



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

FACTSHEET

CIVIL SOCIETY INVOLVEMENT AND CO-OPERATION

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 VII of the implementation report on civil society involvement and co-operation. 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

The involvement of civil society in the prevention and protection of children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse is crucial and recognised by the Lanzarote Convention. Projects and programmes run by civil society, as well as co-operation between the relevant state authorities and civil society, cover a wide range of issues with varying degrees of scope. Child self-generated sexual images and/or videos (CSGSIV) are usually dealt with as part of a wider activity, although in some cases specific activities are undertaken.

Article 9 – Participation of children, the private sector, the media and civil society

1. Each Party shall encourage the participation of children, according to their evolving capacity, in the development and the implementation of state policies, programmes or other initiatives concerning the fight against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children. (...)

4. Each Party shall encourage the financing, including, where appropriate, by the creation of funds, of the projects and programmes carried out by civil society aiming at preventing and protecting children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.

Article 10 – National measures of co-ordination and collaboration

(...) 3. Each Party shall encourage co-operation between the competent state authorities, civil society and the private sector, in order to better prevent and combat sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children.

Article 14 – Assistance to victims (...)

2. Each Party shall take measures, under the conditions provided for by its internal law, to cooperate with non-governmental organisations, other relevant organisations or other elements of civil society engaged in assistance to victims.

Modalities of co-operation between state authorities and civil society in prevention and assistance to child victims of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse facilitated by ICTs, in particular as regards child self-generated sexual images and/or videos

The Lanzarote Committee noted that most Parties support civil society stakeholders as partners in the prevention of child sexual abuse and exploitation and victim assistance activities. However, the frameworks in which this co-operation takes place and the forms it takes differ significantly from one Party to another. It further observed that in most cases, co-operation with civil society is decided at the level of the national government, but the responsible ministries vary (health, justice, economy, interior, women, science, sports, etc). Only a minority of co-operation projects are decided by a national body specifically dedicated to children's rights.² In some Parties, it is not state ministries but ombudsmen or the police who are in charge of co-operation projects with civil society. In addition, some Parties encourage the implementation of prevention projects by civil society not only at federal or national level but also at regional and local level.

As regards the state's interlocutors, civil society includes a wide range of actors: NGOs, the media, telephone hotlines, educational institutions, universities, foundations, youth sports clubs, companies and family planning centres. The nature of co-operation is equally diverse: it can take the form of financial support and grants, training opportunities, co-operation through working groups, seminars

² This is the case in Albania and Latvia.

or forums, exchange of knowledge and skills, logistical advice, and donations of equipment, among others.

The Committee counts 27 Parties out of 43 supporting activities aimed at raising awareness not only among children but also among adults such as parents, educators, doctors and social workers about the existing risks and dangers of ICT for children.

The Committee also highlighted difficulties in some Parties where there is no systemic policy to encourage civil society to develop prevention projects in this area. A first difficulty is the lack of financial support provided to civil society, forcing NGOs to secure their own budget and threatening in return the sustainability of the projects. The second challenge is that there is sometimes no co-operation plan covering the whole national territory on the fight against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children online. Finally, civil society organisations are sometimes required to seek formal approval from the State to see their projects implemented in practice.

Examples of promising practices identified by the Lanzarote Committee

Some countries have embedded the need for co-operation between the state authorities and civil society in their regulatory or legislation frameworks, thus making it more sustainable:

- In **Cyprus**, the *National Strategic and Action plan for the protection and prevention of child sexual abuse and exploitation and child pornography* provides that state authorities should implement prevention projects and programmes in co-operation with other services/NGOs/private sector.
- In **Estonia**, most of the national prevention activities are coordinated by the Strategy for Preventing Violence for 2015-2020 and its implementation plan, which is amended annually.
- In **Luxembourg**, a national programme and Action plan for the promotion of emotional and sexual health, supported by five Luxembourg ministries and Family Planning, HIV-AIDS Berodung and the Psychological Centre for School Guidance, also provides for the strengthening of the networking of partners in the field, and consultation with a wide range of civil society actors.
- In **Switzerland**, several forms of support for private non-profit organisations are provided for in the Federal Law on the Promotion of Children and Youth.
- In **Turkey**, the Child Protection Code provides that public authorities, families and non-governmental organisations and other stakeholders shall work in collaboration for the protection of children, including from sexual abuse and exploitation. In 2014, the Ministry of Interior issued a circular on "Measures to Prevent Sexual Abuse of Children Online", which foresees that awareness-raising activities should be carried out in partnership with civil society and local governors.

Recommendations of the Lanzarote Committee

The Lanzarote Committee **requires** Parties that are not already doing so³ to involve civil society bodies in the implementation of preventive measures in the field of sexual exploitation and abuse of children.⁴

The Lanzarote Committee **requests** Parties that are not already doing so⁵ to encourage the financing of projects and programmes carried out by civil society aimed at preventing and protecting children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.⁶

Whilst recalling that co-operation may be regulated through partnerships and

agreements, the Lanzarote Committee **invites** all Parties to expand co-operation with civil society in order to better prevent sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, including when facilitated by ICTs and as regards the challenges raised by the exploitation of CSGSIV.⁷

The Lanzarote Committee **invites** all Parties to ensure that the forms of co-operation that take place with civil society in the field of prevention and protection of children against sexual exploitation and abuse are of a sustainable nature.⁸

Civil society involvement in the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse facilitated by ICTs, in particular as regards CSGSIV

The Lanzarote Committee recognised that civil society involvement is paramount in the fight against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children facilitated by ICTs. Topics addressed by the projects and programmes carried out by civil society in this domain, whether or not in co-operation with the state authorities, are of a wide variety. However, the specific issue of CSGSIV, is not necessarily the sole concern of the activities carried out in this regard.

³ Albania, Greece, Latvia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, San Marino, Slovak Republic, Turkey.

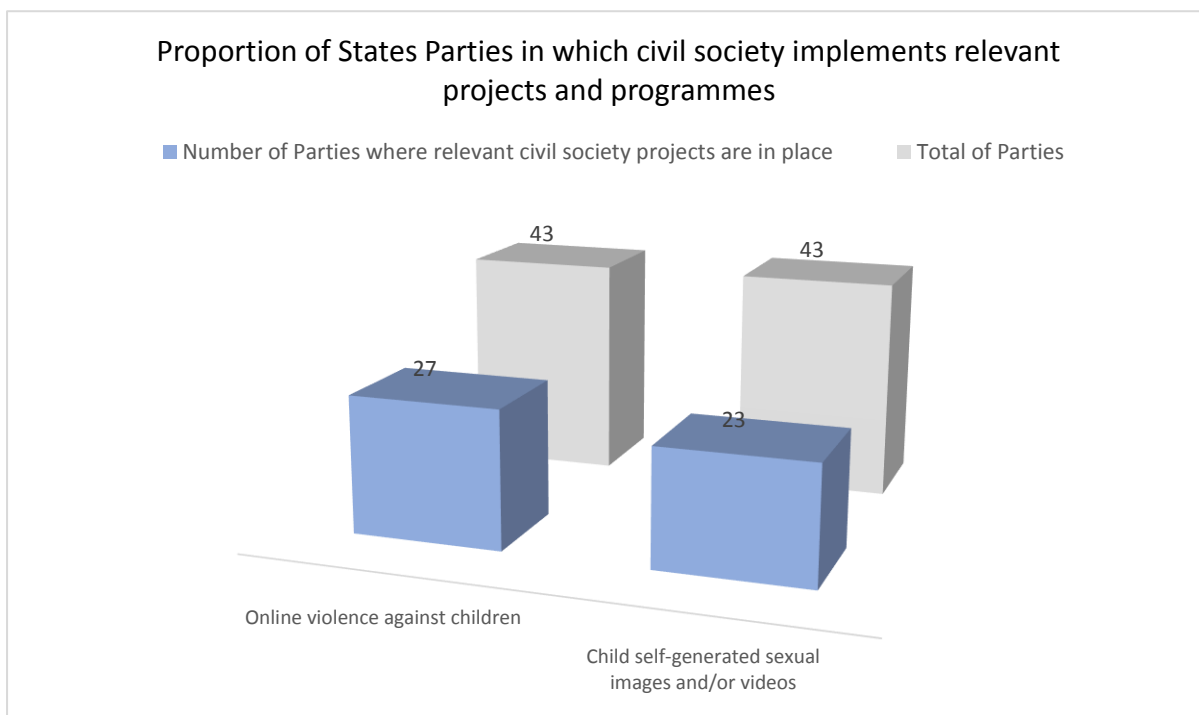
⁴ Recommendation VII-1.

⁵ Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Georgia, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Republic of Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, San Marino, Slovak Republic, Turkey, Ukraine.

⁶ Recommendation VII-2.

⁷ Recommendation VII-3.

⁸ Recommendation VII-4.



Examples of promising practices identified by the Lanzarote Committee:

15 Parties report that civil society uses child-friendly and recreational material to convey preventive information, such as mobile apps, animated video clips, comic books, television debates, podcasts, online databases, hashtags, interactive Internet safety knowledge tests, interactive games, annual competitions, theatre plays, etc.

Many Parties run Safer Internet centres established under the European Commission's Safer Internet Programme. Safer Internet Centres inform, advise and assist children, parents, teachers and carers on digital questions and fights against online child sexual abuse.

As mentioned above, it should however be underlined that most of the information submitted in the context of the monitoring round related to activities for the prevention and protection of children's rights in cases of violence in general. Thus, overall replies from all stakeholders illustrate the limited information on the issue of child self-generated sexual images and/or videos.

Recommendations of the Lanzarote Committee

The Lanzarote Committee invites **all Parties** to:

- support civil society to carry out projects and programmes that include the issue of CSGSIV.⁹
- encourage the participation of children, according to their evolving capacity, in the development and the implementation of state policies, programmes or other initiatives concerning the fight against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of

children, including when facilitated by ICTs and as regards CSGSIV, and to provide example(s) of how children's views are taken into account in the context of the participation of children.¹⁰

- seek children's views at the stage of drafting new legislation on the issues of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, including when facilitated by ICTs and as regards CSGSIV.¹¹

⁹ Recommendation VII-5.

¹⁰ Recommendation VII-6

¹¹ Recommendation VII-7.