



FACTSHEET – ASSISTANCE TO VICTIMS

Lanzarote Committee monitoring findings on:

“The protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse facilitated by information and communication technologies (ICTs): addressing the challenges raised by child self-generated sexual images and/or videos (CSGSIV)”

Introduction

Protecting children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse facilitated by information and communication technologies (ICTs) is a common challenge faced by all States. The often transnational nature of these offences makes international cooperation of the utmost importance especially to identify and protect victims as well as to identify and prosecute perpetrators.

The Council of Europe [Convention on the Protection of Children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse](#) (“Lanzarote Convention”) is a comprehensive instrument that sets out the applicable standards necessary to:

- Prevent child sexual exploitation and abuse, including where this is facilitated by ICTs;
- Protect victims;
- Prosecute perpetrators; and
- Promote national and international co-operation to strengthen these actions.

The [Committee of the Parties to the Lanzarote Convention](#) (“the Lanzarote Committee”) monitors the implementation of the Convention in thematic monitoring rounds. This allows for all Parties to be monitored simultaneously on the same theme.

Particularly concerned by the exponential increase in offences committed using child self-generated sexual images and/or videos (CSGSIV), the Lanzarote Committee decided to dedicate its second monitoring round to this topic. The 43 States that were Party to the Convention at the time the monitoring round was launched took part.

The [implementation report](#) adopted by the Lanzarote Committee in the context of this monitoring round is based on information provided by [State Parties](#) and [other stakeholders](#) in response to a questionnaire. The implementation report also contains information received from 306 [children](#) in 10 Parties who chose to participate.

The Lanzarote Committee indicates the different levels of urgency applicable to the recommendations made by using the following terms:

- **“Require”**: when the steps recommended correspond to obligations arising from the Lanzarote Convention, as clarified by its Explanatory report;
- **“Request”**: when the steps recommended correspond to obligations arising from the Lanzarote Convention, as clarified by documents adopted by the Committee (e.g. previous monitoring round findings, opinions, other)¹;
- **“Invite”**: when the steps recommended correspond to promising practices or other measures to enhance protection of children against sexual violence even beyond specific requirements of the Lanzarote Convention.

This thematic factsheet is based on chapter VI of the implementation report on assistance to victims. It has been prepared by the Lanzarote Committee Secretariat as a practical tool to clearly identify the Committee’s analysis, its recommendations to States Parties and promising practices, as well as difficulties in implementing the Convention. It does not include updated information on measures implemented by the Parties since the adoption of the report in March 2022. Parties and other relevant stakeholders are encouraged to inform the secretariat of any relevant measures implemented after that date, which may have an impact on the Committee’s analysis and recommendations by completing this [online form](#) or by email to lanzarote.committee@coe.int.

¹ See Rule 30 (General comments, proposals and opinions) of the Lanzarote Committee’s Rules of Procedure.

General remarks

While the ultimate aim in the fight against child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse is to prevent sexual offences against children from taking place, it is also essential to ensure that victims of such offences, including when they occur as a result of the self-generation by children of sexual images and/or videos, receive the most appropriate and best possible support, assistance and psychological help.

Based on the information received by Parties, the Lanzarote Committee's report includes a comparative overview of national mechanisms for assisting child victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, particularly where this results from child self-generated sexual images and/or videos (CSGSIV). This identifies the different reporting mechanisms, including helplines, available to children and those who wish to help, and the measures, legislative or otherwise, to provide support, assistance and psychological help to children.

Lanzarote Convention –Chapter IV –Protective measures and assistance to victims

Article 12 –Reporting suspicion of sexual exploitation or sexual abuse

1. Each Party shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that the confidentiality rules imposed by internal law on certain professionals called upon to work in contact with children do not constitute an obstacle to the possibility, for those professionals, of their reporting to the services responsible for child protection any situation where they have reasonable grounds for believing that a child is the victim of sexual exploitation or sexual abuse.

2. Each Party shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to encourage any person who knows about or suspects, in good faith, sexual exploitation or sexual abuse of children to report these facts to the competent services.

Article 13 –Helplines

Each Party shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to encourage and support the setting up of information services, such as telephone or Internet helplines, to provide advice to callers, even confidentially or with due regard for their anonymity.

Article 14 –Assistance to victims

1. Each Party shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to assist victims, in the short and long term, in their physical and psycho-social recovery. Measures taken pursuant to this paragraph shall take due account of the child's views, needs and concerns. (...)

3. When the parents or persons who have care of the child are involved in his or her sexual exploitation or sexual abuse, the intervention procedures taken in application of Article 11, paragraph 1, shall include: –the possibility of removing the alleged perpetrator;

–the possibility of removing the victim from his or her family environment. The conditions and duration of such removal shall be determined in accordance with the best interests of the child.

4. Each Party shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that the persons who are close to the victim may benefit, where appropriate, from therapeutic assistance, notably emergency psychological care.

Reporting mechanisms available to child victims

All Parties have one or several reporting mechanisms in place to assist child victims of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, such as helplines, hotlines, websites, chatlines, available staff, and various applications, and many of them are run in collaboration between different bodies, including ministries and NGOs. In 18 of them, helplines are accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

However, the Lanzarote Committee noted that some Parties have set up telephone lines which are not free of charge, which undermines general access to the service, even more so in the case of vulnerable children. It further noted that few Parties have support services, such as helplines, specifically designed for child victims of online sexual abuse, and only a small minority have assistance measures provided specifically when sexual abuse occurs in the context of the dissemination of CSGSIV.

Examples of promising practices identified by the Lanzarote Committee

In **Bulgaria**, the Safe Internet Hotline and Consultative Line are working to combat the spread of CSAM and to remove inappropriate or harmful online content for children, in close cooperation with national law enforcement authorities and Interpol. Anyone wishing to report illegal online content or behaviour can easily do so anonymously to www.safenet.bg.

In **Croatia**, an application has been developed to allow Internet users to report content related to various types of sexual exploitation and abuse of children, including the dissemination of CSGSIV. The reporting procedure is simple and child-friendly, reducing the fear and psychological pressure usually caused by more formal procedures. In turn, victims whose images are published on the Internet or who have independently produced sexual content receive assistance at the Polyclinic for the Protection of Children and Young People in the City of Zagreb, an institution specialising in helping children suffering from psychological trauma.

In **Ireland**, “Hotline.ie”, the Irish national centre combatting illegal content has developed in 2021 a new reporting service to help young people and adults whose intimate images and videos have been shared online without their consent. “Hotline.ie” already offered the possibility to report child sexual abuse material and activities related to the sexual exploitation of children. The launch of the new service is part of a wider awareness campaign to highlight that sharing or threatening to share intimate images of another person without their consent is a form of abuse, and that there are now laws in place to stop it with penalties of up to seven years of imprisonment. On this occasion, the Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act, enacted in February 2021, created new offences which criminalise the non-consensual distribution of intimate images.

Recommendations identified by the Lanzarote Committee

The Lanzarote Committee **requires** Parties that are not already doing so² to take the necessary legislative or other measures to encourage and support the establishment of information services, such as telephone or internet helplines, to provide advice to child victims of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse facilitated by ICTs as well as persons wishing to help them, in a confidential manner or with due regard for their anonymity. These information services should be made available as widely as possible.^{3 4}

The Lanzarote Committee **invites** all Parties that are not already doing so to promote awareness raising or specialised training for professionals who provide advice to children through telephone or internet helplines on ICT-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse of children – including the risks

² Albania, Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Republic of Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Romania, San Marino, Serbia, Slovak Republic, and Ukraine.

³ This can be done in several ways: the service is available at extended hours, it is delivered in a language that the caller, and especially the child, can understand, and it is free of charge.

⁴ Recommendation VI-1.

associated with CSGSIV – and on how to provide appropriate support to victims and to those who wish to help them.⁵

Legislative or other measures to provide children with support, assistance and psychological help

The Lanzarote Committee noted that most Parties have adopted legislative measures to provide support, assistance and psychological help to child victims of sexual abuse or exploitation. However, many are related to the protection of children in general. The second most common type of assistance is for child victims of sexual abuse, followed by child victims of ICT-facilitated abuse, and only one Party (Hungary) has a specific law addressing the challenges raised by CSGSIV.

The forms of other measures put in place to provide support, assistance and psychological help to child victims depend on the Party: these range from financial compensation to free access to psychotherapists and psychiatrists, and special helplines and coordination mechanisms to support child victims who are abroad or who are returning to their country, especially as a result of child trafficking.

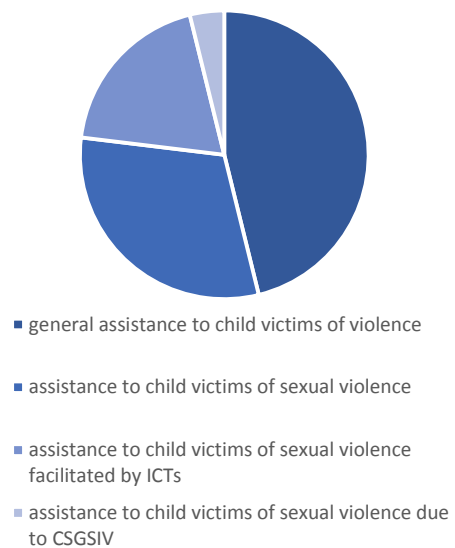
Example of a promising practice identified by the Lanzarote Committee

In some Parties, part of the team running the assistance service has been specifically trained on the topic of online child sexual abuse and exploitation:

In **Poland**, first contact workers operating within the Network of Assistance to Victims receive additional training and support from highly qualified specialists in assisting victims of domestic violence and criminal acts against sexual freedoms. The Network of Assistance to Victims provides all victims, including children and the victim's closest relatives, with legal, psychological, therapeutic and, if necessary, medical assistance. Free assistance for the victim is provided by legal advisers, attorneys-at-law, psychologists, psychotherapists and medical doctors authorised to provide the above-mentioned services on the basis of national law, including specific provisions regulating the right to exercise a profession. The Justice Fund also provides financial assistance to child victims.

in **Malta**, two professionals working for the national hotline have undergone several trainings on the online risks that children may encounter. Both are accredited as analysts by INHOPE and have been trained by Interpol on how to deal with "illegal/indecent online material".

Parties having legislation on assistance to child victims



⁵ Recommendation VI-2.

Recommendations of the Lanzarote Committee

The Lanzarote Committee **requires** Parties which are not already doing so⁶ to take the necessary legislative or other measures to assist child victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, in the short and long term, in their physical and psycho-social recovery, these measures must take due account of the child's views, needs and concerns.^{7 8}

The Lanzarote Committee **invites** Parties which are not already doing so to assist child victims of sexual exploitation and abuse facilitated by ICTs, including of offences due to the production, possession, distribution or transmission of CSGSIV in the short and long term, in their physical and psycho-social recovery, these measures must take due account of the child's views, needs and concerns.⁹

⁶ Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Republic of Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, San Marino, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine.

⁷ Recommendation VI-3.

⁸ After the adoption of the report, the Committee was informed that the situation in the Republic of Moldova is in fact in line with recommendation VI-3. Indeed, the Republic of Moldova has developed a procedure for child victim assistance in their physical and psycho-social recovery. Training material on intervention in cases of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children was developed with the support of the Council of Europe. It is [available online](#) in Romanian.

⁹ Recommendation VI-4.