

## **Council of Europe calls on Hungary to reconsider new law that risks exposing migrant children to sexual exploitation**

<http://bit.ly/2n0WXb7>

Strasbourg, 24.03.2017 - In a [letter](#) to Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, published today, Claude Janizzi, the Chairperson of the Council of Europe [Lanzarote Committee](#) expressed his concern that the adopted law – “On the amendment of certain acts related to increasing the strictness of procedures carried out in the areas of border management” – will negatively impact on the implementation of the [Lanzarote Convention](#), to which Hungary is party, in mainly two ways:

- Unaccompanied migrant children between 14 and 18 will be considered adults during the emergency crisis and will not benefit from child protection measures, including the appointment of a guardian;
- These children will be placed in transit zones with a greater risk of becoming victims of sexual abuse or exploitation.

As a result of the legal changes, “instead of having access to a guardian and being able to benefit from the child protection system, these children will be considered as adult asylum applicants, and placed in transit zones increasing the risk of becoming a victim of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse,” Janizzi wrote.

In the letter, Mr. Janizzi calls on Hungarian authorities to provide within a month information about (1) actions taken to ensure that unaccompanied children (above or below 14 years of age) benefit from child protection; (2) measures to prevent such children from falling victims to sexual exploitation and abuse; (3) the situation of children on the move who do not request asylum, as the legal changes concern only asylum seekers. Based on this information, the Lanzarote Committee will decide on further action.

The letter follows criticism already voiced in a [report](#) (published on 13 March) by the Lanzarote Committee on protecting children affected by the refugee crisis against sexual exploitation and abuse, where Hungary was singled out as the only European country not applying the “benefit of doubt” principle. Under this principle, in case of doubt about age, a person is considered a child, pending age verification.

Hungary ratified the Council of Europe’s Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention) in 2015. The legally binding document requires criminalisation of all kinds of sexual offences against children, prevention of child sexual abuse and exploitation, protection of victims and prosecution of perpetrators.

The Lanzarote Committee is the body in charge of monitoring the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention. It is composed of representatives of the Parties to the Convention. The Lanzarote Convention counts 42 Parties to date.

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