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Joint statement

on the occasion of the 6th edition of the European Day on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (18 November)

issued by six Council of Europe member States
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and supported by the 41 other Council of Europe member States: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine and United Kingdom.

Preventing risky behaviour in children: self-generated images and/or videos of a sexual nature

This year we are celebrating the 10th anniversary of the entry into force of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse.

In 2010, this instrument was the first in the world to mention sexual abuse of children committed for non-commercial purposes, and in particular, inside the circle of trust, i.e. where more than 80% of abuses take place.

Despite the progress made, particularly in raising awareness and realising the extent and consequences of this heinous crime, the Covid-19 pandemic has revealed how difficult it is to fight this scourge further enhanced by information and communication technologies. All indicators show that the circulation of abusive materials and online child sexual exploitation have increased during the lockdown, inter alia, as a result of restrictions of free movement. It therefore appears more than necessary to pay increased attention to the abuses committed by means of new technologies, which represent a major challenge.

The last monitoring cycle of the Lanzarote Committee is dedicated to the issue of the production and sharing of online images by children as well as to the national measures put in place to protect minors against the criminal exploitation of such content; member States' replies highlighted the complexity they face when limiting self-produced material in "cyberspace".



In a society where children and adolescents increasingly have access to the Internet as both an educational and recreational tool, especially social networks and messaging applications, they sometimes expose themselves by posting explicit photos, without being aware of the existing dangers, such as sexual extortion, cyberbullying or psychological manipulation for sexual purposes.

We must stress the importance of raising awareness and continuing education of minors and adults in information and communication technologies in order to meet these challenges. We particularly welcome that the Lanzarote Committee has, for the first time, involved more than 300 children in its monitoring work. Moreover, we encourage their continued participation in all decisions and activities affecting them, in conformity with the cross-cutting approach of our Organisation. Parents must also be more targeted to be able to protect their children from the risks they face online.

We congratulate Azerbaijan and Armenia for the ratification of the Convention and we express the wish that the latter will become the 16th instrument ratified by all member States of the Council of Europe. It is upon us to further promote accession to the Convention by non-member States to our Organisation. In addition, as new technologies transcend borders, it is essential that States further engage in international co-operation to prevent and fight online abuse.

Our conviction is that only united, can States move forward and overcome common obstacles in the fight against child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, which are a major violation of children's rights.