

## Georgia

**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**

No information received.

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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.

Movement restrictions and isolation expose children to increased risk of violence - including gender-based violence and sexual exploitation - particularly those children already living in violent or dysfunctional family situations.

As online communities have become central to maintain many children's learning, social life, and play, it has also increased their exposure to risky online behavior, cyberbullying, and sexual exploitation, such as grooming and the creation and distribution of child sexual abuse images and videos.

- 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.**

In the first four months of 2020 (January-April), compared to the same period in 2019, the rate of crimes against the sexual inviolability and sexual freedom of the person decreased. In 2019 (January-April), 132 cases were registered, while in the same period of 2020 - 86 cases.

The situation has not changed significantly in terms of possible depraved behaviour towards children in online space, however, under COVID-19, the rate of sexual abuse of children in non-online space has decreased, which is partly because people, including children, were

isolated and did not have access to school friends, teachers, social workers and services that schools provide.

**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.**

To protect children from violence and reduce the impact of COVID-19 on children, the Ministry of Internal Affairs has taken the following measures:

- The Ministry sent short text messages to the citizens of Georgia about the reporting mechanisms of domestic violence in Georgian, Azerbaijani and Armenian languages;
- Several social media influencers from different fields prepared a video, calling on the public to timely address violence against children and cooperate with the police;
- The Ministry created video graphics on the forms of domestic violence, including sexual violence reporting mechanisms; TV stations that operate in Georgia spread the information.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs has developed legislative amendments to toughen criminal policy towards child sexual abusers. After leaving the penitentiary institution, they are not allowed to work in educational and upbringing institutions.

Also, the Ministry will set up a database of persons convicted of sexual offenses to control the perpetrators and protect other minors from the expected sexual abuse. These regulations came into force on May 1, 2020.

**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.**

The Ministry of the Internal Affairs has set its priority on the child-oriented investigation in cases of sexual offenses. For this purpose, the Coordinating Service of Witnesses and Victims has been established in the Ministry. Coordinators work primarily with juvenile delinquency victims and help them deal with the primary stress caused by crime and help them use appropriate services.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs actively holds informational meetings with minors; the information received from the children is used for further activities or event planning.

In 2019, within the framework of the Council of Europe's project "Juvenile and Adult Detainees Support," the Human Rights Protection and Investigation Quality Monitoring Department held informational meetings with students at several public schools in Georgia. The department provided juveniles with information on issues of domestic violence, the

importance of gender equality, crimes related to child marriage, bullying, its negative effects, and ways to protect themselves from it.

Besides, PH International, with the support of the United States Department of State's Office of Anti-Drugs and Law Enforcement (INL), started a program "School, Community and Police Cooperation." Teachers from the partner schools and law enforcers actively participate in the process. The program aims to prevent crime among adults, raise legal awareness, promote cooperation between schools, the community, and law enforcement agencies, and introduce approaches and values to community-oriented police activities.

In the second half of 2019, the Ministry of Internal Affairs carried out an information campaign "Do not take Childhood Away." The campaign intended to increase awareness and eliminate crimes contributing to early child marriage.

As a part of the campaign, the Human Rights Protection and Investigation Quality Monitoring Department and representatives of the local police met the residents of the region, local government officials, schoolchildren, and teachers, as well as other stakeholders. The Ministry produced information booklets and distributed them in Tbilisi and other regions of Georgia.

As for the children's involvement in COVID-19 measures, the Ministry of Internal Affairs plans awareness-raising multimedia production and works with youth organizations.