

2014-3

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### Recommended Citation

McElvaney, R. & Lalor, K. (2014). Child abuse in Europe. In J. Conte (Ed.), *Child Abuse and Neglect Worldwide*, Vol. 2. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.

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## **Child abuse in Europe**

**Rosaleen McElvaney and Kevin Lalor**

This chapter will give an overview of child abuse in Europe including definitions, prevalence, intervention & legal responses. . We will outline the key contemporary issues, drawing in particular on the Council of Europe’s strategy for the promotion of children’s’ rights and the protection of children from violence, *Building a Europe for and with Children* (2012 – 2015).

For the purposes of this chapter, Europe is defined as those countries that constitute membership of the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe brings together 47 countries from across the continent to promote democracy, protect human rights, agree legal standards in a range of areas and monitor how countries apply such standards. It has a broader representation than the European Union (which has 27 member states). At present, the Council of Europe represents 800 million citizens from the following countries: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, San Marino, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom. Figueiredo, Bifulco, Paiva, Maia, Fernandes & Matos refer to the “differences in family organization, rural versus urban living, religious affiliation and socioeconomic status in different areas of Europe that make up the cultural hodge podge” (2004, p.672).

### **How child abuse is defined in Europe**

As with other parts of the world, both legal definitions and inclusion criteria in research studies vary from country to country. Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as a person under the age of 18.

The World Health Organization defines child maltreatment as

all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power (Butchart, Putney, Furniss, & Kahane, 2006, p.9)

The Council of Europe defines sexual abuse as:

a) engaging in sexual activities with a child who, according to the relevant provisions of national law, has not reached the legal age for sexual activities (this does not apply to consensual sexual activities between minors), and b) engaging in sexual activities with a child where use is made of coercion, force or threats; or abuse is made of a recognised position of trust, authority or influence over the child, including within the family; or abuse is made of a particularly vulnerable situation of the child, notably because of a mental or physical disability or a situation of dependence (Article 18, Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, CETS No. 201).

ISPCAN (2012) conducted a worldwide survey of professionals working in the field of child abuse for the 2012 edition of *World Perspectives*, a bi-annual publication of the International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect. Twenty countries from Europe were represented in this survey – Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Moldova, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Russia, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Respondents were asked to indicate whether certain behaviours were generally viewed as child abuse or neglect. In the case of physical abuse (e.g. beatings, burnings), failure to provide adequate food, clothing, or shelter (neglect), sexual abuse (e.g. incest, sexual touching), and commercial sexual exploitation, 100% of respondents from Europe indicated that these were considered child abuse or neglect in their country when these behaviours involved a parent or caregiver. In the case of abandonment and emotional abuse (e.g. repeated belittling or insulting of a child), 90% of countries noted that this is considered child abuse or neglect. The remaining behaviours were endorsed to varying degrees: parental substance abuse affecting the child (85%), child witnessing intimate partner (or domestic) violence (75%), psychological neglect (e.g. failure to provide emotional support/attention) (75%), physical discipline (e.g. spanking, hitting to correct behaviour) (60%) and parental illness affecting a child (55%). Social conditions or behaviors outside a caregiving relationship were also investigated. Internet solicitation was considered in 100% of countries as child abuse or neglect, closely followed by physical beating of a child by any adult, children living on the street, prostituting a child, female/child infanticide, forcing a child to beg in 95% of countries surveyed.

Remaining conditions or behaviours included slavery and child marriage (both at 80%), female circumcision/female genital mutilation (75%), and children serving as soldiers (75%).

### **Prevalence of child abuse in Europe**

Prevalence studies within the field of child maltreatment suffer from considerable methodological difficulties that are well documented (e.g. see Fallon, Trocme, Fluke, MacLaurin, Tonmyr, & Yuan, 2010). Stoltenborgh et al. (2011) noted in their meta-analysis of 217 publications on child sexual abuse published between 1982 and 2008 consisting of nearly 10 million participants across the globe, that self report studies yielded an estimated prevalence rate that was 30 times higher than the rate estimated from informant studies. The latter were more likely to use randomized samples, focus on the occurrence of sexual abuse in the past year and relied exclusively on professional reports. The results of their meta-analysis showed a lower limit estimate of self-reported child sexual abuse prevalence in girls of 164/1000 and an upper limit estimate of 197/1000. For boys, the lower limit was 66/1000 and the upper limit was 88/1000. Estimated prevalence rates for girls in Europe were comparable to those of South America, both at (13.5%, 13.4 respectively), higher than Asia (11.3%) but lower than Africa (20.1%) and USA/Canada (20.2%) and Australia (21.5%). Estimated rates for boys in Europe were second lowest (5.6%), higher than Asia (4.1%) and lower than Australia (7.5%), USA/Canada (8%), South America (13.8%) and Africa (19.3%),

In the UK the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children conducted two UK wide large scale studies, one in 1998/1999 (Cawson, Wattam, Brooker & Kelly, 2000) and another in 2009 (Radford et al., 2011). In 1998/1999 a random probability sample of 2,869 young people aged 18 to 24 were interviewed about childhood experiences of abuse (physical, sexual and emotional) and neglect, collectively described as child maltreatment. The 2009 study involved interviews with 2,160 parents or guardians of children aged under 11 years, 2,275 young people aged 11-17 years with additional information from their parents or guardians and 1,761 young adults aged 18-24 years. A decline in prevalence rates was noted with regard to some forms of child maltreatment as reported by the young adults sample, specifically experiences of being beaten or hit repeatedly declined from 6.6% in 1998/9 to 4.3% in 2009 while sexually abusive experiences declined from 6.8% in 1998/9 to 5% in 2009. The latter study found that 5.9% of children under 11 years had experienced severe maltreatment, 18.6% of young people aged 11-17

had experienced severe maltreatment and 25.3% of young adults aged 18 to 24 had experienced severe maltreatment in childhood. No significant differences were noted between the two studies with regard to prevalence of neglect with one in ten children described as experiencing some form of neglect.

The first nationwide study of child maltreatment in the Netherlands investigated reports to child protection agencies or those registered by professionals using six categories of child maltreatment (Euser, Van IJendoorn, Prinzie & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2010). In the year 2005, for a population of approximately 3.5 million children, the prevalence rate for any form of child maltreatment was estimated to be 3% for children up to the age of 18 years. Educational/emotional neglect was most commonly reported while sexual abuse was least often reported.

Studies on prevalence rates of sexual abuse are more accessible in the published literature in the field of child maltreatment and lend themselves more to comparative interpretation than studies of other forms of child maltreatment. Despite the methodological difficulties inherent in such investigations it has been possible to draw on meta analyses of child sexual abuse prevalence studies to make comparisons not only across countries but also across continents (see Pereda et al., 2009, and Stoltenborgh, van IJendoorn, Euser & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2011). A review of this literature is offered here, building on that conducted by Lalor and McElvaney (2011). Overall, prevalence rates have been found to be comparable with North American research studies. Finkelhor's (1994) review of studies in 19 countries worldwide found prevalence rates ranging from 7% to 36% for women and 3% to 29% for men, similar to North American research. Lampe (2002) examined prevalence rates in 24 European studies stretching from the UK in the west to Sweden in the north, Spain in the south and Germany in mid Europe. They found rates of sexual abuse 6% to 36% in girls and 1% to 15% in boys. While these rates are similar to Finkelhor's study for girls, rates for boys were lower. The age range in this study was also lower – age 16 years. In Pereda et al.'s (2009) meta-analysis of 65 child sexual abuse prevalence studies from 22 countries worldwide, only three of these countries were Council of Europe member states – Portugal, UK and Spain. Pereda et al. were thus able to make comparisons between continents, finding the highest prevalence rates for child sexual abuse (34.4%) in Africa (Morocco, Tanzania, South Africa) and the lowest rates in Europe (Portugal, UK and Spain). America, Asia and Oceania had reported prevalence rates between 10.1% and 23.9%.

Table 1 presents a sample of studies to indicate firstly the geographical spread and secondly the variety of forms of sexual violence perpetrated against children in Europe.

**Table 1. Headline prevalence studies for child sexual abuse in Europe (Source: Lalor & McElvaney, 2011)**

Country	Study	Prevalence	Perpetrators
<b>Denmark</b>	Helweg-Larsen and Larsen (2006), n= 5 829 15-16s year-olds (constituted 11% of all 9th grade students in Denmark)	Females: 15.8% "unlawful sexual experiences before age 15" with "someone much older"; 9.2% reported "attempted or completed intercourse". Males: 6.7% "unlawful sexual experiences before age 15" with "someone much older"; 4.2% reported "attempted or completed intercourse"	Most of the unlawful sexual exper by respondents.15.8% of experie someone 5+ years older and perc  6.7% of experiences reported by girls were with someone 5+ years older and perceived to be abuse.
<b>France</b>	King et al. (2006) n=12 256 adults	1.3% (0.7% male; 2.1% female) reported a "forced sexual relationship" ("touching or attempted rape or rape") before age 18.	Not reported
<b>Georgia</b>	Lynch et al. (2007-08), N= 1 050 11-17 year-olds living at home (or in "collective centres") and n=301 11-17 year-olds living in residential child care	9% reported "some form of sexual abuse happening in the home".  17.3% reported sexual abuse.	Most (61%) incidents involved ar Most involved being talked to in a pornography (5% and 3.9% of tot 1.6% said someone "tried to have breakdown for penetrative abuse  The "vast majority" of incidents involved other children showing pornography or unwanted kissing.
<b>Greenland</b>	Curtis et al. (2002), n=1 393 random sample of adult Inuit population	Females: 7.8% "forced to sex as a child (under age 12)" Males: 3.2% "forced to sex as a child" (under age 12)	Against females: 54% family members (18% fathers) Against males: 21% family member; 53% "more distant person"
<b>Ireland</b>	McGee et al. (2002), n=probability sample of 3 118 adults nationwide	Females: 20.4% contact sexual abuse before age 17, 5.6% penetrative abuse before age 17.  Males: 16.2% contact sexual abuse before age 17, 2.7%	Against females: 24% family members; 52% known to victim; 24% strangers  Against males: 14% family members; 66% known to vic-

		penetrative abuse before age 17.	tim; 20% strangers
<b>Portugal</b>	Figueiredo et al. (2004) N=932 parents of primary school children	2.6% report behaviours including “inappropriate touching, sexual fondling, intercourse/rape, and exhibitionism/flashing” – no breakdown reported.  No difference in gender or age experienced abuse (under or over age 13).	Not reported
<b>Spain</b>	Pereda and Fornes (2007), N=1033 university students (30.7% male)	Overall, 17.9% (15.5% of males and 19% of females) reported contact sexual abuse before age 18. Of these abuse experiences, the majority (83%) occurred before age 13.	Not reported
<b>Sweden</b>	Steel and Herlitz (2005), n=random sample of 2 810 adults  Priebe and Svedin (2009), n=4 339 male and female high school seniors	13.9% of the women and 5.6% of men reported “unwanted or forced sexual contact during childhood or adolescence” before the age of 18.  For 55% of males, and 50% of females, the abuse occurred once. 0.6% of males and 2.9% reported unwanted or forced “intercourse”.  “Someone has pawed you or touched your body against your will” – 54.7% for females and 15.2% for males.  Sexual intercourse “against your will” was reported by 10.5% of females and 4.7% of males.  When any form of penetration is included (sexual, oral or anal), this increases to 13.5% for females and 5.5% of males.	Not reported.  Most perpetrators of non-contact abuse (such as indecent exposure) were strangers.  For penetrative abuse of females, perpetrators were family members (7.4%), friends/acquaintances (64.1%) and strangers (28.5%).  For males, the equivalent rates are 5.7%, 56.6% and 37.3%, respectively. The authors speculate liberal attitudes towards adolescent sexual behaviour may be a factor; high expectations may make it difficult for a young person to say “no” or for this to be heard.
<b>Switzerland</b>	Niederberger (2002) n=980 women aged 20-40 years old, general population probability sample	39.8% reported “abuse” (any sexual interaction (excluding those between children) before the age of 16). 14.7% reported “severe abuse” (any form of contact abuse). A breakdown for penetrative abuse is not given.	24.5% of perpetrators belonged to broad family circle, 24.5% were strangers.  Most frequently used strategy was “seduction”, rather than “force”.
<b>Turkey</b>	Alikasifoglu et al. (2006), n=1 955 9th-11th grade	11.3% reported that someone touched their private parts in a way they did not like.	92.9% of perpetrators were male; 5.7% were female and 1.4% reported both male and

	females (age range 15-20; mean 16.3 years), randomly selected from schools across Istanbul	4.9% were forced to have sexual intercourse.	female perpetrators. For sexual intercourse, perpetrators were strangers 35%; boyfriend 23%; acquaintance 12%; family member 1.5%; friend 13.6%; relative 15.2%
<b>United Kingdom</b>	Radford et al. (2010), n=random probability sample of 2 160 0-10 year-olds, 2 275 11-17 year-olds and 1761 18-24 year-olds	Contact and non-contact child sexual abuse experienced by 1.2% of under-11 year-olds and 16.5% of 11-17 year-olds. Severe (contact) sexual abuse experienced by 0.5% of under-11 year-olds and 4.5% of 11-17 year-olds. Girls face the highest risk.	Very rarely caregivers; most frequently known adult men (sometimes women)

Surveys highlight different prevalence rates in European countries from 13% of girls and 21% of boys under the age of 14 in western Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sesar, Zivcic-Becirevic & Sesar, 2008), to 11.5% of women who reported sexual abuse before the age of 18 in Germany (Leeners, Neumaier-Wagner, Quarg, & Rath, 2006), to 10% of a sample of 10 to 18 year olds in Moldova (Ministry of Education and Youth and UNICEF, 2007). Mossige, Ainsaar and Svedin (2007) compared data in five Baltic states – Norway (n=1966), Sweden (n=1571), Lithuania (n=1336), Estonia (n=285) and Poland (n=1094). Three types of sexual abuse were examined in males and females. Prevalence rates ranged from 10% who had unwanted sexual intercourse, 37% who experienced indecent touch and 21.9% who described having experienced indecent exposure. The authors suggest that the inclusion of peer abuse in this study more than likely accounts for the relatively high prevalence rates when compared to other international studies. Of note in this study was the higher prevalence rates in Sweden of indecent exposure and indecent touch compared to other Baltic countries and the higher prevalence rates overall for men in Poland.

Trafficking of children is a major problem in certain parts of Europe. Gjermania et al. (2008) estimate that 4,000 children were trafficked to European countries from Albania between 1992 and 2002. UNICRI (2003) describes the problem of trafficking children and young women for the purpose of sexual exploitation from Nigeria to Italy. While prevalence figures are not suggested, the authors speculate that Nigerians constituted the majority of foreign prostitutes in Italy at that time. Lay and Papadoulouos (2009) describe the sexual maltreatment of unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors by adults from their own country in England that have come primarily from the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia). And within the UK, a survey of 2,420 children in North West England found that 23.1% of victims of attempted or completed sexual abuse (19% of the sample) had been abducted from their homes.



A recent report on trafficking in the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) (Unicef, 2011) found that the number of officially recognised trafficked children is low, but children are trafficked to and within the region and experience sexual exploitation (in prostitution and pornography) and labour exploitation (for example, in construction, restaurants, cleaning, agriculture and berry picking). Children are also trafficked into begging and thieving. In general, children are trafficked by criminal gangs from outside the region.

A primary conclusion of this report is that services targeted at trafficked children run the risk of neglecting other vulnerable groups of children, including trafficked children who have not been identified as such. The report recommends that services be matched to individual needs, with less emphasis on placing children into categories. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is proposed as an alternative framework for meeting the needs of child victims of trafficking and other vulnerable child migrants

“This promises to result in three positive outcomes: (i) to reduce the negative impact on children exploited in the context of migration who are overlooked in the identification of trafficking victims; (ii) to improve access by other vulnerable migrant children to their rights; and, as a consequence, (iii) to help ensure that all rights for all groups of children (including victims of trafficking) are met consistently and in a non-discriminatory manner” (Unicef, 2011, p. 32) There is some suggestion that samples that are ‘hard to reach’ may have higher prevalence rates. Edgardh and Ormstad (2000) included a small sample of school non-attendees (n=210) in their study of school children in Sweden and found a significantly higher prevalence rate of sexual abuse in the school non-attendee group. A survey of 495 children/youth in residential institutions in Poland, Lithuania, Moldova, Bulgaria, Latvia, Ukraine and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia aged 15 to 18 years found that 8% reported having been raped in the past year ([www.canee.net](http://www.canee.net)).

Comprehensive comparative analyses of published studies is difficult given the variability in samples, age cohorts, definitions of abuse and specificity of details offered in publications. Notwithstanding these limitations, some features are evident. As with studies in North America and Australia, prevalence rates for abuse when broad definitions are used (contact abuse) are higher for girls than for boys, (20.4% and 16.2% (Ireland), 15.8% to 6.7% (Denmark), .7% to 2.1% (France) and 7.8% to 3.2% (Greenland)).

There is some evidence to suggest that sexual abuse is on the decline at least in some regions. Consistent with research conducted in the US (Jones, Finkelhor & Kopiec, 2001) and Australia (Dunne, Purdie, Cook, Boyle, & Najman, 2003), McGee, Garavan, Byrne, O'Higgins, and Conroy (2010) found lower rates of child sexual abuse in a younger adult cohort (those born after 1986) than in an older adult group (those born between 1930 and 1986) in Ireland. In the UK, Radford et al. (2011) found a decrease in child sexual abuse from 6.8% in 1998/9 to 5% in 2009. Gilbert et al., (2009) note that there is often a ten-fold difference in reporting rates of child abuse in community surveys compared to official figures. Low reporting rates to both law enforcement agencies and difficulties in substantiating children's accounts of sexual abuse in child protection agencies means that governmental sources are not reliable for obtaining accurate prevalence data on child sexual abuse (ISPCAN, 2008).

### **Online sexual exploitation**

The increased daily usage of the internet by children is providing a new risk for young people. A number of Swedish studies have investigated online risks for young people. One Swedish nationwide survey (Ungdomsstyrelsen, 2009) found that 9.4% of the girls and 6.3% of the boys (age 16-19) reported having posted sexual pictures/videos of themselves online. Approximately 2.5% reported experiences of sexy pictures/films of themselves being disseminated against their will. Bra (2007) surveyed 7500 14-15 year olds and found that 30% (48% girls and 18% boys) had had contact with sexual content through the Internet during the last year. Medierådet (2010) found that 21% of the 12-16 year old children they surveyed had someone talk with them about sex over the Internet. More than a third of these conversations were with strangers. Much of this sexual contact is through peer to peer messaging. In the EU Kids Online study, 15% of 11-16 years olds had received peer-to peer sexual messages or images (Livingstone et al., 2011). Online contact can result in offline contact that itself presents a risk to children and young people. In a Norwegian study (Suseg et al., 2009, cited in Quayle, Jonsson & Loof, n.d.) 35% of the boys and 26% of the girls stated they had met someone face to face who initially was an online contact. Less than five per cent of these meetings had led to sexual harassment or abuse. Wolak et al. (2004) described 129 sexual offences against juvenile victims (13 to 15 years) who met an adult offender in Internet chat rooms. Most of the young people had sex with the adult on more than one occasion. Wagner (2008, cited in Quayle et al., n.d.) described a Swedish case where 58 young girls were groomed and lured into a sexual relationship with a man who pretended to be a woman online.

In Croatia, Flander et al. (2009) studied a sample of 2,880 young internet users aged 10 to 16 years and found that 27% (36% of males and 15% of females) were exposed to sexual content, mostly consisting of nudity and sexual activity. Of the young people using chat rooms, 28% (35% of girls and 23% of boys) described being asked inappropriate questions regarding sexual experience, private body parts, experience of masturbation, clothes and suggesting meeting up or sexual activity.

Livingston et al. (2011) report findings from a survey of 9-16 year old children and their parents in 25 European countries that highlighted the extent of internet usage by both children and parents ([www.eukidsonline.net](http://www.eukidsonline.net)). In particular, they found that the more children do online, the more digital literacy skills and safety skills they have. The generational divide between parents' usage and children's usage was noted as more evident in southern and eastern European countries with children using the internet much more than their parents in these countries. Northern European and Scandinavian countries recorded high rates of daily usage for both children and parents. The EU Safer Internet Project (ROBERT) (Ainsaar & Loof, 2011) highlights the individual and environmental risk factors associated with children and young people becoming victims of internet-related sexual abuse. According to Soo and Bodanovskaya (2011) "It is apparent that the more young people are open to online sexual activities (especially flirting and having sexual conversations with strangers), the more probable it is that they may become victims of sexual harassment, solicitation or grooming" (p. 49). In devising programmes for protecting young people from online sexual abuse, it is important to acknowledge the motivations behind young people's online activities. Quayle, Jonsson & Loof (undated) interviewed 20 12-18 year old young people in Sweden, UK, Germany, Italy, Denmark and Russia about their experiences of grooming and online activity. The authors described how being online provided an opportunity for agency and being in control and for engagement that was seen as both exciting and confusing and often framed as romantic. "In moving towards this engagement there was a suspension of earlier caution and an unwillingness to see this particular situation as risky" (p.64). The young people highlighted the importance of others (usually adults and often parents) needing to talk to young people, to persist in asking questions and being open to discussions, and to be observant. They emphasised the need for understanding, warmth, a willingness to offer quiet support at a pace that the young people could cope with. For many of the respondents the only way that they could maintain a sense of control was to limit the information they were prepared to give.

The internet has been used throughout Europe to contribute to awareness campaigns. Examples of this are the Child Abuse and Neglect in Eastern Europe website (<http://www.canee.net>, accessed

12<sup>th</sup> May, 2012) run by the Nobody's Children Foundation in Poland and funded by the Oak Foundation. Information available on the website includes a range of awareness raising campaigns in central and eastern Europe such as 'Protect me I am small' campaigns in Latvia, Lithuania. The 'Words hurt for life' campaign on verbal abuse in Poland. The Council of Europe awareness campaign has been taken up by various member countries, such as the Incest Trauma Centre in Belgrade, <sup>1</sup>Serbia, the UNCRC Policy Center in Cyprus (<http://www.uncrcpc.org/node/1032>), and the Ministry of Health, Social Security and Equality and Federation of Associations for the prevention of child abuse in Spain ([www.fapmi.es](http://www.fapmi.es)).

UNICEF's Innocenti Research Centre has published a report on the nature and scale of sexual abuse and exploitation of children online (UNICEF, 2011), identifying key principles that inform how we create a safer environment for children on the Internet. ([http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/ict\\_eng.pdf](http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/ict_eng.pdf), accessed 12<sup>th</sup> May 2012). This report was prepared in collaboration with the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) in the UK. The Council of Europe has a specific strategy relating to on-line protection in the form of the Council of Europe Strategy on Internet Governance 2012-2015. Particular attention will be paid to the 'hypersexualisation' of children in the media.

### **Responses to child abuse in Europe**

In ISPCAN's (2012) survey of professionals mandatory reporting was noted to be present in 12 of the 20 countries surveyed (60%), with 88% indicating that specific criminal penalties for abusing a child were available, while 85% of countries surveyed had national law or a national policy regarding child maltreatment. However difficulties with enforcement were evident with only 41% of respondents indicating that the national policy was widely enforced. Although in 90% of countries an identified government agency was responsible for responding to cases of child maltreatment, in only 50% of countries did a government agency maintain an official count of reported child maltreatment cases. In relation to child death reviews, only 15% of the countries surveyed had child death review teams with just 10% having legislative backing for such review teams. Government provision of services were considered adequate by just 6% of respondents.

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<sup>1</sup>[http://www.incestrauacentar.org.rs/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=112&Itemid=27&lang=en](http://www.incestrauacentar.org.rs/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=112&Itemid=27&lang=en)

Respondents were also asked their views as to the strategies used in preventing child abuse in their country and how effective these strategies were in such prevention. Limited confidence was expressed in the effectiveness of prosecution of child abuse offenders as a preventive strategy. Only 37% considered this effective. Media campaigns were available in 58% of countries (n=19) but considered to have no impact by 32% of respondents. Risk assessment methods were used in 63% of countries, but considered effective by just 37%. Training of professional and advocacy for children's rights were commonly used and considered effective (79% and 74% respectively).

### **Building a Europe for and with children**

The Council of Europe has been active in promoting good practice and research that investigates the issue of child sexual abuse in Europe. In 2003 it published *Child sexual abuse in Europe* (May-Chahal & Herzog, 2003) focusing on child sexual abuse in a small group of countries (Romania, Germany, Poland and England) and outlining various interventions including those with victims and perpetrators, helplines and highlighting the legal obstacles to rehabilitation in those countries.

The Council of Europe's strategy on the rights of the child 2012-2015 proposes a vision "Building a Europe for and with children" that aims to achieve the effective implementation of children's rights standards in terms of policy guidance and support to member states in implementing United Nations and Council of Europe standards, thus promoting a holistic and integrated approach to children's rights. The emphasis of the strategy is on bridging the gap between standards and practice. The programme has four strategic objectives: promoting child-friendly services and systems; eliminating all forms of violence against children; guaranteeing the rights of children in vulnerable situations; and promoting child participation. Through these objectives, the Council mobilises and co-ordinates the contribution of all Council of Europe bodies and institutions, embedding children's rights into its monitoring bodies and human rights mechanisms, and into all its policy areas and activities as well as maintaining partnerships with other international organisations, professional networks and civil society.

The *Building a Europe for and with Children* strategy builds on previous achievements in previous policy cycles (2006-2009 and 2009-2011) such as setting up multi-stakeholder platforms on the rights of the child, bringing about major legislative and policy changes regarding children's rights in member states through campaigns such as eliminating corporal punishment of children and stopping sexual violence against children; increasing children's access to information and

participation through the production of child-friendly material, developing policy reviews on child participation and holding consultations with children and collaborating with international partners in developing and implementing programmes. The areas identified by the new strategy as challenges for this policy cycle are prevention, protection, provision and participation. It is recognised that there are insufficient actions at a national level throughout Europe targeting prevention policies, training professionals and raising public awareness of children as rights holders. Children continue to be victims of abuse, exploitation, neglect, exclusion and discrimination throughout Europe while some forms of violence against children, such as corporal punishment, is still legally and socially tolerated. Service provision to children and their families is not always adequate with particular cohorts of children deprived of access to education, health care, justice, social protection and to a nurturing and caring environment. Many professionals and families are ill equipped to deal with the challenges presented by recent developments in society and technology, such as increased access to the internet. Children's participation in terms of access to information and having their voices heard in public and private life remains an aspiration rather than a reality.

The strategy is the result of extensive consultations with the Council of Europe Inter-Secretarial Task Force on the Rights of the Child, the government-appointed Focal Points on the Rights of the Child, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, through its Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee, key partner international organisations, professional networks, civil society and the private sector, and participants at a conference in Monaco entitled "Building a child friendly Europe: turning a vision into a reality" held in Monaco in November 2011. The strategy was adopted by the Committee of Ministers in January 2012. The four primary strategic objectives are described below.

### **Strategic Objective 1: To promote child-friendly services and systems**

As part of this consultation process, perspectives of children were sought. Children and young people highlighted their cautiousness about public services and systems that they come into contact with, their lack of information about where to go to for help and how to navigate their way through complex systems, their frustration at not being listened to and not being heard and not being believed and taken seriously. They requested that their contact with professionals be based on mutual trust and respect. The Strategy aims to promote child-friendly services and systems, fostering exchange of good practices between member states in the areas of child-friendly justice,

child-friendly healthcare, child-friendly social services, family law and family policies, education and sport, culture and other recreational and youth activities.

**Strategic Objective 2: To eliminate all forms of violence against children**

Children and young people highlighted the need to treat violence as a priority given the impact of violence and crime on their lives and their experience of inadequate protection against bullying, gender and youth violence, corporal punishment, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse inside the family, in school, in alternative care, and media, including online social media. Children also highlighted the secondary victimisation associated with reporting procedures, investigation and judicial proceedings following reports of abuse that can fail to respect their rights, needs and views. The Council of Europe is the European forum for implementing the recommendations of the UN Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children (2006) and will work with the United National Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography including legislative, policy and institutional reforms, a focus on prevention and an attitude of zero tolerance in integrated national strategies to protect children from violence. The Council of Europe is co-operatively engaged with its international partners, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in the ONE in FIVE <sup>2</sup>campaign to stop sexual violence against children.

The Council of Europe is committed to ensuring implementation of a number of Conventions aimed at protecting children: the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitations and Sexual Abuse (CETS No. 201), the Convention on Cybercrime (ETS No. 185), the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (CETS No 197), the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CETS No. 210) and other Council of Europe conventions and instruments that contribute to eradicating all forms of sexual violence, including genital mutilation. A general awareness campaign in the form of a European Day on the Fight against Sexual Abuse and Sexual Exploitation of Children by 2014 is planned. In addition to addressing sexual violence and trafficking in children, this strategic objective also targets corporal punishment, gender-based violence and domestic violence, violence in schools and pre-schools.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/children/lin5/default\\_en .asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/children/lin5/default_en .asp)

The role that business can play in promoting children's rights is also acknowledged within the Council of Europe's strategy. A collaborative campaign by UNICEF, The Global Compact and Save the Children, moves beyond the recognition of the responsibility to prevent or eliminate and recognising the diverse ways that business can impact on children's welfare, and provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing the impact of business on the rights and well-being of children. This includes the impact of their overall business operations – such as their products and services and their marketing methods and distribution practices – as well as through their relationships with national and local governments, and investments in local communities, understanding and addressing the impact of business on the rights and well-being of children. Ten principles are offered: “Meet their responsibility to respect children's rights and commit to supporting the human rights of children; contribute to the elimination of child labour, including in all business activities and business relationships, provide decent work for young workers, parents and caregivers, ensure the protection and safety of children in all business activities and facilities, ensure that products and services are safe, and seek to support children's rights through them; use marketing and advertising that respect and support children's rights; respect and support children's rights in security arrangements; help protect children affected by emergencies; and reinforce community and government efforts to protect and fulfil children's rights” ([www.unglobalcompact.org](http://www.unglobalcompact.org))

**Strategic Objective 3: To guarantee the rights of children in vulnerable situations.**

Children highlighted their dissatisfaction with being referred to as members of a ‘vulnerable group’ seeking to be treated with respect as individuals. Young people referred to the lack of preparation for entering care and the lack of continuity in the provision of care; those in detention highlighted the inappropriateness of sharing space with adult offenders and a lack of adequate preparation for reintegrating into the community, slow judicial proceedings and a lack of alternative approaches to tackle crime. Asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors described their experiences as stressful and traumatic and relate widespread experiences of prejudice and discrimination. The Council of Europe plans to eliminate discrimination against children in vulnerable situations through stepped up co-operation with UNICEF, the EU and civil society. Groups of children in alternative care, children with disabilities, children in detention, migrant children and children ‘on the move’, roma children (the term ‘roma’ refers to Roma, Sinti, Kale and related groups in Europe, including Travellers and Eastern groups (Dom and Lom) and covers the wide diversity of groups concerned, including persons who identify themselves as ‘gypsies’). Additional vulnerable situations identified by the Council of Europe include those from national



minorities; living in poverty; children raised in social isolation; child victims of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status such as sexual orientation or gender identity.

#### **Strategic Objective 4: To promote child participation**

Young people identified this right as the one that is respected the least, noting their experience of exclusion from civil life and important decisions that affect their lives, notable placement outside the family, schooling and medical treatment. They identified barriers to their meaningful participation as age limits on the right to be heard, low levels of information, adults' prejudice and lack of listening skills; intimidating formal settings and tight schedules. Areas identified by the Council of Europe where this objective will be specifically targeted will be the right to be heard and taken seriously, democratic citizenship and human rights education, education on children's rights and information and protecting and empowering children in the media environment.

The Council of Europe seeks to consolidate its partnership arrangements with UNICEF, the EU and non-governmental organisations throughout Europe in strengthening its impact. It acknowledges the lack of comprehensive data and thorough analysis of the situation in member states as an impediment to understanding how to remove current obstacles to implementation of laws and policies.

#### **Service Developments**

Whether and how the Council of Europe's strategy will be implemented in such a way that makes a real difference to children and families remains to be seen. The nature of political processes and the pathways of communication between policy makers and frontline services are, one could argue, not conducive to ensuring that aspirations at a political level are translated into practice on the ground. Similarly, service developments at the frontline level are not always reflected in national or international reviews and dissemination of good practice examples is poorly reflected in the literature on child abuse. In Europe, differences in culture and language present a challenge to sharing information on practice developments. This section will highlight some examples of service developments in Europe to reflect both a consistency in thinking that is evident across the continent and the diversity of practice.

The importance of children's rights being monitored by independent agencies is the basis for the establishment of the role of an ombudsperson that not only advocates for children's rights but holds statutory authority for holding countries to account for policies and services for children. The establishment of the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children brings together institutions from member countries of the European Union and Council of Europe. By end-2012, the network included 39 institutions from 31 countries. The network's mandate is to "facilitate the promotion and protection of the rights of children, as formulated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child" (<http://www.crin.org/enoc/about/index.asp>). The network issues position papers on matters affecting children and their rights in areas such as children in conflict with the law, children involved in armed conflict, state obligations for the treatment of unaccompanied minors or separated children outside their state of origin, corporal punishment, involving children in decision making processes, and children with disabilities. Ombudspersons' offices in member countries issue annual reports outlining the work of the offices in championing children's rights, including investigations of breaches of those rights (for example, see [www.oco.ie](http://www.oco.ie)). A global study of the work of human rights organisations for children found that the following constituted the main work of such organisations: making children and their best interests visible in policy making, promoting environments that nurture child rights, promoting equitable approaches for the most marginalized children, promoting child participation in society, and addressing individual or specific situations (UNICEF, 2012a). An additional mechanism for monitoring countries' performance in implementing international policy is that of the United Nations' Universal Periodic Review. This is a universal mechanism whereby human rights records of all 192 UN Member States are reviewed every four years.

Responding to the challenges presented by engagement with technology for ever younger children, the NSPCC in the UK conducted a study on 'sexting' to enhance our understanding of this online phenomenon. The study showed that the threat comes primarily from peers. This is in line with an increased level of concern in relation to sexually reactive behavior in young people across the globe, challenging services to develop innovative methods to both reach out to and help young people address these issues. Awareness centres have been established in many European countries to implement awareness campaigns, measure their impact, and run helplines to respond to young people's queries about online safety. Insafe International brings together centres in 29 European countries ([www.saferinternet.org](http://www.saferinternet.org)).

Developments at a legislative level across Europe reflect a strong commitment to developing services for children in response to child abuse. As noted above, 85% of countries surveyed by ISPCAN (2012) had a national law or national policy regarding child maltreatment. In Bulgaria, the adoption of the Concept on Justice for Children, the drafting of a new Child Act and the implementation of a strategy, *A Vision for the De-institutionalization of children in Bulgaria*, have supported the development of new services and advocacy campaigns over five years that “led to an increase of around tenfold in the number of foster parents by the end of 2011 and promoted a quality family environment for children.” (UNICEF, 2012b, p.23)

Two complementary trends have characterized the development of services for children and families in many jurisdictions in Europe over the past 10 to 20 years. One is that of interagency working and the other reflects what has been termed an ‘outcomes focused approach’, that is, one that focuses on the difference that services make to outcomes for children and families (Utting et al., 2001). An international review (CfBT Education Trust, 2010) found that of 54 countries and States reviewed, 34 had made some move towards a more coordinated policy, strategy and provision for young people and their families. Statham (2011) reviewed the evidence for interagency working noting that while it has proved difficult to demonstrate improved outcomes for children using interagency working, the evidence is reasonably strong that interagency working does improve processes such as improving professional practice and providing better support at an earlier stage for children and families who need it. Positive changes noted by Statham include: improved access to services and a speedier response for service users; enhanced knowledge and skills along with a better understanding of children’s needs; greater enjoyment of their work and increased opportunities for career development for professionals; and greater efficiency, less duplication and greater involvement of service users at an agency level.

In most European states, responses to child abuse are made by a number of different agencies, statutory, voluntary and private. In the statutory sector, healthcare and child protection professionals are involved in investigating credibility of allegations and assessing and intervening in relation to therapeutic need while police are involved in investigating the criminal element of such experiences. In some countries, the law enforcement agencies work in collaboration with the statutory child protection services while in others these two elements in responding to child abuse are quite separate. In northern European countries, Children’s Houses (Barnahus) were introduced in the 1990s. These centres, modeled on the Child Advocacy Centres of the United States, consist of multidisciplinary teams providing an integrated service in child-friendly settings. The core

concept of the Children's House is that of joint interviewing and the collaboration of child interviewers, representatives of the police, the prosecution authorities, the child protection services, and therapeutic services, all under the authority of the local judicial system. All interviews are video recorded so that they can be used for multiple purposes and the interview can be used as direct evidence in court hearings. Children's Houses are now in Iceland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland and Greenland (Guobrandsson, 2011).

One innovative approach in the child protection field in Europe is to involve young people in both developing interventions and in collaborating in interventions. One such example is 'out of the box', a booklet developed by young people (aged 14 to 18 years) for young people aiming to prevent sexual abuse and sexual exploitation (Pearce, 2009). Another UK example is the young people's advisory group for the National Child Trafficking Advice and Information Line (CTAIL), a project run by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC). You Respond, a project funded by the European Commission, led by the University of Sheffield (UK) and involving the UK, Greece, Cyprus and Bulgaria developed educational materials including an evidence-based good practice guide and training materials to assist practitioners in engaging young people developing policy and practice.

In some European countries, specialist sexual abuse services exist alongside more generic mental health services. In the UK, a survey of available services showed that most services (c.80%) were not specialist services. Creative therapies (for instance, play, art and drama therapies) were found to be most common, offered by 91 per cent of services. This was followed by counseling, delivered by 83 per cent, attachment theory approaches and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) (delivered by 69 per cent of services) and psychodynamic psychotherapy (delivered by 66 per cent of services). Approximately one third of services provided transactional analysis, 17% provided sensory motor therapy. Approximately 50% of services offered a range of 'other' types of therapy, including person-centred, narrative, family and group therapy. Statutory services in the UK were underrepresented in this study but other non-NSPCC services were found to offer a range of therapies with the more common being creative therapies, counseling and CBT. Psychodynamic psychotherapy was offered by about one-third of non-NSPCC services, and just over one-quarter offered group therapy and 'other' types of therapy. Arising out of this scoping study, the NSPCC has developed a guide for therapeutic work with children aged four to 18 years, *Letting the future in: An intervention for children or young people affected by sexual abuse* which uses a strengths-

based approach that is child focused and builds upon the therapeutic relationship between the child and practitioner, including the safe carer as an integral part of intervention ([www.nspcc.org](http://www.nspcc.org)). The EU funded Daphne Project has brought a range of European countries together to develop resources dealing with a range of issues. One example is an animated video cartoon ‘Beyond Belief’ developed by a team of professionals in Austria, Germany and Italy on advising adults on how to help children who experience sexual abuse. By using animation rather than ‘live’ characters, the film is able to take into account different physical, ethnic and gender characteristics and create characters with which many different people can identify. It can also be translated into different languages with sound tracks added. ([http://ec.europa.eu/justice\\_home/daphnetoolkit/files/others/illustrative\\_projects/ic07\\_2002\\_062\\_y\\_c\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/daphnetoolkit/files/others/illustrative_projects/ic07_2002_062_y_c_en.pdf))

Finally, while there are many examples of cross national co-operative projects in developing comprehensive responses to child abuse, it is important to acknowledge the challenges in comparing services between countries. Boddy, Smith & Statham (2011) examined policies and supports for parenting in five European countries – Denmark, France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands. When comparing intervention designs in these countries with practice in England, they noted that the emphasis on formal outcome evaluations as typically used in England determined to some extent the design of the intervention with a leaning towards standardized programmes in England as distinct from support that was integrated into universal service provision in other European countries. Integrated support systems are more challenging to evaluate given the complexity of variables involved that influence outcomes.

### **The challenge of inadequate data collection methods**

May-Chahal and Herzog examined a number of European prevalence studies from the late 1980s to 2000 and pointed to the phenomenon of unreported incidents of sexual abuse in particular in relation to trafficking and exploitation of children through prostitution. The Concerted Action on the Prevention of Child Abuse in Europe (CAPCAE, 1997; May-Chahal et al., 2006) reviewed prevention strategies in Belgium, England, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and Spain. Difficulties in finding commonality in the specificity of data hampered the project and highlighted the importance of basing preventative interventions on specific risk information. The International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) established a working group on child maltreatment data (see 2008 special issue of Child Abuse &

Neglect, 33). In Belgium a centralised electronic database was established to enable social workers within the Child and Family Agency and Confidential Child abuse Centres to co-ordinate record keeping (AlEissa et al., 2009). The UK and Ireland has published national guidelines for safeguarding children that facilitates a standardised approach to record keeping (Home Office, 2002; Department of Health and Children, 2011).

Various policy documents have highlighted the need for improvements in data collection and a co-ordinated approach to data collection (Euser et al., 2010, Pinheiro, 2006; Council of Europe, 2012). Public awareness is a crucial element in eradicating sexual violence against children. Much work is still to be done when studies report that only 10% of parents in Moldova acknowledge that child sexual abuse exists in their country (Ministry of Education and Youth and UNICEF, 2007).

Considerable progress has been made in the past few decades on how to respond to child abuse in Europe. However, despite the laudable aspirations of the Council of Europe strategy and the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) with its commitment to take all appropriate measures – legislative, administrative, social and educational – to protect children from child abuse, millions of children continue to be abused in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Improved methods of data collection would at the very least provide a stronger basis for policy development, legislative measures and resource allocation.

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