

## Resolution 2330 (2020)<sup>1</sup>

# Addressing sexual violence against children: stepping up action and co-operation in Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly is deeply concerned by the spread of sexual violence against children, and the fact that increasingly younger children are victimised. Millions of girls and boys are concerned globally. While it is estimated that in Europe at least one child in five has suffered from sexual violence, such violence remains largely unreported due to shame, unbalanced power relations between victims and perpetrators, fear of disclosing intimate information and the fact that disclosure could result in further victimisation rather than an improvement of the situation.
2. Today, as Europe is fighting the Covid-19 pandemic and many countries are in lockdown, the risk of child sexual abuse is even higher. Many children are confined with their actual or potential abusers, out of sight of others who could normally detect, prevent or report the potential abuse. Children who live in poverty are increasingly exposed to sexual exploitation. With more time spent by children on gaming, social media and education platforms, online risks have also grown. Child protection systems are not well equipped to fulfil their mission during a global health crisis.
3. Sexual violence against children has serious adverse consequences on their well-being, including later in life. It is an offence against human dignity and a serious violation of human rights, including children's rights.
4. The Assembly notes that sexual violence against children takes place in different settings, ranging from the home, school and sports clubs, to orphanages and refugee camps, as well as online. Such violence can take different forms, from inappropriate touching to gang rape, and child sexual abuse by adults in positions of authority. It is therefore a broad phenomenon that requires both comprehensive and targeted approaches and policies, which should be developed and put into practice at different levels.
5. The Assembly takes note of the wealth of national, European and international research, experience and good practice in addressing sexual violence against children. It calls on the Council of Europe member States to make addressing sexual violence against children a political priority, make full use of the available resources, and step up their action and increase co-operation.
6. To this end, the Assembly urges member States:
  - 6.1. with respect to policy, to:
    - 6.1.1. develop and improve existing laws to protect children against sexual violence, with the focus on the best interests of the child, and in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the United Nations Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (the

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1. *Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 26 June 2020 (see [Doc. 15109](#), report of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development, rapporteur: Ms Doreen Massey).*  
See also [Recommendation 2175 \(2020\)](#).



Lanzarote Convention, CETS No. 201), the recommendations of the Lanzarote Committee, and the 2018 Committee of Ministers Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment;

6.1.2. set minimum standards and lay down preventive measures to be adopted by educational, cultural, sports, religious and other institutions or organisations where organised activities with children take place, and to implement their legal liability if these requirements are not met, including an obligation to report sexual violence, access to free legal advice for children of any age, protection for whistle-blowers, appropriate recruitment procedures for people in contact with children, and adequate transparency and accountability;

6.1.3. ensure that the age of sexual consent is not lower than 18, except in the case of consensual relationships between minors or when there is only a small age difference (up to two years), in which case it should not be lower than 15;

6.1.4. abolish the statute of limitations for sexual violence against children, or to at least ensure that the prescription periods for sexual violence against children in civil and criminal law are proportionate to the gravity of the alleged abuse and, in any case, no shorter than thirty years after the victim has reached the age of 18;

6.1.5. consider all possible options to ensure adequate financial compensation for individuals who are victims of sexual violence as children, commensurate with the harm suffered, including by the setting up of national funds for victims who are not compensated by the perpetrator, or the liable institution or legal entity;

6.1.6. ensure that international and national frameworks and legislation are effectively translated into action at local level and that systematic monitoring of implementation takes place; make full use of parliamentary oversight in relevant monitoring procedures;

6.1.7. support the creation of “ombudspersons for children” and the strengthening of their role in protecting children from sexual violence;

6.1.8. align policy and practice with the results of research into sexual abuse against children;

6.1.9. develop policy guidelines on the protection of children against sexual abuse and sexual exploitation during national emergency situations;

6.2. with respect to protection and support, to:

6.2.1. ensure that adequate and appropriate support to the victims of sexual violence against children is available and accessible, free of charge, including specialised support for both children and adults who were victimised as children;

6.2.2. promote interdisciplinary co-operation and co-ordination, including by means of setting up child-friendly structures and services for abuse disclosure and child protection, based on the Icelandic model of *Barnahús*, with a view to reducing trauma and re-victimisation of child victims;

6.2.3. promote training for professionals and volunteers in contact with children, including coaches, health or education professionals and confidential counsellors; such training should include the skills required to identify signs of abuse and to take appropriate action;

6.2.4. ensure that steps to deal with sexual violence against children are included in the mandates of all establishments that run organised activities with the participation of children; these should include high-level organisations, such as National Olympic Committees and international and national sports federations, and also local organisations such as clubs, schools or associations; such mandates should be translated into codes of conduct, rules and regulations; such measures should be required at each level as a condition for receiving public funding;

6.2.5. ensure that adequate financial and other resources are available, in order to sustain such action, including in times of pandemics or other emergency situations;

6.3. with respect to prosecution, to ensure that the requirements of the Lanzarote Convention and of the Council of Europe Guidelines on child-friendly justice are fully respected, and:

6.3.1. when children are perpetrators of sexual violence, that alternative measures and restorative justice procedures are applied; criminal prosecution should be used as a last resort;

- 6.3.2. when children are victims or witnesses, that they are properly supported throughout investigations and court proceedings;
- 6.3.3. that in all cases, the best interests of the child are paramount, as recommended in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- 6.4. with respect to prevention, to:
  - 6.4.1. raise public awareness of sexual violence against children by means of campaigns, materials and programmes, including the use of media and social networks; make full use of the European Day for the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse – 18 November – as an opportunity for raising awareness of sexual violence against children;
  - 6.4.2. support comprehensive and appropriate sexuality and relationship education in schools from an early age and as part of lifelong learning programmes, including respectful relationship building and practical guidance on how individuals may protect themselves against and report sexual violence;
  - 6.4.3. provide guidance for the general public on how to respond to suspected child sexual abuse;
  - 6.4.4. promote a culture of openness in all institutions, in order to ensure that victims of violence receive the support that they need;
  - 6.4.5. develop and strengthen the social responsibility and accountability of businesses and media, including social media, in preventing the over-sexualisation of children and the “pornification” of youth culture, and in addressing child sexual abuse;
  - 6.4.6. build alliances with trade unions and civil society organisations and seek their advice in developing strategies, legislation, guidelines and good practice;
- 6.5. with respect to participation and co-operation, to:
  - 6.5.1. involve survivors of child sexual abuse in the promotion of children’s rights and in developing legislation, good practice and monitoring systems, while paying due attention to safeguarding their integrity and well-being;
  - 6.5.2. support regional, national, European and international co-operation in the area of protecting children from sexual violence.
- 7. The Assembly exhorts all States, parliaments, and local and regional authorities, as well as the European Union and the United Nations, to derive the maximum benefit from the Council of Europe’s expertise and experience in addressing sexual violence against children, with a view to working together to eliminate such violence by 2030, in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals Target 16.2: “End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children”.