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Reporting suspected sexual violence against children: legislative and political measures required to protect victims and professionals

Motion for a resolution
tabled by the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

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This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only those who have signed it

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Very few children who are victims of sexual violence report the offences themselves, often due to fear of the consequences or because they have no-one in whom to confide. As a result, professionals who are in contact with children, such as doctors, teachers and child minders, play a key role in detecting signs of malaise in children who are victims of sexual violence and reporting these to the competent authorities. Reporting is a prerequisite for breaking the cycle of violence which often occurs within a child's "circle of trust" (extended family, neighbourhood, school).

Studies show that professionals are more inclined to report their suspicions if they have a legal obligation to do so, combined with legal safeguards such as protection from accusations of false allegations. However, a recent study conducted by the Parliamentary Assembly through the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD) revealed that of 35 countries, only 12 had established a legal obligation in one form or another to report suspected abuse. Experience on the ground also shows that training of professionals is essential to detect signs of violence and prevent further offences.

The Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention; CETS No. 201) requires each Party to "take the necessary legislative or other measures to encourage any person who knows about or suspects, in good faith, sexual exploitation or sexual abuse of children to report these facts to the competent services" (Article 12, paragraph 2). In the light of this provision, the Assembly should invite the member States to adopt clear legislation combined with policies designed to create a context that encourages people to report abuse, and to devise specific instruments such as guidelines.