

# Sexual exploitation and sexual abuse against children

Implementation of the  
Lanzarote Convention  
by the Republic of Moldova

Executive Summary, November 2017



The current Executive Summary includes the main findings and recommendations from the “Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse against Children. Implementation of the Lanzarote Convention by the Republic of Moldova” Report, developed by the International Center “La Strada” based on the data and information collected between June 2016 -July 2017. The full version of the Report can be accessed on [www.lastrada.md/rom/centru-de-resurse](http://www.lastrada.md/rom/centru-de-resurse)



# Prevention

The Lanzarote Convention imposes obligations to the signatory states to take preventive measures as follows:

- select professionals who interact with children in daily activities and provide them with professional training on child rights as a general concept, and on sexual exploitation and sexual abuse against children;
- educate children on the risks of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse;
- organize public awareness campaigns;
- involve the private sector, media and civil society in preventive activities;
- develop intervention services for potential criminals, in order to prevent sexual offences against children.



## Findings:

1. The curricula for initial and continuous training of specialists in the education, health, social protection, police, justice, sport, culture and leisure sectors do not include the subject of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse against children. Thematic trainings on child rights as a general concept, and specific trainings on identifying and assisting victims of child trafficking, as well as children at risk have a sporadic nature and are dependent on the support from civil society and external programs.
2. The national education system has a very narrow and segmented approach towards the topic of preventing sexual exploitation and sexual abuse against children. The task to inform about the risks and develop resilience towards sexual exploitation and sexual abuse among children is not sufficiently accomplished, as on one hand, this subject does not include all age categories, and on the other hand, the premises imposed by the Convention are missing, particularly the premise to ensure, first of all, sexual education of teenagers. The school curricula totally exclude the subject of risks related to sexual exploitation and sexual abuse associated with the use of information technologies. This subject is being discussed during seminars held exclusively with the support of civil society.
3. Child-friendly health centers, as well as psycho-pedagogic assistance services, which also offer information and individual counseling including for developing resilience towards sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, work in cooperation with non-governmental organizations. They are still in the developing phase and are accessible at local level.
4. Public awareness campaigns on child protection against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse are organized mostly by non-governmental organizations active in the field, within projects supported by external donors.
5. Private sector keeps having a passive role in creating a safer virtual environment, as well as in preventing sexual exploitation and sexual abuse against children. The practice of developing self-regulating norms is not viable for the private sector companies. On the other hand, the state is delaying the involvement of the private ICT sector in the mandatory accomplishment of tasks which would contribute to a higher degree of child protection against online violence.
6. The state did not take actions to prevent the risk of committing sexual offences among persons who have the fear of committing or have already committed them, but didn't get under the attention of public authorities.

## Recommendations:

1. Develop, improve and institutionalize training programs for professionals from education, health, social protection, police, justice, culture and leisure sectors on preventing sexual exploitation and sexual abuse against children. Provide appropriate information and methodologic materials to specialists. Ensure continuous and systemic nature of trainings for specialists from the related fields.
2. Ensure a structural approach of the sexual education subject in the school curricula, adjusted for all age categories. Systemize the efforts for educating children and teenagers in schools about the risks of SESAC<sup>1</sup>, cultivating resilience and promoting information on how and where they can ask for help. Due to the complex nature of this subject, information about the risks must be provided along with the information activities on safe use of the Internet by children, and all these activities should be adapted to the children development level and available to children from the entire education cycle.
3. Considering the potential of the child-friendly health centers, as well as of psycho-pedagogical assistance services, supporting their development, promoting them among teenagers and encouraging youth to access these services should become a priority.
4. Develop organizational policies on protection of child rights within private companies and non-governmental institutions (ICT, tourism, avia etc.). These organizational policies can be included in Codes of Conduct, with the goal to prevent sexual exploitation and sexual abuse against children and promote the superior interest of the child in daily activities.
5. Develop counselling services for people who feel attracted to children and teenagers, and have the fear that they might commit one of the offenses established in accordance with the Convention. These services should differ from the assistance services to persons who have already became suspects, defendants or culprits (specified in the Chapter III of the Lanzarote Convention), considering the fact that the goal of preventive intervention services is to prevent the committing of offences.

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1 SESAC – sexual exploitation and sexual abuse against children.

# Protection of and assistance to children

The Lanzarote Convention imposes the following measures to the signatory states:

- develop assistance programs for victims and their families;
- provide emergency therapeutic and psychologic assistance services;
- encourage the reporting of suspicions related to sexual exploitation and sexual abuse;
- create assistance and counseling services on the phone or on the Internet.



## Findings:

1. Activities related to protection and qualified assistance to children who suffered from sexual abuse or sexual exploitation are organized in cooperation with the civil society organizations. At the same time, these activities are part of the current projects, which indicates an increased dependence on the external donors and jeopardizes their sustainability.
2. There is a lack of protection and assistance services and programs that would focus on resocialization and reintegration of children who suffered from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse during a long period of time, with severe consequences for the physical and psychologic health of the child.
3. Specialized assistance and protection services in crises situation for children who suffered from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse are limited from the point of view of geographic location, content and time. Cooperation between the social protection, health and public order systems in this regard is deficient.
4. Child Helpline is the only service specialized in counselling children about their rights, which can facilitate the access of these children to protection and assistance services. This service is managed by a state institution and implemented by a non-governmental organization which ensures the quality of human resources different from public servants.

## Recommendations:

1. Develop and diversify the services at the local level, which would provide qualified assistance to victims of SESAC, including long-term placement for their rehabilitation and social reintegration.
2. Strengthen crisis intervention services, including medical, temporary placement and other services.
3. Develop a legal framework to implement the Law no. 137 of 29.07.2016 on rehabilitation of victims of offences.
4. Support the functionality of phone and online assistance services for children-victims and promote them at the national level.

# Intervention measures for abusers

The Lanzarote Convention provides for the following measures:

- social, medical and psychological measures available at the pre-sentencing, sentencing and post-sentencing phases;
- assess the risk of relapse among the persons who committed crimes related to sexual exploitation and sexual abuse against children;
- request for the consent of the beneficiary to be provided with intervention services.





## Findings:

1. There is almost a total lack of assistance programs for suspects, defendants or culprits in crimes related to sexual life from the moment of the criminal case is initiated and during the entire trial, and specialists from the related institutions have limited knowledge in this regard;
2. There is a considerable deficit in performing the re-socialization of detainees – sexual aggressors. Neither the penitentiary nor the probation system does not ensure the fulfillment of the re-socialization task. At the same time, there is also a lack of conditions required: personnel trained to work with this category of beneficiaries, programs especially created to reach the goal of re-socializing aggressors, lack of appropriate conditions and space;
3. The principle of compulsoriness in receiving the person's consent for receiving psycho-social assistance at the pre-sentencing stage is not always respected.

## Recommendations:

1. Evaluate the actual services of psycho-social intervention related to reducing the risk of relapse of the sexual aggressors who are convicted to imprisonment on the basis of findings. Import, adapt and institutionalize psycho-social intervention programs for sexual aggressors. Develop programs for monitoring sexual aggressors after the discharge of their punishment, during all their life or during a reasonable period of time, in order to prevent the risk of relapse.
2. Develop available services at the criminal investigation phase for children or adults who committed the offenses established in accordance with the Convention. In this regard, the Law on probation could be modified, in order to include this category among the beneficiaries of the probation system. Since currently the psychologic evaluation of children in conflict with the law can be performed on demand by specialists from the district Psycho-Social Services, it is recommended to train psychologists in offering assistance to sexual aggressors and equip them with the instruments they might need for providing qualitative psychologic evaluation services.
3. Evaluate the risk of relapse at the sentencing phase from the very beginning of the detention punishment execution, as this could motivate the detainee to participate in more programs that would change his criminal behavior.

# Coordination and cooperation

The Lanzarote Convention imposes the following obligations to the signatory states:

- ensure coordination of actions at national or local level between in charge of the protection from, the prevention of and the fight against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children;
- set up or designate particular independent national or local institutions for the promotion and protection of the rights of the child;
- create specific mechanisms for data collection or focal points, at the national or local levels and in collaboration with civil society.
- cooperate at the international and regional level for preventing and combating sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, protecting victims and providing them assistance, conducting investigations or trials that reflect the offences established in accordance with the Convention etc.



## Findings:

1. In practice, children victims of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse are subject to two different mechanisms of intervention and cooperation (CCM and MRS), which intersect through the categories of beneficiaries. These mechanisms created platforms for cooperation between local public authorities and local NGOs, following basically the same principles. Developing cooperation with the civil society sector is still a priority in the national policy documents.
2. There is no unique data collection mechanism, or some unique indicators for segregation of data. Moreover, the sectoral collected data are currently not qualitatively analyzed for identifying the risk factors or new tendencies of the sexual exploitation and sexual abuse against children phenomena.
3. Involving children at the phase of development and application of policies, programs or other initiatives related to the fight against SESAC is at the initial stage. There are several initiatives and examples of associating children for participating in the decision-making process, nevertheless, currently their role is yet limited.
4. The state made efforts to develop and strengthen international cooperation in view of preventing and combating SESAC, ensuring assistance and protection to victims, and conducting common investigation of crimes. The law enforcement authorities became members of international platforms and joined several international databases. Negotiations on bilateral assistance related to repatriation and assistance to victims had been initiated, and activities for developing capacity and experience exchange are being organized.

## Recommendations:

1. Clearly define the mechanisms (currently CCM and NRS) applicable to children at risk, emphasizing the identification and elimination of cases in order to prevent abuse and mechanisms applicable in cases of children victims or witnesses, which would comply with the needs of children who already face the consequences of sexual abuse or sexual exploitation.
2. Constantly monitor and evaluate relevant policy documents (CCM and NRS) in order to assess their functionality, development perspectives, and the needs for development, based on a starting point and a final goal.
3. Develop a unique data collection system (development, piloting, further adjustment). Collection of these data should be made with the support of non-governmental organizations. Ensure processing of data on all forms of SESAC by the authorities that are competent in the collection of such data. Develop the capacity of specialists in analyzing data about offences related to SESAC, from the perspective of condition and evolution of various aspects of combating SESAC. Identify the needs for adjusting the Criminal Register, develop and adjust the database, so that it could provide qualitative desegregated data.
4. Create all necessary conditions for a more active involvement of children in the development and implementation of policies for preventing sexual abuse and sexual exploitation (organize training sessions for groups of children on their role within representative Councils/Groups they are members of, and on the risks of sexual exploitation /sexual abuse etc.)