



SO THIS IS SEXUAL ABUSE?

**Child participation in producing
a child-friendly publication**



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1. Preface

On behalf of the Council of Europe, a booklet on sexual abuse and exploitation was produced for teenagers entitled '*So this is Sexual Abuse?*'. The child-friendly version of the Lanzarote Convention was prepared by the Hintalovon Child Rights Foundation with the child participation.

The Council of Europe included child participation into the Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021) as one of the five priority areas to guarantee the rights of the child. The Council of Europe Committee of Ministers adopted a recommendation CM/Rec (2012)2 on the Participation of children and young people under the age of 18 and seeks to involve children through meaningful participation in the development of standards and materials, including the Committee of Ministers CM/Rec (2018)7 on Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil, the rights of the child in the digital environment and the current monitoring round of the Lanzarote Committee which focuses on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse facilitated by information and communication technologies (ICTs).

This publication provides insight into the stories of several young people. Their conversations reveal what constitutes abuse, what happens when someone commits a crime, and what can be done in the event of abuse. The scenes give children an idea of who to turn to for help and confirm that they can talk about sexuality and their feelings.

The aim of this document is to illustrate how children participated in the development of the booklet.

2. Aim of the project

2.1. Mandate

The project was started with the aim of familiarizing children aged 12-18 with the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (hereinafter the Lanzarote Convention or Convention).

The Council of Europe has commissioned our Foundation to produce a child-friendly booklet presenting the relevant provisions and definitions of the Convention to the 12-18 age group. The aim was to produce a short, easy-to-understand booklet that can be easily used both online and in print. The brochure was designed for the international public, but it was important to be able to adapt to national regulations and to include local authorities and helpline numbers. With this publication, the Council of Europe wanted to increase children's resilience, avoid victimization, and encourage seeking help. The Council of Europe encouraged the development of this tool with child participation.

2.2. Considerations for a child-friendly publication

It was crucial to bear in mind the tasks arising from the legal content and the specificities of the target group (such as knowing their interests, habits, knowledge and problems). Therefore, we assessed first what we wanted to say, to whom, and what it meant for the implementation.

The legal language is alienating, the international conventions set out the general directions, but the specifics are often left to national regulation. Instead of the general tone that is used for addressing decision-makers, we sought a more direct sound that brings the individual closer to legal provisions. It was important for the children to understand that the Convention is about them and to focus only on the information that is relevant to them.

The 12-18-year-old target group is wide and diverse, with different levels of knowledge and involvement. Children have little knowledge of human rights and the functioning of the legal system in general. Sexuality is a taboo, they do not know who to turn to for help, and they are usually unaware of criminal responsibility and procedures. They often search the Internet for answers to their questions. So we wanted to reassure them that they were not alone, that they could talk about sexuality, that they would dare to ask for help. We have been mindful of addressing questions that make it easier to find information on the Internet, raise awareness and trust.

2.3. Concept

The publication focuses on children's questions. It uses a case-based approach and presents eight conversations where the characters find themselves in situations that may be familiar to children. They are uncertain, worried about someone or looking for information. The characters break the silence and ask different people about their questions. Discussions bring together frequently asked questions of children to learn about what constitutes sexual abuse or exploitation, what their rights are, or what they can do in such situations. In some scenes, adults initiate a conversation, referring to the responsibility of adults to provide information to children.

Using the form of a conversation lets us put the childrens' questions first, makes the Convention lifelike, promotes children's agency to learn more and encourages them to seek help. But most importantly, it helps to break taboos. The dialogues show that sexuality and sexual abuse and exploitation can be discussed, they reflect the different feelings and reactions experienced by as normal, and their concerns and safety are taken seriously.

3. Child participation in the project

3.1. The role of the children

In this publication, we wanted to give real answers to the real questions children may have, so it was essential to involve them in the work. We were curious as to what they were interested in and how and from whom to seek an answer. Based on their views, we developed the concept, wrote the scenes, dialogues and created the illustration and design.

They played an important role in:

- defining the relevant topics,
- collecting their questions,
- rendering the content informative and interesting,
- elaborating authentic and lifelike scenes, dialogues,
- helping so the terminology would be easy to understand,
- giving the publication an attractive design.

3.2. Ethical considerations

Children's participation has been conducted with due regard for ethical and child safeguarding aspects, as set out in the Foundation's Child Participation Policy. The Policy is in line with the principles outlined in General Comment No. 12 (2009) of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Council of Europe Children's Rights Division Child Safeguarding Policy. Its purpose is to promote the genuine and safe participation of our child volunteers in our projects,

to ensure the well-being and safety of all children who come into contact with us, and to exclude any possibility of harm to them during our activities.

3.3. Child Participation Program

Since its establishment in 2016, Hintalovon Child Rights Foundation has been working with children aged 14-18. An important element of the Child Participation Program is to involve children in the professional work of the Foundation and in the preparation of child-friendly materials. Our high school volunteers, the Child Rights Ambassadors, aim to help their peers learn about their rights and help adults better understand children's perspective. As young colleagues at the Foundation, they gained experience in producing awareness-raising materials and representing children's rights. In 2018, our former Ambassadors participated in reporting on the Lanzarote Convention, and in 2019, the current team submitted Hungary's first children's report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. In the autumn of 2019, we work with 5 people on a weekly basis who have joined for more than 1 year.

3.4. Selecting children

The project relied heavily on the practices of the Child Participation Program, the previous experiences of the Child Rights Ambassadors, our established and trusted relationship with them, as well as their commitment throughout the year.

The project was presented to the Child Rights Ambassadors in August 2019. We first introduced the opportunity in person, and informed them of the purpose, schedule and their role in the project. We then sent them these elements in writing, and they were able to respond to this call within a specified time. Every applicant was given a role in the project.

We also contacted our partner organization, the Kék Vonal Children's Crisis Foundation, which operates the child helpline in Hungary. The members of their Youth Advisory Board had previously met our child volunteers and we wanted to organize an open, mixed meeting. Therefore, the Kék Vonal presented the project in a similar way among their volunteering children.

3.5. Project Team

Five children, 16-18 years old, two boys and three girls applied for the project. Three of the Child Rights Ambassadors and two from Kék Vonal joined. The Ambassadors have a good knowledge of children's rights, but they have not previously dealt with issues of sexual abuse and exploitation or criminal justice. Kék Vonal volunteers have already worked on the topic as part of an online bullying project, and one of them was also a peer supporter.

We worked with the children for almost two months. We had three face-to-face meetings and were in touch online in between. The meetings were facilitated by two adults, the leader and the mentor of the Child Participation Program. A colleague of Kék Vonal also helped with the communication. The project team also included an illustrator and a translator who could also attend meetings with the children. A member of the Council of Europe Secretariat provided guidance and support throughout the work and contributed to finalizing the concept and proofreading the English version.

4. Meetings with the children

4.1. Summary of the meetings

Meetings			
	Topic	Description	Length
0 th meeting	Introducing the project	Information about the project and the Lanzarote Convention. Call for applications, discussing the schedule and roles	30 min
1 st meeting	Adoption of the concept	Collecting the questions, defining the relevant contents and introducing the proposed concept	90 min
2 nd meeting	Planning the dialogues and the scenarios	Role play about the scenarios to prepare the writing. Reviewing the first design.	90 min
3 rd meeting	Reviewing the scenarios	Reviewing the content, the title and the second design.	90 min
Online discussion	Reviewing the final drafts	Feedback on the final design and drafts	30 min
4 th meeting*	Communication and dissemination	Discussing the promotion and new communication materials	90 min
5 th meeting*	Evaluation	Sharing feedback, mini survey	30 min

** Organized following the submission of this paper*

4.2. Introducing the project

We presented the project to the Child Rights Ambassadors. We discussed the purpose, the course of the project, their role and their questions, and talked about the Convention so that they could later make informed decisions about their participation. First of all, we wanted to bring the topic closer to them.

4.3. Adoption of the concept

The meeting was attended by the Child Rights Ambassadors. The goal was to collect the children's questions, identify relevant content and adopt the concept.

Introduction (15 minutes)

We discussed the project, agreed on the dates of the meetings, their contents and goals. We talked about the Council of Europe and the Convention.

Identify relevant content (60 minutes)

We brought the eight cases representing the scenes presented in the concept (Appendix 1). The children pulled one, then we took the time to read and think through the story. We were curious as to what thoughts the cases would bring, so we gave way to free reflection. We discussed one situation at a time. The children gave their first thoughts, impressions, recounted similar stories and asked questions.

We asked who they would turn to and how to find an answer online.

The children's thoughts and questions were accurately recorded to help us identify relevant issues.

- *Some of the children's questions: 'Isn't it possible that the girl has misunderstood it?' 'Who is responsible if the girl agrees?' 'Does age difference matter?' 'What is a teacher-student relationship?' 'What if I send it privately and she shares it in a group?' 'Does it matter that I sent her the picture?' 'Can I report it?' 'Will the police see the naked photo?' 'Could my mother be there?' 'What shall I say?' 'Will I see the offender?'*
- *The children's first impressions also helped define the approach: E.g., 'I would assume hidden motives. He surely has some purpose with it.' 'Of course, you check whether it is a fake profile.'*

Adopting the concept (15 minutes)

We also introduced the concept for children that was previously discussed with the Council of Europe. They gave feedback on the child and adult characters and the circumstances of the situations (such as where and over what they are talking).

- *For instance, based on children's feedback, we have replaced supporters in two scenarios (peer supporter and parent), and added the parent character when the child is talking to a lawyer. With these changes, they felt the scenes were more realistic.*

4.4. Planning the dialogues and the scenarios

Child Rights Ambassadors and Kék Vonal volunteers also attended the event. At the meeting, we gathered ideas for writing the dialogues and asked for feedback on the first design plan.

Introduction (15 minutes)

We introduced ourselves and started with a short game to continue working from a similar and relaxed level.

Role play (60 minutes)

The modified scenes were presented as part of a role-playing game (see Annex 2). All the situations were played by a child and an adult, except for the one with the peer supporter where only children were involved. After a short preparation time, approx. 5 minutes scenes were presented, then we discussed them one-by-one. We talked about their feelings, what it was like to come up with their question, what they needed to open up, how they imagined their environment, their relationship. We discussed if the information they learned was useful, whether they were satisfied with the outcome or how the situation might have ended otherwise. Their feedback was noted down, which gave us a lot of input on how to shape the thread of the conversation. The purpose of the situational game was to write life-like dialogues and formulate them as a child would. Therefore, with the permission of the children, we also

recorded the situations for internal use only. Voice recordings were deleted after the dialogues were written. We played a total of 4 scenes at the meeting.

- *Children's input were very valuable in deciding which information should be included in the conversation and which information comes in the information box. It was important for the dialogue to remain lively, not to become didactic or overly burdensome for the child character/ reader.*
- *Occasionally, the focus of children's attention was different. For example, the character was not afraid of grooming, but was excited about the first date, and wanted advice on that, as well as prostitution and exploitation did not come to their mind as a risk. They were simply worried or unsure what was happening or wanting to see what they could do for the other.*
- *The role play also showed that sometimes children present their story or question as if it happened to their friends. Our child participant used the help-chat as if she was talking about her girlfriend, which is also a common experience for service providers, so we decided to use this approach as well.*
- *There was a recurring concern about not trying to tell tales on, or betraying the other (e.g. asking the teacher not to make it public that the children had spoken up), so we thought it was important to talk about the difference between telling tales and asking for help.*
- *The children also indicated that it is often easier for two of them to go to the teacher.*
- *It was also inspiring to see how children are approaching to or leading a topic, and how they further elaborate on the story. Their sentences are often included verbatim in texts, typically in opening sentences.*

Consulting the first design (20 minutes)

Two designs were prepared, one with drawings and one photographs. All the kids liked the first one better. They commented on the colours, gave extra ideas, and drew a draft of how they imagined, blending the parts they liked from both graphic designs. We shared both the design and the scenes online with the children.

4.5. Reviewing the scenarios

On the third meeting the children commented on the dialogues, the titles and the second design plan.

Arrival, tuning in (10 minutes)

Reviewing the dialogues (60 minutes)

The written dialogues were pre-sent to the children online and brought to the meeting for printing. We gave them time to review and read them, and then discussed what they think about the text, one scene at a time. First, they freely commented on the scenes, and they were asked guided questions about opening and closing, more direct announcements and information boxes. They liked the stories and would have been interested in continuing them. They indicated if there was a word or sentence that they did not fully understand, or it was unclear how some information related to the conversation. We paid special attention to children's sentences so that they could really identify with them. They made concrete suggestions if they said something different, and they helped us a lot to understand the latest trends in how teenagers chat.

- *At the suggestion of the children, for example, we corrected the child's chat messages, and used more abbreviations, emojis and no accents.*

- *We smoothed some openings (such as the parent shall start the conversation and keep asking the girl), added some clarifying questions ('why can it be dangerous?'), and separated longer paragraphs into two parts.*

Reviewing the titles (10 minutes)

They commented on the title of the scenes and then looked for ideas for the title of the whole booklet. Their starting point was to choose expressions that a child would use when talking about these issues or searching the Internet, so the children brainstormed about keywords and phrases. We discussed the best ideas later, and also got plenty of ideas for communication materials.

- *For example, it was unclear what the term 'procedure' is referring to, so we changed it to 'criminal procedure', and they also found the term "blind date" uncommon for a teenager and they preferred simply 'dating'.*

Reviewing the second design (10 minutes)

We reviewed the updated design, which included their suggestions. The kids really liked the result and made some small suggestions for better readability.

4.6. Reviewing the final draft and continuation

Based on their views, we developed and adapted the final content and design that was sent to the children online. Until the release of the booklet, we had an online evaluation session with the participating children, but the project is not finished yet.

Children will also play an important role in promoting the booklet, so we plan a meeting about communication and dissemination. Children are motivated to discuss the best forums (e.g. popular websites, schools, events) to reach their peers and the possibilities for developing further materials on the written contents (e.g. videos).

5. Evaluation

The involvement of the children had a real added-value in developing this child-friendly booklet. During the project, we learned a lot about how legislation will come alive when children's questions and everyday stories are at the centre. We are grateful to them for pointing out their interests, experiences and for making the booklet more authentic.

6. Appendix

Annex I: Case cards

1. You learned that the sport teacher was fired because he made sexual comments on students' body and touched them inappropriately.
2. You are worried about a friend. She spends more and more time with an older man, who is buying her new clothes and takes her to expensive restaurants. She drops out of school and does not want to her friend anymore.
3. A student's half naked picture was shared online and in the group chat of your class. It is a hot topic in the school.
4. A stranger starts chatting with your friend, who does not talk much about himself, but seems to be very nice and considerate, and asks a lot of questions about him. He invites him for a meeting.
5. Your friend recently broke up with her boyfriend, who is now threatening her to upload her naked photos to an online porno site. The girl is frightened and angry.
6. A foreign friend of yours was abused and now he is facing an interview in the police station.
7. Criminal proceedings commenced in your friend's case, and he is summoned for the court hearing.
8. Your friend tells you that her boyfriend wants to have sex with her, but she is not ready yet. He says that if she refuses him, she doesn't love him.

Annex II: Role play

Child, age	Supportive person	Situation
class, 12-13	psychologist	A PE teacher was fired because he made sexual comments on students' body and touched them inappropriately. The school psychologist talks to children about sexual abuse, consent, the underwear rule, etc.
girl living in alternative care, 13	helpline operator	A child calls a helpline worried about her friend. She spends more and more time with an older man, who is buying her new clothes and takes her to expensive restaurants. She drops out of school and does not want to meet her.
2 boys, 15	Teacher	A student's half naked picture was shared online. Two schoolmates who saw it in their class's group chat, decide to tell this to their teacher.
LMBT boy, 14	peer supporter	A child is chatting with a stranger, who does not talk much about himself, but seems to be very nice and considerate, and asks a lot of questions about him. When he invites him for a meeting, he tells this to his parents. They discuss what he needs to do.
girl, 17	helpchat operator	A girl recently broke up with her boyfriend, who is now threatening her to upload her naked photos to an online porno site. The girl is frightened and angry and asks about its legal consequences to her and to the ex-boyfriend.

boy, 16	Police officer	Initial interview during investigation to talk about rights and procedures during the investigation
boy, 12	lawyer	A child victim, who is waiting for his first hearing and asks a lawyer what will happen during the hearing.
girl, 15	parent	A child turns to the school's peer supporter that her boyfriend wants to have sex with her, but she is not ready yet. He says that if she refuses him, she doesn't love him. They talk about consent and the different people/services she can still talk to.

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Find out more here:

**www.coe.int/children
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