



Resolution 2533 (2024)¹

Child abuse in institutions in Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

1. In Europe, the abuse of children, whether they have been victims of sexual predators, gratuitous violence or ill-treatment in public, private or religious institutions that are supposed to be safe havens, must never again be ignored. Too many children's futures have been shattered beyond repair. The exposure of such human rights violations throughout Europe has also highlighted serious errors of judgment and professional or ethical misconduct committed by third parties. The accounts of these crimes are always harrowing, whether they took place in orphanages in Ireland or Romania, schools in Norway or Sweden, church-run institutions in Belgium, France, Germany, Spain or Switzerland, farms in Switzerland or summer camps in France.

2. A reality passed over in silence, the amount of suffering, abuse and violence, be it sexual or otherwise, that children have suffered in institutions in Europe is as intolerable as the impunity that surrounds it and that persists today. The act of ignoring such malicious acts, or refusing to acknowledge such abuse and the torment of victims, plays a part in maintaining conditions that are conducive to allowing such totally impermissible crimes to continue to this day.

3. The Council of Europe, including the Parliamentary Assembly, strongly supports children's rights and their protection from abuse. The Organisation has developed pioneering, binding standards and norms, monitored their implementation, issued guidance and provided support and capacity building through, in particular, the multidisciplinary work of the Committee of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Committee), in which the Assembly participates. The Council of Europe has established itself at the forefront of efforts to consolidate children's rights and, above all, as a driving force for positive change.

4. "Freedom from violence for all children" and "Child-friendly justice for all children", two of the six objectives of the fourth Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027), remain priority areas for the Organisation, requiring "continuous implementation". These objectives and the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16.2 to "end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children" must remain a priority for all Council of Europe member States.

5. In order to reaffirm that combating violence against children is a European priority and to ensure that national structures are set up to prevent such violence effectively, the Assembly reiterates the recommendations set out in [Resolution 2330 \(2020\)](#) "Addressing sexual violence against children: stepping up action and co-operation in Europe" and in [Resolution 2294 \(2019\)](#) "Ending violence against children: a Council of Europe contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals" which echoed [Resolution 2056 \(2015\)](#) "The inclusion of children's rights in national constitutions as an essential component of effective national child policies".

1. *Assembly debate* on 26 January 2024 (7th sitting) (see [Doc. 15889](#), report of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development, rapporteur: Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez; and oral opinion of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, rapporteur: Mr Constantinou Efstathiou). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 26 January 2024 (7th sitting).

See also [Recommendation 2269 \(2024\)](#).



6. By promoting good practice, the Assembly seeks to open a Europe-wide debate on the full reparation for all violence committed against children. Violence takes many forms (and is not always sexual) and its effects on victims today and on their development must be recognised so that this full reparation truly reflects the seriousness of and is proportionate to the harm done.
7. The Assembly therefore calls on all member States to:
 - 7.1. take stock of the situation of violence committed in public, private or religious institutions against children in order to create the right conditions for victims to speak out (including as adults) by ensuring they are treated with respect and humanity;
 - 7.2. analyse the circumstances conducive to such abuse, including institutional care in public, private or religious settings, inadequate care, foster care in private homes, the removal of children from parents deemed to be “unfit”, forced adoption, etc.;
 - 7.3. recognise the suffering endured and ensure complete management of after-effects and consequences of all kinds (physical, emotional, social, etc.);
 - 7.4. issue an official and formal apology to past and present victims;
 - 7.5. prosecute and sanction perpetrators of these acts without a statute of limitations;
 - 7.6. encourage and support non-state institutions caring for children and operating on the national territory to assume their responsibilities and ensure that their responses also allow for the full reparation for all violence committed against children;
 - 7.7. ensure that victims, regardless of their age, who have been subjected to any form of physical, sexual or psychological violence are awarded an appropriate and adequate compensation that is proportionate to the gravity of the harm done, as reparation and repair for the damage suffered and its future effects, with no time limit in relation to the date of the offence;
 - 7.8. support the creation of memorials of institutional mistreatment which highlight the Council of Europe’s fundamental values – human rights, democracy and the rule of law – in order to educate future generations about the best interests of the child and the protection of its well-being;
 - 7.9. embark on a comprehensive programme of prevention and awareness-raising measures, including monitoring institutional care facilities and any situation in which children are taken into care, in order to minimise risks and be able to react quickly in cases of abuse.
8. The Assembly also encourages the European Union and Morocco to accede to the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS No. 201, Lanzarote Convention) in order to contribute to the Council of Europe’s efforts to strengthen children’s rights and to work towards the eradication of all forms of violence against children, and to combat new threats.
9. Lastly, the Assembly intends to update its handbook for parliamentarians in order to support the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention and to provide parliamentarians with effective instruments to combat violence against children.