

CYPRUS NGO REPORT ON MISSING CHILDREN

I. Missing Children:

A. What law enforcement standard operational procedures, law enforcement resources and technical means exist for investigations related to missing children?

Law enforcement is solely placed on the police force and there is an immediate cooperation with the State Welfare Office. No such cooperation exists with any NGO. The Police have standard operational procedures and the fact that Cyprus is a small country facilitates investigations. We have had no reported cases of missing children in the past few years and thus, the problem is considered to be non-existent. Cyprus is not easily accessible and therefore, no reported cases of foreign children being brought to the island exist. Parental abduction is not common, but there have been 3 cases reported in the last years that have been investigated and solved in cooperation with international police forces. There is no child-line or any special web-site for missing children and there has been no history of poster posting or public announcements for missing children.

B. What are the judicial authorities' standard operational procedures for handling investigations for handling investigations related to missing children?

Since missing children is not an issue, judicial authorities deal only with parental abduction, after the case has been solved by the police, with the General Attorney's office being in charge and assisted by the State Welfare Office. Such cases involve one parent from another country, either in the process for a divorce, or unilateral marriage break.

C. What kind of co-operation is there between law enforcement and/or judicial authorities and civil society for handling cases related to missing children?

No such cooperation exists and this is primarily why no specialized NGO exists on the island.

D. What kind of cooperation is there between NGOs, law enforcement and/or judicial authorities and the media for handling cases related to missing children?

There are strong ties between the police, the courts and the media. Nevertheless, media coverage is inadequate and in most cases of parental abduction publicity is given not in order to help solve the case but for "selling", often exaggerated and including children's pictures and "juicy" details of parent's former life together.

E. What kind of cooperation is there between NGOs, law enforcement and/or judicial authorities and social services for handling cases related to missing children?

No specialized NGO exists and thus, no cooperation. Only the Social Services (State Welfare Office) are in cooperation with NGOs but NGOs do not play a major role in investigations or handling cases.

II. Sexually exploited children:

A. What law enforcement standard operational procedures, law enforcement resources and technical means exist for investigations related to sexually exploited children?

The police is highly interested and involved in all cases of sexual exploitation, be it against children or adults (women in particular). There is a special law covering sexual exploitation and the police have special units for investigating such cases and even though there is no real discrimination in procedures regarding children, there is high sensitivity in dealing with abused children.

B. What are the judicial authorities' standard operational procedures for handling investigations related to sexually exploited children?

The judicial authorities are not directly involved in the investigations, except for the General Attorney's office, but during the hearing procedures children are protected, escorted by a social worker and testify away from the offender – usually in a separate room and not in the actual court room. Video conferencing in court is being introduced, with good results.

C. What kind of cooperation is there between law enforcement and/or judicial authorities and civil society for handling cases related to sexually exploited children?

Civil society is not directly involved in handling such cases. Several NGOs exist dealing with persons that suffered sexual abuse and exploitation, but are not specific to children alone. It is essential that more cooperation is encouraged between authorities and civil society, primarily for raising awareness and encouraging children to report such cases.

D. What kind of cooperation is there between NGOs, law enforcement and/or judicial authorities and the media for handling cases related to sexually exploited children?

The media are directly involved and unfortunately, even though there is a law prohibiting the exploitation of abused children by the media, this is often not the case. Publicity is given not for the sake of information dissemination and raising awareness but for “selling”.

E. What kind of cooperation is there between NGOs, law enforcement and/or judicial authorities and social services for handling cases related to sexually exploited children?

NGOs are not directly involved in the handling of such cases, but two NGOs provide special shelters for abused women and children (even though, again, there is nothing specific to children alone). Social Services are the major stakeholder in handling cases and children are placed under the care of the Head of the Department and, in extreme cases, removed from home and placed temporarily in state operated residential care. The Social Services are involved immediately after reporting and are there in all steps to be taken regarding abused children (and adults), providing support and suggestions for further actions to be taken.