies and practice Questions for discussion: How can data from Barnahus and other MDIA services be used to better understand the nature and phenomenon of child sexual abuse? How is the data gathered by Barnahus/MDIA services transmitted to national authorities? How governments use this data to inform, update, or design national policies and strategies to combat child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse?

	Moderator: Mireya García de Murcia, Legal Advisor, Lanzarote Committee Secretariat, Council of Europe - Páll Magnússon, Lanzarote Committee representative, Iceland - Katerina Melissari, Coordinator of Child Protection Department, Hope for Children, Cyprus - Vasile Cușca, State Secretary of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Republic of Moldova - Daniela Sîmboteanu, Centrul Național de Prevenire a Abuzului față de Copii, CNPAC, Republic of Moldova Discussion
12.30-14.00 Lunch	
14.00-15.15	Workshop 1: Enriching evidence-based policy making through engagement with children, including victims and survivors. Room: Nistru Ballroom Moderator: Claire Cody, Safer Young Lives Research Centre - Daniela Sîmboteanu, Centrul Național de Prevenire a Abuzului față de Copii, CNPAC, Republic of Moldova - Sara Platten Bäckström, Office of the Ombudsman for Children, Sweden - Markus Kaakinen, Associate Professor of Criminal Policy (Tenure Track), Institute of Criminology and Legal Policy, University of Helsinki, Finland Discussion Workshop 2: Enhancing data collection and sharing across different agencies and feeding into international data collection efforts. Room: Loft Lounge Moderator: George Nikolaidis, Psychiatrist Researcher, Department of Mental Health and Social Welfare, Greece - Case – study: A proposal for a data collection mechanism (Republic of Moldova): Irina Urumova and Mariana Ianachevici, independent consultants for the Council of Europe - Manuela Balliet-Ahogo, Deputy Director, Data to Action, Together for Girls Discussion
15.15-15:45 Coffee break	

15:45-16:00	Reporting back from breakout sessions Moderator Agnes von Maravić, Head of Children's Rights Division, Council of Europe - Claire Cody, Safer Young Lives Research Centre - George Nikolaidis, Psychiatrist Researcher, Department of Mental Health and Social Welfare, Greece
16.00-17.00	Transnational sex offenders: strengthening policies to prevent re-offending abroad Moderator: Naomi Trewinnard, Legal Advisor, Lanzarote Committee Secretariat, Council of Europe Questions for discussion: How can data on convicted offenders who travel be used to prevent re-offending and protect children? Are current policies and procedures adequate to prevent convicted offenders from travelling to sexually abuse children in other countries? - Sendrine Constant, Director of Programmes, ECPAT International (online) - Mark Beavan, Head Crimes Against Children, INTERPOL - Anton Toni Klančnik, O3 European Cyber Crime Centre (EC3) Specialist in AP Twins, EUROPOL Discussion
17.00-17.30	Closing remarks - Maria José Castello Branco, Chairperson of the Lanzarote Committee

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