FACTSHEET – RESEARCH

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)"

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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 XI of the implementation report on research. 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.

General remarks

The increased use of ICTs by children brings new challenges in the fight against child sexual abuse and exploitation. An important tool to fight child sexual abuse and exploitation is the prevention of its occurrences in the first place. Effective prevention mechanisms and responses to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse of children require an understanding of the issues at stake, as well as knowledge of the prevalence and characteristics of the phenomenon. In fact, accurate and precise information may be necessary for the development of quality and targeted policies and measures. The gathering of information and understanding of the phenomenon is of particular importance in the context of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse facilitated by ICTs, in light of the rapid development and increased use of technology.

Although the Lanzarote Convention does not expressly provide for the obligation to conduct research on the issues raised by sexual exploitation and sexual abuse facilitated by ICTs, including on those arising from child self-generated sexual images and/or videos (CSGSIV), Article 10(2)(b) refers to the obligation to designate or set up mechanisms for data collection or focal points for the purpose of observing and evaluating the phenomenon of sexual abuse and exploitation of children. Furthermore, paragraph 83 of the explanatory report emphasises the "lack of accurate and reliable statistics on the nature of the phenomenon and on the numbers of children involved", and explicitly states that the obligation provided for in Article 10(2)(b) "aims at taking measures to address the lack of information". Therefore, this article refers to the need to study and conduct research on the changing nature of sexual exploitation and abuse, including exploitation and abuse facilitated by ICTs.

In its report, the Lanzarote Committee presents an overview of the existing research on sexual exploitation and sexual abuse facilitated by ICTs in Parties, specifically on issues arising from CSGSIV and on the psychological effects on persons whose CSGSIV have been shared online. It further provides information on the framework within which such research was conducted, including whether research was conducted by Parties in collaboration with civil society.

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

> **Lanzarote Convention**
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> **Article 10 – National measures of co-ordination and collaboration**
> *(…)*
> *2. Each Party shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to set up or designate:*
> *(…)*
> *b. mechanisms for data collection or focal points, at the national or local levels and in collaboration with civil society, for the purpose of observing and evaluating the phenomenon of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children of children, with due respect for the requirements of personal data protection.*

Overview and extent of the research for the purpose of observing and evaluating the phenomenon of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse facilitated by ICTs, in particular the issue of CSGSIV

Considering the increased use of ICTs by children, and the particularly harmful effects on children depicted in CSGSIV when such material is distributed to others or disseminated online without their consent, research on CSGSIV, and the number of children involved in it, should be carried out. This section of the report gives an overview of the research conducted in Parties on the issues raised by CSGSIV in general, and in particular on the psychological effects on persons whose CSGSIV have been shared online.

23 Parties provided information on research undertaken on the issues raised by CSGSIV in general. For many of these Parties, the research was conducted as part of a broader research project, including, among others, on sexual abuse, including online, sexual health, and child abuse material.

12 Parties specifically informed the Lanzarote Committee of their participation for one or several years in the EU Kids Online research. These are multinational research networks which seek to enhance knowledge of children's online opportunities, risks and safety. Surveys carried out under the framework of EU Kids Online collect data and information on, *inter alia*, children's practice of sending and receiving sexual messages online. In addition to the abovementioned Parties, the Committee also noted from that it appears that 20 more Parties participated for at least one year in the EU Kids Online surveys.

The Committee further noted that in 10 Parties in which research on the issues raised by CSGSIV have been carried out, information on the psychological effects arising from such material being shared online was explored.

> **Examples of promising practices identified by the Lanzarote Committee**
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> In **Austria**, a study on the topic of "sexting" was conducted by Safer Internet Austria. After consultation with children from 14 to 18 years old, the research found that 51% of the sampled group knew of someone who had sent a CSGSIV to someone else and 16% had taken sexual images of themselves, the majority of whom sent it to someone else. This study shed light on the prevalence of this practice among children.
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> In **Germany**, review programmes have been put in place at the Federal Ministry for Education and Research. These programmes control the success of research which was promoted. This allows the Ministry to become aware of research results, and to put these results in practice.

In **Latvia**, the Latvian Safer Internet Centre organised a survey among children from 13 to 18 years old, to collect data on the number of children who had sent, received and/or disseminated CSGSIV. The results of the survey were used in an awareness raising campaign on the risks associated with sending such material. Moreover, in the framework of the campaign "I only forwarded it" organised by the "Centrs Dardedze" two online surveys were undertaken. One survey addressed children from 12 to 17 years old, and included among other questions on whether they knew of any peers who had sent to someone a sexually explicit image of themselves (64%), whether they had received any such image by one of their peers (42%), and whether they had forwarded a sexual image of someone else to others (9%). The second survey was addressed to parents, who were asked whether they had spoken to their children about the risks of "sexting" and what actions they had taken if their child had sent a CSGSIV and subsequently suffered from a bad experience.

Recommendations of the Lanzarote Committee

The Lanzarote Committee **invites** Parties:
- to collect data and undertake research at the national and local level, for the purpose of observing and evaluating the phenomenon of CSGSIV.[2]
- to ensure that data on the phenomenon of CSGSIV and the risks associated with it is regularly collected and research on the issue is regularly undertaken.[3]

- to build on the findings from existing research on child self-generated sexual images and/or videos, when available, to ensure that policies and measures are best developed and appropriately targeted to tackle the issues raised by CSGSIV.[4]

Framework for development of research on the issues raised by child self-generated sexual images and/or videos, and the psychological effects of their sharing online

The Lanzarote Convention requires Parties to take the necessary legislative or other measures to set up or designate mechanisms for data collection or focal points, at the national or local level, and in collaboration with civil society.

The Committee observed that most Parties collaborate with civil society for the purpose of conducting research on the issues arising from CSGSIV. However, the framework and form for this cooperation differs from one Party to another. In a number of Parties, State authorities collaborate with NGOs, non-governmental initiatives, research centres, universities and academia. For some of these collaborations, the Party financially supported the research or provided official data on the state and scope of the issue.

Examples of promising practices identified by the Lanzarote Committee

In conducting research, information gathered from hotlines can be a tool used for the purpose of observing and evaluating the phenomenon of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, including the issue of CSGSIV. The **Russian Federation**, **Save the Children Finland** and the **Central Union for Child Welfare Finland** have informed making use of information from hotlines. This can be of particular use when resources for the development for large scale studies are lacking. Case-analysis of information from national hotlines, with due respect for the requirements of personal data protection, may provide valuable input to policy-making.

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[2] Recommendation XI-1.
[3] Recommendation XI-2.
[4] Recommendation XI-3.

The establishment of research networks is particularly valuable for the development of research. For example, **EU Kids Online** is a multinational research network, which has been developing considerably important and influential work to enhance knowledge of European children's online opportunities, risks and safety. Many Parties have participated in the survey, which makes the comparison of the situation in various States possible.

Recommendation of the Lanzarote Committee

The Lanzarote Committee **invites** all those Parties which are not already doing so to take the necessary legislative or other measures to set up or designate mechanisms for data collection or focal points at the national or local levels and in collaboration with civil society, for the purpose of observing and evaluating the phenomenon of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, including on the issues arising from CSGSIV, with due respect for the requirements of personal data protection.[5]

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[5] Recommendation XI-4.