



Speak out to break down the wall that makes underage prostitution invisible






Report on the sexual exploitation of minors in prostitution in Italy



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Introduction

This country report aims to analyse the phenomenon of child prostitution in Italy. The analysis presented is based on both primary and secondary data collected through desktop research as well as semi-structured interviews with relevant experts of legal and social aspects of juvenile prostitution at the local and national level.

The report is created in the context of the Jericho project, co-funded by the CERV programme of the European Commission, which aims to raise awareness on the issue of child prostitution at the national, European and international level, a very underreported phenomenon in most European countries. In particular, the project aims to collect and share knowledge on the phenomenon, and develop an awareness raising campaign targeted at different audiences in the three partner countries of the project: Italy, France and Greece.

As defined in the *Optional Protocol to The Convention On The Rights Of The Child On The Sale Of Children, Child Prostitution And Child Pornography*, child prostitution is the "use of a child in sexual activities for remuneration or any other form of consideration" (OHCHR,2000). The Italian penal code punishes one who recruits and induces a minor into prostitution or facilitates, exploits, manages, organizes or controls the prostitution of a minor, or one who otherwise derives some profit from child prostitution (Art 600 bis Codice Penale). In Italian indeed the expression *sfruttamento della prostituzione minorile*, translated as exploitation of minors in prostitution, is preferable as it puts the exploiter at the centre, emphasizing that the child is a victim of exploitation even if apparent consent is given. This terminology is also used in the 2019 Report of ECPAT International on sexual exploitation of children in Italy (ECPAT International,2019).

As highlighted in this report, child prostitution is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon which variably intersects with social, economic and cultural issues. This complexity and the limited data available on the occurrence of the phenomenon at the national level make it hard to draw clear lines. This report attempts to offer an overview of the legal framework, some statistical and demographic data and information on the response implemented in Italy, finally providing some conclusions and recommendations for future actions.



LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON JUVENILE PROSTITUTION

In Italy, Law No. 269/1998, subsequently reformed by Law No. 172/2012, was included in Chapter III of Title XII of Book II of the Criminal Code, a series of rules ranging from Article 600 bis to 601 regulating offences committed against minors.

In particular, the offence of child prostitution and the related exploitation of minors are regulated by Article 600 bis of the Criminal Code, which punishes those who:

- 1) **engage in the recruitment or induction into prostitution of a person under the age of 18 years;** (this refers to all those activities of persuasion, often in a devious and deceptive manner, which may also result in the use of force to force the minor into prostitution)
- 2) **engage in conduct aimed at favouring, exploiting, managing, organising and controlling the prostitution of a person under the age of 18, also for profit** (this refers to all those forms of conduct aimed at developing and increasing the activity of prostitution, with an economic advantage for the exploiter who receives sums of money from the person who then materially abuses the minor)
- 3) **perform sexual acts with a minor between 14 and 18 years of age, in exchange for a consideration in money or other benefit, even if only promised.**

The rationale of the above rule is to preserve, protect and guarantee the psycho-physical integrity of minors, including morals and morality.

Child prostitution is a particularly serious offence in the Italian legal system, as it directly affects the sphere of personal freedom of minors, entailing the real risk of leaving indelible wounds in minors that will accompany them throughout their lives, even as adults.

The protection of minors, against the crimes of prostitution and trafficking, is guaranteed not only at national and European but also at international level.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) approved in New York on 20 November 1989 by the General Assembly of the United Nations (ratified and executed in Italy by law no. 176 of 27 May 1991), **articles 19, 34 and 36**. In particular, Art. 19 states:

"States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect, or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care parent(s), legal guardian(s), or any other person who has the care of the child.

Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement”.

Articles 34 to 36 of the CRC prescribe a positive obligation to states to protect children against all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual violence and to take all necessary measures to prevent the abduction, sale or trafficking of children and young people for any purpose and in any form. Measures must be taken to prevent children from being induced or coerced into engaging in unlawful sexual activity, from being exploited for prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices, or from being exploited to produce pornographic performances or material.

The rights enshrined in CRC have been supplemented by the **Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (OPSC)** (ratified in Italy by law n. 146 of 11 March 2002). This protocol obliges the contracting states, among other things, to adopt national legislation criminalising the sale of persons under the age of 18, child prostitution and pornography representing children, ensuring the protection of the rights and interests of child victims at all stages of criminal proceedings, the safeguarding of the rights of children and adolescents, the best interests and participation of children in decisions and proceedings concerning them, the guarantee of appropriate assistance for child victims, capacity-building of professionals working with children and young people, and the promotion of international cooperation and mutual assistance for the implementation of the Protocol.

In relation to the specific topic of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children, the first legal instrument that requires states to criminalise all forms of sexual abuse against children, including abuse committed within the home or within the family, with the use of force, coercion or threats, is the **Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (the so-called “Lanzarote Convention”)**, opened for signature on 25 October 2007, executed in Italy by law no. 172 of 1 October 2012. The preventive measures enshrined in the Convention concern the recruitment, training and awareness-raising of persons working in contact with children and young people, the education of minors, so that they receive information on the risks they can run and on ways to protect themselves, and intervention measures and programmes to prevent the risk of acts of abuse by persons who have already committed such offences or who might commit them. The Convention also provides for the establishment of victim support programmes, calls on States to take the necessary measures to encourage any person who suspects incidents of sexual abuse or exploitation to report them to the responsible services, and to establish information services, such as special helplines and websites to provide advice and assistance to children. The Convention also provides for the prosecution of conduct such as sexual activities with a child, child prostitution and child pornography, grooming and sex tourism.

In order to combat sex tourism involving children and young people, the Convention stipulates that perpetrators can be prosecuted for the offences committed, even if the act was committed abroad. The Lanzarote Convention also ensures that abused children are protected throughout legal proceedings, e.g., by protecting their identity and private life.

Particularly noteworthy are also **the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (opened for signature in Warsaw on 16 May 2005) and the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime (so-called "Budapest Convention", 23 November 2001).**

The Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, executed in Italy by Law No. 108 of 2 July 2010, aims to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings in all its forms, whether or not related to organised crime, and in relation to all victims, whether women, children, girls or men. The Convention covers not only trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, but also forced labour and other trafficking in persons. It adopts a human rights-based perspective, with a focus on the protection of victims, and provides for an independent monitoring mechanism to ensure compliance and monitoring. With specific regard to child victims of human trafficking, in the context of the prevention of the phenomenon, it obliges the State Parties to take specific measures to reduce the vulnerability of children and young people to trafficking, in particular by creating a protected environment, and to employ appropriately trained personnel in the identification of victims, especially children. In the area of assistance to victims of trafficking, this instrument requires States Parties to take the necessary measures for their physical, psychological and social recovery, with particular reference to the rights of children in terms of housing, education and adequate care. The Convention also stipulates that the best interests of the child shall be considered paramount, both with regard to the issuance and renewal of residence permits for child victims, and with regard to their repatriation and the special protective measures that States Parties are obliged to put in place for the protection of victims, witnesses and persons cooperating with the judicial authorities.

The legal framework of the Convention complements that of the Additional Protocol to the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, and develops and strengthens the protection measures contained therein.

The Budapest Convention was executed in Italy by Law No. 48 of 18 March 2008 and represents the first binding international instrument concerning crimes committed through the Internet or other computer networks. The Convention is accompanied by a protocol on acts of a racist and xenophobic nature committed by means of computer systems and is supported by the Committee on Cybercrime, which monitors its implementation, and by the Bucharest Cybercrime Programme Office, which supports countries around the world through capacity-building programmes. The objective of the Convention is to criminalise offences against the confidentiality, integrity and availability of computer data and systems, offences associated with information technology, offences associated with content (including child pornography) and offences related to the violation of copyright and related rights. Another objective of the Convention is to create procedures to increase the efficiency of investigations and to provide a legal basis for international cooperation between the States Parties to the Convention.

With regard to children specifically, Article 9 of the Convention is entirely dedicated to offences related to child pornography: in addition to providing a specific definition of child pornography, the provision stipulates that each State Party shall take the necessary measures to define as a criminal offence, under its national law, the production of child pornography for the purpose of its dissemination through a computer system; the offering or making available, or the distribution or transmission of child pornography material through a computer system; the procuring of child pornography material through a computer system for oneself or others; the possession of child pornography material through a computer system or a computer data storage device.

General Comment No. 13 (2011) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) highlights that "the extent and intensity of violence perpetrated against children is alarming". Data collection is strongly recommended by the General Comment. In the legal analysis of Article 19, paragraph 2 of the CRC it is emphasised that 'prevention measures for professionals and institutions (government and civil society)' should be undertaken in order to 'create an information base for policies and implementation plans and identify opportunities for prevention' (Article 47, d, i) and that this can be achieved through systematic and continuous data collection and analysis. In relation to effective procedures, recommendations were included concerning 'inter-sectoral coordination', 'the development and implementation of systematic and continuous data collection and analysis' and 'the development of measurable targets and indicators in relation to policies, processes and outcomes for children and families' (Art. 57, a, b, d). Among the administrative measures that should reflect 'governmental obligations', it is suggested that 'policies, programmes, monitoring and supervision systems are necessary to protect children from all forms of violence at the national and sub-national governmental level', as well as the establishment of 'a comprehensive and reliable national data collection system to ensure the systematic monitoring and evaluation of systems (impact analysis), services, programmes and outcomes based on indicators aligned with universal standards, and adjusted and guided by locally established goals and objectives' (Article 42, a. i-ii, v).

Still at the international level, albeit without binding force, on 23 February 2022 the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted the new **Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027) Children's Rights in Action: from continuous implementation to joint innovation**. The approved text constitutes the fourth edition of a series of successful strategies to advance the protection and promotion of children's rights across the European continent, within the framework of the "Building a Europe for and with Children" programme in place since 2006. As part of the Council's long-standing commitment to put children at the centre of its work, the Strategy was developed through an extensive consultative process involving national governments, international and civil society organisations and, not least, 220 children and young people from ten member states. The Strategy is built around six strategic objectives that are partly based on priority areas already identified in the previous Strategy for the period 2016-2021, which remain relevant (continuous implementation) and, on the other hand, include new actions to respond to new priority areas (joint innovation). The new strategic objectives are:

1. freedom from violence for all boys and girls;
2. equal opportunities and social inclusion for all boys and girls;
3. access to safe use of technology for all boys and girls;
4. child-friendly justice for all children;
5. giving every child a voice;
6. children's rights in crisis and emergency situations.

The thematic priority dedicated to freedom from violence against children stems from the realisation that the Covid-19 pandemic has led to an increase in physical, psychological and sexual violence against persons under the age of 18 and has shown the vulnerability of child protection systems in times of crisis. The Strategy therefore translates the urgent need to address this vulnerability, in particular through an integrated and strategic approach to combating violence, strengthening legal systems, intensifying prevention and reinforcing reporting and response systems through multidisciplinary approaches.

On the supranational level, in 2011 the European Parliament and the Council adopted **Directive 2011/93/EU** on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography, which replaces Council Framework Decision 2004/68/JHA of 22 December 2003 (adopted in Italy by art.20 of law n.238 of 23rd December 2021). The Directive was created with the aim of further approximating the criminal laws of the Member States of the European Union on the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children, child pornography and grooming of children for sexual purposes, establishing minimum rules concerning the definition of the aforementioned offences and the relevant penalties, as well as with the aim of introducing provisions to strengthen the prevention of these offences and the protection of child victims. The Directive has introduced numerous novelties both as regards the definition of certain behaviours not yet regulated (for the first time it has provided an agreed definition of child pornography and pornographic entertainment) and for the introduction of new criminal offences and relative sanctions. Through the Directive, certain situations of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children not covered by the previous framework decision are indeed criminalised, including new forms of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation facilitated by the use of IT tools, such as the online grooming of children for the purpose of abuse and the mere viewing of child pornography through webcams or the Internet. Article 25 defines the ways to stop the distribution of child sexual abuse material on the web: in particular, it states that Member States must take all necessary measures to ensure the timely removal of pages hosted in their territory that contain or disseminate child sexual abuse material and, when this is not possible, they are required to block access to them from their territory. The directive also introduces important changes in terms of sanctions: as regards the level of penalties, it provides for harsher penalties for those who commit serious abuse or other forms of sexual exploitation of minors than those provided for in Framework Decision 2004/68/JHA. For the most serious cases, it calls for the first time for the national court to apply the maximum term of imprisonment. Further provisions are then devoted to assistance, support and protection measures for child victims, considering the best interests of the child. For the first time, particular attention is also paid to the preventive work that states are obliged to undertake, both through measures to discourage and reduce the demand that underlies all forms of sexual exploitation of children, and through measures to reduce the risk of children becoming victims, through information and awareness-raising campaigns, as well as research and education programmes.

Again, at the level of the European Union, worth mentioning is the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on an EU Strategy to combat child sexual abuse more effectively (2020-2025), adopted on 24 July 2020 - which, among other things, provides for the establishment of a European Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Centre - and the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, on the First EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2021-2024), adopted on 24 March 2021.

With the Action Plan on the Implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights of 4 March 2021 (Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - SWD/2021/46 final), the Commission set the target of reducing the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU by at least 15 million by 2030, including at least 5 million children. One of the main outcomes is the Recommendation (EU) 2021/1004 of the Council of the European Union - of 14 June 2021 - establishing a European Child Guarantee, which complements the Strategy and calls for specific measures for children at risk of poverty or social exclusion. With the European Guarantee, EU Member States are recommended to provide free and effective access for children in need to: early childhood education and care services; educational and school activities; at least one healthy meal every school day; and health services.

The European Commission has been working together with UNICEF on pilot projects in some Member States, including Italy: on 29 March 2022, the National Observatory for Childhood and Adolescence approved the **Italian Action Plan on Child Guarantee**, implementing the Recommendation. The Plan, which envisages EU funding of 635 million euros, has been forwarded to the European Commission. On the occasion of its approval, the Observatory shared the final text of the Plan, based on the document prepared by the dedicated working group chaired by Senator Anna Maria Serafini. The National Plan of the European Guarantee is an integral part of the 5th National Plan for Childhood and Adolescence approved by the Decree of the President of the Republic of 25 January 2022, and implements many of its actions - among which, the adoption of essential performance levels (LEPs) for school lunch services, for 0-3 education services, and for the participation of children - and reinforces them, not only in systemic terms, because it makes it clear that both plans are the expression of a single national strategy for the protection of childhood, but also in terms of resources: in countries where child poverty is higher than the European average, such as Italy, 5 per cent of the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) will, in fact, be earmarked for actions to combat this phenomenon. Again on 29 March 2022, it was also recalled that Senator Serafini was designated by the ministers responsible for Child Guarantee, Bonetti and Orlando, on 11 March 2022, as the national coordinator for Italy for the Child Guarantee.

The National Plan of Action against Trafficking in Human Beings 2022-2025 is intended to consolidate and relaunch the action of the Government and institutions aimed at preventing and combating trafficking and ensuring adequate protection for victims, in line with the provisions of the Convention, ratified by Italy in 2008. Paragraph 2a of Article 13 of Law No 228 of 11 August 2003 (on Measures against trafficking in persons), introduced by Article 9 Legislative Decree No. 24 (on the Implementation of Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting victims, replacing Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA) provides that by resolution of the Council of Ministers, on the proposal of the President of the Council of Ministers and the Minister of the Interior within their respective competences, after consultation with the other Ministers concerned, and after obtaining the agreement at the Unified Conference, the National Plan of Action against trafficking and the serious exploitation of human beings is adopted.



DATA ON PROSTITUTION OF MINORS – STATISTICS AND PROFILE OF VICTIMS

A lack of comprehensive data regarding the issue of prostitution of minors is observed at the EU level. The available data indicate that the prostitution of minors primarily involves teenage girls between the ages of 14 and 17, but the involvement of boys has also been reported in several countries in the region. More data are available on the issue of child trafficking. According to the latest available, between 2017 and 2018, almost every fourth victim of trafficking in the EU is a child, 78% of child victims were girls, 60% of the child victims were trafficked for sexual exploitation and three-quarters (75%) of all child victims in the EU were EU citizens (European Commission, 2021, p. 12).

Despite being recognised as a significant concern, the issue of prostitution of boys has not been thoroughly investigated and continues to go unnoticed and unaddressed, due inter alia to:

“lack of gender perspective in research and programmes, the stigma attached to homosexuality, a tendency not to see males as victims of prostitution” (ECPAT International, 2014, p. 11), and the under-reporting linked with it (European Commission, 2021, p. 13). While the data remains limited, it is crucial to acknowledge that both girls and boys can be victims of prostitution, and efforts should be made to address the issue comprehensively for all genders.

The scarcity of available and reliable statistics both at national and EU levels further hinders the effective prevention and combat of the prostitution of minors, as it limits the development of informed policies and measures to combat this form of exploitation.

In line with EU trends, the available data on the prostitution of children in Italy is very limited. This is because prostitution and child sexual exploitation generally take place in a dimension of concealment and difficult visibility. Furthermore, the complexity of the phenomenon, which intersects multiple issues related to trafficking, child pornography and child sexual abuse in general, makes it hard to draw clear lines.

The most recent and comprehensive investigation, which nonetheless does not provide an estimate of the extent of the phenomenon, is the **Fact-finding investigation into child prostitution** conducted by the Parliamentary Commission on Childhood and Adolescence (Commissione Parlamentare per l'Infanzia e l'Adolescenza, 2016). The investigation highlights that the exploitation of children in prostitution is growing and distinguishes between: (1) prostitution from trafficking; (2) prostitution that originates within fragile families and disadvantaged socio-economic contexts; (3) prostitution that originates in other family contexts with other kinds of deficiencies that are affective, cultural or psychological.

As highlighted by one of our informants, in both the last two types of situations, the involvement of minors in prostitution represented only one face of a much more articulated socio – cultural gap which affects all the relational, familial, social and, at times, psychopathological spheres of society. For the most part, these are minors with multiple problems, characterised by early exposure to traumatic experiences.

On the one hand, the exploitation of children in prostitution is often triggered by poverty and the gaps of the welfare system. Sometimes families induce their children into prostitution to sustain the family and offenders may perceive themselves as supporters of the families of their victims. On the other hand, sexual exploitation of children can also happen in the context of wealthy families triggered by consumerism, peer-pressure and weak parental support. Here families convey distorted messages related to appearance, contributing to the normalisation of certain conducts of the minors characterised by an unhealthy interest in money. The most popular example of this is the scandal of the “baby squillo” in Rome, where young minors from a wealthy neighbourhood in Rome were sexually exploited for prostitution by representatives of the political and economic elite (ECPAT International, 2019). Furthermore, as mentioned by one of our informants, in recent years child prostitution has seen the proliferation of many new figures, mainly due to the increased use of social media platforms such as the Onlyfans.

According to some of our informants from the legal and the social sector: *“Usually the victims do not recognize themselves as such. They think they have the situation under control, because they feel independent and do not realize that prostitution is exploiting them and not vice versa”*. In this regard it's noteworthy to mention that the Parliamentary Commission on Childhood and Adolescence underlines that *“it is **absolutely impossible to consider that there is an intentional prostitution of minors**, accepted by minors: even when it appears that these persons are consenting and willing, in reality one cannot but speak of abuse, since they are in any case minors. In this regard, it is emphasised that all minors become fungible, deprived of their subjectivity and instruments aimed at satisfying the needs of clients.”* The lack of awareness around this aspect and a distorted narrative on child prostitution in the media has made it harder to recognize children victims of sexual exploitation in prostitutions as victims of child abuse with consequences on the support received (Commissione Parlamentare per l'Infanzia e l'Adolescenza, 2016).

The data provided in the fact-finding investigation relates to the period 2009-2014 and analyses offences of child prostitution, sexual acts with a minor in exchange for money and tourist initiatives aimed at exploiting child prostitution. In 2012 there **were 174 registered criminal proceedings for the exploitation of children in prostitution**. In 2014, there were **221 offences committed by underage people** related to exploitation of child prostitution, child pornography and detention of pornographic material. The incidence of proceedings for actual child prostitution, which have been progressively increasing over the last few years, has appeared more significant than others. The data reports an increase that specifically concerns the perpetrators of Italian nationality as well as an increase of offences committed by underage perpetrators. These are mostly young men of Italian nationality. Crimes related to child pornography are also increasing. More cases emerged from the south and the islands, suggesting a connection between child prostitution and the more disadvantaged socio-economic conditions of these regions (Commissione Parlamentare per l'Infanzia e l'Adolescenza, 2016).

The investigation also highlighted the complexity of the phenomenon and its connections with:

- Online crimes including child pornography, virtual pornography and child grooming.
- Criminal networks and organizations who often recruit minors to commit crimes of sexual exploitation against other minors.
- Drug addiction

Among the gaps that hinder the protection of children against these forms of exploitation the investigation recognizes:

- the absence of a sexuality and affectivity education in schools
- the characteristic of technologies and the internet
- the inadequacy of the school system and the family to respond to the phenomenon
- the increase of families in conditions of economic disadvantage and the gaps of the welfare system to respond to these needs
- the lack of parental education

As some of our informants highlighted, the minor who incurs in child prostitution is often subject to *sextorsion* from the exploiter who threatens them, and sometimes their families, with pictures and other evidence in exchange for money or to hold them in the condition of exploitation. When the perpetrator comes from the same family of the victim, cases of prostitution and abuse rarely emerge. Families are sometimes aware and/or complicit, fearing to be exposed.

With regard to the more specific phenomenon of trafficking, the report "Piccoli schiavi invisibili"[1] by Save the Children (2023) offers an up-to-date snapshot of the **trafficking and exploitation of minors in Italy**. In Italy, in 2021 among the 757 new victims of trafficking identified, more than half of them were women and 35% were children (96 young men and 168 young women). Out of all the victims 431 were victims of sexual exploitation. In 2022 the potential victims of trafficking and exploitation identified were 2517 of which 101 minors. In 2022, 850 people were supported by anti-trafficking projects, of which 14 minors. In 38% of cases they are victims of sexual exploitation. With regards to victims' profiles most of them are young women of Nigerian origin coming from fragile economic and family backgrounds. As highlighted by the report of the Commission the foreign victims often receive low targeted support. For example, sometimes they are not protected in anti-violence centres but rather in migrants' reception centres, and often no investigation is initiated for the crimes committed on Italian territory (Commissione Parlamentare per l'Infanzia e l'Adolescenza, 2016).

The **COVID-19 pandemic** has shifted the channels of exploitation to online communication and exploitation in homes. According to the European Commission, the demand for child pornography increased during the lockdown by up to 30% in some EU Member States. The movement restrictions have also made the victims more isolated harder to reach and limited their opportunities to flee or find help, while the increased reliance on online channels has increased the risk of online grooming (Save The Children International, 2020). In 2017 the offences reported to the judicial authority related to online child sexual exploitation were 560. In 2018 the Postal and Communication Police Service included 2182 websites in a blacklist containing child sexual abuse material (ECPAT International, 2019).

[1] "Invisible Little Slaves" in English

RESPONSIBLE AGENCIES/AUTHORITIES FOR TACKLING JUVENILE PROSTITUTION

Agencies/authorities against juvenile prostitution

At European and international levels, there are several organisations that work on fighting child trafficking: the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), the European Police Office (Europol), the European Agency for the operational management of large-scale IT systems in the area of freedom, security and justice (eu-LISA), the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), the EU Judicial Cooperation unit (Eurojust), the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX), the EU agency for Fundamental Rights, the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL), the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound). According to the Joint Statement that they signed on June 13, 2018, they have committed to the following: countering the culture of impunity for perpetrators, abusers and exploiters, enhancing their focus on prevention, taking into account the entire trafficking chain inside and outside the EU, ensuring a gender-specific and child-sensitive approach, addressing the vulnerabilities of victims and ensuring accountability towards them, enhancing the effectiveness of investigations and prosecutions, promoting cross-border and internal law enforcement and judicial cooperation, strengthening training activities, sharing good practices, improving information sharing within the limits of data protection rules. There is also the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, based in the European Commission, who is responsible for improving the coordination and coherence among EU institutions, EU agencies, member states and international actors for developing existing and new EU policies to address trafficking in human beings. Also, ECPAT International is the only international NGO network - currently comprised of 124 civil society organisations in 103 countries - solely dedicated to the fight against sexual exploitation of children, by coordinating research, advocacy and action towards this aim.

In Italy, the management of legal cases is competency of the **Juvenile Court** on the basis of a reporting procedure that involves the **Public Prosecutor's Office for Minors** competent in the protection of minors' rights, which:

- receives the reports from: the educational institution, the local authority, the police authority, Social Services, Health Services, Family Consultants, Child Neuropsychiatry Services, S.E.R.T. and other subjects including private citizens;
- assesses the judicial relevance of the reported facts, collecting further information if necessary, in order to determine whether there is likely to be harm and what presumable advantage the child would gain from judicial intervention;
- decides whether to initiate proceedings by filing an appeal with the Juvenile Court.

Nonetheless, many of our informants mentioned that the authorities are not adequately equipped with the human and material resources to adequately respond to the phenomenon. There is a lack of targeted services to the issue of prostitution of minors.

Measures against juvenile prostitution

At the **EU level**, the European Commission adopted a comprehensive strategy in July 2020 to combat child sexual abuse – both offline and online. The primary objectives of this strategy are to enhance existing EU measures for safeguarding children from sexual exploitation and to address emerging challenges, particularly in the digital media context. The strategy focuses on verifying compliance with EU regulations, developing sector-specific rules for law enforcement agencies and the private sector for detecting and reporting child sexual abuse on the internet. It centres on establishing an EU centre for preventing and combating child sexual abuse by focusing on transferring knowledge and networking within the EU. It also aims at improving how children are protected against sexual violence through networking different actors in global alliances.

In **Italy**, the **Department for Family Policies** of the Council of Ministers is in charge of developing the strategies for preventing and combating sexual exploitation of children. The **Observatory for the Fight against Paedophilia and Child Pornography**, managed by the aforementioned Department and presided by the Ministry, is tasked with acquiring and monitoring the data and information on the activities carried out by all public administrations, for the prevention and repression of the phenomenon of child sexual abuse and exploitation, also through the creation of a database for monitoring the phenomenon. The Observatory has the task of promoting studies and research, as well as drawing up an annual technical-scientific report on the activities carried out, and it prepares the **National Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of children** (Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri – Dipartimento per le politiche della famiglia, 2022). The Plan is the policy instrument that defines the actions and goals that both the institutions and civil society have to undertake in order to contribute to the prevention and combating of child exploitation and sexual abuse. The National plan is the primary national strategy against the sexual exploitation of children including in prostitution (Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri – Dipartimento per le politiche della famiglia, 2022). Nonetheless, as also highlighted by ECPAT, it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of these measure due to the lack of information on its implementation and monitoring (ECPAT International, 2019).

The last plan was published in 2022 and was developed around three areas:

- **Education** - Crime prevention through the development of awareness-raising and training, in different contexts, on the issue abuse and sexual exploitation of minors, aimed at minors themselves, families, university students, professionals and the general public.
- **Equity** - Protection and assistance to victims through the implementation of services addressed to child victims and perpetrators of sexual abuse and exploitation and their families, as well as through specific interventions (programmes of recovery, assistance, etc.) dedicated to child and adult sex offenders.

- **Empowerment** - Combating crime through actions against widespread child pornography on the Internet and emerging phenomena, as well as through the strengthening of cooperation between institutions services and police forces, also promoting the cooperation and involvement of social media; Monitoring the phenomenon of sexual abuse and exploitation and the interventions and actions carried out with respect to the objectives set by the Plan, development of actions related to the creation and updating of a system for sharing data and actions implemented by the members of the Observatory, also with a view to implementing the database of the body.

For each strategic objective, specific actions are outlined in the Plan. It's noteworthy to mention that the plan was developed taking into consideration the recommendations provided by 70 young people at the conclusion of four focus groups and thematic meetings (Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri – Dipartimento per le politiche della famiglia, 2022).

The Observatory who drafts the National Plan also stores data and information in a database but no report has been published so far. This data would enable monitoring of the effectiveness of the actions included in the Plan (ECPAT International, 2022).

In addition, the **National Authority for Childhood and Adolescence** promotes the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other relevant international instruments. It implements projects aimed, in particular, at ensuring that children and young people are aware of their rights and that they are fully entitled to them. It cooperates with public bodies, with international organisations, non-profits and institutes for the protection and promotion of children's rights. The **Ministry of the Interior** is in charge of collecting and storing data on convictions for sexual offences (Commissione Parlamentare per l'Infanzia e l'Adolescenza, 2016).

In addition to these general state-level measures, other public and private bodies carry out prevention and protection actions.

Prevention actions include:

- Sexuality and Affectivity education in schools, carried out mostly by third sector organizations and activist groups also cover topics such as consent and abuse, promoting self-determined sexuality with respect for each other.
- The Postal and Communication Police who is in charge of cases of online exploitation and abuse and also carries out educational activities on the responsible use of technologies and online risks (ECPAT International, 2019).
- SOS Telefono Azzurro organizes training and information sessions with children, families and schools on children rights and use of technologies.
- The Campaign STOP Sexual Tourism was launched by a number of NGOs in 2018 to raise awareness on this phenomenon through posters in Italian Airports
- The National Union of Juvenile Chambers is a non-profit legal association of lawyers who practice in the field of juvenile and family law. Its activities involve the study and dissemination of juvenile and family law, through research and training activities. They also promote dialogue with all the professionals who, in various capacities, deal with minors.

Protection actions include:

- The number 114 is a public service for child protection active since 2003 and managed by the organization Telefono Azzurro and can be used by victims and bystander to get advice and referral to support services.
- Save the Children is very active in the prevention and support to victims of trafficking. The project "Vie d'Uscita"[2] provides victims with legal counselling, social and cultural mediation, referral to other services.
- Each territorial police office has a Minors Office with specialized staff in relation to child maltreatment, abandonment of minors, exploitation in prostitution; child labour sexual abuse, bullying and use or dealing of narcotic substances. They support victims, child offenders, children at risk and their families.
- Potential victims of trafficking and/or severe exploitation, private citizens, representatives of public and private entities and private organisations and public security forces can contact the free anti-trafficking hotline 800 290 290, anonymous and operational 24 hours a day throughout the year. It was established by the Department of Equal Opportunities to support potential victims offering information and connecting them with local support services. It is available in multiple languages.
- Local Street Units often represent the first point of contact with children victims of exploitation in prostitution. The educators, cultural mediators, peer educators of the street units work to build contacts and relationships with the victims to foster the initiation of pathways out of exploitative conditions, protection and social integration. The main actions carried out by street units are distribution of informative material and connection with health and social services. They are present in most bigger cities. In Rome in 2020 the first street unit tasked with the protection of male children in prostitution was established (RomaToday,2020)



Stakeholders' mapping

Name of service/ organisation	Description	Role in preventing and combating prostitution of minors	Role in the provision of support or services to victims	Contact info (Phone, e-mail, website)
Department for Family Policies of the Council of Ministers	Government department tasked with policies related to family, childhood and adolescence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develops strategies for the prevention and combating of sexual exploitation of children 2. Management of the Observatory for the fight against Paedophilia and Child Pornography 	N/A	Website: https://famiglia.governo.it/it/
Observatory for the Fight against Paedophilia and Child Pornography	Strategic government body for the monitoring and contrast to child abuse	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Acquires and monitors the data and information on child sexual abuse and exploitation 2. Prepares a National Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of children 	N/A	Website: https://famiglia.governo.it/it/politiche-e-attivita/infanzia-e-adolescenza/osservatorio-per-il-contrasto-della-pedofilia-e-della-pornografia-minorile/
National Authority for Childhood and Adolescence	Public body tasked with the promotion and implementation of child protection measures.	Promotion of children rights and participation	N/A	Website: https://www.garanteinfanzia.org/
Offices of Social Services for Minors (USSM)	49 Offices on the national territory, related to the Ministry of Justice, mainly tasked with the management of juvenile criminal proceedings	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Oversees the implementation of judicial measures in juvenile delinquency 2. Carries out educational and research activities aimed at the prevention of juvenile delinquency 	N/A	Website: https://www.giustizia.it/giustizia/it/mg_form_submit.wp?uid=G_MAP&pagina=2&tipo_ufficio=Ufficio%20servizio%20sociale%20per%20minorenni&xml=htmlSubmit=cerca

Responsible agencies/authorities to tackle the prostitution of minors

Name of service/ organisation	Description	Role in preventing and combating prostitution of minors	Role in the provision of support or services to victims	Contact info (Phone, e-mail, website)
Minor's office	Office of the State Police tasked with the protection of minors	1. Staff specialized in child maltreatment, abandonment of minors, exploitation in prostitution; child labour sexual abuse, bullying and use or dealing of narcotic substances. They support victims, child offenders, children at risk and their families.	Referral to services	Website: https://www.poliziadistato.it/articolo/ufficio-minori-2
Postal and Communication Police	Police office in charge of cases of online exploitation	1. Handles cases of online exploitation 2. Carries out educational activities on the risks of technologies	N/A	Website: https://www.commissariatodips.it/index.html
ECPAT Italia	Non-profit organization working on the defence of children against sexual exploitation for commercial purposes	Research, campaigning, training activities	Different kinds of support based on projects	Website: https://www.ecpat.it/
National Union of Juvenile Chambers	CSO of legal experts working on child abuse	N/A	Legal support to victims	Website: https://lnx.camereminorili.it/
Save the Children	NGO working on child protection	Collection and publication of data	Project "Vie d'Uscita" (Ways Out) provides victims with legal counselling, social and cultural mediation, referral to other services.	Website: https://www.savethechildren.it/cosa-facciamo

Responsible agencies/authorities to tackle the prostitution of minors

Name of service/ organisation	Description	Role in preventing and combating prostitution of minors	Role in the provision of support or services to victims	Contact info (Phone, e-mail, website)
Local Street Units	Street units monitoring conditions of prostitution in different cities Street units monitoring conditions of prostitution in different cities	N/A	First point of contact with victims and referral to services	Website: https://www.romatoday.it/politica/prostituzione-minori-maschi-unita-di-strada-progetto.html ; https://sociale.regione.emilia-romagna.it/prostituzione-e-tratta-di-esseri-umani/prostituzione/unita-di-strada
EU agencies which signed a joint statement on addressing human trafficking	They have committed to working closely to address human trafficking, according to their areas of competence, which range from gathering intelligence and facilitating prosecution in trafficking cases to coordinating Member States' efforts to support victims and prevent victimisation.		N/A	Website: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0607
EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator	EU Anti-trafficking coordinator is responsible for improving coordination and coherence among EU institutions, EU agencies, Member States and international actors.	<u>Responsible for:</u> - Improving coordination among all the anti-trafficking stakeholders - Monitoring the implementation of the EU strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings - Contributing to the reporting carried out by the European Commission every two years on the progress made in the fight against trafficking.		Website: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/internal-security/organised-crime-and-human-trafficking/together-against-trafficking-human-beings/eu-anti-trafficking-coordinator_en
ECPAT International	ECPAT is a global network of civil society organisations working together to end the sexual exploitation of children.	ECPAT coordinates research, advocacy and action towards the aim of ending the sexual exploitation of children.		Website: https://ecpat.org/

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

In conclusion, the report has highlighted the complex nature of the phenomenon of child prostitution. It presents very diverse victim profiles, involves diverse criminal networks, manifests in different socio-economic contexts, involves young women and men, Italian and foreign citizens. This complexity makes it hard to collect reliable estimates of the incidence of the phenomenon, which is further hidden by the fact that it occurs in conditions of concealment and invisibility. Paramount is the importance of recognising children victims of prostitution as victims of child abuse, even when apparently consensual. In order to stamp out the phenomenon of child prostitution, it is necessary to proceed along three different lines, which include the level of counteraction but also the level of prevention and support. Currently the area of victim support is covered mostly by third sector organization but there is an evident lack of targeted services. Even though the legislation seems to have made progress and there are action plans in place, the practical implementation of these plans appears harder to monitor and so their impact on the phenomenon in general.

Recommendations

In light of the reported evidence and based on the suggestions of our informants, the following recommendations should be applied:

- The Observatory for the fight against paedophilia and child pornography should publish a report on the data included in its database.
- The implementation of the National Plan should be monitored and its impact evaluated. The results of this evaluation (internal or external) should be publicly available so to inform both governmental and independent actions.
- Strategies should be in place to actively involve young people in policy making processes in a safe, empowering and not victimising manner.
- Criminal Courts should have specialized sections dealing with cases related to the sexual exploitation of children.
- Comprehensive sexuality education should be mandatory in schools and in line with UNESCO guidelines[3]. Teachers should be trained to deliver these programs. They should include the education to a healthy use of web content and tools, addressing topics like pornography, sexting.

[3] Available here: ["Invisible Little Slaves" in English](#)

Conclusions and recommendations

- Schools should offer specialized support teams composed of experts - psychologists, psychiatrists, paediatricians - who can offer support to children and families with respect to difficult situations.
- Information campaigns, both governmental and independent, should be launched on multiple media to inform about exploitation of children in prostitutions, break the taboo around the topic and refer potential victims and bystanders to support services.
- Support services specifically targeted to victims of sexual exploitation for prostitution should be increased, including reception centres, legal support, psychological support and support to reintegration.



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