



10 November 2021

Joint Statement on the occasion of the 7th edition of the European Day on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (18 November 2021)

Issued by six Council of Europe member States

(Andorra, Belgium, Luxembourg, Monaco, San Marino and Slovenia)

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, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine and United Kingdom;

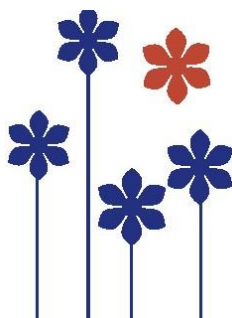
as well as by the European Union and Tunisia.

Making the circle of trust truly safe for children

The 7th edition of the European Day on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse focuses on the circle of trust of children, which is the most common environment of abuse of children.

Together the Council of Europe member States have done a considerable amount of work. However, we have to accept that the situation is worsening, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Millions of children have remained locked up in their homes and yet, they were not completely safe in their own circle of trust.

If and when those closest to them (family members, family friends, religious workers, sport coaches, mentors and other adults who are in close contact with children) abuse them, instead of caring, educating and protecting them, this traumatic experience will stay with them all their life. It is of the utmost importance that every child has their own safe environment – their circle of trust.



An important starting point is **awareness raising** and we acknowledge that many countries are already addressing this topic, although **proper legislation** needs to be in place to have effective prevention, as well as training, mandatory screening and monitoring of all professionals in regular contact with children. Concerning **protection**, some good models already exist like the Barnahus (the children's houses model first developed in Iceland), and the **psychological and psychosocial rehabilitation** of victims has improved as well in most of the Council of Europe member States. Nonetheless, more has to be done to protect all children from sexual abuse, and help victims. Unfortunately, many of them remain unknown and ignored, because of a lack of reporting.

We need to involve children further in these processes to combat this scourge more effectively. **Accountability** also has to be reinforced to enhance our societies' and particularly children's confidence in the system. To pursue this objective, we propose to support Council of Europe activities in the field of the protection of children against sexual violence in their circle of trust in as many countries as possible.

The importance of this topic has been underlined by the decision of the Committee of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (the Lanzarote Committee) to choose this theme for its first thematic monitoring cycle. The Lanzarote Committee clearly states in its [reports](#) that more than 80% of child abuse takes place in the circle of trust (based on trust, authority or influence). Yet, fact-finding, data collection and research on sexual abuse in the circle of trust needs to be advanced considerably in order to properly address the issue with the aim to prevent these abuses and protect all children. On this basis, effective legislation, policies and prevention programmes should be prepared or revised by states in cooperation with civil society.

We are proud that the Lanzarote Convention is one of those few Council of Europe conventions ratified by all its 47 member States and, as Members of the Council of Europe, we will continue to work together to address all forms of sexual violence against children by setting, monitoring and implementing standards. This sends a strong signal to the world that fighting sexual violence against children is and should be a common priority for all of us, in Europe and beyond. We therefore call on non-European countries to follow the example of Tunisia and accede to the Lanzarote Convention, to participate in the sharing of best practices and consider how to improve the situation in their own country.