

## Denmark

### **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);**
  - **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.**

“Professionals working with or for children expressed concern in the media about the threat of an increased level of abuse shortly after the schools and other institutions were ordered to shut down. Further, leading persons from some police districts and some of the so-called Children’s Houses<sup>1</sup> have expressed the same sort of concern during conversations with members of the National Police. In general, they were worried that vulnerable children would be further exposed if their parents or caregivers already had an abusive tendency. The local police are aware of the threat and have a close cooperation with the local social authorities and the Children Houses.”

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<sup>1</sup> When a child has been subject to a crime, including sexual violence and sexual exploitation, the police have a close cooperation with the social authorities and other professionals. In this regard, a so-called Children’s House is an essential element. The house is a child-friendly, interdisciplinary and multi-agency centre for child victims. The children are interviewed in the house and other professionals take care of their social or mental needs.

**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.**

The Danish National Police has informed the Ministry of Justice of the following:

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Number of cases reported to the police	JAN-19	FEB-19	MAR-19	APR-19	JAN-20	FEB-20	MAR-20	APR-20
Rape by intercourse with a child under the age of 12	9	9	8	7	11	8	8	10
Intercourse with a child under the age of 15	18	22	9	19	18	24	14	5
Other sexual interaction with a child under the age of 12	16	11	26	16	16	12	9	3
Other sexual interaction with a child under the age of 15	7	10	38	9	13	11	4	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>20</b>

Please, note that the numbers are relatively small and therefore even minor deviations or small corrections cause big changes in percentage. In this regard, it is also noteworthy that the newest registered cases in any type of crime might change later due to updates and corrections.

Nonetheless, it appears to be quite clear that the number of reported cases has gone down significantly during the lock-down. The total number of cases increased appr. 11% from January and February 2019 compared with the same two months in 2020 (before the lockdown). The restrictions regarding schools and other institutions were introduced in mid-March 2020. The table shows that the number of recorded cases already dropped during that month and in April 2020 the number of recorded cases were more than 60% lower than in April 2020. The National Police does not think that the significant registered drop in March and April reflects the true development in abuse cases. It is more likely that the cases have not been detected by professionals or by other adults related to the exposed children. However, it is impossible at pre-sent to foresee if recent cases of abuse will be reported to the police at a later time.”

The Danish Ministry of Justice may further note that both a psychologist from the Centre for Victims of Sexual Assault, Rigshospitalet, and a senior researcher from the Danish Center for Social Science Research, VIVE<sup>2</sup>, have stated that the decline may also be due to lack of socialization caused by the covid-19-restrictions<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> VIVE is an independent research and analysis centre operating under the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Interior that carries out research and analysis projects in all the major aspects of welfare and the welfare state.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/anmeldelser-om-seksuelle-overgreb-mod-boern-styrtdykker-under-coronakrisen> (Article available only in Danish)

- 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.**

The Danish Ministry of Social Affairs and the Interior has informed the Ministry of Justice of the following:

“The Act on Social Services makes it clear that children have the right to be protected from all forms of abuse. The definition of ‘abuse’ is broad and includes, thus, both sexual abuse, physical violence and mental abuse. Anyone who becomes aware that a child is in need of special support has a duty to notify the social authorities.

If it is suspected that a child is a victim of any kind of abuse, then the municipality has a duty to investigate that suspicion and to initiate the necessary help and support for the child. These demands apply equally to all municipalities in Denmark. Among other things the municipalities are obliged to respond to all notifications about possible abuse within 24 hours.

Efforts for vulnerable children including children subject to abuse are a so-called critical function, which has been maintained during the period of COVID-19 including during the lockdown. The municipalities must thus ensure that vulnerable children and young people who need help and support can continue to receive the necessary help. Among other thing, this means, that:

- All placement of children in places of residence and in foster families etc. has been maintained.
- The municipalities continue to process notifications of concerns about a child or young person and supply help and aid if needed e.g. in cases where a child is suspected of being abused.
- That children and young people should continue to receive the necessary support, including placement if they need it.

The temporary closure of schools and day-care centers to contain the coronavirus has entailed a potential risk of further pressure on vulnerable children and families, especially children who live with sickness, abuse or other problems at home.

The government and municipalities have been making efforts to find solutions so that all children and their families get through the corona crisis as well as possible. Among other things, it has been ensured that children with very special social, educational or treatment needs could stay in their day care or school. That includes children who experience problems at home to an extent, that they need a break from everyday life.

Furthermore, the municipalities established emergency care throughout the country not just for the children whose parents have a critical social function but also as an option for vulnerable children. That includes children where there is a concern that the parents cannot attend to the children's daily needs e.g. due to abuse of parents.

In addition, the government including the Minister of Social Affairs and the Interior has repeatedly emphasized publicly the duty of municipalities to react and ensure help and support to vulnerable children.

The situation with the COVID-19 has meant that a number of organizations, who supply counselling and help, experience a greater need for them to provide counseling and practical help to vulnerable children and their families. Therefore, the parliament has set aside DKK 13.5 million for a children's package to support a number of organizations' work with vulnerable children.

After the breakout of the COVID-19 there has been issued an executive order in the field of social services, that provides a possibility of temporarily derogating from public and private obligations towards the public sector. However, this order stipulates that the municipal council cannot fail to process notifications of children and young people, cf. Article 4, Section 2.

In addition, Article 9 and 10 of the order stipulate that a specific and individual assessment must be made with regard to each derogation. Furthermore, the order does not apply if it will cause a safety or health risk to the individual citizen or if it will result in restrictions on emergency or urgently needed assistance and support under the Social Services Act."

Finally, in regard to the measures taken by the National Danish Police please see the answer to question 1.

**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.**

The Danish Ministry of Social Affairs and the Interior has informed the Ministry of Justice of the following:

"Help and support for children including children subject to abuse is a critical function maintained under COVID-19. The Act on Social Services states that each child is to be included in their own social case in compliance with the principle of children's right to be heard. In addition, the municipality must conduct a children's interview with the child before making any decisions on special support for the child.

In regard to the involvement of children in the decision-making process under COVID-19, children organizations have been involved in partnerships in connection with the reopening of Denmark after the lockdown."