

Germany

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.**

The contact restrictions and quarantine measures currently in place to contain the spread of COVID-19 pose an enormous challenge to many families. Families with children under the age of 14 are experiencing the corona crisis as a particularly heavy burden. Especially where families are already burdened by other problems, additional pressures, existential fears and conflicts may lead to violence against children and adolescents. The impact of the situation resulting from the corona crisis is particularly severe in families who already report psychological burdens such as fear and insecurities.

At this point, however, the specific extent of these problems cannot yet be established. This also applies to the current developments. Nevertheless, the risk of sexual abuse (Articles 18 and 23 of the Convention) has likely increased overall: Regarding abuse within the family, we proceed from the following assumptions:

- Fewer possibilities to avoid abuse, as well as closer contact to offenders within the family
- Less “control” from outside
- Possibly, however, better control from within because other family members are more likely to be at home.

Regarding abuse by persons in the victims' more distant social environment (clubs etc.), we make the following assumptions:

- The risk has decreased as a result of the lockdown since direct contact is currently not possible (however, contact is still possible through social media and mobile phones).
- On the other hand, an increasing number of parents are now calling the "Sexual Abuse Helpline" (*Hilfetelefon Sexueller Missbrauch*) because their children have recently confided in them and told them about an abuse incident.

Regarding cybergrooming (Article 23 of the Convention), we proceed from the following assumptions:

- The risk has increased because many children probably spend more time on smartphones/computers, are more bored and thus more susceptible to approaches by strangers.
- Possibly, however, better control from within because other family members, particularly the parents, are more likely to be at home.

Currently, no information can be provided regarding criminal offences pursuant to Article 21 (offences concerning the participation of a child in pornographic performances) and Article 22 (corruption of children) of the Convention.

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.

Given the severe impact which the measures taken to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic have had on the lives of children, adolescents and their families – including the closing of facilities serving the care and education of children and adolescents, as well as the restriction of social contacts – there is reason to fear an increase of violence against children and adolescents. However, no reliable data are as yet available. The Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) is planning to monitor current developments in child protection by means of an ongoing survey of the youth welfare offices' weekly risk assessments, with a view to providing relevant support to the *Länder* and municipalities in developing practicable solutions. In order to ensure the protection of children and adolescents from violence and abuse during the corona pandemic, the BMFSFJ maintains regular and intensive dialogue with the ministries for youth and family of the *Länder*.

- 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.**

Child and youth welfare institutions and services, which are tasked with ensuring the child's best interests, are continuing their work. Each individual case is assessed as to how support can best be continued. This calls for flexible solutions: for example, specialist staff can provide important support through telephone or video calls with the families concerned. After all, key "controlling entities" (day-care centres, schools, clubs etc.), which otherwise would have noticed any abuse, are not available during lockdown.

Additional measures taken: In many *Länder*, emergency care was put in place for children from families at risk very soon after lockdown started. A number of campaigns were initiated with a view to raising awareness of the risk of abuse/violence (e.g. the campaign "Leave no child alone" (*Kein Kind alleine lassen*) launched by the Independent Commissioner for Child Sexual Abuse Issues). In order to improve the support provided during the COVID-19 pandemic to children affected by violence, the "Number against Sorrow" (*Nummer gegen Kummer*) helpline for children and adolescents as well as parents has been expanded. The helpline for children and adolescents is now available six days per week and has been extended to the morning hours. Chat counselling and online counselling have been increased in order to ensure that inquiries are responded to within a maximum of two days.

- 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.**

So far, children have not been directly involved in the decisions on the above-described measures.