

Who are we?

The Child Safeguarding Team (established in 2010) within the Issues Affecting Children Program of International Center "La Strada Moldova" consists of an **attorney** and several **psychologists**, who provide assistance to children victims and witnesses of sexual abuse and exploitation throughout the criminal proceedings.

Our mission

To ensure the rights and interests of children are respected throughout the entire criminal procedure in order to avoid repeated victimization and ensure that all the principles of restorative justice are followed.

Area of competence

Any form of sexual violence against children, whether it is sexual abuse or sexual exploitation, represents our area of activity. **The use of informational technologies** as a means of recruiting, enticing or as an environment to commit the abuse or exploitation, represents the defining element of our specialization. We provide legal and psychological assistance to the child victim or witness of the following offences:

- Rape (art. 171 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Moldova)
- Violent actions of a sexual nature (art. 172 of the Criminal Code of the RM)
- Sexual harassment (art. 173 of the Criminal Code of the RM)
- Sexual intercourse with a person under the age of 16 (art. 174 of the Criminal Code of the RM)
- Perverted actions (art. 175 of the Criminal Code of the RM)
- Child enticement for sexual purposes (art. 175/1 of the Criminal Code of the RM)
- Child trafficking (art. 206 para. (1) a) of the Criminal Code of the RM)
- Child pornography (art. 208/1 of the Criminal Code of the RM)
- Child prostitution (art. 208/2 of the Criminal Code of the RM)

Our principles

- Ensure the balance between criminal justice and the best interests of the child;
- Confidentiality and protection of the identity of the victim;
- Avoid interventions that have low benefit for the child, but where the risk of damage is high;
- Involving the child in the decision-making process that concerns him/her.

Who can request our services

- Law enforcement agencies;
- Professionals in the field of child protection and related fields (social assistance, education, health).

Our services

- **Assist and consult law enforcement agencies** during the period of investigation;
- **Provide specialized psychological assistance to the children and the members of their families** throughout the criminal proceedings;
- **Provide specialized legal assistance and consultation to the children and the members of their families;**
- **Child-friendly hearing spaces** for children victims/witnesses of sexual abuse or exploitation.

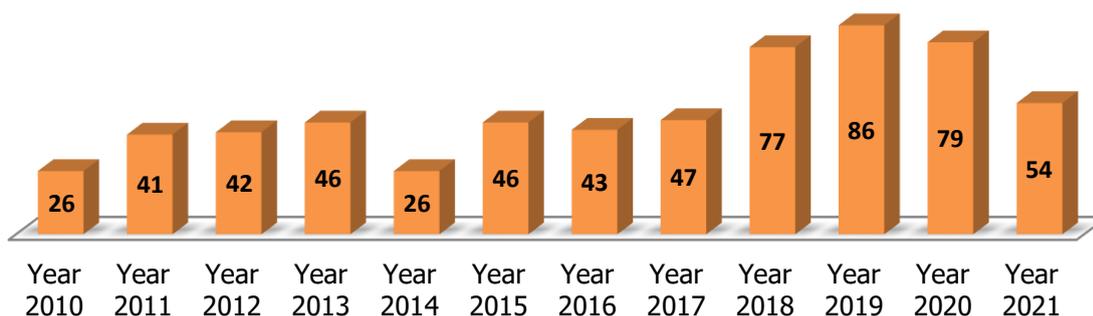
Contacts

- ✓ **Tel.:** +373 78 330 406, +373 78 405 660
- ✓ **Web:** siguronline.md, lastrada.md
- ✓ **Working hours:** 24/7.

An overview of the cases assisted by the CST over the last 12 years

From the first day of activity until the middle of 2021, a total of **636 children** have received support from the La Strada attorney and psychologist. These are children and adolescents who were victims or witnesses in legal proceedings related to sexual abuse (rape, sexual harassment, child enticement, violent actions of a sexual nature) or sexual exploitation (child trafficking, child pornography, child prostitution).

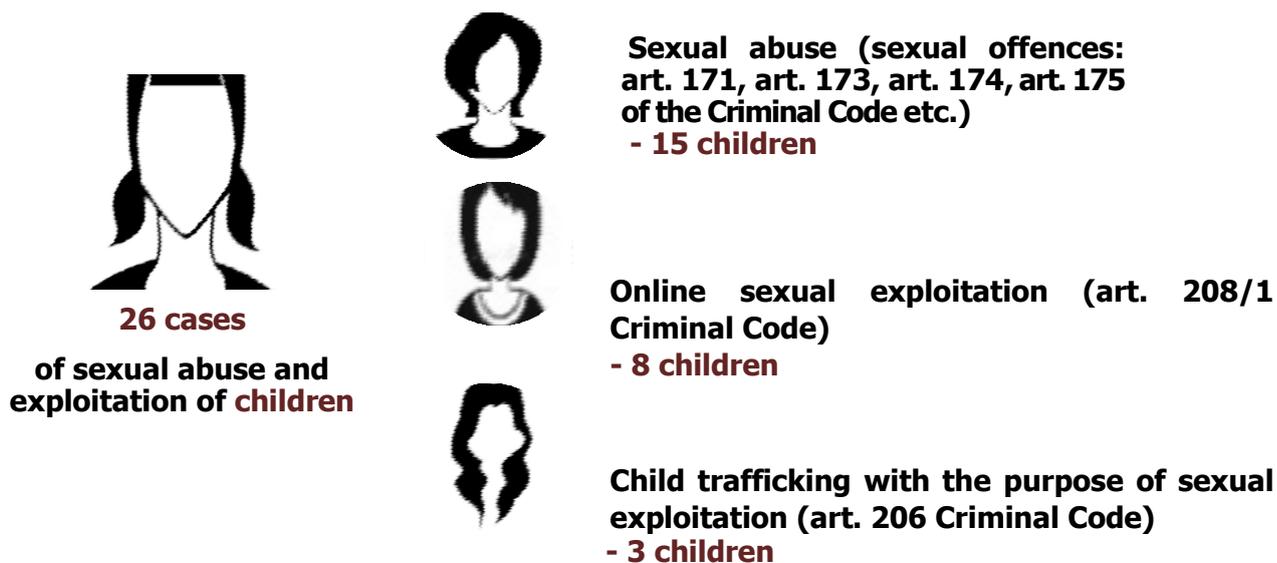
Dynamic of the number of beneficiaries of the CST, 2010-2021



2021: Statistics and trends

Over the period January-June 2021, the Child Safeguarding Team has provided support to 58 children-victims of different types of sexual abuse or exploitation: 26 of these cases were registered in the current year, while 32 are cases of continued assistance from previous years.

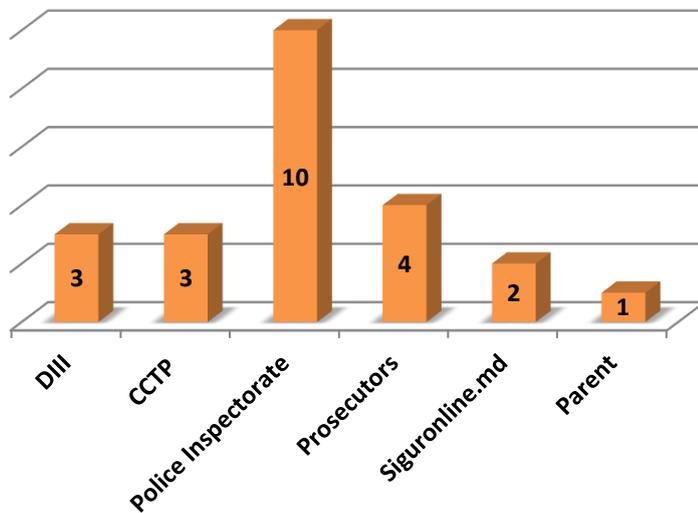
New cases referred to the Child Safeguarding Team in the first half of 2021



CHILD SAFEGUARDING TEAM

1. During the first half of 2021, the CST psychologist received several requests to take part in special hearings for children-victims or witnesses of sexual abuse

Who referred the cases

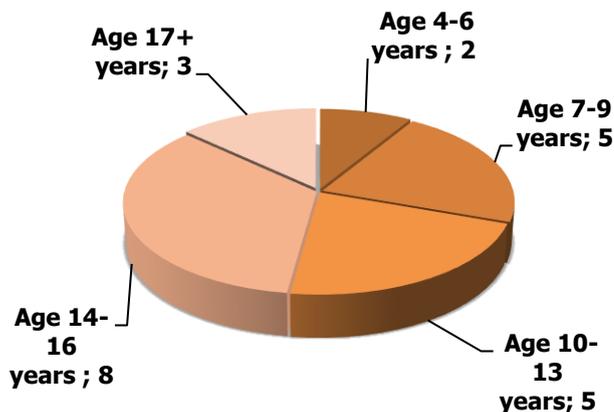


Most of the cases were referred to us by police officers and prosecutors. Usually, the CST is asked to take part in special hearings for minors-victims or witnesses of sexual abuse, so they can assist the child during the hearing process and build the psychological evaluation reports. The high number of hearing requests in Chisinau and the districts of the RM is explained by the lack of qualified and available interviewers that would interview the minors under special conditions in court. In the majority of cases, special condition hearings are requested for children up to 10 years (art.

171, art. 172, art. 175).

2. The age of the children who have experienced sexual abuse in real life is becoming lower and lower

The age of the beneficiaries



The youngest child assisted by the CST in the first half of 2021 had only just turned 5 at the time of the abuse. Approximately 30% of the beneficiaries were under the age of 9. Half of them were victims or witnesses to cases of severe sexual violence, where the child was exposed to rape, violent sexual actions or other sexual actions involving penetration. Among them were 3 boys under the age of 9 who have been abused by the man from their circle of trust (neighbor, father, partner of the mother).

CHILD SAFEGUARDING TEAM

3. 1 of 3 children refuse to collaborate with law enforcement bodies and give any details about the abuse because they don't have trust in law enforcement

3 of the CST beneficiaries have notified law enforcement bodies about the abuse they have been exposed to online. However, they were called to the hearing about what happened to them only a year after the abuse. In this period, the children were blamed and marginalized by their classmates and community members, and experienced states of anxiety and depression. Although none of the children received psychological support, after some time they were able to overcome the crisis situation with the help of their family. Because, in a way, the children have overcome the traumatic event, when the criminal investigation body called them to the hearing, both the children and the parents refused to take part in the hearing process, as they perceived it as traumatic.

4. The way in which sexual abusers operate online has stayed the same

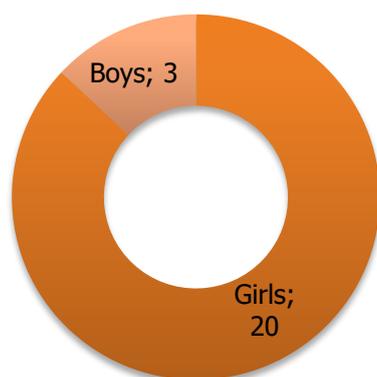
In the majority of cases of online sexual abuse and exploitation, children were lured through social networks (Instagram, Facebook, Odnoklassniki, Snapchat). The offenders were simulating amorous relationships with the minors, convincing them to send intimate pictures. Subsequently, they would threaten to share these, or create fake profiles using them. The fake profiles would include their intimate photographs and their phone number, and would specify that the person offers sexual services (a way of humiliating the children).

5. The severity and complexity of cases of trafficking with the purpose of sexual exploitation is rising, although the number of reports is decreasing

Two of the minors assisted by the CST were sexually exploited over a long period of time by several people from the Republic Moldova. The victims started being abused when they were 13-14 years old, and the abuse was only identified 3-4 years later. In one of the cases the exploitation was facilitated by a person in the child's circle of trust.

6. The number of identified cases of sexual abuse against boys remains low

Beneficiaries



The number of boys who report cases of sexual abuse is still very low. In the first half of 2021, the CST professionals assisted 3 boys under the age of 9. All three cases were picked up by the police only because the parents noticed changes in the boys' behavior. After speaking to the children, the boys admitted what happened to them, and subsequently law enforcement was notified.