



Learning from victims and survivors of childhood sexual violence to inspire policy change

November 2023

Contents

- European Day on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (18 November) 3
- 2023 Edition: Learning from victims and survivors of childhood sexual violence to inspire policy change 4
 - Victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse* 4
 - What we know about child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse* 4
 - Engaging with victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse* 5
 - How has the Council of Europe been engaging with victims and survivors?* 5
- Forms of engagement with victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse 8
 - Victims’ and survivors’ participation in their individual cases: victim centred approaches and restorative justice* 9
 - Victims’ and survivors’ participation in policy making* 11
- How to better engage with victims and survivors of childhood sexual violence? 12
 - Listening to and believing victims and survivors* 12
 - Supporting victims and survivors* 12
 - Training of professionals engaging with victims and survivors* 13
- How to better engage with victims and survivors to inspire policy change 15
 - Recognising victims and survivors as experts and co-creators* 15
 - Human rights and child rights-based approach* 15
 - Safe environment* 15
 - Sustainability and continuity* 16
 - Providing feedback and monitoring the implementation* 17
 - Awareness raising and the role of the media* 17
- Available resources 18



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

Sexual violence against children is a widespread phenomenon that knows no borders, it is present in all cultures, in every country of the world and it increasingly has an international aspect. Offenders who sexually abuse children are often people who are known to the child: family members (including parents) and friends, sports coaches, teachers, priests, and sometimes peers. The severe trauma caused by sexual abuse can have deep and long-lasting impacts on the child throughout their childhood and often continue into adulthood. A minority of children and adults are able to report what has happened and even today, a very low proportion of offenders are convicted for the crimes they have committed. For all these reasons, it is imperative to continue raising awareness about what is sexual abuse and exploitation against children, what can be done to prevent it, how children and trusted adults can report abuse and how we can protect children, overall.

The Council of Europe has been raising awareness through the annual [European Day on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#) on the 18th of November each year since 2015. Since 2021 this has now also become the world day for the prevention of and healing from child sexual exploitation, abuse and violence.



18 NOVEMBER

European Day on the Protection of Children
against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse

www.coe.int/EndChildSexAbuseDay

COE
COUNCIL OF EUROPE

CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

The banner features a blue background with white and red stylized flowers. The Council of Europe logo is in the bottom right corner.

2023 Edition: Learning from victims and survivors of childhood sexual violence to inspire policy change

Each year, the Council of Europe seeks to raise awareness on different aspects concerning sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children (also referred to as childhood sexual violence) through a thematic focus. The [2023 Edition](#) of the European Day focussed on learning from victims and survivors of childhood sexual violence to inspire policy change.

Victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse

People affected by child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse may prefer to be referred to as victims or survivors, and different people may identify with each of these terms at different stages of their lives. According to Article 3 of the [Lanzarote Convention](#), the facts of the sexual exploitation or sexual abuse do not have to be established in court in order for a person to be recognised as a victim. Although the Convention does not specifically refer to the term survivor, the terms victim and survivor are used throughout this text to be as inclusive as possible.

Did you know...

The Lanzarote Convention requires State Parties (countries that have agreed to implement this treaty) to criminalise sexual activities with a child. The following acts are criminal offences according to the Lanzarote Convention:

- engaging in sexual activities with a child who has not yet reached the legal age for sexual activities (Article 18 paragraph 1 a);
- engaging in sexual activities with a child, regardless of the age of the child, where use is made of coercion, force or threats, or a recognised position of trust, authority or influence over the child, including within the family, or a particularly vulnerable situation of the child (Article 18 paragraph 1 b);
- exploiting the child through prostitution (Article 19);
- production, offering, distributing, procuring, possessing, or obtaining child sexual abuse material (i.e. material that visually depicts a child engaged in real or simulated sexually explicit conduct or any depiction of a child's sexual organs for primarily sexual purposes (Article 20);
- recruiting or coercing a child or knowingly attending production of child sexual abuse material (Article 21);
- corruption or solicitation (grooming) of children for sexual purposes (Articles 22 and 23).

What we know about child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse

About one in five children are victims of some form of sexual violence. In the vast majority of cases, children are subjected to sexual abuse by people they trust. Approximately one third of child victims never tell anyone about the abuse for reasons such as the fear of not being believed, fear of consequences, feelings of shame, guilt, or confusion. Some children remain silent because they are not able to identify abuse, or they don't know who to tell. Consequently, many children never disclose what is happening and often live in the isolation and trauma of their suffering.

**one in five
un sur cinq**



Delayed disclosure of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse is a common phenomenon whereby it can take individuals years before they are able to tell anyone about the abuse. There are many victims/survivors who experienced sexual violence in childhood and were first able to disclose it at the age of 50 or older.

Sexual violence in childhood has been recognised to have long-term impacts on the health and well-being of victims/survivors throughout their lives. These include increased exposure to a range of chronic physical and mental health conditions. Listening to victims and survivors, respecting them, and believing them is very important. Learning from their experiences to develop better policies to prevent child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse and protect the rights of victims/survivors can bring about social change while also helping to improve healing of other victims/survivors.

Engaging with victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse

Listening to victims and survivors helps legislators, policy makers and professionals to better understand the phenomenon of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. For example, the information shared by victims and survivors can provide evidence on the reasons that caused victims and survivors to report or not report the abuse and the long-lasting harm experienced.

While comprehensive legislation is available in the majority of State Parties to the Lanzarote Convention, evidence suggests that a minority of victims report the abuse, that often victims do not receive appropriate services and that few offenders are prosecuted. Engaging with victims and survivors can be a powerful way to shed light on the existing gaps, the difficulties faced by victims and how these affect their health and well-being in the long run. The information provided by victims and survivors should be used as a qualitative measure to evaluate current legislation, policies and practices with a view to strengthening and improving the response by the whole system. This information should also help to raise awareness on the need to put in place any further measures including assistance to victims.

Did you know...

State Parties must also take the necessary legislative and policy measures to encourage any person who knows about or suspects sexual exploitation or sexual abuse of children to report these facts to the competent services (Article 12).

How has the Council of Europe been engaging with victims and survivors?

The Council of Europe engages with victims and survivors in different capacities and for various purposes.

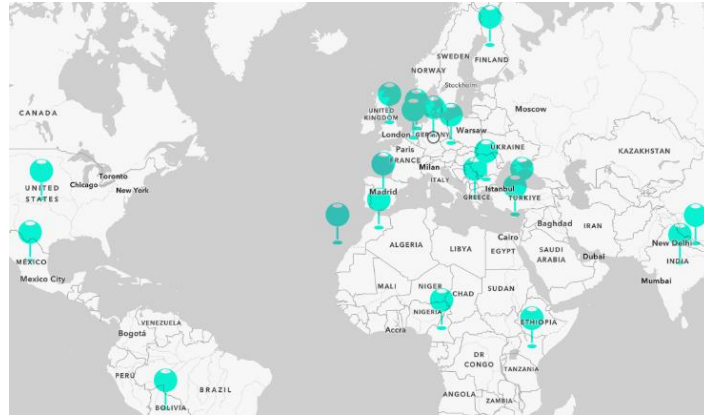
✧ In the framework of the 2023 Edition of the European Day, the Council of Europe has taken many opportunities to engage with victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse and with organisations led by or working with them:

✧ European Day Panel

Victims and survivors from different State Parties, who took part in independent commissions, inquiries and investigations into child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse as well as civil society, gathered at the European Day Panel held on 30 November 2023 to exchange views and share good practice examples to improve victim/survivor engagement with policy makers. For more information, please see the [Programme](#).

✧ Online survey

An online survey was launched to consult with organisations that engage with victims and survivors to learn from stakeholders all around the world about the various ways in which victims/survivors are already engaging with policymakers to inspire change (hereinafter referred to as: the online survey).



17 civil society organisations (4 from Asia and Africa, 11 from Europe, 1 from North America and 1 from South America), and 59 state authorities from Europe responded to the online survey. Although the questionnaire was not directly addressed to individuals, 3 victims/survivors also sent responses.

✧ Victims and survivors as experts drafting projects, guidelines, and recommendations
 Victims and survivors work as independent experts in projects and in the drafting of Council of Europe guidelines and recommendations. They often undertake such tasks because they are expert professionals in the relevant subject matter, but they also bring their lived experiences as victims/survivors to the work and help to make it better adapted to the reality of all victims/survivors.

Most recently, independent experts, who also identify themselves as survivors, were involved in drafting the Guidelines for victim/survivor engagement in policy making within the framework of the 2023 Edition of the European Day.

✧ Victims and survivors engaging with the Council of Europe monitoring bodies
 The Council of Europe has a number of Conventions and bodies responsible for monitoring the effective implementation of these Conventions to ensure better protection of human rights in various fields in State Parties. The Convention on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse is monitored by the [Lanzarote Committee](#) in [thematic rounds](#). The members of the Lanzarote Committee are the representatives of the State Parties to the Convention. Victims and survivors also participate in the work of the Lanzarote Committee in various ways:

✧ Shadow reports

Victims and survivors' organisations can submit additional information or comments on the responses of State Parties to the questions posed by the Committee for monitoring purposes. The Lanzarote Committee provides a period of two months from the publication of the response of a State Party on the Lanzarote Committee's website for civil society to submit comments. For more information, please see: [Civil society – Lanzarote Committee](#).

✧ Observer status

International non-governmental organisations, including those that are led by victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse may participate in the Lanzarote Committee as observers. Observers participate in the work of the Lanzarote Committee in almost the same way as members, they can contribute to draft texts, keep the Committee informed about emerging issues and act as rapporteurs. They cannot vote on matters subject to a vote and are not entitled to defrayal of their expenses to attend meetings.

[Brave Movement](#) is a global, inclusive, and survivor-led advocacy movement. [Survivors representing the Brave Movement participate in the work and meetings of the Lanzarote Committee as an observer](#) since 2 February 2023.

[Global Collaborative](#) is an all-volunteer, survivors led network of child advocacy organisations, academic institutions, survivors networks, NGOs and faith actors and has been an observer since 30 November 2023.

✧ Capacity building events

Victims and survivors participate in the capacity building events of the Lanzarote Committee as experts and speakers. The Lanzarote Committee conducts capacity building events to exchange information, national experiences and promising practices presented by State Parties, civil society, and other stakeholders to improve capacities to prevent and combat sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children. For more information, please see: [Capacity building – Lanzarote Committee](#).

Did you know...

The Council of Europe has other monitoring and standard setting bodies working on topics relevant to victims/survivors of childhood sexual violence, such as:

- [Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child](#)
- [Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence](#)
- [Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings](#)
- [European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#)
- [European Committee on Crime Problems](#)
- [European Committee on Legal Co-operation](#)
- [European Social Charter](#)

For more information, please click on the links and visit the web pages of each body.

✧ Victims' and survivors' participation in public hearings

Public hearings may occasionally be held by relevant Council of Europe monitoring bodies, the [Parliamentary Assembly](#), or the [Congress of Local and Regional Authorities](#) during country visits or in Strasbourg to collect evidence and the views of victims/survivors regarding their relevant work.

The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly's [Committee on Social Affairs, Health, and Sustainable Development](#) held a [public hearing with two survivors of childhood sexual abuse](#) in Strasbourg, on 11 October 2022 and conducted a [fact finding visit to Romania](#) in September 2023 to learn from lived experiences of victims and survivors while drafting recommendations to Council of Europe Member States on "Child abuse in Europe: addressing, compensation, and prevention".

For more information, please see: [Motion for a Resolution](#) and [Justice Initiative](#).




Forms of engagement with victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse

Victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse are all different, the way they have experienced the abuse is personal and the way they are prepared to share their story will also be distinct.

All the States authorities that replied to the online survey indicated that they engage with child victims/survivors of childhood sexual violence. Some of the local authorities from Bulgaria stated that they also engage with adult victims/survivors. The majority of the civil society organisations from all around the world who replied to the online survey also stated that they engage with victims and survivors of childhood sexual violence. The organisations that responded to the online questionnaire have been working with victims/survivors for an average of 12 years.

Examples of victim/survivor engagement in different State Parties

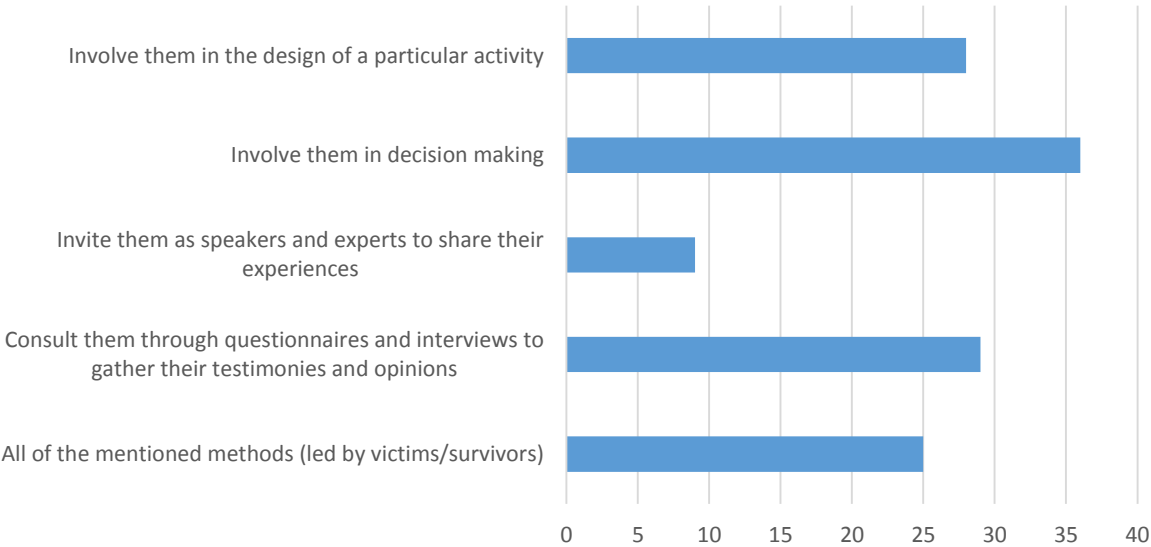


Bulgaria

53 different State-authorities from Bulgaria responded to the online survey. All of them stated that they engage with child victims or children at risk, as well as their families, to implement the child protection policy, protect their rights and interests and provide support and assistance. 7 Social Assistance Directorates operating in different regions indicated that they also engage with adult victims/survivors of childhood sexual violence.

Respondents to the online survey also indicated that the most common method of engagement is to involve victims/survivors in decision-making. From comments made by respondents, it is understood that the inclusion of victims/survivors in decision-making refers to their participation in decisions related to their individual cases, rather than decisions made in the policy making processes.

Methods used to engage with victims/survivors



Victims' and survivors' participation in their individual cases: victim centred approaches and restorative justice

A large number of victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse still do not have access to victim-centred services and approaches within the justice system. The data shows that there are significant gaps between the prevalence, reporting, prosecution and conviction rates of childhood sexual violence. One reason for this is that the means and methods of listening to victims and survivors in a victim-centred and trauma-informed way is still not widespread in practice.

In many countries criminal justice mechanisms operate according to retributive justice models, primarily indicating that crimes are committed against the law of the state, focusing on punishment and rehabilitation of the offenders. In cases where the crime is prosecuted, victims and survivors often participate in the proceedings as witnesses for the State. In the absence of victim-centred and trauma-informed approaches, victims'/survivors' testimonies are at risk of being treated as unreliable, with often untrue claims being made that they are confusing or misinterpreting events. This risk is especially acute if they are still children, and similarly that they may be misremembering sexual violence if they are now adults.

Whereas following a victim-centred approach, listening to, and engaging respectfully with victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse can contribute both to improve their personal access to justice and to the strengthen justice systems in general. Securing effective access to justice for victims enables more offenders to engage with offender management and treatment programmes.

Did you know...

The **victim-centred approach** puts the rights and dignity of victims and survivors at the forefront of all efforts to prevent and respond to a crime. Victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse have a right to:

- be treated with respect
- be heard
- privacy and confidentiality
- receive information (this information should be in a child-friendly language if victim/survivor is a child)
- receive assistance and support with short and long term recovery
- complain
- effective remedies

Where the victim/survivor is a child, the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration for all professionals working on the case and a child-sensitive approach should be implemented. A child-sensitive approach means taking the child's age, views, needs, concerns, and evolving capacities into account.

For more information please see:

- [Articles 14 and 30-31 of the Lanzarote Convention](#)
- [Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Child-friendly Justice Guidelines](#)
- [Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Recommendation on Rights, Services and Support for Victims of Crime](#)
- [United Nations' Victims' Rights First initiative](#)
- [European Union Directive establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims](#)

There is also a growing interest in introducing restorative justice models at national level in Council of Europe Member States to shift the focus of criminal justice to the benefit of victims and survivors. Restorative justice defines crime not primarily as breaking the laws of the state, but as harm done to the victim. States using restorative justice tools recognise the legitimate interest of victims and survivors to

have a stronger voice, to obtain reparation and satisfaction within the justice process. Restorative justice aims to better address and repair the harm caused to the victim by crime and to make the justice process as responsive and solution oriented as possible.

Did you know...

Restorative justice often takes the form of a dialogue (whether direct or indirect) between the victim and the offender and can also involve other persons directly or indirectly affected by a crime. This may include supporters of victims, relevant professionals and members or representatives of affected communities.

Where restorative justice involves children (whether as victims or as offenders), they have a right to participate as in any other legal proceeding. Their parents, legal guardians, or other supporting adults also should be able to attend any proceedings to ensure that their rights are upheld. This can be achieved for example through the use of victim impact statements when a judge is deciding on the sanction to be handed down to the offender.

For more information, please see: [Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Recommendation concerning restorative justice in criminal matters](#).

Examples of victim/survivor engagement in different States Parties



The use of restorative justice tools was first experimented in France in a pilot project in 2010. Restorative justice has come a long way in terms of both form and content since its development and has accelerated when it was integrated into the French criminal law in 2014. In 2021, there were 83 ongoing restorative justice procedures that included restorative mediation, victim-offender meetings, and support groups.

For more information, you may consult the following sources in French: [La justice restaurative - L'essentiel](#) and [Institut Français pour la Justice Restaurative](#).

Victims' and survivors' participation in policy making

State Parties have developed different ways of engaging with victims and survivors in the context of policy development. Victims and survivors can contribute as a one-off event or participate in long-term processes by participating in a permanent body, such as a victims' and survivors' council.

For each form of engagement with victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, there are various methodologies that can be used. Methodologies for gathering the views of victims and survivors may include:

- Face-to-face individual interviews;
- Face-to-face group discussions or focus groups;
- Written surveys;
- Online surveys;
- Telephone surveys;
- Other, as appropriate.

It would be ideal to discuss with victims and survivors their preferred method of participation and to tailor the engagement as much as possible to the specific needs of each victim/survivor.

Examples of victim/survivor engagement in different States Parties



United Kingdom

The UK Home Office Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Unit replied to the online survey, explaining how they engage with victims/survivors of childhood sexual violence. The Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse has established several models of engagement with adult and young survivors of child sexual abuse and their families. These include:

- recruitment of a diverse group of adult survivors to collaborate on development of its Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway;
- use of a co-delivery model with experts by experience in its training on working with adult survivors;
- and experts by experience are also engaged strategically through the Centre's own Advisory Board and operationally through reviewing and advising on specific publications and programmes of work.

Additionally, [Independent Inquiry Child Sexual Abuse](#) in England and Wales was established in 2015 aiming to identify the extent to which State and non-State institutions had failed to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation and to make recommendations in order to protect children from such abuse in the future. Approximately 7,300 victims and survivors of child sexual abuse participated in the Inquiry through various mechanisms including: the Victims and Survivors Consultative Panel, the Truth project, Victims and Survivors Forum, investigations, and research. The inquiry published its final report in 2022.



How to better engage with victims and survivors of childhood sexual violence?

Listening to and believing victims and survivors

Victims and survivors participating in different engagement activities organised within the framework of 2023 Europe Day, stated that listening to and believing victims/survivors is key to develop better policies to fight against childhood sexual violence.

Did you know...

Listening to, respecting, and believing the testimonies and experiences of victims and survivors of childhood sexual violence is the first and indispensable stage of constructive engagement.

Examples of victim/survivor engagement in different States Parties



[Independent Commission on incest and sexual violence against children](#) was established in 2021 for three years. The main priority of the Commission was to provide space for victims and witnesses to share their testimonies and to provide support to them in order to understand and raise awareness about the extent of sexual violence against children in France. The Commission also used the testimonies gathered to conduct research and make recommendations to strengthen policies to better prevent sexual violence and protect children. The Commission was formed of 27 experts including diverse professionals, victims and representatives of victims' associations. As of March 2023 over 10,000 testimonies had been gathered by the Commission. The Commission published its [final report](#) on 20 November 2023 (available in French).

They also underlined the importance of listening to children regardless of their age and believing what they say to better protect them in their individual cases.

Did you know...

Participation is a fundamental right of all children

Children have the right to be heard and to express their views in all matters that affect them. This right is commonly known as ***the right to participation***. Accordingly, child victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse have the right to report to the authorities what has happened to them, to participate in trials where offenders are being prosecuted and give their account of the events; and to contribute in other ways, such as [participating in the activities of the Lanzarote Committee](#).

Enabling child victims and survivors to be heard and to share their experiences can help to raise awareness of how sexual abuse and exploitation of children takes place and what we can do to prevent it. It can also contribute to improve the existing services available in countries to better respond to their needs.

Supporting victims and survivors

Victims and survivors who sent replies to the online survey requested access to centres/institutions where they could receive continuous psychological and social support.

State authorities also underlined the need to establish a sufficient number of specialised centres and networks of support groups to provide adequate and continuous psychological and social services to

victims and survivors. They stated that psychologists and specialists on working with children should be appointed to all state institutions engaging with victims/survivors of childhood sexual violence.

Did you know...

The Lanzarote Convention requires State Parties to establish effective social programmes and set up multidisciplinary structures to provide the necessary support for victims, their close relatives and for any person who is responsible for their care (Article 11). They must take the necessary legislative and policy measures to assist victims, in the short and long term, in their physical and psycho-social recovery (Article 14).

They emphasised that multi-agency and multi-disciplinary services (such as Barnahus) should be made widespread to better engage with victims and survivors while working on sexual violence cases.

Did you know...

Lanzarote Committee recommends that State Parties encourage the co-ordination and collaboration of different stakeholders who engage with victims and survivors during criminal proceedings and follow a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to offer extra support to victims and survivors ([Recommendation 24 of the 1st Implementation Report adopted on 4 December 2015](#)). In the same report the Committee recognised the Icelandic Barnahus model as a promising practice. For more information: [Mapping study on multidisciplinary and interagency child-friendly justice models](#)

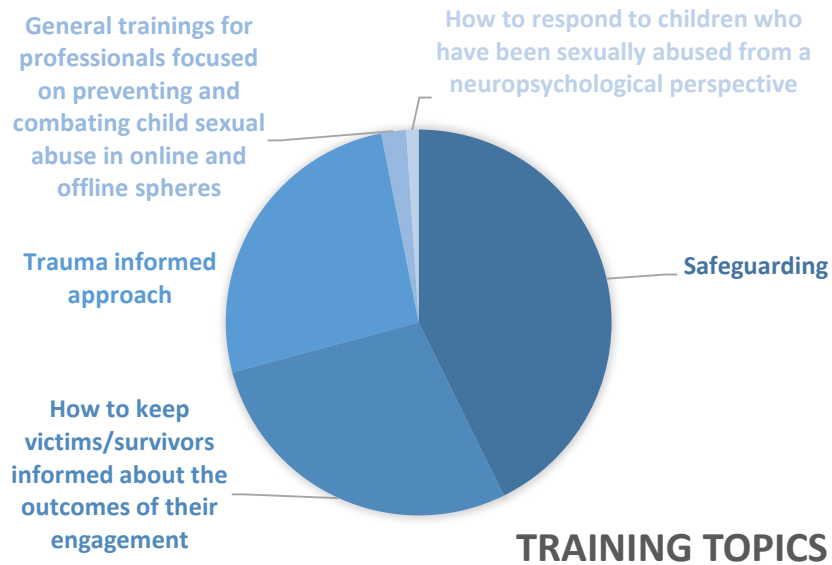
Training of professionals engaging with victims and survivors

Victims and survivors requested to be addressed by specially trained professionals in order to better engage with legal procedures and policy making processes. They also noted the need to build the capacity of professionals in all sectors (law enforcement, legal, social services) to prevent re-victimisation of victims/survivors.

Did you know...

The Lanzarote Convention requires State Parties to encourage and ensure that training on the protection and rights of children is available for the benefit of all persons *who have regular contacts with children in the education, health, social protection, judicial and law-enforcement sectors and in areas relating to sport, culture, and leisure activities.* (Article 5).

The majority of the state authorities and civil society organisations responding to the online survey, stated that they provide training to their staff members engaging with victims/survivors of childhood sexual violence. 19 out of 59 State authorities and 2 out of 17 civil society organisations stated that they do not provide specialist training for their staff, despite their engagement with children in general or victims/survivors. One of the civil society organisations responding in this way stated that they provide online and offline support services instead of training. Many respondents indicated that they provide training on multiple topics.



The respondents who stated that they provide specialised training also indicated the topics of the trainings. Accordingly, 43% of the participants provide training on protection and 26% on trauma-informed approaches.

All respondents working with victims/survivors of violence highlighted the need for quality and ongoing specialised training, certification programmes and supervision to better equip their staff. Human and children's rights-based and trauma-informed approaches, recognising signs to identify victims of violence and constructive communication are among the areas identified for potential training. To achieve this, some suggested the establishment of mobile training teams to support both victims/survivors of violence and professionals working with them, and a platform for sharing good practice examples.



How to better engage with victims and survivors to inspire policy change

As the 2023 Edition focused on the theme of learning from victims and survivors of childhood sexual violence to inspire policy change, victims/survivors and other relevant stakeholders participating in the different events held in the framework of the Europe Day were specifically asked to provide indications on how to ensure a more meaningful and constructive engagement with victims and survivors in the context of legislative reform and policy making.

Recognising victims and survivors as experts and co-creators

Survivors speaking at the Europe Day Panel underlined that being a victim/survivor is part of their identity but not their full-time profession, they are often highly qualified professionals with expertise in various fields. Therefore, it is important to recognise victims and survivors as experts contributing to legislative processes and policy making.

They also stated that involving victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse to seek feedback at the end of the legislative reform or policy development processes is not efficient and is less accessible for most victims/survivors. They recommended that engagement be initiated from the very beginning of the process to achieve more effective outcomes.

Human rights and child rights-based approach

All participants to the online survey highlighted the importance of learning directly from the experiences of victims/survivors while making law and policies relevant to them and the prevention of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. They recommended that policy makers integrate a human rights and child rights-based approach to consultation activities so that victims and survivors feel supported, respected, and believed.

Did you know...

Human rights-based approach to victim/survivor engagement means that the rights of victims and survivors protected by international human rights conventions (such as the [European Convention on Human Rights](#)) are respected and fulfilled throughout the engagement process. The aim of the human rights-based approach is to strengthen the capacity of State Parties and policy makers to ensure that they fulfil their obligations, while enabling victims and survivors to participate.

As children are entitled to an additional set of rights protected by international human rights conventions (such as the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) and the [Lanzarote Convention](#)), **child rights-based approach** means that these specific rights must also be respected when applying a human rights-based approach to engagements involving children.

Safe environment

Providing a safe environment for victims' and survivors' engagement was a common recommendation from all participants to the online survey and the Europe Day Panel. A safe environment would not only enable healthier communication and gathering of more accurate information but would also prevent victims/survivors from being re-traumatised. It would also be beneficial to protect policy makers from secondary or vicarious traumatisation. Providing supportive services such as psychological support before, during and after the engagement can help all parties to better cope with the process. In addition, all other rights of victims/survivors, such as the right to privacy, must continue to be protected at all times.

✂ *Child safeguarding policies*

Participants to the European Day Panel strongly recommended that child safeguarding policies be incorporated into systems and procedures while engaging with child victims and survivors to create safe environments.

Did you know...

Child safeguarding policies serve to prevent and minimise the risk of harm to children at any stage of the engagement activities to make children's participation safe and in accordance with their rights and best interests. Such policies are usually binding on all participants, starting prior to the engagement activities continuing until the very end. These policies require that:

- potential risks and mitigating measures are considered before engagement begins,
- incidents that may occur during engagement are assessed and responded to in an appropriate manner,
- concerns about children's safety are reported to the appropriate authorities, and
- all rights of children are respected when providing feedback, reporting, and communicating results with the media.

For more information, please see: [Listen – Act – Change Council of Europe Handbook on children's participation for professionals working for and with children.](#)

✂ *Ethical and practical guidelines*

All participants to the online survey and the European Day Panel also stated that ethical and practical guidelines and protocols should be developed to ensure that engagement with victims and survivors in the context of policy development is victim-centered and trauma-informed. To help policy makers manage engagement in the best possible way and achieve the most efficient results, the Council of Europe has prepared guidelines for victim/survivor engagement in policy making for the 2023 Edition of the Europe Day outlining the key principles for policy makers seeking to engage with victims/survivors.

Sustainability and continuity

Speakers at the Europe Day Panel placed great weight on the importance of sustainability and continuity to ensure that engagement activities are not a tokenistic exercise and effectively improve systems to prevent child sexual exploitation and better protect victims/survivors. They recommended the establishment of focal points and the appointment of permanent professionals responsible for ensuring that the views of victims and survivors are integrated into the law and policy-making process.

They mentioned that engagement initiatives, such as independent commissions, inquiries and investigations into child sexual abuse, need to continue for at least one generation to become embedded in the public consciousness and create a cultural change. Panellists acknowledged that the permanent Office of the Independent Commissioner for Child Sexual Abuse Issues in Germany provides a policy structure and sustainability for victim/survivor engagement.

Examples of victim/survivor engagement in different States Parties



Germany

[Office of the Independent Commissioner for Child Sexual Abuse Issues](#) was established in 2010, and declared a permanent institution by the Federal Cabinet in 2018. Its mandate includes developing concepts to improve protection against child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, identification of legal and research gaps and ensuring independent inquiries into child sexual exploitation and abuse in Germany.

A Survivors' Board was established in 2015 to ensure the structured participation of survivors in all aspects of the work of the Commissioner and has currently 16 members.

Providing feedback and monitoring the implementation

Other common recommendations mentioned by all participants included providing feedback to victims and survivors after engagement activities on how their views will be taken into account and taking necessary law and policy-making steps in a timely manner to implement the recommendations.

Participants underlined that there was sometimes a lack of monitoring of the implementation of recommendations and suggested that a possible solution is the establishment of independent centralised authorities to monitor implementation.

Awareness raising and the role of the media

Participants the Europe Day Panel agreed that child sexual abuse is not only a legal and political problem, but also a social issue. It is essential to ensure that policy change helps not only victims and survivors, but also society to heal. They said that public communication and social support are at the heart of the solution. They recommended that politicians should allocate sufficient funds to raise awareness about child sexual abuse and where victims/survivors can get help.

They also called for the media to be held accountable for providing adequate and sensitive coverage to the voices of victims and survivors.

Did you know...

The Lanzarote Convention requires State Parties to promote and conduct awareness raising campaigns addressed to the public providing information on prevention of child sexual abuse (Article 8).

The Convention also requires State Parties to encourage the media to provide appropriate information concerning all aspects of sexual abuse of children (Article 9 paragraph 3).



Available resources

The Children's Rights Division of the Council of Europe has developed many different awareness-raising tools and resources which are available on its [website](#) and are classified according to the target audience:



[For children](#)



[For parents](#)



[For authorities and
parliaments](#)



[For professionals
working with children](#)

Check regularly the Council of Europe websites for more information.

Contact: EndChildSexAbuseDay@coe.int

Websites: www.coe.int/EndChildSexAbuseDay
www.coe.int/children
www.coe.int/lanzarote

Twitter: [@coe_children](https://twitter.com/coe_children) / [#EndChildSexAbuseDay](https://twitter.com/EndChildSexAbuseDay)

Facebook: [Council of Europe Children](https://www.facebook.com/CouncilofEuropeChildren)

Instagram: [@councilofeurope](https://www.instagram.com/councilofeurope)

