

Montenegro

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

No information received.

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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.**

Due to COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Montenegro, with the assistance of UN system in Montenegro conducted the Rapid Impact Assessment of the COVID-19 on the socio-economic situation in the country (April 2020). Even though sexual exploitation and abuse of children have not been assessed as such, broader phenomenon of violence against children and gender based violence was assessed with the following findings: As a result of restrictive measures taken in Montenegro to contain the spread of COVID-19, there is a high risk that domestic violence against women and children will increase massively in the country. The national SOS line reported an increase in the number of calls with 27 percent in March after the country announced lockdown measures. The Women's Safe House received an increased number of calls for support and requests for accommodation in its shelter, already in first week of April. In addition, the Women's Safe House reported an increase in requests of former clients for food or some financial support due to job losses experienced by that former clients or women who contact them by phone. Centres for Social Work and NGOs which provide services to victims of domestic violence report more calls/requests for assistance during the COVID epidemic. Measures put in place to contain the spread of the virus limits the options for reporting and protection, and victims believe they need to stay in their homes even when they are under the threat of violence. Considering that children do not access services to the same extent, reporting is more challenging. Stress, disruption of social and protective networks, decreased access to services and family separation exacerbated the risk of violence for women and adolescent girls. NGOs working with children victims or witnesses of violence

report an increase of such incidents as well as a change in their nature, as psychological violence including arguments between spouses/partners, but also between parents and children, particularly adolescents, became more prominent. The COVID-19 crisis has already shown a significant increase in calls by victims of domestic violence to the national hotline, it is important to find out if the GBV has increased among women with disability in Montenegro, as well.

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.

Montenegro has just declared the end of the virus COVID 19 epidemic and data collection has only just begun.

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.

All childcare institutions and state and non-state-run shelters have regularly applied child safeguarding procedures. The Government of Montenegro with assistance of UNDP launched mobile application for fast and confidential reporting of family violence by victims, including development of the annex on working with cases within the COVID-19 to the Protocol on Inter-sectoral cooperation on Family Violence. With UNICEF support, state run Child helpline regularly provides psychosocial support to children in relation to COVID-19 and all other issues of concern, including all forms of violence (<https://www.unicef.org/montenegro/en/stories/national-sos-childrens-line-116-111-support-children-relation-their-coronavirus-concerns>). Additional efforts have been continuously invested in Helpline promotion. Given the fact Red Cross of Montenegro's outreach workers and volunteers have been on the field providing direct assistance to beneficiaries, 140 Red Cross's outreach worker and volunteers have been educated on Prevention of Sexual Abuse and Abuse by humanitarian workers (PSEA), prevention, risk mitigation & referrals for survivors, with assistance of UNICEF. Within the same initiative, NGO "SOS Niksic" prepared draft Gender Based Violence pocket guide, based on the international Inter-Agency Standing Committee GBV Pocket Guide, including information on Prevention of Child Sexual and Exploitation (Hyperlink: https://gbvguidelines.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/GBV_PocketGuide021718.pdf). The Association of Youth with Handicap provides psychosocial and legal support to children with disabilities and their families through an online platform: (<https://vrsnjackapodrska.me/>). Total number of children with disabilities and their families supported with psychosocial support is 195 family members, out of which number 41 children. Number of persons with disabilities provided with legal aid is 82.

- 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.**

In accordance with applicable legislation of Montenegro, children should participate in all proceedings that affects them directly or indirectly, through the Support Person or Professional Support Services, established in Montenegro's judiciary (Family Law, 2016, Act on Treatment of Juveniles in Criminal Proceedings, 2011). The same practice was applied during COVID-19 crisis.