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Motion

Safe Environments for Every Child: Towards a European Standard for Child Safeguarding in Organisations

Signed by: Lithuanian Youth Council (LiJOT)

Co-signed by: International Federation of Catholic Parochial Youth Movements (FIMCAP)

Across Europe, children spend a large part of their lives in organisations built on the trust of adults: schools, sports clubs, youth organisations, summer camps, religious communities, cultural institutions and social services. Recent cases of sexual violence against minors in such settings, in Lithuania and elsewhere, point to the same lesson. Checking who is allowed to work with children is necessary, but it is not enough. A child is safe only when the organisation around them knows how to prevent risk, recognise warning signs, listen to children, report concerns and respond properly. Europe has developed strong criminal law and screening tools. What is still lacking, however, is a shared minimum expectation that every organisation working systematically with children has a functioning safeguarding system, regardless of its size, sector or ideology.

Lithuanian Context

Lithuania has taken an important step on screening. Since 1 November 2024, Lithuanian law has required persons whose work, volunteering or other activities involve direct and regular contact with children to hold a Lawful Work with Children Code (a QR code). Employers and other responsible organisations must verify the code before allowing such activities and re-check it periodically.[1],[2] The Child Rights Ombudsperson noted that before this reform the duty to check staff existed on paper but did not work in practice. Between December 2024 and 20 March 2025, 204,249 codes were issued, while 45 people with convictions for sexual offences who applied for a code did not receive one.[3]

The summer of 2026 showed the limits of this approach. In June and August, prosecutors sent to court two separate criminal cases against priests who had served in the Archdiocese of Vilnius. In the case referred to court in August, a priest is accused of 34 criminal offences, including sexual offences against children, allegedly committed between 2002 and 2025. Eleven people, aged between 12 and 18 at the time of the alleged offences, have been recognised as victims in the proceedings. The accused are presumed innocent until a court rules.[4]

The public response so far has centred on tools that concern known offenders. The Minister of Justice announced an action plan for the Seimas covering public education and support for victims, while the Prime Minister, the President and the Speaker of the Seimas have said that a public register of persons convicted of sexual crimes against children should be reconsidered, along-

1 Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania (2024) *Stiprinama vaikų apsauga nuo seksualinio smurto: QR kodas, privaloma stebėsena ir griežtesnė darbdavių atsakomybė* [Child protection from sexual violence is being strengthened: QR code, mandatory monitoring and stricter employer responsibility]. Available at: https://socmin.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/stiprinama-vaiku-apsauga-nuo-seksualinio-smurto-qr-kodas-privaloma-stebesena-ir-grieztesne-darbdaviu-atsakomybe/

2 Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania (n.d.) *Teisėto darbo su vaikais QR kodas* [Lawful Work with Children QR code]. Available at: https://smsm.lrv.lt/lt/veiklos-sritys-1/smm-svietimas/prevencija-mokyklose/teiseto-darbo-su-vaikais-qr-kodas/

3 LRT (2025) *45 už seksualinius nusikaltimus teisti bei su vaikais dirbti norėję asmenys negavo QR kodo* [45 people convicted of sexual offences who wished to work with children did not receive a QR code], LRT.lt, March. Available at: https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/2521190/45-uz-seksualinius-nusikaltimus-teisti-bei-su-vaikais-dirbti-noreje-asmenys-negavo-qr-kodo

4 Prosecutor General's Office of the Republic of Lithuania (2026) Teismui perduota nagrinėti byla dėl dvasininko, įtariama, seksualinio pobūdžio nusikaltimų prieš nepilnamečius asmenis [Case concerning a clergyman accused of sexual offences against minors referred to court], 11 August. Available at: https://www.prokuraturos.lt/lt/teismui-perduota-nagrineti-byla-del-dvasininko-itariama-seksualinio-pobudzio-nusikaltimu-pries-nepilnamecius-asmenis/12697

side stronger control of the QR code.[5] These measures matter. However, on the basis of what has been announced publicly, none of them asks whether a parish, school, sports club or youth organisation has procedures that make abuse harder to commit, easier to detect and safer to report.

Child-safety, violence-prevention and reporting requirements already exist in individual sectors, but their scope and nature differ, and there is no common minimum standard across institutions. For this reason, the Lithuanian Youth Council, together with partner organisations, has appealed to the President, the Government, the Seimas and the responsible ministries to establish a national safe-environment standard. The proposal is to link it to the existing child-protection framework in the Law on the Fundamentals of Protection of the Rights of the Child, to keep it proportionate to an organisation's size and specifics, and to apply it to the signatory organisations themselves.[6]

Broader European Context

Lithuania's challenge is a European one. The Council of Europe's Lanzarote Convention requires its parties to take measures concerning the recruitment, training and awareness-raising of persons whose professions involve regular contact with children, including measures to ensure that candidates for such professions have not been convicted of acts of sexual exploitation or sexual abuse of children.[7] The Lanzarote Committee has repeatedly urged parties to extend screening to all professionals and volunteers in regular contact with children, and in March 2026 it adopted a thematic questionnaire on the subject. The replies submitted by national authorities and civil society illustrate how different national arrangements remain, including between sectors such as sport.[8]

At EU level, Directive 2011/93/EU already requires Member States to ensure that employers can obtain information on criminal convictions when recruiting for roles involving direct and regular contact with children.[9] On 22 June 2026, the European Parliament and the Council reached a provisional agreement on a recast of this Directive. It covers more offences, including AI-generated abuse material, paid access to livestreamed abuse, grooming and sexual extortion of children, raises penalties, extends limitation periods to up to 32 years for the gravest offences, makes it easier for professionals working with children to report, and strengthens support for victims. Member States will have three years to transpose it once it is formally adopted.[10] Civil society organisations also point to its prevention elements,

5 LRT (2026) *Po seksualinių nusikaltimų atvejų – naujas veiksmų planas: svarstomas ir viešas registras* [After the cases of sexual crimes – a new action plan: a public register is also under consideration], LRT.lt, August. Available at: https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/3026374/po-seksualiniu-nusikaltimu-atveju-naujas-veiksmu-planas-svarstomas-ir-viesas-registras

6 Lithuanian Youth Council (LiJOT) and signatory organisations (2026) *Kreipimasis dėl nacionalinio saugios aplinkos standarto vaikų apsaugai* [Appeal for a national safe-environment standard for the protection of children]. Vilnius: LiJOT. Available at: https://bit.ly/VaikuApsauga

7 Council of Europe (2007) Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention), CETS No. 201, Article 5. Available at: https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/lanzarote-convention

8 Lanzarote Committee (2026) *Thematic questionnaire: Screening of professionals, volunteers and other persons in contact with children*, adopted 26 March 2026. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Available at: https://rm.coe.int/thematic-questionnaire-screening-of-professionals-volunteers-and-other/48802b1ec6

9 European Union (2011) *Directive 2011/93/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography*. Official Journal of the European Union, L 335, 17 December, Article 10. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1774495731638&uri=CELEX:32011L0093

10 Council of the European Union (2026) *Combatting child sexual abuse: EU agrees stronger criminal law rules and enhanced support to victims*, press release, 22 June. Available at: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/06/22/combatting-child-sexual-abuse-eu-agrees-stronger-criminal-law-rules-and-enhanced-support-to-victims/

including criminal record checks for people working with children, reporting duties for certain professionals and safeguarding education.[11] The scale of the problem explains the urgency: the Commission reports that reports of child sexual abuse online grew from 1 million in 2010 to more than 23 million in 2025.[12]

Yet these instruments are, by design, instruments of criminal justice and personal screening. They define what must be punished and who may not work with children. As far as published summaries show, they do not require each organisation that works with children to maintain its own safeguarding system. Both the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the EU strategy for a more effective fight against child sexual abuse place prevention at the centre of EU action, but prevention inside organisations is left largely to national law and to the goodwill of individual institutions.[13]

Several Member States have gone further and regulate the organisation itself:

- **Ireland.** The Children First Act 2015 requires providers of "relevant services" to carry out a written risk assessment, prepare a Child Safeguarding Statement setting out relevant safeguarding procedures, and appoint a "relevant person" as the first point of contact in respect of the statement. Certain professionals are legally mandated to report qualifying child-protection concerns to the Child and Family Agency (Tusla), which also provides guidance and support documents to help organisations comply.[14]

- **Spain.** Organic Law 8/2021 requires every school to appoint a welfare and protection coordinator, and requires entities that regularly run sports or leisure activities with minors to adopt a protection protocol and appoint a protection delegate.[15]

- **Italy.** Italy's sports safeguarding framework requires sports organisations to adopt organisational safeguarding models and codes of conduct aimed at preventing abuse, violence and discrimination, as well as to designate a safeguarding officer responsible for protecting members from such conduct.[16]

At European level, the Council of Europe and the EU have also jointly supported the creation of Child Safeguarding Officers in sport.[17] Together these examples show that organisational duties can be proportionate, supported by state-provided templates and training, and built on existing supervisory structures. They also show how uneven the picture remains: some duties are cross-sector, others are limited to a single sector, and a child's protection can still depend on which door they happen to walk through.

11 WeProtect Global Alliance (2026) *WeProtect Global Alliance welcomes new EU criminal law to better protect children*, 25 June. Available at: https://www.weprotect.org/?p=485876

12 European Commission (2026) *Commission welcomes political agreement on criminal law rules to fight child sexual abuse*, 23 June. Available at: https://luxembourg.representation.ec.europa.eu/actualites-et-evenements/actualites/commission-welcomes-political-agreement-criminal-law-rules-fight-child-sexual-abuse-2026-06-23_fr

13 European Commission (2021) *EU strategy on the rights of the child*, COM(2021) 142 final. Brussels: European Commission; and European Commission (2020) *EU strategy for a more effective fight against child sexual abuse*, COM(2020) 607 final. Brussels: European Commission. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021DC0; https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0607

14 Government of Ireland (2015) Children First Act 2015 (No. 36 of 2015), Sections 8 and 11; see also Tusla – Child and Family Agency, Children First support documents and guidance on developing a Child Safeguarding Statement. Available at: https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2015/act/36/enacted/en/print.html and https://www.tusla.ie/children-first/support-documents/

15 Spain (2021) *Ley Orgánica 8/2021, de 4 de junio, de protección integral a la infancia y la adolescencia frente a la violencia*, Boletín Oficial del Estado, No. 134, 5 June, Articles 35 and 48.

16 Italy (2021) *Decreto legislativo 28 febbraio 2021, n. 39*, Article 16 (organisational and control models and codes of conduct for the protection of minors in sport). For an overview see ItaliaOggi (n.d.) Guida ai modelli organizzativi e di controllo nello sport. Available at: https://www.italiaoggi.it/settori/sport/guida-ai-modelli-organizzativi-e-di-controllo-nello-sport-o3j2h87t

17 Council of Europe, Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS) (n.d.) *Inclusion of children and their protection in sport* (including the EU–Council of Europe joint project Child Safeguarding in Sport, 2020–2022). Available at: https://www.coe.int/en/web/sport/child-protection

Impact on Young People

Children and young people are both the people a safe-environment standard protects and the people it will affect most directly. A standard written without them will not work: reporting channels must be ones that children trust and understand, and rules on overnight trips, individual contact and digital communication must reflect how young people actually take part in organised activities.

Safeguarding systems must be inclusive, accessible and responsive to the diverse needs and circumstances of all children, particularly those who may face additional barriers to protection, including children affected by migration or displacement, unaccompanied children, children with disabilities or additional support needs, and children facing other challenging circumstances. Such systems should address linguistic, cultural, social and other barriers to accessing information, seeking support and reporting concerns.

Youth organisations carry a particular responsibility. They run camps, training courses, international exchanges and online communities in which minors and young adult leaders, often volunteers who have received no formal safeguarding training, spend extended time together. Clear rules protect the children, but they also protect the volunteers, by setting out boundaries, reporting routes and protection for anyone who raises a concern in good faith. Long limitation periods for offences involving the sexual abuse of children reflect the recognition that survivors may need many years before they are able to disclose abuse. Organisations that provide safe reporting channels and respond effectively to concerns can help ensure that abuse is identified and addressed much earlier.

Credibility also matters. Organisations that ask schools, clubs and religious communities to meet a higher standard must be ready to meet it themselves. The Lithuanian Youth Council and the organisations that joined its appeal have said they are prepared to be bound by the same rules.[18]

We envision a Europe where every child, wherever they learn, play, worship or volunteer, enjoys the same essential safeguards; where institutions are accountable for prevention and not only for reaction; and where young people help design the systems that protect them.

18 LiJOT (2026). See note 9 above.

Calls to Action

European Union institutions:

- Adopt and transpose the recast Child Sexual Abuse Directive swiftly, and ensure that its prevention provisions on training, reporting by professionals and screening are effectively implemented in every Member State;

- Go beyond criminal law by developing a Council Recommendation or Commission guidance on minimum child safeguarding standards for organisations working with children, building on the Lanzarote Convention and existing national models, and by addressing the issue in the successor to the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child;

- Provide dedicated funding through Erasmus+, ESF+ and the AgoraEU programme for model procedures, training and peer learning, so that small, volunteer-run organisations can comply without being excluded;

- Ensure that criminal record checks function across borders for youth exchanges, volunteering and the European Solidarity Corps, and consider requiring a child safeguarding policy, supported by templates and training, in EU-funded projects that involve minors.

Council of Europe and the Lanzarote Committee:

- Continue to monitor how parties apply the screening, training and awareness provisions of the Lanzarote Convention, and encourage them to introduce organisation-level safeguarding duties in all sectors;

- Extend the practical tools developed for child safeguarding in sport to other sectors, including youth work, education, culture and faith communities.

National governments and parliaments:

- Establish by law a universal duty for legal entities that work systematically with children to maintain and apply a child safe environment system covering prevention, risk management, reporting, response and accountability, and do not treat screening or offender registers as a substitute for it;

- Define minimum elements: a safeguarding policy and code of conduct; a designated responsible person and an alternative reporting route where the concern involves that person; accessible internal and external reporting channels; a clear procedure for responding and informing the competent authorities; induction and training for staff and volunteers; risk assessment of higher-risk situations such as one-to-one contact, trips and overnight stays, transport and digital communication; child-friendly information on rights and acceptable behaviour; and rules on confidentiality, measures to ensure digital safety and privacy, including safe online communication and protection of children's personal data, and protection of those who report;

- Keep the duty proportionate to size, activity and risk, avoid duplicating equivalent sectoral requirements, provide model procedures, training and a sufficient transition period, integrate oversight into existing supervisory bodies, and consider a separate proportionate regime for individuals who work with children without a legal entity;

- Involve children, young people, youth councils, religious communities and other civil society organisations in drafting the standard, and publish the responsible institutions and a timeline for the necessary legislative and implementing changes;

- Expand and strengthen training for police officers on cases of sexual exploitation and sexual violence, ensuring a timely, professional, and sensitive response to reports from victims. Training should cover the psycholo-

gical responses experienced by victims, the dynamics of sexual violence, secondary victimisation, and principles for communicating with children and other vulnerable persons.

Youth organisations, political youth wings and other civil society organisations working with children:

- Adopt safeguarding policies now, without waiting for legislation, and accept that any standard adopted will apply to our own organisations;

- Strive to provide consent and physical boundaries training to all leaders and volunteers before they work with minors and once again share existing materials across borders so that smaller organisations can benefit;

- Share templates, training and lessons learned across borders, so that smaller organisations are not left to build safeguarding systems on their own.

Invites the European Youth Forum and its Member Organisations to:

- Adopt a position in support of organisation-level child safeguarding standards as a core part of quality and accountability in the youth sector;

- Develop a shared safeguarding toolkit and peer-learning exchange for youth organisations, including for international events and activities in which minors take part, and apply these standards to the Forum's own activities and those of its members;

- Support National Youth Councils in advocating for such standards in their own countries, and advocate for dedicated EU and national funding so that youth organisations can implement them.







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