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Ref. DC 100(2015)

"Online grooming": sexual abuse of children and cybercrime merged **New document adopted by the Council of Europe's monitoring body**

Strasbourg, 18.06.2015 – All cases of sexual abuse of children – no matter if they are a result of a physical meeting, or committed purely online – should be criminalised, says a new Council of Europe's [opinion](#) on "online grooming" presented in Strasbourg today.

The document was adopted yesterday by the [Lanzarote Committee](#) bringing together the current 36 parties to the Council of Europe's Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse ([the Lanzarote Convention](#)).

Online sexual abuse, even if it does not lead to a physical meeting, can be very traumatic for the child. While not amending the text of the legally binding Convention, the opinion provides useful guidance to those states who wish to go one step further in the criminalisation of online grooming in national law. It specifically recalls that the responsibility for the investigation and prosecution of online grooming should remain with law enforcement authorities and the criminal justice. Specialised NGOs can provide assistance, when appropriate and requested, but "neither these nor the public should become the *de facto* agency of the law enforcement".

The document was presented at the high-level cross-regional [meeting](#) on the protection of children from sexual violence organised by the Council of Europe and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Violence against Children that started today.

Other key themes of the two-day event are sexual abuse of children in the circle of trust, and international co-operation to protect children. The event was opened by Gabriella Battani-Dragoni, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Marta Santos Pais, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on Violence against Children, and Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, UN Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

Note for editors:

According to the [EU Kids Online 2010 survey](#) of children from 25 EU countries, 60% of children between 9 and 16 years old go online every day and more than half of them have social network profiles; 30% have had contact online with someone they haven't met face-to-face, but only 9% have met an online contact offline.

At the same time, 40% of parents whose child has seen sexual images online, 56% of parents whose child has received nasty or hurtful messages online, 52% of parents whose child has received sexual messages, and 61% of parents whose child has met offline with an online contact claim that their child has not.

A poll conducted in France by Génération numérique and published in 2012 indicates that 68% of children aged 15-17, 62% aged 13-15 and 43% aged 11-13 have already come across "shocking" material on the Internet.

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