



Building a Europe
for and with children
Construire une Europe
pour et avec les enfants



Strasbourg, 07 April 2020

United Nations: follow-up to the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and beyond Contribution prepared by the Children's Rights Division of the Council of Europe

The Secretariat of the Council of Europe extends its gratitude to the United Nations for the opportunity to submit information in furtherance of the report of the Secretary-General (following General Assembly Resolution 74/124). Any views reflected in this contribution are those of the Secretariat of the Council of Europe and do not necessarily reflect the official position of its member states.

The Council of Europe's work is strongly grounded in the legal acquis of the United Nations. The standards developed by the Council of Europe provide further guidance to its member states, thus complementing the efforts at global level. As family-related rights and ending violence against children are global issues, the Council of Europe tools and standards in these areas are also readily applicable beyond the pan-European region.

Where applicable, this contribution has been structured in accordance with the elements detailed in the United Nations letter of 28 February 2020 (reference: DESA-20/00542).

Family-oriented policies and programmes that enhance strong intergenerational interactions

General framework

The rights of the family are enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR - Article 8 Right to family life), as [interpreted](#) by the European Court of Human Rights, and in various provisions of the European Social Charter (ESC - notably Article 16 on the right of the family to social, legal and economic protection). The European Committee on Social Rights monitors conformity with these rights as contained in the ESC: the [2019 conclusions](#) on the social rights of children, families and migrants were published in March 2020.

Parenting education

Parental education forms a central tenet of the Council of Europe's **positive parenting** work – discussed below.

In the digital environment, Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2019\)10](#) on developing and promoting digital citizenship education underscores the important role that families and child carers play in this field. It calls on public authorities to promote and raise awareness regarding this group's own digital citizenship skills, recognising their role as lifelong learners, as well their ability to further children's digital citizenship education. The Recommendation is supported by a set of resources, including the [Digital Citizenship Handbook](#) (2019) and the fully-revised [Internet Literacy Handbook](#) (2017). The Council of Europe has also developed online safety awareness-raising games, which are aimed at the whole family ([Through the Wild Web Woods](#), Online with the Websters (forthcoming)).

Support for grandparents

The issue of **relationships between grandparents and their grandchildren** has been considered by the European Court of Human Rights, both in the context of grandparents as primary care-givers (*Khusutdinov and X v. Russia*) and of maintaining ties after the child's adoption (*Bogonosovy v. Russia*).

Families facing difficulties

Numerous Council of Europe standards underline that **parents have the primary responsibility** for the upbringing and development of the child (Recommendation [Rec\(2005\)5](#); Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2010\)2](#)), and that family strengthening and support should be prioritised, where appropriate, over removing the child from the family environment ([Declaration of the Lanzarote Committee](#), 21 October 2019). Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2011\)12](#) calls on member states to improve the family friendliness of social services, which aim for the preservation of family strength and unity, especially in families facing difficulties.

At the same time, the mid-term evaluation process of the [Strategy for the Rights of the Child \(2016-2021\)](#) revealed that **many legal processes in the family context do not adequately consider or balance the views, rights and best interests of the child** (See the [mid-term evaluation report](#) (2019)). To address this, a committee of experts on the rights and the best interests of the child in parental separation and in care proceedings ([CJ/ENF-ISE](#)) has been set up. The Committee will review law, policy and practice in the area, and produce instruments or tools, as appropriate, in line with international and European standards and good practice.

Investments in parenting education as a tool to enhance children's well-being

The Council of Europe has produced numerous tools for parenting education, in order to enhance children's well-being. Those relating to **positive parenting** are discussed, below.

A number of **digital parenting** tools have been developed to help parents empower and protect their children from online sexual violence. This includes a booklet ([Parenting in the digital age: Parental guidance for the online protection of children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse](#) (2017) and a set of [video tutorials](#), on topics ranging from "sexting" to grooming. **Digital citizenship education** for parents was discussed in the previous section. A parental guide ([Digital citizenship...and your child: What every parent needs to know and do](#) (2019)) has also been produced.

Measures taken to prevent all forms of violence against children¹

Framework and the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child

Children's right to protection from violence is found in Article 3 of the ECHR (prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment) and a number of provisions of the ESC (notably Article 17, the right of children and young persons to social, legal and economic protection).

"A life free from violence for all children" is a **key pillar of the Council of Europe's Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021)**. Emphasis has been placed on mapping the Council of Europe's work in this area onto the relevant UN SDGs (and particularly **Target 16.2** – see Parliamentary Assembly Resolution [2294 \(2019\)](#) on Ending violence against children: A Council of Europe contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals and [dedicated webpage](#)). The intergovernmental **Steering Committee**

¹ For more comprehensive information, see Council of Europe (2019) [A life free from violence for all children: Report on action taken by the Council of Europe and member States](#).

for the Rights of the Child (CDENF), set up in January 2020, will continue this focus, with the assistance of a Group of Experts on Responses to violence against children.

The Council of Europe Policy Guidelines on **Integrated national strategies** for the protection of children from violence ([CM/Rec\(2009\)10](#)) underscore the importance of adopting a holistic approach in tackling this phenomenon. An evaluation of action in this area was carried out last year (see the [report](#) (2019)). While it revealed that 84% of responding member states had adopted integrated strategies or policy measures, a number of challenges remained: including in **systems for professionals to report violence against children**. Accordingly, the [CDENF](#) will seek to develop instruments in the area, including through an analysis of mandatory reporting. It will also continue to develop a [Clearinghouse](#) platform on responses to violence against children, which supports exchange of knowledge and good practice.

Sexual exploitation and sexual abuse

The Council of Europe **Convention on the Protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (Lanzarote Convention)** was the first regional treaty dedicated specifically to protecting children from sexual violence. It provides holistic action through the “4 Ps” approach: prevention, protection, prosecution and promotion of cooperation. It has been ratified or acceded to by 46 countries, including one non-member state (Tunisia).

Implementation is monitored by the **Committee of the Parties to the Convention** (the [Lanzarote Committee](#)). Monitoring rounds have focused on [sexual abuse in the circle of trust](#), [children affected by the refugee crisis](#) and sexual violence [facilitated by information and communication technologies \(ICTs\)](#). The Committee has also produced a number of declarations and opinions, including on protecting children in out-of-home care ([Declaration of 21 October 2019](#)) and on sexually suggestive or explicit content generated, shared and received by children ([Opinion of 6 June 2019](#)).

The Council of Europe has undertaken a number of **co-operation projects** to strengthen national and regional responses to prevent and combat child sexual exploitation and abuse in [Georgia](#), the [Republic of Moldova](#) and [Slovenia](#). Phase II of the Slovenia country project will support implementation of the children’s house (Barnahus) model, which has been identified and [promoted](#) as a good practice. The regional cooperation project [EndOCSEA@Europe](#) focuses on online child sexual abuse and exploitation at the pan-European and country level.

The **European Day on the Protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse** (End Child Sex Abuse Day - 18 November) aims to raise public awareness and open discussion of the issue, as well as to encourage ratification and implementation of the Lanzarote Convention. Each year is themed, with the [2019 edition](#) focusing on “empowering children to stop sexual violence”. Numerous practices and [resources for different stakeholders](#) have been produced and collected for the day.

Violence in other forms and settings

The [Istanbul Convention](#) addresses **domestic violence and gender-based violence**, including forced marriage and female genital mutilation. A [brochure](#) on the Convention and children’s rights has been published. Lanzarote Committee action on sexual violence in the circle of trust has already been outlined, while **corporal punishment** is discussed in the following section.

Trafficking in children is covered by specific provisions of the [Convention on Action against trafficking in human beings](#). The Group of Experts on Action against trafficking in human beings ([GRETA](#)) have produced a dedicated monitoring [chapter on trafficking in children](#) (2016).

Children on the move or otherwise affected by migration face heightened risk of violence for a number of reasons. A package of measures have been provided by the Council of Europe, under the [Action Plan on protecting refugee and migrant children \(2017-2019\)](#) (see also Parliamentary Resolution [2295 \(2019\)](#) to Stop violence against, and exploitation of, migrant children). It has been the subject of significant work by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment ([CPT](#)), the [Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees](#), the Lanzarote Committee and other Council of Europe bodies. Specific elements have been targeted by the extensive [Campaign to End Immigration Detention of Children](#) and the recent Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2019\)11](#) on effective guardianship for unaccompanied and separated children in the context of migration. Work also continues within the CDENF on age-assessment procedures.

Violence in sports settings is the subject of a pan-European campaign, "[Start to talk](#)".

The Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment ([CM/Rec\(2018\)7](#) – available in [19 languages](#)) provide holistic action for tackling **violence against children in the digital sphere**. They are accompanied by, inter alia, the aforementioned work of the Lanzarote Committee, the EndOCSEA@Europe project and the [No Hate Speech](#) movement.

Preventing peer violence and supporting children who display harmful sexual behaviours has been identified as an area requiring further work by the CDENF. They will seek to develop instruments on measures to be taken in the area. Peer violence is also addressed through a manual on [addressing violence in schools](#) (2016) and the [Free to Speak- Safe to Learn](#) campaign.

In light of the ongoing **COVID-19 pandemic**, many countries have implemented wide-ranging lockdown measures. Various representatives of bodies of the Council of Europe have issued [statements](#) about the increased risks of [domestic violence](#) and [child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation](#) during this time. A [dedicated webpage](#) has been produced, offering guidance and resources for protecting and empowering children in this context.

Efforts at promoting non-violent forms of disciplining children

For many years, bodies across Council of Europe have called for a complete ban on corporal punishment of children, including in the family setting (see for example Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation [1666 \(2004\)](#) on a Europe-wide ban on corporal punishment of children; [Association for the Protection of all Children \(APPROACH\) Ltd v. France](#) (European Committee of Social Rights); [Position Paper by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (2010)). These calls have been supported by a successful awareness-raising campaign, "[Raise Your Hand Against Smacking!](#)", with campaign materials and educational tools available in 19 languages. [Guidance to parliamentarians](#) on law reform to eliminate corporal punishment (2008), and a [Questions and Answers booklet](#) on abolishment (2007) have been developed.² The number of member states implementing complete bans on corporal punishment continue to increase, with 34 (out of 47) having done so to date.³

Meanwhile, Recommendation [Rec\(2006\)19](#) on policy to support positive parenting calls on member states to provide parents with sufficient support in bringing up their children in non-violent ways (a leaflet is provided [here](#)). An open [repository of good practices](#) on non-violent parenting has been developed jointly by the Council of Europe and the European Commission.

² Other language versions of the Council of Europe's resources available [here](#).

³ Scotland and Wales (United Kingdom) have also recently introduced full bans.