

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Strasbourg, 1 June 2023

ENF-VAE(2023)PV01

Committee of experts on the prevention of violence (ENF-VAE)

First Meeting (Strasbourg, Palais, Room 6)

(In person meeting)

16 – 17 May 2023

Meeting report

*Prepared by the Children's Rights Division
Directorate of Anti-Discrimination
Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity*

Agenda item 1: Opening of the meeting and welcome

1. The first meeting of the Committee of experts on the prevention of violence (ENF-VAE, hereafter the Committee) was opened and temporarily chaired by Irena GUIDIKOVA, Head of the Children's Rights and Sport Values Department. In her welcoming words, she referred to the Council of Europe's [Strategy for the Rights of the Child \(2022-2027\)](#), in which freedom from violence for all children is a strategic objective, covering violence in all its forms, including neglect, hate speech and bullying as well as online violence.
2. Regina JENSDOTTIR, Head of the Children's Rights Division, welcomed the experts and recognised the excellent input they will bring to the Committee's work. She pointed to the importance of involving children throughout the work of ENF-VAE and further emphasised the need to empower parents, carers, and all those with responsibilities towards children to make sure that children stay safe and that they understand risks associated with what they observe and how they behave with their peers. It is therefore essential to find the right tools to support member States in protecting children from violence.
3. The Committee was then greeted by Zeynep USAL-KANZLER, Secretary to the Committee, who thanked colleagues for their support in the preparation of the meeting and looked forward to the work ahead.

Agenda item 2: Tour de table

4. The members and observers of the Committee introduced themselves and their area of expertise.

Agenda item 3: Election of the Chair and Vice Chair

5. The Committee elected Maria VARGOVA (Slovakia) as its Chair for a term of office of one year, renewable once, and Alina SEEL (Austria) as its Vice Chair for a term of office of one year, renewable once.

Agenda item 4: Appointment of the Gender Equality Rapporteur of ENF-VAE

6. The Committee appointed Viktoria SEBHELYI (Hungary) as its Gender Equality Rapporteur.

Agenda item 5: Adoption of the agenda and order of business

7. The Committee adopted the agenda as it appears in Appendix I.

Agenda item 6: Information on relevant Council of Europe activities, including of the CDENF, under the Strategic Objective 1 of the Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027) and terms of reference of the ENF-VAE for 2023-2024

8. The Committee took note of the information provided by the Secretariat on relevant CDENF, activities under the Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027), drawing particular attention to the draft Recommendation containing Guidelines on Strengthening reporting systems on violence against children, which had been approved by the CDENF and would soon be presented to the Committee of Ministers in view of its adoption. Lastly, information was provided regarding the upcoming implementation review of the Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on child-friendly justice.
9. The Committee took note of the information provided by the Secretariat on the terms of reference of ENF-VAE and discussed the deliverables as foreseen until the end of 2024, which would be subject to a possible revision in light of the outcomes of the 4th Council of Europe Summit of Heads of State and Government (Reykjavík, 16-17 May 2023) and the revision of the Programme and Budget.

10. The Committee then exchanged with the representatives of several Secretariats of the Council of Europe about their related activities on prevention of violence and age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education. The following Secretariats were present and elaborated on their relevant work: the Lanzarote Committee (Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse- i.e. the Lanzarote Convention); the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights; the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), the independent expert body responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) and the Gender Equality Division.
11. During the discussion that followed, participants mentioned that long-term change in attitudes and stereotypes that are based on prejudices that might justify sexual violence can only be achieved from a young age through education in both formal and informal establishments. While the schools have a crucial role in the provision of age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education (hereafter CSE), it is also essential to remember the importance of wider communities, including families and people working with children and other networks. The need to create safe environments for delivering CSE as well as the acknowledgement of children who, in addition to being victims, can also be aggressors and witnesses of violence were further underlined. The participants also recalled that where the CSE is framed as a health issue, there is no critical discussion of gender stereotypes, and the issue of consent, for instance, only focuses on girls even though boys are also integral to changing stereotypes that are the foundation of sexual violence. In this regard, the importance of gender equality as an outcome of CSE was particularly mentioned, in view of prevalence of victims of sexual violence or trafficking victims among girls.

Agenda item 7: Exchange of views between experts

12. The Committee held a first exchange of views on the key areas and main challenges in law, policy and practice on strengthening responses for preventing and combatting violence against children, including sexual violence and harmful behaviour, particularly through the provision of age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education. The Chair brought the discussion to six main questions shared previously with participants. During the discussion between experts, the following points were mentioned:
 - Implementation of measures aiming at tackling violence against children (VAC) often face a number of difficulties, including clearly to define the aims and addresses of campaigns, how to formulate the message, and how to safely and appropriately involve children's views. A recommendation around national campaigns against VAC could be a useful tool.
 - Police and administrative intervention in case of VAC inside the family often falls short of supporting the family as a whole. Experts also raised the excessive length of investigations into VAC, and the lack of reasons given if such proceedings are discontinued.
 - There is a lack of consensus on the very concept of prevention amongst professionals. In some countries, any death attributable to domestic violence triggers an investigation by the national board of health and welfare in view of drawing lessons for the future. One such investigation revealed that health and social services who had been in contact with victims shortly before their death had failed to ask them if they had been exposed to violence.
 - Judges in custody or contact cases had the tendency not to believe allegations about domestic violence against children and parents, better knowledge is needed, and risk assessments are to be improved.
 - The definition of 'effectiveness' of prevention of VAC was considered important and oftentimes fragmentation regarding who is responsible for what is counter effective. There is a continuous need to advance inter-sectoral cooperation, proper coordination between all the players, and clear-cut responsibilities are imperative in order to provide effective response. This might include a freephone or online chat number to report suspected VAC.
 - With the prevalence of online violence, a recent problem has also been understanding and implementation of national policies on General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). It sometimes appears that there is no data information on abused children because GDPR

is misunderstood and used to block assistance on child protection issues. The experience is also that training of high position of law enforcement practitioners is in place, but for first responders it is still missing – i.e. police officers first attending a domestic violence scene.

- Experts commended the Council of Europe’s work to support member States in setting up multidimensional structures, including Barnahus, which is intended for victims of sexual violence and witnesses of domestic violence.
- Involving men and boys in these discussions and capacity building is a very topical issue.
- Reporting systems for children should be strengthened and challenges faced by some professionals bound by confidentiality should be further examined. A mechanism of support for child and family after the reporting must be ensured.
- Special attention had to be given to children in situation of vulnerability, eg children who have a disability are often overrepresented when it comes to VAC.
- One of challenges in VAC is the failure to recognise the impact of the history of child-hood trauma suffered by adults on their behaviour towards children.
- Five main challenges faced by member States in putting in place effective CSE: safe spaces for prevention; compassion for adults who have suffered violence as children and now inflict it on children; loss of intimacy through social media and commercialisation of intimacy; misunderstanding affection, intimacy and protection; and the political use (instrumentalization) of CSE.
- One of biggest concerns is that CSE is often mistaken with being a tool to teach children about sexual intercourse instead of perceived as a tool to prevent sexual violence. The task of CSE is primarily to teach about relationships and concepts such as consent and young people’s access to digital material including the (criminal and other) consequences of forwarding self-generated pictures received from peers.
- It would be useful to closely look at the different models of developing CSE in different member States, including work at pre-school level.
- It is important to distinguish between natural development of children through their exploration of sexuality and harmful situations. Training programmes should reassure parents/teachers about what is normal/not normal.

Agenda item 8: Proposed working methods and workplan

13. The Committee approved the workplan as outlined in the working documents ([ENF-VAE\(2023\)01](#)) as presented by the Secretariat subject to an extension of the mandate, suggested to prioritise the work during the next two years towards the following deliverables, which the Committee agreed on subsequently:

- the drafting of a feasibility study on age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education to strengthen responses for inter alia preventing and combatting violence against children, including sexual violence and harmful or risky behaviour by children;
- the development of non-binding standard(s) on the basis of the above-mentioned feasibility study;
- the implementation review of the Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)10 on Council of Europe policy guidelines on integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence.

Agenda item 9.1 Age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education to strengthen responses for - inter alia - preventing and combating violence, including risky or harmful sexual behaviour by children

14. Dr Catherine O’SULLIVAN, an expert in criminal law and criminology from the University College Cork (Ireland), made a presentation on age-appropriate CSE to strengthen the responses to prevent violence against and among children as a basis for the preparation of a feasibility study and a non-binding instrument. The presentation, which included an extensive overview of the international human rights law framework on CSE, was followed by in-depth discussion on some of the issues raised where, among others, the following was pointed out:

- Interventions should encourage consultation with parents in advance of preparing programmes on CSE at schools. Once parents know what the purpose is and that it will

actually protect their children, resistance on CSE ends. This problem is the result of sustained, deliberate and misleading campaigns by bad actors and parents subjected to fear mongering on the provision of CSE.

- A national awareness raising campaign, covering the legal context, could be an important strategy on violence prevention, especially in view of lack of understanding on the concept of consent, including amongst adults.
- Training of teachers on CSE is crucial and such training should not be limited to biological aspects.
- Harmful practices, including female genital mutilation (FGM), is part of CSE. There are certain things children cannot protect themselves against and that is one. In this regard, part of CSE should also include information what is legally prohibited and what is culturally prohibited.
- It is necessary to consult children regarding what they want CSE to look like.

Agenda item 10: Update on key developments and other events by participants and observers

15. Joanna HERAT, Chief (a.i.) of the Section of Health & Education at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), made a presentation on the extensive work of UNESCO regarding CSE, being one component in the prevention of violence against children.

16. This presentation was followed by an exchange. The topics discussed included: the ideal age in starting the provision of CSE; the language and terminology used in CSE according to the age groups of children; the challenge of not enough attention paid to gender, equality and harmful norms in the scope of CSE; the global partnership forum for CSE initiated by UNESCO; available tools, particularly ones focused in the European region –to enhance quality of CSE; involvement of children in the design of CSE; measurement of impact of CSE, including on preventing peer to peer violence. Against this background, the following points were particularly underlined:

- It is important to teach children the correct names for their body parts because if children do not know what has been done to them, they cannot accuse perpetrators. Using 'fun' names like 'flower' for body parts is inappropriate and dangerous.
- Feelings must also be acknowledged. Even though very young children cannot understand what they are going through, they can express how it made them feel (their internal sensations).
- Particular attention must be paid to online settings because you cannot touch the other person online. The pandemic has also prevented and created a fear of physical contact.
- The question on involvement of children in the design of CSE is an important one, and a gap in work so far.
- Measurement of impact of CSE is a complex matter. A number of studies often focus on health outcomes – e.g. the role of CSE in the reduction of pregnancy. Some studies have investigated CSE and understanding of rights in prevention of violence. While evidence is positive and CSE is now understood to be an effective component, more research should be done with a view to better understand how children understand the other aspects covered by CSE, including gender equitable attitudes. It should also be remembered that CSE is part of a package of tools and interventions for violence prevention.
- Given the sensitivity of the topic, systems need to be in place where education professionals can communicate with parents. More and targeted measures should be taken for vulnerable groups – especially for children with disabilities who experience high levels of violence. Work on gender equality can also improve understanding of other sexual orientation and gender identities.
- On peer-to-peer violence, those who work on CSE and those who work on violence have started to come together more frequently, given the close connection between these topics.
- Awareness of violence must coincide with awareness of reporting mechanisms. There is a gap in CSE here and hence, it should be accompanied with awareness on reporting mechanisms.

Agenda item 9.2: Implementation review report on Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)10 on Council of Europe policy guidelines on integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence.

17. The Committee took note of Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)10 on Council of Europe policy guidelines on integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence and explained the methodology applicable to the conduct of implementation reviews of such instruments as presented by the Secretariat. The necessity to gather data from member States about actions being taken to implement the guidelines was emphasised. The Committee instructed the Secretariat to prepare a questionnaire on the relevant national law and practice for the review of the implementation of the Recommendation, covering the challenges in developing national strategies, that can be examined at the next meeting.

Agenda item 11: Organisation of consultations with relevant stakeholders, including the discussion on child participation in the context of the work on ENF-VAE

18. The Committee exchanged on relevant stakeholders as well as on the modalities and organisation of consultations or hearings in the upcoming meetings, primarily in the context of the draft feasibility study. Topics for such consultations could notably be the responsible engagement with new media (internet) and digital literacy for children; initiatives at national and local levels, to support victims of sexual abuse as well as good national practices in the provision of CSE. The Committee was invited to send further proposals to the Secretariat by the first half of June.

19. The Committee discussed the child participation dimension in carrying out its deliverables, as proposed in the workplan, and agreed that the involvement of children is crucial and that it might be good to have child consultations after the preparation of a first draft of the feasibility study, when there is a better sense of challenges on the topic.

20. The Committee further exchanged on synergies and co-operation with other relevant international and national initiatives.

Agenda item 12: Any other business

21. No further issue was raised.

Agenda item 13: Date and place of next meeting

22. The Committee took note that the next meeting of ENF-VAE would be held, in person, in Strasbourg from 11th to 12th October 2023.

Agenda item 14: Approval of the meeting report

23. The Committee agreed to approve the meeting report in written proceedings.

Appendix 1

Agenda and Order of Business

1.	Opening of the meeting and welcome	
2.	Tour de table	<u>Reference documents</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• List of participants - ENF-VAE(2023)LOP1• List of members
3.	Election of the Chair and Vice-Chair of ENF-VAE	<u>Working documents</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• List of candidatures - ENF-VAE(2023)03• Article 12 of Resolution CM/Res(2021)3 on intergovernmental committees and subordinate bodies, their terms of reference and working methods
4.	Appointment of the Gender Equality Rapporteur of ENF-VAE	<u>Reference document</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• List of candidatures - ENF-VAE(2023)03• Terms of reference of the ENF-VAE
5.	Adoption of the agenda and order of business	<u>Working document</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Draft agenda and order of business - ENF-VAE(2023)OJ1 rev
	<i>Family picture scheduled on 11.45 am</i>	
6.	Information on relevant Council of Europe activities, including of the CDENF, under the Strategic Objective 1 of the Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027) and terms of reference of the ENF-VAE for 2023-2024	<u>Reference documents</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Terms of reference of the CDENF• Terms of reference of the ENF-VAE• Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027)• CoE Conventions and Recommendations – Key Resources for implementing the Strategy (2022-2027) CDENF(2023)INF2• Report on the High-level Launching Conference for the Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027) (CDENF(2022)11, 21-22) <u>Theme IV – Deep Dive Conversation B: “Comprehensive and age-appropriate sexuality education for preventing violence”</u>
7.	Exchange of views between experts	
8.	Proposed working methods and workplan	<u>Working document</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Working methods and workplan - ENF-VAE(2023)01

Key deliverables

9.1 *Age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education to strengthen responses for - inter alia - preventing and combating violence, including risky or harmful sexual behavior by children*

(presentation by consultants followed by a discussion)

9.

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

(presentation by the Secretariat)

Reference document

- Study on Sexual violence and harmful sexual behaviour displayed by children: Nature, causes, consequences and responses, Prepared by: Prof Simon Hackett, Durham University, United Kingdom - [CDENF-GT-VAE\(2020\)04](#)

Information document

- Resources and excerpts of relevant international and European instruments on age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education [ENF-VAE\(2023\)02](#)

Reference document

- [CM/Rec\(2009\)10](#) on Council of Europe policy guidelines on integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence
- Methodology to conduct implementation reviews of Committee of Ministers' Recommendations - [CDENF\(2022\)27](#)

10. **Update on key developments and other events by participants and observers**

11. **Organisation of consultations with relevant stakeholders, including the discussion on child participation in the context of the work of ENF-VAE**

12. **Any other business**

13. **Date and place of next meetings** 11 and 12 October, Strasbourg (in person)

14. **Adoption of the meeting report**

Working document

- Meeting report - ENF-VAE(2023)PV1
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ORDER OF BUSINESS

Date	Time (UTC+1)	Agenda items
16 May 2023	Morning 09.30 am -12.30 pm	Items 1-6
	Afternoon 2.00 pm - 5.00 pm	Items 6 (continued), 7-8

17 May 2023	Morning 09.30 am - 12.30 pm	Item 9.1, 10
	Afternoon 2.00 pm - 16.30 pm	Item 9.2, 11-14

GENERAL REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Terms of reference of ENF-VAE 2023-2024
Resolution CM/Res(2021)3 on intergovernmental committees and subordinate bodies, their terms of reference and working methods

Appendix 2

List of participants

MEMBERS / MEMBRES

Austria / Autriche

Alina Seel
Austrian Federal Chancellery
Head of Department
Directorate General VI – Family and Youth
Department VI/6 – Family Law Policy and Children's Rights

Finland / Finlande

Malja Marjo
Ministry of Social Affairs and Health
Senior Ministerial Adviser, Social Affairs

France

Solenne Donal
Juge des enfants
Tribunal Judiciaire de Paris

Greece / Grèce

Eftychia Katsigaraki
Teaching Staff & Academic Training Program Manager

Hungary / Hongrie

Viktoria Sebhelyi
Senior project manager

Slovakia / Slovaquie

Mária Vargová
National Coordination Centre for Resolving the Issues of Violence against Children
Director

Spain / Espagne

Pepa Horno
Espirales Childhood Consultancy
Independent consultant on childhood, affectivity and protection

Sweden / Suède

Ola Florin
Government Offices of Sweden, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Division for Social Services and Disability Policy
Deputy Director

PARTICIPANTS

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

Joanna Herat
Senior Programme Specialist /Team Leader

OBSERVERS / OBSERVATEURS

Defence for Children International (DCI)

Konstantina Tsekeri
Director of DCI – Greece

Missing Children Europe

Andrea Raimondi
Senior Advocacy Advisor

CONSULTANTS

Prof. Aoife Daly

Lecturer in Law
School of Law, University College Cork

Meghan O’Campbell

Reader in International Human Rights Law
Birmingham Law School, University of Birmingham

Catherine O’Sullivan

Lecturer
School of Law, Centre for Criminal Justice and Human Rights, University College Cork

COUNCIL OF EUROPE SECRETARIAT / *SECRÉTARIAT DU CONSEIL DE L’EUROPE*

Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights / *Bureau de la Commissaire aux droits de l’homme*

Charlotte Altenhoener-Dion
Advisor / *Conseillère*

Parliamentary Assembly / *Assemblée Parlementaire*

Giorgio Loddo
Secretary to the Committee on Equality and non-discrimination / *Secrétaire du Comité sur l’égalité et la non-discrimination*

Caroline Le Bourhis
Trainee / *Stagiaire*

Secretariat of the Lanzarote Committee of the Council of Europe / *Secretariat du Comité Lanzarote du Conseil de l’Europe*

Gioia Scappucci
Executive Secretary to the Lanzarote Committee/ *Secrétaire exécutive du Comité de Lanzarote*

DGII – Directorate General of Democracy / *Direction générale de la Démocratie*

Children's Rights Division / *Division des Droits des enfants*

Irena Guidikova
Head of the Children's Rights and Sport Values Department / *Chef du service des droits des enfants et des valeurs du sport*

Regina Jensdottir
Children's Rights Co-ordinator and Head of the Children's Rights Division / *Coordinatrice des droits des enfants et Cheffe de la Division des droits des enfants*

Katrin Uerpmann
Secretary of the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF) / *Secrétaire du CDENF*

Maria Asensio Velasco
Assistant Lawyer/ *Juriste assistante*

Amy Hanna
Study visitor / *Visiteur d'étude*

Gender Equality Division / Division de l'égalité de genre

Cécile Gréboval

Programme Manager / *Responsable de programme*

Violence against women Division / Division sur la violence à l'égard des femmes

Elif Sariaydin

Administrator / *Administrateur*

Education Department/ Programme du service de l'Education

Salvador Sala

Administrator / *Administrateur*

SECRETARIAT OF THE ENF-VAE / SECRÉTARIAT DU ENF-VAE

Zeynep Usal-Kanzler

Secretary to the ENF-VAE / *Secrétaire du ENF-VAE*

Children's Rights Division (DGII) / *Division des Droits des enfants (DGII)*

Audrey Winum

Project Assistant / *Assistante de projet*

Children's Rights Division (DGII) / *Droits des enfants (DGII)*

INTERPRETERS / INTERPRETES

Amanda Larivière

Didier Jungling

Rémy Jain