

Cyprus

Information provided further the statement by the Lanzarote Committee Chair and Vice-Chairperson on stepping up protection of children against sexual exploitation and abuse in times of the COVID-19 pandemic

No information received.

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Responses to specific questions by the Bureau of the Lanzarote Committee on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the protection of children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse

- 1. To what extent, if at all, has the threat of child sexual abuse/exploitation changed due to COVID-19? If so:**
 - Please tell us about whether the level of risk has increased/decreased/remained the same and if possible specify this with regard to the various types of sexual offences against children (Articles 18-23 of the Convention);**

Although there are no statistics or research in the area, we believe that the risk has increased concerning cases of sexual abuse of children within the family. As schools are the main source of referrals, for child abuse, due to schools closing, referrals of abuse concerning children decreased dramatically. The risk has also increased concerning cases of sexual abuse and/or exploitation of children via ICTs, since children during the lock down were exposed more to the use of internet (i.e. to study, for leisure, etc.).

- You may also wish to indicate any emerging trends relating to child sexual abuse/exploitation, as the result of COVID-19, and point at measures taken to address them.**

No information received.

- 2. Did lockdown cause child sexual abuse/exploitation cases (identified/reported) to increase, decrease or stay the same? Please submit data (number of victims/offenders) and highlight what you think may explain the trend.**

No information received.

- 3. Please also tell us whether and how general child safeguarding measures were, or are likely to be, affected by measures taken by governments in response to COVID-19. In addition, highlight any additional, specific measures put in place during lockdown to ensure reporting by victims of child sexual abuse/exploitation as well as to support and assist them, and whether these measures will be maintained even when the lockdown is lifted.**

During the lock down, all the relevant services continued to receive referrals and report the cases to the Children's House, which continued its operations. The Children's House in cooperation with the relevant services continued to handle cases of sexual abuse and/or exploitation of children.

A helpline (1466) was created by an NGO and operates 24 hours, 7 days a week. The helpline was not only created for cases of sexual abuse and/or exploitation of children, but as a helpline to provide help and guidance to children and families. In case a sexual abuse of a child is reported to the line, the call centre informs immediately the Children's House.

Furthermore, the Police is in the process of creating a new mobile application in order for a victim of violence to be able to ask for immediate intervention.

- 4. Finally, please tell us whether children have been duly listened to on decision-making concerning their protection against sexual abuse/exploitation during this period. Please also tell us whether and how children will be involved in decision-making on or assessing the impact of COVID-19 measures in the future.**

Unfortunately, due to the immediate measures for public health that had to be taken by the Republic of Cyprus, there was no time for consultation. Professionals and NGOs in the area of children's rights were involved in the decision-making processes. The House of Representatives also played a monitoring role through emergency meeting during the pandemic.