

## **Italy**

### ***Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri Dipartimento per le politiche della Famiglia***

**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**

#### **Extraordinary leave for parents and babysitting bonus**

As a consequence of the spread of the Covid-19 virus all over the country and considering the subsequent temporary suspension of the provision of child education services and teaching activities in all Italian schools, art. 23 of Decree Law No. 18 of 17 March 2020 (the so-called Cura Italia Decree) introduced an extraordinary leave and bonus for parents, with the aim of supporting them during the period of temporary closure of school activities.

Indeed, starting from 5 March 2020, parents working in the private sector with children up to 12 years of age have access to a specific 15-day leave covering 50% of the salary. The leave can be enjoyed by both parents alternatively and only if no other income support measures apply for the family members.

Age limits do not apply to children with serious disability certified under Law No. 104/1992.

Furthermore, starting from 17 March 2020, as an alternative to the Extraordinary leave, private sector working parents can choose to receive a specific bonus for the purchase of babysitting services amounting to 600 euros. For parents working in the public and private accredited health sector, as well as for the police and the defence personnel employed with anti-Covid tasks, the babysitting voucher is increased to totally 1,000 euros.

The above-mentioned measures can be requested for also by foster parents.

#### **Extension of paid leaves for people assisting persons with disabilities**

Among the numerous measures taken to support families during the Covid emergency, the abovementioned Decree Law has increased the already existing monthly paid leave for working people assisting a person or relative with disability (pursuant to Law No. 104/1992) from 3 to 15 days for March and April 2020.

#### **Family Card**

On 18 March 2020, the new Family Card was launched by the Department for Family Policies of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. The Card allows families with 3 children under 26 years of age to access discounts and price reductions on goods and services offered by the companies participating in the initiative and listed in the online portal specifically set up by the Department (<https://www.cartafamiglia.gov.it/cartafamiglia/>). With the entry into force of Decree Law No.9 of 2 March 2020, the Family Card has been extended to all families with one child living in the Italian territory, with a view to providing additional support to families during the current virus crisis.

### **Experts' groups on family/children and Covid**

Within the framework of the activities carried out by the national Observatory for Childhood and Adolescence (established within the Presidency of the Council of Ministers – Department for Family Policies), on 8 April 2020 the proposal was made to establish a specific Working Group of experts for the assessment of the current health emergency's impact on children and the identification of actions and strategies on the topic to be proposed to the Government.

Also within the framework of the National Observatory on Family, a special experts' Working Group is being established with a view to assessing the impact of Covid emergency on demography and family choices. The start of the Working Group's activities will be announced on 28 April 2020 during the presentation of a survey carried out by the Toniolo Institute on the effects of the pandemic on youth's change of habits and life projects.

### **Anti-Wastage donations**

With the aim of contributing to overcome the loneliness experienced by hospitalized children and elderly people, as well as by children and their families staying home in compliance with the lockdown measures currently in force in Italy, and with a view to providing people with more educational and cultural opportunities while in the hospitals and at home, the Minister for Equal Opportunities and Family called upon the main IT and toy-selling companies operating in Italy to donate them electronic, IT, educational and play materials (toys, personal computers, tablets, e-readers, etc.) in line with the anti-wastage provisions extended by art. 31 of Decree Law No. 9 of 2 March 2020.

### **The “#CiStoDentro” (#IAmln) initiative**

The “#CiStoDentro” (#IAmln) project is the new initiative launched by the Minister for Equal Opportunities and Family to provide all parents with a tool for experimenting new ways to play with their children at home during the current lockdown. The initiative is available on the website of the Department for Family Policies (<http://famiglia.governo.it/ci-sto-dentro/>) and includes several sections, such as 1) information on Coronavirus; 2) the possibility to send a letter to the Minister; 3) pieces of advice on new games to be played at home; 3) suggestions on books to read; and 4) a photo gallery.

### **Toll-free number**

Upon request of the Minister for Equal Opportunities and Family and in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the Presidency of the Council of Ministers - Department of Civil Protection, a specific toll-free number (800.833.833) was made available for all people (including children) in need of support to manage anxiety, distress, and psychological discomfort generated by the pandemic and the related social isolation measures. The number was active from April to June 2020, 24 hours a day with psychologists, psychotherapists, and psychoanalysts answering the calls with a view to further strengthening the psychological assistance services already provided by the National Health System. Throughout its period of activity, the number received over 50,000 calls, 9.8% of them from students (although the data on the age of the students is not available).

### **“Educhiamo” (Let’s Educate) Call for Proposals**

The Department for Family Policies is elaborating a public Call for proposals for the financing of non-formal and informal education projects for the empowerment of children and youth, with a view to allowing them to acquire knowledge and abilities that will contribute to the development of their potential as active and responsible citizens and promote their commitment towards their society, while respecting differences. The Call will be aimed at promoting such activities to accelerate the recovery of the society after the end of the coronavirus global emergency, in collaboration with civil society organizations and local bodies. The total amount that will be allocated should be 30 million euros and will fund projects on children’s and youth’s empowerment, intercultural exchange, intergenerational dialogue, non-discrimination and equality, inclusion of disadvantaged people and persons with disabilities, promotion of healthy lifestyles among children and youth, environmental protection and sustainable development, appreciation of local cultural heritage and respectful use of social media.

### **“Giochiamo” (Let’s play) Call for Proposals**

This initiative will provide financings for projects envisaging play activities for children aimed at finding alternative and creative solutions for them to enjoy their rights to rest, free time, recreational, cultural and artistic activities during Stage 2 of the Covid emergency. The total amount allocated for the Call will be equal to 5 million euros. The abovementioned solutions could envisage, inter alia, the carrying out of outdoor play activities for children under adults’ supervision, as well as online and offline child-friendly cultural and artistic activities, all in line with the social distancing protocols. The funded actions will also be aimed at supporting children and their families whose vulnerable conditions have worsened after the Covid outbreak, such as families with disabled children and families living in economic and educational poverty or in social marginalization.

### **Joint letter to EU Commissioner Schmit**

A joint letter signed by the Italian Minister for Equal Opportunities and Family, Prof. Elena Bonetti, the French Secretary of State for Child Protection, Mr Adrien Taquet, and the German State Secretary at the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, Ms Juliane Seifert, has been sent to the European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, Mr Nicolas Schmit. The initiative is aimed at avoiding that the condition of children living in poverty and social exclusion in the EU is further worsened by the global health emergency the Union is facing and that will have heavy economic and social consequences especially on children and youth. The letter underlines the importance of a stronger, prompt, and coordinated response of the European Commission and the EU Member States for combating child poverty, with a view to ensuring the most vulnerable children the best possible growth, including through economic support measures such as the Child Guarantee for vulnerable children.

\* \* \*

## 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.

Since 2009, the Italian Government has been managing a specific helpline for children called **114 - Children Emergency Number** (*114- Emergenza Infanzia*). This is an emergency helpline fully funded by the Department for Family Policies of the Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers (Prime Minister's Office). The multilingual service is active 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and can be called free of charge from all over the country by anyone wanting to report dangerous situations involving children. The service provides psychological, psycho-pedagogical, legal and sociological support and a link with the local authorities competent at the social, judicial, and security levels, following a multi-agency approach.

Following the restrictions established by the Government for the management and containment of the Covid-19 pandemic, children have been forced to continuously spend their time at home with their families, this making even more difficult for victims to ask for help by calling the emergency number. Furthermore, lockdown measures had the effect of increasing the number of hours spent by children online, often without parenting control.

In this scenario, the **114 Children Emergency Number has been strengthened with further one-to-one communication channels, namely a specific Whatsapp number ((+39)3487987845) to be contacted via chat, and a digital app**, which can be downloaded free of charge on every smartphone.

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.

The 114 Children Emergency Number also provides data on the reporting of dangerous situations for children. The **Department for Family Policies has officially asked the helpline for a specific report of data relating to the lockdown period**, in order to have a clearer picture of the situation of violence abuse against children in our country during the pandemic.

In the three-month period between 21 February and 20 May 2020, namely during the Covid-19 crisis, the helpline has managed 410 emergency cases, namely 4.5 cases per day. Compared with the same period last year, the **number of managed cases has increased by 13%**.

According to the data provided by the helpline, in over 60% of cases, the reported dangerous situations have taken place in the child's house or in the house of the victims' relatives. **Data also show a significant increase in the number of reports for dangerous situations on the Internet.**

As for as the age of victims, half of the reported cases concerns children between 0 and 10 years of age, but also the number of pre-adolescents and adolescents involved in dangerous situations has increased compared with 2019 data (+17% and +11% respectively).

Similarly, as far as the victims' gender is concerned, the number of both female (+21%) and male (+8%) victims has increased.

As for the alleged perpetrators of emergency situations, data shows that in 75% of cases parents are involved.

**Compared with the same period last year, the number of interventions by Local Services/Authorities has increased, especially with reference to the cases of physical and psychological abuse and online child pornography.**

**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.**

With a view to increasing awareness on the services provided by the 114 Children Emergency Number especially among children and increasing knowledge on the opportunity to ask for help through the different helpline channels, including the WhatsApp chat and the digital app, the **Department for Family Policies of the Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers is elaborating a new awareness campaign** aimed at:

- Informing children on the opportunity to ask for help through the different helpline channels;
- Increasing the awareness of vulnerable families on the 114 Children Emergency Number they can contact to ask for support;
- Increasing public awareness on the various forms of online violence and social media dangers;
- Increasing public awareness on the increased domestic violence against children during lockdown.

The campaign will therefore specifically address children, especially children with disabilities, and their families, as well as educators, social and health operators, media and the general public.

Last but not least, the **Department for Family Policies will soon reconvene the Observatory for the Fight against Paedophilia and Child Pornography**, which will work, *inter alia*, on the drafting of the **new National Plan for the Prevention and Fight against Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation**.

- 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.