

Finland

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

In Finland, the Government held a coronavirus (COVID-19) info session for children on 24 April 2020. Prime Minister Sanna Marin, Minister of Education Li Andersson and Minister of Science and Culture Hanna Kosonen answered questions about the coronavirus situation by 7–12-year-old children via videoconference. The info session was organised in cooperation with Lasten uutiset (“Children’s news”) of Helsingin Sanomat newspaper and other partners. The questions addressed at the coronavirus info session were collected through the partners’ channels from primary school pupils, and schools were able to use the live broadcast in their distance teaching. Information on the children’s info session has been distributed to schools, for example through participating children’s and young people’s media channels. The press conference broadcast live on the Government YouTube channel and was interpreted into Swedish and into sign language. The children’s coronavirus info is available at the streaming service of the National Broadcast Company (YLE).

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has on 26 May 2020 appointed a working group to strengthen the rights of the child and the wellbeing of children and families in the aftermath of the coronavirus (COVID-19) epidemic. The information gathered by the working group will be used in the preparation of the National Child Strategy to assess the realisation of the rights of the child during the state of emergency. The working group will first draw conclusions about how the restrictions imposed due to the coronavirus epidemic have affected the situation of children and families and the realisation of the rights of the child. The term of the working group runs until the end of October 2020.

In April 2020, the Ministry of Justice conducted an unofficial survey among its stakeholders on the impacts of COVID-19 on equality and non-discrimination. Many respondents stated that it was too early to estimate the concrete impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on equality and non-discrimination. According to the responses, challenges are similar for all minority groups but are more severe for groups in vulnerable situations. Social isolation has also had an impact on transgender children and youth who cannot receive peer support outside their homes due to the restrictions. As schools switched to distance teaching, insufficient digital and language skills as well as lack of technical equipment have an impact on how parents with immigrant background can support and supervise their children in their studies.

The Ombudsman for Children in Finland was nominated as an independent expert member in the Scientific Panel set by the Government of Finland that assessed the current and long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in Finland. The Scientific Panel consisted of 13 academics from several fields of disciplines, and it published its report on 1 June 2020, which is available only in Finnish. In this report it was acknowledged that the pandemic poses a risk for different minority groups, such as the Roma, indigenous Sámi people, asylum

seekers, persons with disabilities, persons placed in closed institutions, such as prisons, persons placed in semi-closed institutions, such as children's homes and half-way houses, and especially persons with intersectional marginalized position. Children and young people belonging to different minorities are in serious risk of short and long-term negative risks of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ombudsman conducted a survey for the Child Advisory Board on the effects of COVID-19 on children in Finland from the point of view of different actors.

On 9 April 2020, the National Bureau of Investigation published a podcast where Head of the Police Cybercrime Centre, Inspector Mikko Rauhamaa and Detective Sergeant Maria Rossi discussed the effects of COVID-19 crisis on child sexual abuse online. On the website of the National Bureau of Investigation children and their parents are given safety instructions and contact information and they are encouraged to report online bullying, harassment and suspicious material by using the Net Tip to alert the police (<https://www.poliisi.fi/nettip>) or, for example, Save the Children's Nettivihje (<https://www.pelastakalapset.fi/en/our-work-in-finland/child-protection-and-finnish-hotline/>). Reports can be made anonymously. Also persons experiencing sexual interest in children are encouraged to seek help through various services.

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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.

No information received.

- 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.**

No information received.

- 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.**

No information received.

- 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.**

No information received.