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Sexual violence against men and boys

Report[1]
Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination
Rapporteur: Mr Edmunds CEPURĪTIS, Latvia, Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group

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1. Reference to Committee: Doc. 15805, Reference 4764 of 9 October 2023.

A. Draft resolution[2]

1. Sexual violence against men and boys is a reality but also a hidden phenomenon which must be prevented and combated, giving priority to the needs of all victims/survivors and without detracting attention nor funding from addressing gender-based violence against women and girls.

2. There is a lack of comprehensive and disaggregated data on sexual violence against men and boys in all their diversity in our member States, as well as limited research, which is partly due to under-reporting.

3. While all victims/survivors of sexual violence share the difficulties of facing stigma, negative attitudes, and victim-blaming, the specificities of violence against men and boys need to be tackled, including different perceptions around masculinities and sexuality.

4. Sexual violence against men and boys takes place in many different places and contexts: at home and within the closest circles, in education and religious settings, during sports activities, in a migration context, in closed institutions, and in conflict-related and humanitarian settings, among others. Measures to prevent this violence, report and prosecute it, and support victims, need to be applied and adapted to the different contexts.

5. Men and boys in all their diversity can be subjected to sexual violence regardless of age, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics, migration status, disability, origin and any other characteristic. All measures to prevent and combat such violence against men and boys and to protect victims/survivors should be applied without discrimination on any ground and by adopting an intersectional approach.

6. Many male victims/survivors of sexual violence need a long time to address the feelings of shame, fear and isolation, which leads to non-reporting or doing so many years after the sexual violence took place. This is also due to the lack of awareness and knowledge by victims/survivors about their rights, reporting mechanisms and support services, as well as lack of trust in the justice system more broadly.

7. Under-reporting leads to high levels of impunity, which is compounded by the different statutes of limitations for sexual offences against children across countries. It is therefore critical to raise awareness about sexual violence against men and boys and to advocate for the abolition of statutes of limitations.

8. Engaging with male victims/survivors of sexual violence should be mainstreamed across all relevant activities and policy-making processes, so that their lived experiences are taken into account in the development and review of relevant policies and laws.

9. Studies indicate that the physical and mental health consequences of surviving sexual violence can include anxiety, depression and suicidal tendencies, which need to be addressed as public health issues in national policies and strategies. Official recognition of the sexual violence victims/survivors have suffered is an important part of the healing process. This can also help them to recover and reclaim their life after the trauma of sexual violence, by confirming that they are never responsible.

10. The Parliamentary Assembly underlines the need to meet relevant targets under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, including Goal 3 on good health and well-being for all, Goal 5 to achieve gender equality, and Goal 16 to promote peaceful and inclusive societies and provide access to justice for all.

11. The Assembly refers to its Resolution 2533 (2024) “Child abuse in institutions in Europe” and Resolution 2547 (2024) “The protection of children against online violence” as regards preventing and combating sexual violence against boys.

12. The Assembly further refers to its Resolution 2607 (2025) “Protecting human rights in and through sport: obligations and shared responsibilities” and underlines the widespread and systemic abuse of children and vulnerable adults in sport, including sexual abuse, and the lack of victim-centred reporting mechanisms and trauma-informed redress systems.

13. The Assembly welcomes the work carried out over the years by the Lanzarote Committee as it oversees the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS No. 201, the “Lanzarote Convention”).

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2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 11 September 2025.

14. It further recalls that the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CETS No. 210, "Istanbul Convention") encourages Parties to apply the Convention to all victims of domestic violence.

15. The Assembly looks forward to the completion of the draft recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education to strengthen responses for *inter alia* preventing and combating violence against children, as an additional tool to address sexual violence against boys and girls. It also looks forward to the forthcoming adoption by the Committee of Ministers of the first legal instrument on the equality of rights of intersex persons.

16. The Assembly calls on the member and observer States of the Council of Europe, and States whose parliaments enjoy observer or partner for democracy status with the Assembly:

16.1. with regard to data collection and research, to:

16.1.1. support disaggregated data collection, through official statistics and surveys, from relevant authorities and institutions in different settings, and where appropriate, directly from male victims/survivors themselves, about experiences and reported cases of sexual violence;

16.1.2. encourage and support research about the specificities of sexual violence against men and boys in all their diversity, in order to successfully address the underlying factors that fuel it, and barriers to reporting;

16.1.3. conduct research on what does and does not work well to prevent sexual violence against men and boys in various contexts, in co-operation with specialised organisations;

16.1.4. disseminate the data and research results in accessible formats, in order to raise awareness and to guide evidence-based policy making;

16.2. with regard to awareness-raising and other prevention measures, to:

16.2.1. conduct awareness-raising and information campaigns about sexual violence against men and boys, targeting different settings and age groups and including accessible information on the rights of victims/survivors, reporting mechanisms and support services;

16.2.2. develop measures to counter and challenge the "social discourse" and cultural assumptions regarding male behaviour, roles and power dynamics that contribute to sexual violence against men and boys and their stigmatisation, including harmful masculinities, structural homophobia, and traditional gendered roles;

16.2.3. implement prevention programmes and measures by working, *inter alia*, with youth, women's rights and LGBTI organisations, focusing on challenging and transforming gender norms to build more gender equal societies for the future;

16.2.4. make available preventive intervention programmes and measures to persons prosecuted and/or convicted for sexual violence against children, as well as to children who have committed sexual offences, in accordance with the Lanzarote Convention;

16.2.5. implement age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education to provide boys with the knowledge and language to protect themselves and to respect the boundaries of others, and to address bodily integrity and sexual consent in education and outreach measures;

16.3. with regard to detecting and reporting cases of sexual violence in different settings, to:

16.3.1. create an enabling environment for professionals who work with children to report cases of sexual violence; and consider introducing, for certain employments/professions, mandatory reporting of sexual violence to the relevant authorities;

16.3.2. set up children-centred and trauma-informed safeguards and reporting mechanisms where children and young men are present, such as schools, extracurricular facilities, sports clubs, churches and online platforms,

16.3.3. ensure that systems for reporting sexual violence against men and boys are well publicised, and tackle barriers that prevent victims/survivors from reporting;

16.3.4. tackle systemic weaknesses in organisations and institutions which leave men and boys vulnerable to sexual violence, exposed to harm or denied access to justice;

16.4. with regard to legal and policy measures, to:

16.4.1. include male victims/survivors of sexual violence and their specific needs in national laws and policies to prevent and combat sexual violence; and consider linking national strategies on gender-based violence with LGBTI strategies;

16.4.2. review relevant criminal law definitions of sexual violence, including rape, and amend them as necessary, to base them on the principle of lack of consent and include men as possible victims;

16.4.3. consider abolishing the statute of limitations for crimes related to sexual violence against children;

16.4.4. apply the Istanbul Convention to male victims of domestic violence, in line its Article 2(2);

16.4.5. ban so-called "conversion" or "reintegrative therapies", and conversion practices, aimed at changing or suppressing an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity or expression, as they can amount to sexual violence;

16.4.6. implement integrated child protection systems that promote co-ordination among the health, education, social protection, online support, and justice sectors, and which address the connections between online and offline sexual violence;

16.4.7. monitor and evaluate laws, policies and measures aimed at preventing and responding to sexual violence against men and boys, in order to make informed decisions about future steps;

16.4.8. take measures to provide full reparation to male victims/survivors of sexual violence;

16.5. with regard to providing support to male victims/survivors of sexual violence, to:

16.5.1. establish accessible and country-wide specialised and gender-sensitive support services, catering to the needs of men and boys victims/survivors of sexual violence without discrimination on any ground and taking into account the specific needs of GBTI men, in co-operation with relevant civil society organisations;

16.5.2. provide age-appropriate and quality support services, including telephone helplines, sexual violence referral centres, healthcare, psychosocial support, legal assistance, shelters, online counselling, as well as group and peer-to-peer counselling;

16.5.3. help and assist child victims of sexual violence in a non-traumatising environment, including through the application of the Barnahus model;

16.5.4. provide training to relevant professionals, such as law enforcement, healthcare, educators and social care professionals, to raise their awareness about the experiences and needs of male victims/survivors of sexual violence, and to prevent secondary victimisation: the HELP (Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals) course on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse can be a useful tool in this respect;

16.6. with regard to the participation of male victims/survivors of sexual violence in the development of measures that affect them, to:

16.6.1. involve and consult men and boys victims/survivors of sexual violence, and the organisations representing them, when developing such measures;

16.6.2. apply the "Guidelines for policy makers on engaging with victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse 'Nothing About Us Without Us'", published by the Council of Europe, to support the participation of victims/survivors in policy making;

16.6.3. consider adopting the participatory "survivors' council" model to involve victims/survivors of sexual violence in the development of policy and measures.

17. The Assembly invites the Lanzarote Committee to consider focusing a forthcoming edition of the Day on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, held on 18 November each year, on preventing and combating sexual violence against boys in all their diversity.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Edmunds Cepurītis, rapporteur[3]

1. Introduction

1. On 24 January 2023, the Parliamentary Assembly adopted Resolution 2476 (2023) "Conflict-related sexual violence", based on a report by Ms Petra Bayr (Austria, SOC) for the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination. During the discussions, it became clear that violence targeting women and girls deserved full focus in this context, but that violence against men and boys was also a matter of concern needing attention. Committee members called for further consideration of sexual violence against men and boys, in all their diversity, in order to make recommendations to prevent and combat this phenomenon.

2. According to global research published in May 2025,[4] nearly one in seven men (and nearly one in five women) worldwide experience sexual violence before they turn 18, with no region spared from this "pervasive health and human rights issue". In October 2024, the first-ever global and regional estimates of sexual violence against children were published by UNICEF, revealing the magnitude of this human rights violation worldwide and indicating that only one in six countries around the world has national data on boys' experiences of sexual violence.[5]

3. An example from Europe with data on male victims of sexual violence is Ireland, which has reported that 11% of victims/survivors going to Rape Crisis Centres (RCCs) were boys and men, according to 2023 data published by RCCS, which also indicated that 96% of all perpetrators were male. The country's 2022 Sexual Violence Survey found that 28% of men in Ireland have been subjected to sexual violence in their lifetime. Improving data collection on sexual violence against men and boys, including the sharing of information about relevant research and good practices, is therefore critical.

4. As most perpetrators of sexual violence against men and boys are also men and boys, legal and policy action should address our societies' culture regarding male behaviour, roles and power dynamics, which undoubtedly fuel such violence.

5. Under-reporting of sexual violence is common due to social norms and stigma around sexual violence, as well as concerns over safety, particularly when the perpetrator is known, or even a member of the household. These factors play a combined role in hindering disclosure of sexual violence during childhood and adulthood.

6. Previous Assembly reports have looked at men and boys either as perpetrators of gender-based violence against women, or as actors who can play a role in preventing and combating it. In its Resolution 2480 (2023) "The role and responsibilities of men and boys in stopping gender-based violence against women and girls", the Assembly pointed out that even if not all men are perpetrators of gender-based violence, most perpetrators are men, a fact which applies also in relation to violence against men and boys. In addition, boys are also perpetrators of sexual violence against other boys.

7. In the current political context of growing backlash against women's rights, I am aware of the potential risk for this issue to be misrepresented by some, as a pretext for downplaying and undermining the need to continue to fight for women's rights and detracting attention from the urgent need to put an end at once and for all to the endemic levels of gender-based violence against women and girls. Such violence – all too often ending in femicide – is a particularly nefarious manifestation of the wider climate of discrimination and inequality faced by women in societies at large and must never be minimised or ignored.

8. I wish to emphasise from the outset therefore that this report does not establish "hierarchies of victims", nor does it compare the levels or impacts of sexual violence on women and men. It rather aims to address the specificities of sexual violence perpetrated against men and boys in a diversity of contexts and settings, with the objective of putting forward the measures needed to best prevent and combat it, addressing first and foremost the needs and recovery of male victims/survivors of sexual violence.

9. As reflected in the 2023 Council of Europe Guidelines on the place of men and boys in gender equality policies and in policies to combat violence against women, measures involving men and boys should serve to reinforce and not replace gender equality policies primarily targeting women and girls.

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3. The explanatory memorandum is drawn up under the responsibility of the rapporteur.
4. Cagney J. *et al*, "Prevalence of sexual violence against children and age at first exposure: a global analysis by location, age, and sex (1990–2023)", *The Lancet*, Volume 405, 24 May 2025.
5. UNICEF, "When Numbers Demand Action: Confronting the global scale of sexual violence against children", New York, 9 October 2024.

2. Scope of the report

10. With this report, I aim to map the main dynamics and contexts where sexual violence against men and boys takes place: including incest and violence in the family, in relation to certain activities such as in sports, and in the context of religious organisations, as well as in the framework of armed conflicts. It was also my intention to apply an intersectional perspective, looking at areas such as sexual violence against gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (GBTI) men and boys, and migrant and asylum-seeking men and boys.

11. The lack of visibility of the problem in all areas of society justifies a broad scope for this report. In addition, the dynamics and the diversity of contexts where sexual violence against men and boys takes place, as well as the specific needs of men and boys victims/survivors of sexual violence regarding support and assistance, have led me to approach this topic with the aim of providing an overall mapping of the situation in Europe.

12. The subject of sexual violence against men and boys is vast and it takes place in many settings in society. I have focused on what I consider the most important contexts and aspects of sexual violence against men and boys Therefore, this report cannot be considered as exhaustive, and I invite fellow Assembly members to continue this work and look more in detail into particular aspects of this issue.

13. Due to the numerous implications and ramifications of this topic, I am not able to address online sexual violence against men and boys in depth, and I believe that this should be the focus of a future report. The proliferation of sexual abuse images and videos created using artificial intelligence, and the increasing number of children, especially teenage boys, who are victims of professional "sexual extortion", are worrying trends. Furthermore, Assembly Resolution 2547 (2024) "The protection of children against online violence" is fully relevant to the present report and I call for the implementation of all the relevant recommendations as regards online sexual violence against boys.

14. This report uses the terms "sexual violence" and "victim/survivor" in a broad sense. As regards sexual violence against boys, the report refers to the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS No. 201, the "Lanzarote Convention") and the definitions of the terms used in the Lanzarote Convention. I recognise that the terms "victim" and "survivor" have different legal implications in different countries and that most of the relevant legal instruments use the sole term "victim" alone, while the majority of persons with lived experiences of sexual violence prefer the term "survivor". I am therefore using "victim/survivor" throughout this report, unless there is an explicit reference to a legal or policy text.

3. Working methods

15. This topic has not been addressed in the previous work of the Assembly and is to some extent unchartered territory, including within the Council of Europe as a whole. It has, however, been the subject of academic study and research, which I have taken into account.

16. The previous rapporteur appointed for this report, Mr Fourat Ben Chickha (Belgium, SOC), organised a hearing in March 2024, with the participation of experts from SurvivorsUK (who presented knowledge gathered throughout 38 years of experience working with men, boys and non-binary persons victims/survivors of sexual violence), and from the Women's Refugee Commission, who provided information on sexual violence against men and boys in humanitarian settings. I have of course taken into account the valuable information they both shared.

17. After I was appointed rapporteur, on 3 October 2024, I continued gathering information from the Council of Europe and other international bodies as well as non-governmental organisations working on sexual violence against men and boys and assisting survivors.

18. On 18 March 2025, I organised a hearing with the participation of Mr Matthew McVarish, Co-Founder of the NGO Brave Movement; Ms Taina Laajasalo, Research Professor at the Finnish Institute of Health and Welfare, and Mr Tom Pakkanen, clinical forensic psychologist (PhD) at the Forensic Psychology Centre for Children and Adolescents of Helsinki University Hospital (online); and Ms Marie Derain de Vaucresson, President of the Independent National Authority for Recognition and Reparation (INIRR), set up to support persons who were victims of sexual violence in the Catholic Church in France during their childhood. They all provided valuable insights for this report, including indications as to the measures that should be taken at national level. I chose to focus this hearing on sexual violence against boys, since our committee can usefully apply the particular angle of equality and non-discrimination from the perspective of the rights of children.

19. It was very important for me to gather information directly from survivors of sexual violence and from civil society organisations assisting survivors, as only they can convey the actual needs and demands of men and boys who have suffered sexual violence. Their experience should inform the legal and policy measures at the national and European levels.

4. Key features of sexual violence against men and boys

20. Men and boys who suffer sexual violence face specific challenges linked to social attitudes and stereotypes about their behaviour and as regards masculinity, more broadly. There appears to be a vast amount of under-reporting among men and boys victims/survivors of sexual violence due to stigma and lack of information about where and how to get support.

21. In order to understand the risks, vulnerabilities and needs across a diverse population of men and boys victims/survivors of sexual violence, an intersectional analysis which takes into account the interconnected identities of a person is necessary. Intersecting diversity factors combine to increase a person's risk of being subject to sexual violence. For example, persons with disabilities (which include psychological, intellectual, sensory and physical impairments) and GBTI men and boys are at particular risk of sexual violence.

22. Psychological problems and depression are sadly prevalent among survivors of sexual violence, with reported suicide rates much higher than for other males. Sexual violence in adulthood is a risk factor for mental illness, suicide attempts, and addiction problems.[6]

23. In January 2023, the Assembly adopted Resolution 2480 (2023) "The role and responsibility of men and boys in stopping gender-based violence against women and girls", based on a report by Ms Petra Stienen (Netherlands, ALDE).[7] The report contains extensive research on the different types of masculinities and their consequences in society, including references to General Recommendation No. 35 of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which recognised "gender-based violence against women as being rooted in gender-related factors, such as the ideology of men's entitlement and privilege over women, social norms regarding masculinity, and the need to assert male control or power, enforce gender roles or prevent, discourage or punish what is considered to be unacceptable female behaviour." When addressing sexual violence against men and boys, it becomes clear that the same root causes, namely patriarchal values, are at the origin of sexual violence against men and boys: patriarchal values.

24. Petra Stienen's report took note of academic research, including by Professor Erik Melander who described harmful masculinities as the result of "patriarchal values" combined with "masculine toughness", leading men to think that they must show strength and not show weakness or emotions. These two elements form what is called "masculine honour ideology": the belief that certain behaviour is acceptable for men but not for women, and vice versa. These concepts behind masculinities may explain the issues of under-reporting and stigmatisation attached to cases of sexual violence against men and boys.

25. Such gender stereotypes suggest that men and boys cannot be victims but only perpetrators of violence. Therefore, they cannot consider themselves as potential victims of sexual violence or potential targets for perpetrators. Sexual violence against men thus appears to be at odds with society's general understanding of masculinity. Victims/survivors are considered weak and helpless, while men are strong and powerful. Masculinity and victimhood are thus seemingly inconsistent. These gender stereotypes and conceptions of masculinities reinforce what is commonly referred to as "the rape myths".

26. Men who sexually assault men/boys aim to impose their own masculinity and weaken that of their victim. It is significant that male victims/survivors of sexual violence are often feminised by perpetrators and society and accused of having provoked the assault due to their own "effeminate" sexual behaviour. The imposition of this type of masculinity carries other consequences, including the stigmatisation of victims of sexual violence, and the reinforcement of narratives confining men and women to traditional gender roles that place men as perpetrators and women as victims.

27. Studies, including testimonies from survivors, show that men who are sexually victimised confront a set of stigmatising cultural narratives that contribute to a unique sense of shame, and may feel great guilt after being sexually assaulted. Because men are socially expected to want sex, they may feel conflicted when they

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6. Carlsson, A. C., Owen, U., Rajan, G., "Sexual violence, mental health, and suicidality—Results from a survey in cooperation with idea-driven organizations and their social media platform followers", *Health Science Reports*, 2 December 2022.

7. Doc. 15678 "The role and responsibility of men and boys in stopping gender-based violence against women and girls".

experience an unwanted sexual experience.[8] This nourishes the general idea that men are inherently more sexual than women, and that it is unlikely for a man to be sexually assaulted. As a result, male sexual victimhood is nearly incomprehensible to the eyes of some, because it contradicts traditional discourses that link male sexuality with dominance, aggression, and desire – and female sexuality with passivity, vulnerability, and submissiveness.[9]

28. Myths that men are always the sexual aggressor and that they always welcome sex render the male victim illegitimate or altogether invisible. As male victimhood is perceived as either aberrant or harmless, men and boys find themselves discouraged from disclosing sexual assault, causing an important under-reporting, which makes it impossible to gather data on sexual aggressions against men and boys. The design and development of adequate services for male survivors of sexual violence is also affected by under-reporting and the limited documentation available.

29. Many men and boys do not disclose rape for fear of being ridiculed as weak or labelled as homosexual. The latter is connected to societal homophobia, which needs to be addressed to increase reporting, awareness and prevention measures. Such attitudes and rape myths contribute to the justification of victim-blaming narratives, refuting their status as victims and obscuring the terrible consequences they suffer, including shame, stigma, depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and suicide. The emotional consequences of what has happened to them, coupled with the associated stigmatisation, are very deep: conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder and rape trauma syndrome have been found to manifest.[10]

30. In a study based on direct testimonies of victims/survivors of sexual violence, focus group participants identified the influence of traditional gender roles on men's avoidance of disclosing and seeking help for sexual violence, especially among gay men, who face double (intersectional) stigmatisation: as male victims/ survivors and as members of sexual minority groups or communities.[11]

31. Research reveals that victims/survivors of sexual violence are considered as degradingly feminised.[12] This phenomenon, often referred to as "feminisation" or "emasculation", originates from traditional gender stereotypes. The vast majority of studies on sexual violence against men has shown that emasculating male survivors is both a motivation for sexual violence against men to occur, and its primary consequence.[13]

32. Emasculation relies on the idea that male victims of sexual violence are not "real men", as they would not have let that happen to them. The intention of the rape may be to lower the social status of the male survivor by reducing him to a "feminised male." Regardless of the actual gender of the perpetrator or victim, the characteristic of masculinity is systematically attributed to the perpetrator and femininity to the victim. Rape and other forms of sexual violence have been described as "gendering" crimes, meaning that they have the potential to feminise their victims.[14]

33. Traditional gender norms encourage men to appear strong and unemotional, rendering them less able to disclose and process sexual violence experiences. They also act as barriers to access sexual violence support services. I am convinced that unlearning harmful masculinities is the way towards a culture of believing and supporting male victims/survivors of sexual violence.

34. I learned from a survivor himself at the hearing of the committee in March 2025, his first-hand experience of how male victims/survivors of sexual violence are stigmatised in some countries due to the belief that sexual violence turns heterosexual men into gay men – which led him to receive homophobic attacks. Such attitudes will only reinforce the stigma, fear and under-reporting of sexual violence by male victims/survivors.

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8. Caballero L., Konopa R. and Whittenburg P., "Man Up: How the Stigma of Masculinity Can Hurt Male Survivors", *RISE Blog*, Texas Tech University, 14 April 2022.
9. Hlavka H., "Speaking of Stigma and the Silence of Shame: Young Men and Sexual Victimization", *Men and Masculinities*, Volume 20(4), 2017.
10. Kopel J. and Thomas J.C., "Male Victims of Sexual Assault: A Review of the Literature", *Behavioral Sciences*, Volume 13(4), 13 April 2023.
11. Donne M.D. *et al.*, "Barriers to and Facilitators of Help-Seeking Behavior Among Men Who Experience Sexual Violence", *American Journal of Men's Health,* Volume 12(2), 2018.
12. Du Toit L. and Le Roux E., "A feminist reflection on male victims of conflict-related sexual violence", *European Journal of Women's Studies,* Volume 28(1), February 2020.
13. Schulz P., "Male survivors are not 'emasculated' but experience 'displacement from gendered personhood'". *LSE Women*, Peace and Security blog, 26 October 2018.
14. Mulder E., Pemberton A. and Vingerhoets A.J.J.M., "The Feminizing Effect of Sexual Violence in Third-Party Perceptions of Male and Female Victims", *Sex Roles*, Volume 82. pp. 13-27, 27 March 2019.

5. Mapping sexual violence against men and boys: an overview of the main settings where it occurs

35. The Explanatory Report of the Lanzarote Convention already recognised that the highest prevalence of sexual violence against children takes place "within the family framework, by persons close to the child or by those in the child's social environment" (paragraphs 48 and 123-125). The Lanzarote Committee therefore decided to focus its first monitoring round on "the protection of children against sexual abuse in the circle of trust".

36. The first implementation report by the Lanzarote Committee published in 2015 and covering 26 countries, indicated that a majority of them protected children against sexual abuse within the context of certain specific relationships and settings (e.g. within the family, at school, in institutions). However, the Lanzarote Committee regretted that most Parties did not cover all persons in the child's closest circle who might abuse their position of trust, authority or influence (e.g. a parent's friend or colleague, an older sibling's friend, a neighbour, etc.). Over the years, the Lanzarote Committee has called on Parties to place particular attention on the measures and procedures applied during criminal investigations and proceedings in order not to aggravate the trauma experienced by children having suffered sexual abuse in their circle of trust.

37. A new implementation report on "Protection of children against sexual abuse in the circle of trust: legal frameworks", was adopted in July 2025, on the basis of information submitted by Parties.

38. In response to the high prevalence of sexual violence against children within the family and by persons in the circle of trust, in January 2021, the French Government launched an Independent Commission on Incest and Child Sexual Abuse (CIIVISE). The Commission gathered some 30 000 testimonies of victims and its final report, published in November 2023, contains 82 public policy recommendations. The report concluded that 160 000 children are victims of sexual violence in France each year, and that 5.4 million women and men have been victims of such violence when they were children. The impunity of perpetrators and the lack of social support for victims have an estimated cost of 9.7 billion Euros of public funds each year, two thirds of which correspond to health-related impacts of sexual violence on victims.

39. Furthermore, I would like to recall Resolution 2533 (2024) "Child abuse in institutions in Europe", which should be fully applied as regards sexual violence against children in institutions.

5.1. Sexual violence against boys and men in religious settings

40. In recent years, disclosures and investigations into allegations of sexual violence committed by priests or religious leaders against men and boys, in particular within the Catholic Church, have increasingly been brought to light across Europe, with different levels of engagement within the clergy to uncover the extent of the violence, provide redress to victims/survivors, and put in place preventive measures for the future.

41. In November 2018, the Conference of bishops of France set up an Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church (CIASE). The CIASE published its report in October 2021, estimating that 330 000 people had been sexually abused by clergy and other Church personnel in France between 1950 and 2020. The report concluded that 80% of victims were children when the abuse took place, and that the vast majority of victims were boys, aged between 10 and 13. This report also notes the high prevalence of sexual violence in the Catholic Church, coming after family and friend circles.[15] Following the CIASE report, two reparative bodies were set up: the Commission for Recognition and Reparations and the Independent National Authority for Recognition and Reparations (INIRR), aimed at providing reparation to victims of sexual violence in the Catholic Church. Although deemed insufficient by many victims/survivors, these mechanisms represent an official recognition of the harm caused, marking a turning point in the way sexual violence in the Catholic Church is addressed in France.

42. At the hearing held by the committee on 18 March 2025, the President of the INIRR explained that the national authority had been set up by the Conference of bishops of France, as an independent institution, to deal with cases of sexual violence within the Catholic Church that had taken place during the childhood of current adults who could no longer bring their case to court, due to the statutes of limitation. The INIRR follows a restorative justice approach and has developed certain criteria to assess the damage and to determine an amount of financial compensation based on the seriousness of the sexual violence, the gaps in preventing such violence and redressing the individual case, the seriousness of the consequences in terms of school and professional life, and the impacts on social life and health, including mental health. In 2024, the INIRR dealt with 213 requests for reparation and compensation.

15. The Report of the Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church is available in English and French.

43. Other European countries have also carried out enquiries into sexual violence perpetrated by the clergy of the Catholic Church, such as Spain.[16] In Italy, an investigation in the diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone reported 60 cases of sexual assault committed by priests since 1964. This is the first independent study on abuse within the Italian Church, published in January 2025.[17] A support group to help the families of victims/ survivors of clerical sexual violence was launched in February 2025, the first one in the country.[18]

44. In Belgium, the "Chalice operation" was closed in February 2025, after 15 years of investigations and 68 alleged perpetrators, with the decision not to open criminal proceedings. In January 2024, the Evangelical Church in Germany published a study revealing that at least 9 355 children and adolescents had been victims of sexual violence within the Protestant Church and its diaconal services since 1946. The study identified 1 259 perpetrators, including 511 clergy members, and 2 174 victims/survivors (of which nearly 65% boys).

5.2. Sexual violence against men and boys in the field of sports

45. Sexual violence in sport remains taboo and difficult to address. Attention should be given to sexual violence against men and boys in sport settings, including how this violence is influenced by socio-economical, cultural and sport factors.[19] A multi-faceted and integrated approach is needed to combat it, which must include a cultural change in sport organisations and individuals. Effective and practical tools and the financing of activities in this field are crucial to raise awareness, inform potential victims, manage cases, protect victims/survivors, and instigate a change in the culture of sports activities, organisations and institutions.

46. The European Sports Charter establishes that the due diligence approach in sport requires respect for the human rights of those involved in sport-related activities. This includes applying a policy of zero tolerance for violence and all forms of discrimination, "paying particular attention to individuals and groups in a situation of vulnerability, such as children, migrants and persons with disabilities" (Article 6.2.d). Furthermore, the European Sport Charter addresses sport integrity and the need for all stakeholders in the field of sport to commit to protect all people, particularly the young, from violence, harassment and abuse" (Article 8.1.a).

47. The Council of Europe has been running the project "Start to Talk" since 2018, calling on public authorities and the sport movement (i.e. sports clubs, associations and organisations, athletes and coaches) to stop child abuse.[20] This project aims to protect children in sport by eliminating all forms of abuse and violence against them through technical support, resources and materials[21] addressed to public authorities and sports organisations. This includes tools to develop and implement child safeguarding policies, trauma-informed training for sport experts and professionals, and awareness-raising campaigns.

48. A training kit to prevent and react to situations of potential sexual violence against children and young people in sport was developed in 2018 under the European Union/Council of Europe project "Put an end to sexual harassment and abuse against children in sport". The training kit provides information to help trainers/ instructors, sport leaders, coaches and physical education teachers) in preventing and reacting to situations of sexual violence in sport, and it is currently being updated by a Pool of international experts on safe sport.

49. In July 2025, the Governing Body of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS) adopted "Guidelines on safer recruitment in sport", aimed at human rights-compliant screening of professionals and volunteers who are in contact with children through sport activities.

50. I fully support the Assembly Resolution 2607 (2025) "Protecting human rights in and through sport: obligations and shared responsibilities" and the calls for action made by rapporteur Mr Kim Valentin (Denmark, ALDE), to combat abuse and violence in sport.

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16. In October 2023, the Spanish Ombudsman (Defensor der Pueblo) published a "Report on sexual abuse within the Catholic Church and the role of public authorities. A much-needed response" (a summary is available in English and Spanish). The Ombudsman has urged the state and the Catholic Church to work together to compensate victims of sexual abuse, which the church hierarchy has so far refused to do.
17. Until now, data collection had been left to the only campaign group on this issue: the Abuse Network ("*Rete l'Abuso*"), which released a comprehensive report in 2023, with over 400 cases recorded over 13 years.
18. See webnews from France24, from 7 February 2025.
19. Bjørnseth I. and Szabo A., "Sexual Violence Against Children in Sports and Exercise: A Systematic Literature Review", *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, Volume 27(4), pp. 365-385, 2018. Hartill M. *et al*, "Prevalence of interpersonal violence against children in sport in six European countries", *Journal ofChild Abuse & Neglect,* 146 (2023) 106513.
20. See "Start to Talk" video clip and TV spot on sexual abuse in sport, in English with subtitles.
21. A compendium of resources on safe sport is available online, including a self-assessment tool for governments and sports organisations to evaluate their capacity to create safe environments for children.

5.3. Sexual violence against men and boys on the move

51. Research indicates that in the context of migration, sexual violence is not uncommon among migrant, asylum-seeking or refugee men and boys. Refugee boys and young men are at particular risk of sexual violence perpetrated by older boys or men from their own community, as well as from the host communities.

52. However, victimisation among migrant men and boys remains under-researched. Recent work on the experiences of migrant men witnessing and surviving sexual violence in Europe[22] indicates the need for safe legal migration routes, increased awareness of migrant men's vulnerabilities to sexual violence, and enhanced training and screening of professionals and volunteers working in the field.

53. Migrant populations are also at increased risk of sexual violence both within immigration detention institutions and when they are homeless. This risk is heightened as regards GBTI men and boys.

54. The Lanzarote Committee has addressed the need to protect migrant and refugee children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. In a Declaration adopted in 2018, Parties to the Convention acknowledged that migrant and refugee children, in particular unaccompanied and separated children, are extremely vulnerable, and are therefore in need of additional protection and care to safeguard their rights and best interests. The Lanzarote Committee called on Parties to uphold the rights and best interests of the child at all times, regardless of their migration status. A call that remains fully relevant and applicable today.

5.4. Sexual violence against gay, bisexual, trans and intersex men and boys

55. Data indicate that GBTI men experience higher rates of sexual violence than the general population of men (noting that as regards Europe, most of the available data on sexual violence against GBTI men is produced in the United Kingdom). In a survey conducted in 2021 by SurvivorsUK, 45% gay and bisexual men had experienced sexual assault, and 85% of them never reported it to the police.[23] This is due to a number of factors, including structural anti-GBTI sentiments, sexual pressure, an under-developed consent culture, and the systemic silencing of this violence.[24] Furthermore, distrust in law enforcement, dismissive or homophobic attitudes from authorities and institutional discrimination also deter victims/survivors from reporting.[25] It is therefore critical to address sexual violence against men and boys with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics.

56. The 2023 EU LGBTIQ Survey III, conducted by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and published in May 2024,[26] provides limited evidence regarding sexual violence against GBTI men. The survey asked about violence in the previous year, followed by a question about the kind of violence (physical, physical and sexual, or sexual). Among men of any sexual orientation or sex characteristics, around 1% reported having experienced violence with a sexual component (either physical and sexual, or sexual), while it was the case for 3% of trans men (of any sexual orientation or sex characteristics), and nearly 4% for gay trans men.

57. There is very little data on sexual violence against intersex and trans men and boys. The 2023 EU LGBTIQ Survey III found that among all intersex respondents (i.e. not only men), nearly 5% had experienced an attack with a sexual component in the previous year. This survey saw a significant increase in the number of intersex respondents, and it also showed that intersex persons face alarmingly increasing levels of violence in their everyday life.

58. Furthermore, intersex men and boys may experience sexual violence in the form of medically unnecessary and non-consented medical interventions related to their variations of sex characteristic.[27] In its General Policy Recommendation No. 17 on preventing and combating intolerance and discrimination against LGBTI persons, from September 2023, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)

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22. Linthout L. *et al.*, "Lived experiences of migrant men witnessing and surviving sexual violence in European transit spaces", *Globalization and Health*, 21, 38, 1 July 2025.
23. Thomson S. and Beresford M., "Silenced Survivors – Understanding gay and bisexual men's experience with sexual violence and support services in the UK", SurvivorsUK, 2021.
24. Communication received from ILGA Europe in March 2025.
25. Communication received from ACCEPT Romania in March 2025.
26. This third edition of the survey on LGBTIQ people provides up-to-date information on the lives of LGBTIQ people in the 27 EU Member States + candidate countries Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia. This latest survey saw a significant increase in the number or intersex respondents. It also showed that intersex people face alarmingly increasing levels of violence in their everyday life.
27. Germany, Greece, Iceland, Malta, Portugal and Spain restrict surgical/medical treatments and interventions on intersex persons without consent.

noted that intersex persons continue to experience high rates of discrimination and abuse, including violence, on the ground of sex characteristics. A draft recommendation of the Committee of Ministers on the equality of rights of intersex people is scheduled for adoption before the end of 2025.

59. There is very little research as regards trans men, but a 2022 study conducted by Galop in the UK found that 35% of all trans men who had experienced sexual violence indicated that attempted conversion practices were part of the perpetrators' intent. I look forward to the report "For a ban on so-called conversion therapies", currently under preparation by Ms Kate Osborne (United Kingdom, SOC). In the context of this report, I call for a ban on such practices in our member States, as they can amount to sexual violence.

60. As regards laws and policies to prevent and combat gender-based violence against GBTI men, some countries integrate these measures in national strategies on LGBTI equality (Germany, the Netherlands), while others integrate LGBTI-related aspects into national strategies to combat gender-based violence (Ireland). In both cases, explicit references in a national strategy to gender-based violence, including sexual violence, targeting LGBTI people, gives visibility to this issue and provides an inclusive policy approach.

61. A promising initiative was taken by the German Ministry of Interior, which set up a working group on "Combating homophobic and transphobic violence", with the participation of the German Länder and civil society, and which in 2023 put forward 22 policy measures to increase the reporting of cases of hate crime, including violence, such as measures to protect the address of those reporting, and low thresholds for online reporting.

62. Finally, the Lanzarote Committee has recommended States to ensure that all children are equally protected against sexual violence without discrimination on the grounds of their sex or sexual orientation, by avoiding stigmatisation of sexual activities based on sexual orientation and ensuring equal sanctions irrespective of the sex or gender of the victim or perpetrator.

5.5. Conflict-related sexual violence against men and boys

63. Rape and other forms of sexual violence are prohibited under international human rights law and international humanitarian law. They can also constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide under international criminal law. Evidence-based survivor-centred prevention and response interventions should be implemented to address the protection needs of boys and men victims of conflict-related sexual violence.

64. The United Nations Security Council paved the way for action to change the traditional concepts of masculinities with its Resolution 2467 (2019) where it addressed the need to strengthen justice and accountability and called for a survivor-centred approach in the prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence. The Resolution urged member States "to protect victims who are men and boys through the strengthening of policies that offer appropriate responses to male survivors and challenge cultural assumptions about male invulnerability to such violence" (paragraph 32). The Assembly should follow this resolution and call on Council of Europe member States to take steps to overcome traditional gendered roles.

65. The extent to which conflict-related sexual violence impacts men and boys is increasingly recognised. It occurs in a wide range of settings, including military camps, checkpoints, police stations, prisons and other places of detention. In December 2019, the NGO "All Survivors Project" published a "Checklist on preventing and addressing conflict-related sexual violence against men and boys", aimed at supporting national efforts to ensure that men and boys are protected against conflict-related sexual violence in law and practice; that national policies and other measures respond to the risks and vulnerabilities of all persons; and that all victims/survivors have access – without any discrimination – to justice including reparations, as well as to quality, survivor-centred medical, mental health and psychosocial support and other assistance.

66. Conflict-related sexual violence against men and boys is today a reality in the war of aggression against Ukraine and in the occupied territories, including violence against detainees held in captivity.[28] It is reported that sexual violence has been consistently and deliberately used as a form of torture, with an intent to punish and humiliate.[29] The true scale of this violence is considered to be much higher due to under-reporting,

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28. Since 24 February 2022, the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights has documented 484 cases of conflict-related sexual violence perpetrated by Russian authorities against civilians and prisoners of war, including 350 men and 2 boys. Source: "Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine, 1 December 2024 – 31 May 2025", 30 June 2025.

29. "Human rights situation in the territories of Ukraine temporarily controlled or occupied by the Russian Federation", SG/Inf(2025)24, 30 June 2025.

stigma, and barriers to access support in occupied or frontline territories. In its Grand Chamber judgement of 3 July 2025 (*Ukraine and the Netherlands v. Russia*), the European Court of Human Rights found "evidence of a widespread and systemic use of sexual violence by armed separatists and Russian troops, in respect of men and women, old and young". The Court further underlined the "horrific sexual violence frequently perpetrated upon male detainees … often carried out to attack and destroy their sense of masculinity or manhood".

67. On 10 March 2022, the Lanzarote Committee adopted a "Statement on protecting children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse resulting from the military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine". It called on States Parties to take measures to prevent and address the risk of exposure to sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of migrant and refugee children, taking into account the increased vulnerability caused by factors such as deprivation of liberty, family separation, inadequacy of reception and care and lack of effective guardianship systems. In September 2023, the Lanzarote Committee expressed concern that the Ukrainian children who have been unlawfully transferred or deported to the Russian Federation, or to the areas temporarily controlled or occupied by it, may be at risk of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.

68. The Council of Europe Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine (CGU) was launched in November 2023 to facilitate co-operation between member States, the European Union and relevant international organisations. In July 2024, the CGU held a thematic hearing on "understanding the risks of human trafficking, including for the purposes of sexual and labour exploitation, of children of Ukraine". The report, published in October 2024, identifies key risks and potential mitigation measures for the protection of children of Ukraine against human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

69. As it was explained at a hearing in March 2024, the Women's Refugee Commission established and led a working group on addressing the needs of male survivors of sexual violence in Ukraine, including to understand the barriers to access support services. Barriers to accessing health and psychosocial services included the fear of being identified as survivors of sexual violence, and the fear of being identified or viewed as homosexual. Other barriers identified were the fear of being blamed, and the lack of knowledge or information on where to access safe medical care.

70. In November 2024, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted the Law on Legal and Social Protection of the Rights of Victims of Sexual Violence Related to the Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, and Urgent Interim Reparations (No. 10132). The law represents a significant milestone in the efforts to address conflict-related sexual violence and support survivors, making Ukraine the first country to implement urgent interim reparations for victims/survivors of sexual violence during an ongoing armed conflict.

71. The Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine continues to receive and record claims for compensation for the damage, loss, and injury inflicted by the war of aggression. New claims categories have been added in 2025, including sexual violence.

5.6. Sexual violence against men and boys deprived of liberty

72. Increased vulnerability to sexual violence is also found in places of detention where men and boys are deprived of their liberty. Detention creates opportunity for perpetration and raises barriers for victims/survivors to access the services they need.

73. In its country reports, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) regularly addresses violence among prisoners, including sexual violence. The CPT has called for adequate training for prison health care services and prison management to support victims of sexual violence. The CPT has also issued recommendations in cases of inter-detainee violence in juvenile correctional establishments.

74. In 2023, the CPT issued a set of standards and recommendations to European prisons aimed at ensuring that transgender prisoners, a highly vulnerable part of the prison population, are protected from the risks of ill-treatment, including sexual violence. Indeed, GBTI men and boys are at particular risk of sexual violence in close settings, such as prisons and migration detention facilities.[30]

6. Legal and policy frameworks to prevent and combat sexual violence against men and boys

75. The following Council of Europe Conventions should be fully implemented as regards preventing and combating sexual violence against men and boys, as appropriate: the Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS No. 201); the Convention on Action against

30. ILGA Europe briefing, op. cit.

Trafficking in Human Beings (CETS No. 197), as regards male victims of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation; the European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No. 163); the European Sports Charter; and the Convention on Cybercrime (ETS No. 185).

76. Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CETS No. 210, "Istanbul Convention") can decide to apply it to all victims of domestic violence, in accordance with Article 2(2). This allows the Convention to be applied to male victims of sexual violence "within the family or domestic unit, or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim". In Germany, services explicitly targeted at men victims of domestic violence are reportedly being created in some of the 16 German *Länder*.[31]

77. Men are less likely to access specialist medical care after being raped or sexually assaulted. This means lack of forensic and other evidence to support a criminal investigation and no access to support to recover from trauma, including longer-term support services. A relevant example is the Good practice guide to supporting male victims/survivors accessing a sexual assault referral centre, published by England's National Health Service in 2022.

78. When given the right support, male victims/survivors of sexual violence can recover.[32] Group work or counselling for survivors of sexual abuse can yield positive outcomes by providing a safe and supportive space where survivors can share their experiences and challenges. Through guided discussions, therapeutic exercises, and the presence of a trained therapist, survivors can process their trauma, address feelings of shame and guilt, and learn coping mechanisms. Over time, they can experience improved mental well-being, increased self-awareness, and enhanced coping skills, ultimately empowering them to reclaim their sense of agency and embark on a journey of healing and recovery.

79. Prevention and support measures for men and boys victims/survivors of sexual violence in all their diversity, such as information campaigns, training for professionals, access to shelters and other services, as well as access to justice and redress, should be strengthened, with a view to better protect victims/survivors from sexual violence. Systems for professionals and volunteers to report all forms of violence against children, including sexual violence, are essential elements of national strategies to combat and prevent violence against children.[33]

80. Sexual consent is integrated in the main international guidelines for sexuality education. The UN international technical guidance on sexuality education was last updated in December 2024. The Council of Europe Steering Committee on the Rights of the Child is preparing a draft Committee of Ministers Recommendation on age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education to strengthen responses for *inter alia* preventing and combating violence against children, which should be adopted in 2026.

81. The participation of specialised civil society organisations in policies to prevent and combat sexual violence against men and boys, including in the provision of specialised support services, is crucial. I would like to mention the Global Alliance on the Protection of Boys from Sexual Violence, which brings together international and local organisations working to combat all forms of sexual violence affecting boys in diverse contexts. The Global Alliance has developed a Global Manifesto to combat sexual violence against boys focused on embedding the protection of boys into the core of child protection initiatives, challenging rigid ideas of masculinity, and reducing gender-based violence against women and girls.

82. One of the good practices shared at the hearing held by the committee in March 2025 highlighted the benefits of facilitating the participation of victims/survivors in policy making through a "survivors' council", as it is the case in Germany. I welcome this practice, and I invite other countries to consider it.

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31. "Protection of male victims of violence and implementation of the Istanbul Convention in Germany – Current status", Federal Coordination Office for the Protection of Male Victims of Violence, 2021.

32. For the personal message of a survivor to adolescent victims, to help them recover from the trauma of sexual violence, see McVarish M. (2019), *The truth that no one tells teenagers – Ten facts every teen victim has the right to know*.

33. See Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)8 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on strengthening reporting systems on violence against children.

6.1. Laws to prevent and combat sexual violence against men

83. Sexual violence, including rape, should be understood as engaging in non-consensual acts of a sexual nature with a person or causing another person to engage in non-consensual acts of a sexual nature with a third person. Consent must be given voluntarily, as the result of the person's free will, assessed in the context of the surrounding circumstances. Criminal law definitions of sexual violence including rape should be consent-based, as it is required by the Istanbul Convention (Article 36), and the relevant case law of the European Court of Human Rights.

84. I was shocked when I learned that not all definitions of rape in the criminal codes of our member States cover sexual violence against men. When comparing the national legal definitions of rape in Europe,[34] it is remarkable that certain countries do not recognise the possibility of rape against men – and that some rape definitions explicitly refer to men, and only men, as perpetrators. Such definitions contribute to reinforce the "rape myths" according to which "men cannot be raped".

85. Some criminal codes use the terms "sexual" (meaning "heterosexual") and "homosexual" in relation to different sexual crimes. This is the case in Albania, where Article 102 of the Criminal Code defines the crime of sexual (i.e. heterosexual) activity by the use of force against adult females or between spouses or cohabitants. These provisions are worded in a way that excludes heterosexual men and homosexual women from being the victims of sexual violence. In addition, Article 102/a of the Criminal Code addresses "Homosexual activity by use of force with adult males".

86. The Armenian Criminal Code defines rape also as a crime that can only be perpetrated by men against women. Article 138 refers to sexual intercourse between a man and woman, which leaves no room for a different interpretation. Article 139 of Armenia's Criminal Code defines "Violent sexual actions" as "homosexual, lesbian or other sexual actions" against a person, using force, threatening with the use of force, or taking advantage of the aggrieved person's helplessness. Other countries that only recognise women as possible victims of rape are Bulgaria and the Slovak Republic.

87. Switzerland used to follow this approach too (i.e. that only women can be victims of rape) but the Swiss Government amended the definition of rape in the Criminal Code (Article 190), with effect from 1 July 2024. The provision is now worded in a gender-neutral language so that it can be applied to women and men.

88. In other countries, such as Ireland, male rape is recognised as a criminal offence, but only when perpetrated by men. The same seems to apply in the United Kingdom, as the Sexual Offences Act 2003 recognises rape against men, but its exclusive use of male pronouns and attributes imply that only men can commit rape. The Crown Prosecution Service indicated that "a woman can only commit this offence as an accomplice",[35] therefore rejecting the possibility of female perpetrators of rape. There is a new offence within this Act, entitled "Causing sexual activity without consent" and aimed to create a female equivalent to the offence of rape, with the same level of punishment for what amounts to be the same type of offending behaviour."[36] Other criminal codes, as is the case in Bulgaria, allow for the possibility of women as perpetrators of rape.

89. This initial analysis of the different approaches and limitations in the legal definitions of rape in European countries, regarding whether men and/or women can be considered as victims and/or perpetrators of rape, reflects the gender-related stereotypes and biases in our societies. It calls for the need to strongly and urgently recommend to member States that the scope of criminal law definitions of rape should cover both women and men as possible victims and as perpetrators of sexual violence.

6.2. Laws to prevent and combat sexual violence against boys

90. While awareness of violence against children has increased significantly, there is often silence when it comes to sexual violence against boys.

91. At the global level, Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a clear obligation for States to protect children from all forms of violence at all times and in all settings. Other relevant international instruments and commitments include the Rio de Janeiro Declaration and Action Plan to Prevent and Stop Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents (2008).

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34. "Definitions of rape in the legislation of EU Member States", European Parliamentary Research Service, January 2024.
35. "Rape and Sexual Offences – Chapter 7: Key Legislation and Offences", Crown Prosecution Service, 21 May 2021 (updated on 8 July 2022).
36. *Ibid.*

92. The Lanzarote Convention and Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)10 of the Committee of Ministers on integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence, which includes a set of policy guidelines, are the key Council of Europe legal instruments to prevent and combat sexual violence against boys in Europe.

93. The Lanzarote Convention, which entered into force in July 2010, requires the criminalisation of sexual abuse and exploitation against children. It requires States to adopt legislation and take measures to prevent sexual violence, to protect child victims, and to prosecute perpetrators. The Lanzarote Committee has been established to monitor the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention by its 48 Parties.

94. The Lanzarote Convention leaves discretion to Parties to decide the age below which it is prohibited to engage in sexual activities with a child: the legal age. In September 2023, the Council of Europe published a Comparative study of the legal age for sexual activities in the States Parties to the Lanzarote Convention.

95. The statutes of limitation are critical for child victims of sexual violence as they establish the time-frame during which offences can be reported after they occur. Article 33 of the Lanzarote Convention provides that Parties must ensure that the statute of limitation lasts "for a period of time sufficient to allow the efficient starting of proceedings after the victim has reached the age of majority and which is commensurate with the gravity of the crime in question". This provision identifies an important practical hurdle that impacts reporting. In June 2024, the Lanzarote Committee adopted an Opinion to clarify the interpretation of Article 33 of the Lanzarote Convention, recognising the abolition of limitation periods for sexual offences against children as an effective action to ensure sufficient time to initiate proceedings after the victim has reached the age of majority.

96. In its Resolution 2330 (2020) "Addressing sexual violence against children: stepping up action and co-operation in Europe", the Assembly urged member States to "abolish the statute of limitation for sexual violence against children, or to at least ensure that the prescription periods for sexual violence against children in civil and criminal law are proportionate to the gravity of the alleged abuse and, in any case, no shorter than thirty years after the victim has reached the age of 18". I stand by this call made by our Assembly in 2020. Civil society organisations and academics are also calling to abolish statutes of limitation for child sexual abuse crimes.

97. It is not possible to address in-depth the issue of sexual violence against men and boys on online settings within the scope of this report. Article 23 of the Lanzarote Convention establishes the need to take measures to criminalise the solicitation of children for the purposes of committing sexual abuse or child pornography, using information and communication technologies (ICTs). The Lanzarote Committee works on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse facilitated by information and communication technologies, and addresses the challenges raised by child self-generated sexual images and/or videos. In its 2015 Opinion, it held that States should consider extending this criminalisation to cases where the sexual abuse is committed online. Furthermore, Article 9 of the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime (ETS No. 185, the "Budapest Convention") requires Parties to criminalise a number of offences related to possessing, procuring, producing, offering or distributing child pornography through a computer system.

98. A recognised good practice proven to minimise trauma and secondary victimisation of children and improve the quality of evidence, the "Barnahus model" has been widely developed, in application of the Lanzarote Convention.[37] It allows all relevant professionals, including police, prosecutors, social workers, health professionals and the judiciary, to work together with child survivors and witnesses of violence in a safe space. The testimony of children is collected only once and filmed for use in court, to avoid repeated interrogations. International standards on Child-friendly multidisciplinary and interagency response services for children who are victims of violence — Requirements and recommendations were published by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) in March 2025, and should be applied by member States.

99. In March 2024, the Lanzarote Committee published a set of Guidelines for policy makers on engaging with victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, aimed at supporting policy makers in engaging with victims/survivors of sexual violence, based on the principles that such engagement should be trauma informed, that self-determination should be integrated throughout the process, and that survivors' advocates should also be empowered to interact on their behalf with policy makers.

37. According to a mapping study published in September 2023, a total of 28 Council of Europe member States had Barnahus and/or Barnahus-type services in place.

100. In February 2024, under the EU strategy for a more effective fight against child sexual abuse, the European Commission submitted a proposal to review the 2011 Directive on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography. The Council of the European Union and the European Parliament are discussing the changes to the 2011 Directive, with the aim of ensuring that all forms of child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, including those enabled or facilitated by new online tools, are criminalised. Higher penalties and more specific requirements for prevention and assistance to victims, as well as minimum statutes of limitations to effectively allow victims to seek justice, are being discussed.

7. Conclusions

101. My report aims to raise awareness about sexual violence against men and boys in all their diversity, taking due account of the main contexts where it takes place, the need to address root causes, and the problems of under-reporting, stigma and invisibility that remain key features of this violence. More research and disaggregated data collection into sexual violence against men and boys is urgently needed.

102. Sexual violence against men and boys is a human rights violation and a crime which must be recognised as such and tackled by the authorities and by all of society. It is vital that victims/survivors of sexual violence are believed, listened to, accompanied, supported and empowered in their path to recovery.

103. Adequate training of relevant authorities is a pre-condition for male survivors of sexual violence to access justice and redress. The testimonies of victims/survivors should be properly collected, and access to legal aid and support to bring their cases to justice must be provided. The statutes of limitations should be eliminated and a range of adequate support services for male victims/survivors should be established.

104. In order to prevent further sexual violence against men and boys, more awareness-raising, education and targeted research need to be undertaken, so that the best evidence-based laws and policies can be developed.

105. It is essential to address the root causes of sexual violence against men and boys in all their diversity, including patriarchal values, harmful masculinities, negative gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles affecting men. Men who perpetrate sexual violence against men and boys aim to impose their masculinity and weaken that of their victim. The phenomena of emasculation and feminisation are accompanied by extreme stigmatisation and have important consequences on the mental health and social life of men and boys survivors of sexual violence. Work needs to be done to change this environment for the future, including measures designed and targeted to meet the different contexts and settings where sexual violence takes place.

106. As political leaders, we have a responsibility to guarantee the enjoyment of human rights and dignity to everyone, without any discrimination whatsoever and recognising and responding to the impact of intersectional considerations. It is our responsibility to promote a society that respects and cares for all its members and which provides an environment where gender equality is a reality for all. I am convinced that addressing the needs of men and boys who are victims/survivors of sexual violence is a part of this picture and can be achieved at the same time as continuing to fight for the right of women and girls to live in a world free from gender-based violence and discrimination. I hope that this report contributes to this aim, and that it will pave the way for further engagement of our Assembly to prevent and combat sexual violence against men and boys.