

Response to GREVIO's first thematic evaluation of the Netherlands



Dutch NGO Coalition for
Children's Rights |
Kinderrechtencollectief

1. Introduction

This document is submitted on behalf of the Dutch NGO Coalition for Children's Rights ('Kinderrechtencollectief'). The Dutch NGO Coalition for Children's Rights is a collaboration of children's rights organisations active in the Netherlands. Through the Coalition for Children's Rights, organisations join forces to protect the interests of the child and supervise the safeguarding of children's rights in Dutch law, policy and practice. The Coalition consists of key members Augeo Foundation, Defence for Children, Kinderpostzegels, the National Youth Council (NJR), Save the Children, and Terre des Hommes Netherlands. The Coalition was established in 1995, the year the Netherlands ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Our contribution to the evaluation focuses on violence against girls (< 18 years old). This focus is important because girls, as other groups of women, face specific vulnerabilities towards gender-based violence. Additionally, the legal and policy frameworks that address their rights and needs are often different from those of adults.

In this document, we will address the questions that we deem most relevant to accurately portray the position of girls in light of GREVIO's goals and recommendations. We therefore answer **questions 6, 15, and 43** of the questionnaire for GREVIO's first thematic evaluation round. We also highlight **recommendations made by the Committee on the Rights of the Child** to the Netherlands in March 2022 that are linked to topics discussed. This submission incorporates insights from recent findings and research and the latest session at the Dutch Children's Rights Dialogue with policymakers of various Ministries in April 2024. On the website <https://www.kinderrechteninbeweging.nl/> you can find recent data and policy developments on children's rights in the Netherlands, including on violence against children, and child trafficking and sexual exploitation of children.

2. Answers to GREVIO's questionnaire

Question 6. Please provide information on any new development since the adoption of GREVIO's baseline evaluation report on your country on the introduction of data collection categories such as type of violence, sex, and age of the victim and the perpetrator, the relationship between the two, and where it took place for administrative data of relevance to the field of violence against women and domestic violence emanating from law enforcement agencies, the justice sector, social services, and the public health care sector.

Since the adoption of GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, several advancements have been made in data collection. A key source for data on violence against girls is the National Rapporteur's 2023 Monitor on sexual violence against children (2018-2022). The monitor includes disaggregated data on reports of child sexual abuse from the Dutch police, the reporting point Safe Home (Veilig Thuis), and the Sexual Assault Centers, highlighting trends and providing detailed statistics on, for instance, the types of sexual violence, the ages of victims, and the locations of the reported incidents. At most of these organisations, the reports of sexual violence against children increased between 2018 and 2022.

However, collecting data on the actual prevalence of (sexual) violence against girls is challenging. According to the national rapporteur, there are currently no reliable numbers on how often sexual violence against children (and therefore girls) is committed. Although the Prevalence Monitor on Domestic Violence and Sexually Transgressive Behaviour will include a range of new measurements in its future reports, national (self-reported) data is only available for certain forms of violence committed against girls aged 16-17, with no data available for girls younger than 16. Similarly, while the public prosecutor's office has begun recording female victimisation this year, the presence of children in these cases should also be documented. The lack of prevalence data on children younger than 16 years is a concern: this means that there is currently limited insight into the scale of gender-based violence against girls in the Netherlands.

*What we know about victims of child sexual abuse and exploitation between 2018 - 2022*¹

- Of the child sexual abuse victims registered with the police 85% are girls. The average age of a victim is 12 years old.
- An estimated 35,000 girls and 8,000 boys aged 16-17 were victims of physical sexual violence in the 12 preceding months to the a large 2020 study based on self-reporting.
- Police reports indicate that 58% of child sexual abuse incidents occur in a home. This suggests that the perpetrator is often a family member or someone known to the victim.
- Approximately half of the reports of sexual abuse to the police result in a formal complaint being filed.
- Between 2017 and 2021, fewer than 10 reports of sexual exploitation of children in prostitution were registered with the police each year. A total of 11 reports were registered in these five years.² The anonymous Chat with Fier helpline registered 83 (possible) underage victims of sexual exploitation in 2022. The majority of these victims are girls.³ The estimated number of minor victims of sexual exploitation is many times higher than the number of reports.⁴

*What we know about perpetrators of child sexual abuse*⁵

- The average age of suspects registered with the police is 31 years, and 96% are male.
- Many suspects of child sexual abuse are younger than 21 years old (38%).
- These young suspects often victimize their peers.
- In cases involving suspects younger than 21 years and less than 5 years older than their victims, rape is the most common crime, followed by sexting and molestation.

Online sexual violence and abuse

Online violence against girls is a particular concern: it is estimated that around 72,000 girls and 24,000 boys aged 16-17 experienced some form of online sexual harassment in the 12

¹ [Monitor Seksueel geweld tegen kinderen 2018-2022 | Publicatie | Nationaal Rapporteur](#)

² [Slachtoffermonitor seksueel geweld tegen kinderen 2017-2021 | Rapport | Nationaal Rapporteur](#)

³ [CKM, Onzichtbare slachtoffers van mensenhandel 2022](#)

⁴ [Nationaal Rapporteur, Slachtoffermonitor seksueel geweld tegen kinderen 2017-2021](#)

⁵ [Brede blik op ouderschap - achtergronden van ouders van binnenlandse seksuele uitbuiting | Rapport | Nationaal Rapporteur](#)

preceding months to a large 2020 study.⁶ The available data again lacks insights into online violence against girls age 15 and younger.

The number of reports of child sexual abuse imagery to the Dutch police has increased sharply in recent years. In 2022, the number of reports doubled compared to 2020 (from 26.120 to 55.730). This does not necessarily mean an increase in the presence of child abuse material online: it is likely that more footage is found due to improved identification techniques.

Question 15. Please provide information on any multi-agency co-operation mechanisms, structures or measures in place designed to protect and support victims of any of the forms of gender-based violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention (e.g., interdisciplinary working groups, case-management systems, cross-sectoral protocols/ guidelines...).

In 2022, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended to following to the Netherlands in its Concluding Observations:

Recommendation 22d: Improve measures to ensure that children who are victims or witnesses of violence have immediate access to child-friendly, multi-sectoral treatment and broad support, such as forensic interviews and psychological therapies, by ensuring that the multidisciplinary approach (MDA++) is child-focused through the methodology used to prevent secondary victimization of children.

The Netherlands has established several multi-agency cooperation mechanisms to protect and support victims of gender-based violence against women, as outlined in the Istanbul Convention:

The multidisciplinary approach (MDA++) is crucial for providing comprehensive support to child victims of violence. The *Toekomstscenario (Future scenario)* program aims to establish a broad, system-oriented framework for child and family protection by 2026. However, the implementation of MDA++ across all regions is still in progress.⁷

There is a growing effort to implement the Barnahus model in Sexual Violence Centre's across the Netherlands, for example, at the organisation Filomena in Rotterdam.⁸ Additional measures to improve multi-agency cooperation mechanisms include the development of regional safety teams (RVT) to provide specialised expertise on developmental threats and safety and increasing the number of families supported through pilot programs (Proeftuinen Toekomstscenario).⁹

Despite these efforts, significant gaps remain:

- **Inconsistent Availability of MDA++ Services:** The availability of MDA++ services is inconsistent across regions, meaning not all victims have equal access to comprehensive support.

⁶ [Monitor Seksueel geweld tegen kinderen 2018-2022 | Publicatie | Nationaal Rapporteur](#)

⁷ [Derde voortgangsrapportage Toekomstscenario](#)

⁸ [Wij zijn Filomena - Centrum Huiselijk Geweld en Kindermishandeling Rotterdam-Rijnmond](#)

⁹ [Derde voortgangsrapportage Toekomstscenario](#)

- **Insufficient Data:** There is insufficient data to evaluate the effectiveness of new approaches, including the RVT, on family outcomes. This lack of data makes it challenging to draw broader conclusions about the overall impact of these initiatives.

Question 43. Please describe any measures taken to ensure swift investigation into and effective prosecution of cases of violence against women and domestic violence such as prioritisation through fast-tracking, benchmarking or other initiatives, without compromising the thoroughness of the investigation.

In 2022, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended to following to the Netherlands in its Concluding Observations:

Recommendation 22a: Ensure that all cases of violence against children are thoroughly investigated, and interventions are always made, including in cases of neglect and sexual abuse both at home and outside, including in the digital environment, particularly in cases of online sexual exploitation, online aggression, and grooming (online/offline approaching of children for sexual purposes).

Efforts to investigate and intervene in cases of violence against children have been strengthened. The Central advice and reporting point Safe Home (Veilig Thuis) has reported a consistent increase in the number of child abuse reports, with 65,280 cases in 2023 compared to 62,460 cases in 2022.¹⁰ Despite the high volume of reports, challenges persist in ensuring timely and thorough investigations. While there has been an increase in reported cases, the closure rate of investigations into child abuse has not seen a corresponding rise.¹¹

Key challenges identified through discussions with experts and child rights organizations include inconsistent follow-up on child abuse reports by local teams and variability in response based on regional resources and practices. A poignant example highlighting these challenges occurred in Vlaardingen, where despite multiple reports to adults in her environment, signs of domestic abuse suffered by a 10-year-old girl under foster care went unnoticed until after she suffered severe abuse, requiring emergency medical attention.¹²

Regarding online violence against girls, there are a multitude of initiatives to improve legislation and policies to respond to this concern. A significant development is the adoption of updated Sexual Offences legislation, which provides a comprehensive legal framework addressing both offline and online sexual abuse. However, progress on other initiatives, such as the action plan "Together against Human Trafficking" and the implementation of the DSA (Digital Services Act) legislation, has been slower. Consequently, efforts to combat online child trafficking and sexual exploitation in the Netherlands remain constrained, with some initiatives unable to be fully implemented or not yet operational.¹³

¹⁰ [Dashboard Veilig Thuis](#)

¹¹ [Dashboard Veilig Thuis](#)

¹² [Vlaardings pleegmeisje uit ziekenhuis, 'maar situatie blijft zorgelijk'](#)

¹³ [Kinderhandel en seksuele uitbuiting | Kinderrechten in Beweging](#)

3. Conclusion

The Dutch NGO Coalition for Children's Rights emphasises the specific and critical situation of girls as victims and/or survivors of violence in the Netherlands. Recognizing that addressing gender-based violence and violence against women and girls inherently means strengthening children's rights, we advocate for a comprehensive approach that requires robust investigation procedures, multi-sectoral support systems, and the consistent application of legal protections in custody decisions.

The Coalition expresses concern over the lack of available data regarding the extent of violence against girls, especially those under the age of 16. Additionally, issues such as inconsistent follow-up on child abuse reports and unequal access to comprehensive support through a multidisciplinary approach are areas of significant concern.

We look forward to discussing these issues further during your upcoming visit to the Netherlands in Autumn 2024.

Sincerely,

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Joint submission of the Dutch NGO Coalition for Children's Rights to GREVIO

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