

United Kingdom

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

Summary

- We are acutely aware that the necessary guidelines about social distancing and self-isolation may leave the victims of hidden crime, such as child sexual abuse, feeling especially vulnerable.
- With schools and many youth services closed, millions of children are spending more time online and may be even more vulnerable to online predators.
- We are working with law enforcement to ensure they have the capacity to continue to tackle child sexual abuse and bring heinous offenders to justice.
- We are working across government, with law enforcement partners and the third sector to ensure services are primed to protect vulnerable children and prevent abuse. We urge everybody, especially parents, carers and teachers to follow the essential the advice on how we can protect children and keep them safe online.

Online risk

- The National Crime Agency is already stepping up its messaging to professionals, parents and children on staying safe online through their #OnlineSafetyAtHome campaign and their ThinkUKnow resources which can be easily incorporated into home schooling
- The Department for Education have published interim safeguarding advice with the primary focus to support schools and colleges to keep children safe. The guidance asks schools and colleges to support parents and carers to keep children safe online and signpost them to information and advice such as National Crime Agency's Thinkuknow resources, Internet Matters and Parent Info.

Online Industry

- Government is working with tech companies, NGOs, law enforcement and other Governments to understand the impact of COVID on technology companies' ability to identify and combat online child sexual exploitation and abuse, and any steps that can be taken to address this.
- From initial conversations, this issue remains a priority for companies and they continue to identify child sexual abuse content with reduced capacity.

Online Pursue

- The National Crime Agency and UK policing relentlessly fight the online child sexual abuse threat, arresting more than 500 child sex offenders and safeguarding around 700 children each month.

- The Home Office will continue to work with the National Crime Agency, the National Police Chiefs' Council and the UK Intelligence Community in order to sustain and optimise our Law Enforcement response, adapting to COVID-19 by pivoting our capabilities to bolster areas of increased risk whilst ensuring greatest impact as we tackle an evolving threat.

Offender management

- We recognise that social isolation and loneliness are key issues for those who have offended sexually and that there will be new challenges in terms of the supervision and support some offenders will receive during this period. We are working closely with offender managers, law enforcement colleagues and the Lucy Faithfull Foundation (*charity working with offenders and those at-risk of offending*) to address this challenge.

Safeguarding Partnerships

- Government departments are working with local safeguarding partners to understand how COVID-19 has impacted on their work to protect vulnerable children. Safeguarding must remain a priority during this extremely challenging period, and we continue to support local agencies to continue to work together and keep children safe.

Trusted Relationships (*community-based projects working with vulnerable children*)

- We have been liaising with Local Authorities to determine the risks and effects of COVID-19 on service delivery and will ensure any risks, particularly safeguarding risks, are appropriately mitigated.
- Covid-19 has limited the number of face-to-face engagements between participants and their support workers, however Local Authorities have used a RAG rating system, and those children and young people that are classified as the highest need continue to receive face-to-face contact under specific home visit protocols. Local Authorities have increased their presence in schools to appeal to special care students that are attending.

Victims

- We are working across government and with the voluntary sector to ensure that victims and survivors continue to have access to the best possible support.

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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.**

No information received.

- 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.**

No information received.

- 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.**

No information received.

- 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.**

No information received.