

Towns and regions: a pact to stop sexual violence against children

A contribution of the Congress
to the Council of Europe
ONE in FIVE campaign

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Presentation of the Pact

What's it all about?

Available data suggest that [about one child in five](#) in Europe is a victim of some form of sexual violence, one of the worst forms of violence against children. Sexual violence can take many forms including incest, pornography, prostitution, trafficking in human beings, corruption, solicitation via Internet, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. All of these can and do cause serious damage to children's mental and physical health. The consequences of sexual abuse follow children into their adult lives – lives which first person accounts often describe as lived out in hidden sorrow and pain.

In 2010, the Council of Europe launched a campaign to address the issue of sexual violence against children. This campaign, entitled ONE in FIVE to reflect the extent of the problem, aims to achieve further signature, ratification and implementation of the [Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#) (hereinafter “the Lanzarote Convention”); and to equip children, their families/carers and societies at large with the knowledge and tools to prevent and protect children from sexual violence and abuse, thereby raising awareness of its extent.

Why involve local and regional authorities?

Local and regional authorities have a responsibility to safeguard and promote the safety and welfare of children and young people living in their areas, working together with partners such as the third sector, public organisations and the private sector. They should adopt a four-pronged approach of Prevention, Protection, Prosecution and Participation - the four “Ps”. The challenge to Europe's towns and regions when dealing with cases of sexual violence and abuse against children is to raise awareness of the issue, to develop and implement community-based action plans and strategies to address the four “Ps”, and to invest in better

services. All services and actions must be respectful of children's rights, put the child's best interest first, and enable children's voices to be heard, in order to deliver locally what children and families need to stop sexual violence and sexual abuse, as well as to bring perpetrators to justice.

What is the Congress proposing?

To address the local and regional dimensions of the ONE in FIVE campaign, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe has adopted a Strategic Action Plan the specific objectives of which are to:

1. raise awareness amongst Congress members, local and regional authorities, associations of local and regional authorities and other partners of the campaign's aims;
2. promote the use of Council of Europe legal standards and instruments (Lanzarote Convention and Child Friendly Justice Guidelines) when setting up structures and mechanisms for protecting children from all forms of violence;
3. encourage local and regional authorities to launch campaigns, develop awareness-raising tools to prevent sexual violence against children, in particular disseminate and adopt campaign awareness-raising materials (The Underwear Rule) to assist parents and carers to talk to children about sexual violence in a child-friendly manner;
4. promote a multi-stakeholder approach and encourage local and regional authorities to develop coordinated multi-disciplinary structures, processes and mechanisms to tackle sexual violence against children;
5. develop a culture whereby towns and regions are more child-friendly and enable children and young people to participate meaningfully in the development of safe communities free from sexual violence.

What does the Council of Europe Congress want local and regional authorities to do?

Action at local level would appear to be limited, indeed research from 2010 conducted in the United Kingdom suggests that less than a quarter of local authorities in that member state have a strategy to protect children from sexual exploitation.¹ However, available research and evidence indicate that child sexual exploitation **is happening**, not only in the UK but also in every area of each of the 47 Council of Europe member states, although data collection methods are not always well enough developed to support this argument.

The Congress's aim, therefore, is to promote the ONE in FIVE campaign and to raise awareness of the Lanzarote Convention among local and regional authorities so as to bring about the adoption of child-friendly local and regional services, to protect children and help prevent sexual violence within the community.

Thus, the Council of Europe Congress is urging all towns and regions to commit to the ONE in FIVE campaign by signing up for the **Congress's Pact of towns and regions to stop sexual violence against children**.

What is the Congress's Pact of towns and regions to stop sexual violence against children?

Action is desirable, indeed necessary, in all of the four "P" domains described above. The Congress has drawn up a list of possible actions, starting with those that require very little if any public spending, leading up to others which will necessitate substantial investment because of the need to define specific strategies and set up dedicated structures. Whatever the cost involved, measures to stop child sexual violence and abuse will always be cost effective as

¹ What's going on to safeguard children and young people from sexual exploitation? Jago et al, October 2011.

they are an investment in a healthy community, based on the respect for human rights.

Although the Congress's ultimate aim is that as many local and regional councils and parliaments as possible develop coordinated multi-disciplinary structures, processes and mechanisms to tackle sexual violence and abuse against children, initially towns and regions can contribute, step-by-step, to the ONE in FIVE campaign by starting at a much more modest level, for example by raising awareness of the campaign by means of a link on their homepage.

The Congress urges local and regional authorities from across the 47 member states to sign up for the Pact and start by implementing at least one of the actions on our checklist and to progress in the fight against sexual violence and abuse against children by adopting as their ultimate goal the establishment of coordinated multi-disciplinary structures, processes and mechanisms.

What does signing up for the Pact involve?

Participating towns and regions will commit to the Congress's aim of raising awareness of and creating the structures necessary to deal with the issue of sexual violence and abuse of children by implementing as many as possible of the actions listed in this pamphlet, or indeed any other actions that will help the Congress achieve its aim.

Who are the main partners?

The Council of Europe has established a network of government-appointed focal points in the 47 member states which can advise and help local authorities to join forces with the myriad NGOs and civil society groups already actively working on the campaign. [National campaign teams](#) have been set up in several member states which coordinate and implement campaign work and can provide guidance to regional and municipal levels. Municipalities and regions can also liaise with the relevant national ministries.

The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly has set up a [Network of Contact Parliamentarians](#) to coordinate national, European, and international parliamentary action to combat sexual violence against children. The Network, which currently has 49 members, facilitates the exchange of best practices on the legislative and political action implemented in each member state.

What are the four “Ps”?

The ultimate aim of local and regional authorities must be to prevent children from being exploited. For this, they must decide how best to run public sector agencies to ensure that children and young people are protected and supported, whilst actively pursuing the prosecution of perpetrators. Local and regional authorities should adopt a four-pronged approach of Prevention, Protection, Prosecution and Participation - the four “Ps”: to prevent abuse, protect victims, prosecute perpetrators, and ensure the full participation of children in the entire process.

In this section, you will find information about the sort of action that needs to be taken and why it is necessary.

The four “Ps”: Prevention

There are a number of preventive actions that can be taken at local and regional levels to help prevent sexual exploitation and abuse of children.

Awareness raising

Local and regional authorities should set up child sexual abuse and violence prevention programmes and policies to raise awareness of children, people working with children, parents, families, carers, and the general public. Awareness raising can help bring about social change so as to support prevention measures.

Prevention programmes and strategies should ensure all stakeholders receive adequate, high-quality professional training to ensure an effective and safe delivery of services. Stakeholders include all persons who have regular contacts with children, for example social workers, health professionals, teachers (at all levels from pre-school to secondary), police, staff in cultural, leisure and sports complexes, churches, youth centres, law enforcement officers, etc.

As early identification of children at risk should be part of any strategy, adequate knowledge of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children should be acquired and awareness raised on how to spot signs which may indicate sexual violence, such as changes in behaviour.

Proposals for Actions

- Put a link to the Council of Europe ONE in FIVE website on town's and region's homepages
- Organise information sessions in schools and youth centres for children and staff
- Distribute factsheets and leaflets containing information and guidelines
- Provide training for local and regional professionals
- Organise discussions and seminars for professionals and for the public
- Use the European Local Democracy Week to highlight the issue
- Cooperate with NGOs, the media and the private sector

Parents, families and carers should also learn about how to recognise indicators of child sexual exploitation and abuse, the course of action to be taken and about the impact it has on children and families.

Training should also be provided in preventive measures, such as monitoring online spaces, and children should be helped to protect themselves for example by recognising harmful content on the Internet or inappropriate contacts from strangers who may ask them to reveal personal information to befriend them (grooming). This training should be extended to parents who should be taught how to monitor and control access to the Internet, and to children who should learn about the risks and dangers of the Internet. Online Internet safety tools for children, parents, teachers, families can be devised in cooperation with NGOs or other organisations, or existing awareness-raising tools used.

Awareness-raising actions should also be targeted at the general public who should receive information on the phenomenon and on preventive measures which can be taken. A link from the town's and region's homepage to the Council of Europe's ONE in FIVE website is one way of achieving this. National and European hotlines and helplines can be promoted at the local level.

Proposals for Actions

- Ensure numbers of national and European child helplines are readily available
- Create a one-click link on town's or region's homepage to quick help and advice
- Design and distribute small, easy to carry memory cards containing useful numbers and addresses to all school children
- Produce fridge magnets containing useful numbers and addresses for each household
- Display in areas frequented by children posters containing information on where to go for help
- Make available child-friendly educational materials in schools and youth clubs
- Distribute factsheets or leaflets on safe online behaviour
- Facilitate reporting of online illegal activity

Awareness-raising and educational materials

The Council of Europe has developed materials to increase understanding of the issue of sexual violence and abuse of children and to promote the campaign's messages. Material has been designed for use by decision-makers, advocacy groups and professionals working for and with children. Specific awareness-raising material, translated into 36 European languages, has been developed to empower parents and children to prevent and report sexual violence (www.underwearrule.org). Local and regional authorities should print and distribute widely the ONE in FIVE campaign materials in schools, crèches, and other establishments welcoming children (youth clubs, youth associations such as guides, scouts, etc). (Contact: 1in5@coe.int).

Education of children

By learning about sexual abuse and violence, including the different types of violence and risky situations, children develop knowledge and skills to make informed, safe and healthy choices to avoid the risk of child sexual exploitation and abuse, and thus are able to develop healthy and positive relationships.

Effective, age appropriate educational materials, tailored to children's particular needs and sensitivities, including culturally sensitive information and in child-friendly language, should be used at both primary and secondary levels. Children thus receive the message about what sexual violence is and how to recognise it which supports prevention through the promotion of safe practices. Information on new communication technologies and the risks involved in online behaviour and on how to report illegal online content should be included.

Any educational and information campaign should include sign posting to sources of advice and support, for example dedicated phone lines or helplines, in particular national and European numbers, which are also operational outside of normal working hours, in order that children know to whom to turn. Small, easy to carry memory cards, key rings or mobile phone covers containing useful numbers and addresses can be distributed to all school

children for them to keep handy in their school bags. Local and regional authorities could produce fridge magnets with this information to ensure each child in each household has ready access to this information. Local and regional authorities should ensure information and help are easy to obtain, a clearly visible, one-click link on the town's/region's website which leads children to help and advice is easy to set up. Information on where to go and whom to contact should be displayed in all areas frequented by children: in schools, play groups, youth centres, health centres, public libraries, accident and emergency services, sexual health clinics, local authority websites, churches, etc.

Partners in prevention activities

The Lanzarote Convention encourages authorities to set up independent institutions for the promotion and protection of children's rights. It also suggests the appointment of a person or body to raise the public's awareness of child sexual exploitation and abuse such as a Children's Ombudsperson, Children's Advocate or Children's Rights Commissioner. Such positions can be set up at local and/or regional level.

Proposals for Actions

- Nominate a person or body at local/regional level to raise awareness of sexual violence and abuse of children
- Work with civil society to collect information on specific local situations to inform policies and action
- Cooperate with media
- Cooperate across town boundaries

Many organisations and associations – at international, European, national, regional and local levels – are very active in the fight against sexual violence and abuse against children. Many of them have produced awareness-raising and information documents and materials that can be disseminated widely. National associations of local and regional authorities, and the authorities themselves, should work with these organisations to ensure these materials are widely used.

Child sexual exploitation and abuse is known as the secret crime as child victims typically experience great difficulty in disclosing it. This and the lack of standardised and comparable data collection methods mean it is difficult to obtain a clear picture of the scope of the problem. It is important that local and/or regional authorities set up mechanisms for data collection to observe and evaluate the situation in their area. Thanks to the data collected, authorities can assess the risks, extent and nature of child sexual exploitation in their areas and set up informed responses to the problem.

Civil society organisations can work with local and regional authorities on projects and programmes aimed at preventing and protecting children, as can the private sector, in particular the information and communication technology sector and the media. Cooperation at regional level can be effective in targeting perpetrators that cross town boundaries, for example in cases of child trafficking.

The four “Ps”: Protection

As the governance level closest to the victims of child sexual exploitation and abuse, local and regional authorities are best placed to set up structures which implicate all actors in the chain of care and ensure that the best support and assistance possible will be extended to children. They also have a duty to serve not only the needs of the child victims, but also the family system and the community as a whole. Local and regional authorities should promote a multi-stakeholder approach and develop coordinated multi-disciplinary structures, processes and mechanisms to tackle sexual violence against children.

Multi-disciplinary centres

Towns and regions should adopt a holistic, integrated approach based on a multi-agency strategy and set up specialised, dedicated authorities with clearly defined roles and responsibilities which bring together all local services involved in protecting children and improving their welfare and well-being. Local protection strategies should be developed encompassing specific local procedures and systems.

In most European countries, the responsibility for dealing with child sexual abuse lies with many different agencies all of which have to investigate the cases. Children are subjected to repeat

interviews resulting in a re-victimisation of the child which can be as or even more harmful than the original abuse. The Lanzarote Convention promotes the setting up of multi-agency, multi-disciplinary “one-stop” centres where all professionals involved in the investigation of child abuse cases – child welfare and health care services, law enforcement, judicial authorities, etc - work under one roof to ensure that child victims of sexual violence are not subject to further abuse (the concept of Child Friendly Houses). It is important that children have places to go where they can express themselves in confidence, freely and confidentially, and where they must feel safe. These centres allow for this: children can be interviewed and medically examined for forensic purposes, comprehensively assessed and receive all relevant therapeutic services from appropriate professionals while avoiding repeated interviews and re-victimisation.

Proposals for Actions

- Set up multi-agency, multi-disciplinary, child friendly houses
- Introduce an obligation to report at local/regional levels
- Publicise national and European telephone or online helplines
- Issue clear guidelines to all professionals working with children on reporting

More children could be protected if an obligation to report suspicions was mandatory, without that obligation breaching existing confidentiality rules or the child's confidence. Clear guidelines should be issued to all professionals working with children on referring their concerns to the appropriate agency, local and regional authorities must then make enquiries to ascertain whether there is reasonable cause to suspect abuse. Stakeholders should also be made aware of the protection and rights of children, as well as of the importance of putting the child's best interest first.

Where these do not exist at national level, telephone or online helplines should be set up providing children with easy access and anonymous counselling.

Partners in protection activities

NGOs and other civil society organisations are important partners, especially those engaged in providing assistance to victims.

The four “Ps”: Prosecution

The Lanzarote Convention criminalises a series of acts and although procedures for investigating and prosecuting perpetrators will mainly be defined in national criminal legislation, local and regional authorities do play a role in this field. In all actions at this stage, including during investigations and judicial proceedings, the child's best interest, rights and vulnerability must be of prime concern.

Assistance to victims

Authorities should ensure, including in cooperation with NGOs, that certain measures are taken such as providing free assistance during court proceedings, counselling to parents and siblings, and therapeutic assistance.

Dealing with perpetrators

Local and regional authorities can ensure that appropriate support services are provided, in particular with a view to avoiding repeated offences. They can also ensure that perpetrators receive information on their rights and the services available to them.

The four “Ps”: Participation

The Council of Europe believes that the right to be heard and taken seriously is fundamental to the human dignity and healthy development of every child and young person. Listening to children and young people and giving due weight to their views in accordance with their age and maturity is necessary for the effective implementation of their right to have their best interests be a primary consideration in all matters affecting them and to be protected from violence, abuse, neglect and maltreatment.² All action by local and regional authorities should be guided by this principle.

What specific action can be taken at regional level?

While many measures advocated by the Lanzarote Convention will have to be transposed into criminal and civil laws, which are usually the responsibility of the state, some crucial issues in the field of child protection may come under the remit of regions, such as the regulation and organisation of welfare, social and health services and the adoption of specific measures and structures to prevent and protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse. Regional authorities and parliaments should explore what measures, both legislative and administrative, they may take in order to implement the provisions of the Lanzarote Convention level.

² Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18.

How will the Pact work in practice?

Local and regional elected representatives are invited to bring the pact to the attention of their colleagues and departments responsible, in their towns and regions, for the health, welfare and safety of children, in order that they may campaign for the implementation of the initiatives proposed therein.

An online “platform” to register for the Pact

Local and regional elected representatives may register on the Congress’s “pact platform” (www.coe.int/congress-pact). Towns and regions wishing to implement the pact, or who have already launched initiatives, are also invited to register.

On this platform, everyone will have the possibility to provide information on new initiatives and structures, as well as existing measures and may return to the platform each time new activities are implemented. This information will allow for the progress, at local and regional levels, of the ONE in FIVE campaign to be measured.

Local and regional authorities' check list for action

Prevention

- ☐ Put a link to the Council of Europe ONE in FIVE website on town's and region's homepages
- ☐ Organise information sessions in day-care centres, schools and youth centres for children and staff
- ☐ Distribute factsheets and leaflets containing information and guidelines
- ☐ Provide training for local and regional professionals
- ☐ Organise discussions and seminars for professionals and for the public
- ☐ Use the European Local Democracy Week to highlight the issue
- ☐ Cooperate with NGOs, the media and the private sector
- ☐ Nominate a person or body at local/regional levels to raise awareness of sexual violence and abuse of children
- ☐ Work with civil society to collect information on specific local situations to inform policies and action
- ☐ Cooperate across town boundaries
- ☐ Promote national and European child helplines
- ☐ Create a one-click link on town's or region's homepage for quick access to help and advice
- ☐ Design and distribute small, easy to carry memory cards containing useful numbers and addresses to all school children
- ☐ Produce fridge magnets with important numbers for each household
- ☐ Display posters containing information on where to go in areas frequented by children
- ☐ Make available child-friendly educational materials in schools and youth clubs
- ☐ Distribute factsheets or leaflets on safe online behaviour
- ☐ Facilitate the reporting of online illegal activity

Protection

- ☐ Set up multi-agency, multi-disciplinary, child-friendly houses
- ☐ Introduce an obligation to report at local/regional levels
- ☐ Promote guidelines on reporting for professionals working with children

Documents and reference sites

- [ONE in FIVE, the Council of Europe campaign to stop sexual violence against children](#)
- [Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#)
- [Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2012-2015](#)
- [Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings](#)
- [Convention on Cybercrime](#)
- [European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights](#)
- [Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on child friendly justice](#)
- [Recommendation on the Participation of children and young people under the age of 18](#)
- [Discover children's rights!](#)
- [Raise your hand against smacking!](#)
- [Wild Web Woods](#)

