Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

**Resolution 2119 (2016)**[1]

# Fighting the over-sexualisation of children

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Mass media, marketing campaigns, television programmes and everyday products regularly "over-sexualise" children, particularly girls, by conveying images which portray women, men and in some cases even children, as sexual objects. Ease of access to unsuitable, pornographic and even illegal content on the Internet threatens the innocence and privacy of children. The phenomenon of "sexting" (the sharing of sexually explicit images via mobile devices or other means on the Internet) has swept through Europe's schools, often leading to significant psychological trauma. These are just a few examples of subtle and unsubtle sexual pressures that today's children face in an over-sexualised environment.

2. The Parliamentary Assembly is very concerned about the over-sexualisation of children, which has a significant influence on their perception of society at large, as well as on their own self-perception. The over-sexualisation of children can have a severe impact on their self-esteem, well-being, relationships, equal opportunities and achievements in school. In some cases, it can lead to sexual violence and be severely detrimental to their physical and mental health.

3. Action is needed urgently before these trends become further embedded in society and more children suffer from their detrimental consequences. Public authorities must develop effective legislation and implement policies and programmes to prevent the over-sexualisation of children; parents and teachers must be equipped to convey coherent messages to children to combat this phenomenon; the media and advertising sectors should be encouraged to change their approaches to marketing and to refrain from continually promoting gender stereotypes, and legal restrictions should be imposed if need be.

4. In the light of the above, the Parliamentary Assembly urges member States to:

4.1. compile scientific evidence, through longitudinal studies, of the effects of the over-sexualisation of children, and particularly girls. This should include collecting data in order to help define appropriate legislative and political measures and carrying out a review of the existing international literature on the over-sexualisation of children in order to better understand the gravity of the phenomenon and the current state of knowledge in the scientific community;

4.2. take legislative action to put limits on the inappropriate sexualised depiction of children in the media and advertising sectors, based on, among other references, the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS No. 201, "Lanzarote Convention") and the guidelines contained in Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 on gender equality and media, while respecting the fundamental right to freedom of expression as guaranteed by Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5);

4.3. adopt policies and measures that seek to inform, educate and remind parents about the dangers that their children face in an over-sexualised environment (as well as to raise awareness of indicators of related distress or trauma), and equip parents to educate their children on these very sensitive issues in a constructive way;

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1. *Assembly debate* on 21 June 2016 (22nd Sitting) (see Doc. 14080, report of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development, rapporteur: Mr Valeriu Ghiletchi). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 21 June 2016 (22nd Sitting).
See also Recommendation 2092 (2016).

4.4. adopt policies which develop sex- and relationship-education programmes in a school context, and provide support for educational staff responsible for giving such education, with the aim of informing children about the realities of everyday pressure they face in the media, at school and in other social contexts, and of protecting them from any unwanted sexual attention;

4.5. provide specific training to professionals who are engaged in educating and caring for children, enabling them to convey constructive messages to children and open up trustful dialogue with them;

4.6. encourage media and advertising supervisory bodies to ensure the safeguarding of human dignity, in particular the rights of children; where such advisory bodies are not already in place, encourage their creation; and ensure that accessible and effective complaints mechanisms are in place;

4.7. encourage the media and advertising sectors to safeguard the dignity and innocence of children in their productions, through self-regulatory mechanisms, internal codes of conduct and other voluntary action, and inform these sectors on the impact of overtly sexual content on children;

4.8. promote and support public policies, agencies, strategies and tools aimed at raising children's and young people's awareness of over-sexualisation and at empowering them to resist such trends by supporting approaches and structures (such as Safer Internet Centres and helplines) and involve children in the conception of tools and messages;

4.9. support the education children receive from their parents at home by promoting programmes for children that highlight the dangers of an over-sexualised society and that:

4.9.1. are provided at home and in schools (primary and secondary), but also via social networks, in an age-appropriate manner;

4.9.2. include information about respect for one's own privacy and respect for others;

4.9.3. empower children to develop critical attitudes towards media content and increase children's resilience to peer pressure, thus reducing the harmful consequences of sexualised images.