



April 2024

This factsheet does not bind the Court and is not exhaustive

# Protection of minors

## **Article 1 (obligation to respect human rights) of the [European Convention on Human Rights](#):**

"The High Contracting Parties shall secure to **everyone within their jurisdiction** the rights and freedoms defined in ... this Convention".

## Corporal punishment

### **[Tyrer v. the United Kingdom](#)**

25 April 1978

In the Isle of Man, a 15-year-old boy was subjected to judicial corporal punishment for assault causing actual bodily harm of a senior pupil at his school. He was required to take off his trousers and underpants and bend over a table. He was then held down by two police officers while a third police officer struck him three times with a birch.

The European Court of Human Rights considered such punishment to be "institutionalised violence", in **violation of Article 3** (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment) of the European Convention on Human Rights.

### **[A. v. the United Kingdom \(application no. 25599/94\)](#)**

23 September 1998

A supposedly "difficult" nine-year-old was caned several times and with considerable force by his step-father, causing bruising and suffering. His step-father was tried for assault causing actual bodily harm, but acquitted, as English law at the time allowed for a defence of "reasonable punishment".

The Court considered that children and other vulnerable individuals in particular were entitled to protection, in the form of effective deterrence, from such forms of ill-treatment. It found a **violation of Article 3** (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment) of the Convention, as English law did not adequately protect the boy.

### **[Tlapak and Others v. Germany \(nos. 11308/16 and 11344/16\) and Wetjen and Others v. Germany \(nos. 68125/14 and 72204/14\)](#)**

22 March 2018

These cases concerned the partial withdrawal of parental authority and the taking into care of children belonging to the Twelve Tribes Church (*Zwölf Stämme*), living in two communities in Bavaria. In 2012 the press reported that church members punished their children by caning. The reports were subsequently corroborated by video footage of caning filmed with a hidden camera in one of the communities. Based on these press reports, as well as statements by former members of the church, the children living in the communities were taken into care in September 2013 by court order. The proceedings before the Court have been brought by four families who are members of the Twelve Tribes Church. They complained about the German courts' partial withdrawal of their parental authority and the splitting up of their families.

The Court held that there had been **no violation of Article 8** (right to respect for private and family life) of the Convention, finding that the German courts, in fair and

reasonable proceedings in which each child's case had been looked at individually, had struck a balance between the interests of the parents and the best interests of the children. The Court agreed in particular with the German courts that the risk of systematic and regular caning of children justified withdrawing parts of the parents' authority and taking the children into care. Their decisions had been based on a risk of inhuman or degrading treatment, which is prohibited in absolute terms under the Convention. The Court pointed out, moreover, that the German courts had given detailed reasons why they had had no other option available to them to protect the children. In particular, the parents had remained convinced during the proceedings that corporal punishment was acceptable and, even if they would have agreed to no caning, there had been no way of ensuring that it would not be carried out by other members of the community.

## Covert filming of minors

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### Söderman v. Sweden

12 November 2013 (Grand Chamber)

The case concerned the attempted covert filming of a 14-year old girl by her stepfather while she was naked, and her complaint that the Swedish legal system, which at the time did not prohibit filming without someone's consent, had not protected her against the violation of her personal integrity.

The Court held that there had been a **violation of Article 8** (right to respect for private life) of the Convention. It found in particular that Swedish law in force at the time had not ensured protection of the applicant's right to respect for private life – whether by providing a criminal or a civil remedy – in a manner that complied with the Convention. The act committed by her stepfather had violated her integrity and had been aggravated by the fact that she was a minor, that the incident took place in her home, and that the offender was a person whom she was entitled and expected to trust.

## Domestic violence / abuse

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### Z. and Others v. the United Kingdom (no. 29392/95)

10 May 2001 (Grand Chamber)

Four very young children/babies were only taken into care four-and-a-half years after concerns about their family were reported to social services. The children were subjected to appalling long-term neglect and emotional abuse by their parents during that time and suffered physical and psychological injury. They were variously found, for example, locked in their rooms smearing excrement on the walls and stealing food from bins.

The Court found that the system in place had failed to protect the children and that there had been no effective remedy, in **violation of Articles 3** (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) **and 13** (right to an effective remedy) of the Convention.

### E. and Others v. the United Kingdom (no. 33218/96)

26 November 2002

Three sisters and their brother were for many years abused physically (all four children) and sexually (the girls) by their mother's boyfriend, including after his conviction for assaulting two of the girls, when he came back to live with the family, in breach of his probation conditions. The man forced the children, among other things, to hit each other with chains and whips in front of and sometimes with him. The girls all suffered severe post-traumatic stress disorder and the boy had personality problems as a result.

The Court found that social services had failed to protect the children, in **violation of Article 3** (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) of the Convention, and that there had been no effective remedy, in **violation of Article 13** (right to an effective remedy) of the Convention.

### Kontrovà v. Slovakia

31 May 2007

On 2 November 2002 the applicant lodged a criminal complaint against her husband, accusing him of having assaulted and beaten her with an electric cable. She subsequently returned to the police station with her husband to withdraw the complaint, and the police cooperated. On 31 December 2002 the husband killed their daughter and son, born in 1997 and 2001 respectively.

The Court found a **violation of Article 2** (right to life) of the Convention, because of the authorities' failure to protect the children's lives, and a **violation of Article 13** (right to an effective remedy) of the Convention, because the mother had been denied the possibility of seeking compensation.

### Juppala v. Finland

2 December 2008

This case concerned a grandmother's conviction for defamation of her son-in-law after she had taken her three-year-old grandson to a doctor and voiced a suspicion that he might have been hit by his father.

The Court found a **violation of Article 10** (freedom of expression) of the Convention. In its view, people should be free to voice a suspicion of child abuse, formed in good faith, in the context of an appropriate reporting procedure without fear of a criminal conviction or an obligation to pay compensation for harm suffered or costs incurred. There had been no suggestion that the applicant had acted recklessly: on the contrary, even a health care professional had decided that the case should be reported to the child welfare authorities. In sum, it was only in exceptional cases that restriction of the right to freedom of expression in this sphere could be accepted as necessary in a democratic society. In the applicant's case, sufficient reasons for the interference with her right to freedom of expression had not been provided and the interference had therefore failed to answer any "pressing social need".

### E.S. and Others v. Slovakia (no. 8227/04)

15 September 2009

In 2001 the applicant left her husband and lodged a criminal complaint against him for ill-treating her and her children (born in 1986, 1988 and 1989) and sexually abusing one of their daughters. He was convicted of violence and sexual abuse two years later. Her request for her husband to be ordered to leave their home was dismissed, however; the court finding that it did not have the power to restrict her husband's access to the property (she could only end the tenancy when divorced). The applicant and her children were therefore forced to move away from their friends and family and two of the children had to change schools.

The Court found that Slovakia had failed to provide the applicant and her children with the immediate protection required against her husband's violence, in **violation of Article 3** (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) **and Article 8** (right to private and family life) of the Convention.

### M. and M. v. Croatia (no. 10161/13)

3 September 2015

This case concerned a custody dispute, including allegations of child abuse by the father. The applicants, the child and her mother, complained in particular that the Croatian authorities had failed to remove the child from the father's care and to thus prevent further domestic abuse.

The Court held that there had been a **violation of Article 3** (prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment) of the Convention as concerned the State's failure to investigate promptly the allegations of ill-treatment brought by the mother and child, and that there had been **no violation of Article 3** as concerned the child and the State's duty to protect her from further ill-treatment. It further found that there had been **no violation of Article 8** (right to private and family life) of the Convention as concerned the mother and the State's duty to protect her daughter from further ill-treatment, and that there

had been **two violations of Article 8** on account of the excessive length of the custody proceedings in respect of both mother and daughter and on account of the daughter's lack of involvement in the custody decision-making process. The Court noted in particular substantial delays in both the criminal proceedings brought against the father as well as in the custody proceedings, both still pending after more than four years without the child ever having been interviewed in either set of proceedings. The Court was particularly struck by the fact that the child, now 13 and a half, has still not yet been heard in the custody proceedings and has thus not been given the chance to express her view before the courts about which parent she wants to live with. The protracted nature of those proceedings has exacerbated the plight of a traumatised child who, if for nothing else than her parents' conflicting relationship, has suffered great mental anguish, culminating in self-injuring behaviour.

### **Talpis v. Italy**

2 March 2017

This case concerned the conjugal violence suffered by the applicant, which resulted in the murder of her son and her own attempted murder.

The Court held that there had been a **violation of Article 2** (right to life) of the Convention on account of the murder of the applicant's son and her own attempted murder. It found, in particular, that by failing to take prompt action on the complaint lodged by the applicant, the Italian authorities had deprived that complaint of any effect, creating a situation of impunity conducive to the recurrence of the acts of violence, which had then led to the attempted murder of the applicant and the death of her son. The authorities had therefore failed in their obligation to protect the lives of the persons concerned. The Court also held that there had been a **violation of Article 3** (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) of the Convention on account of the failure of the authorities in their obligation to protect the applicant against acts of domestic violence. In this respect, it noted in particular that the applicant had lived with her children in a climate of violence serious enough to qualify as ill-treatment, and that the manner in which the authorities had conducted the criminal proceedings pointed to judicial passivity, which was incompatible with Article 3. Lastly, the Court held that there had been a **violation of Article 14** (prohibition of discrimination) of the Convention **in conjunction with Articles 2 and 3**, finding that the applicant had been the victim of discrimination as a woman on account of the inaction of the authorities, which had underestimated the violence in question and thus essentially endorsed it.

### **D.M.D. v. Romania (no. 23022/13)**

3 October 2017

This case concerned the proceedings brought by the applicant against his father for domestic abuse. The proceedings in question had lasted over eight years and ended in the father's conviction of physically and mentally abusing his child. The applicant complained that those proceedings had been ineffective and that he had not been awarded damages. In particular, the domestic courts had found at last instance that they did not have to examine the issue of compensation as neither he nor the prosecutor had made such a request before the lower courts.

The Court held that there had been a **violation of Article 3** (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) of the Convention because the investigation into the allegations of abuse had lasted too long and had been marred by other serious shortcomings. In this respect, it recalled in particular that Contracting States should strive to protect children's dignity and that, in practice, this required an adequate legal framework to protect children against domestic violence. In this judgment the Court also held that there had been a **violation of Article 6 § 1** (right to a fair trial) of the Convention because the domestic courts had not examined the merits of the applicant's complaint about the failure to award him compensation, despite it being clearly worded in domestic law that they were under an obligation to rule on the matter of compensation in a case concerning a minor, even without a formal request from the victim.

### **Association Innocence en Danger v. France and Association Enfance et Partage v. France**

4 June 2020

This case concerned the death in 2009 of an eight-year-old girl as a result of abuse by her parents. The applications were lodged by two French child protection associations. Both associations complained in particular that the French authorities had failed to protect the child from parental abuse. The first applicant also complained about the need to establish the existence of gross negligence in order to engage the State's liability for the malfunctioning of the justice system.

The Court decided to examine the first complaint under Article 3 (prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment) of the Convention, finding that the dispute concerned the question whether the domestic authorities should have detected the ill-treatment and protected the child from those acts which had ultimately led to her death. In the present case, it held that there had been a **violation of Article 3**, finding that the system in place had failed to protect the child from the severe abuse by her parents which had led to her death. The Court noted in particular that the "report of suspected ill-treatment" sent by a headteacher in 2008 had triggered the State's positive obligation to carry out investigations. It concluded that the measures taken by the authorities between the time of that report and the child's death had not been sufficient to protect the child from severe abuse by her parents. The Court further held that there had been **no violation of Article 13** (right to an effective remedy) of the Convention. As to the civil liability suit against the State for the malfunctioning of the justice system, the fact that the applicant association *Innocence en Danger* had not met the statutory conditions did not suffice for it to find that, as a whole, the remedy was not "effective".

### **Penati v. Italy**

11 May 2021

The applicant's son, who was eight years old at the time of the events, was killed by his father during a "protected" contact session between father and son on public premises belonging to the municipal authority. The child was at that time in the care of the social welfare department, which was responsible for arranging the contact sessions, in a context of heightened conflict between the child's parents. The applicant alleged that the national authorities had breached their positive obligation under the Convention by omitting to take all the necessary measures to protect the life of her child.

The Court held that there had been **no violation of Article 2** (right to life) of the Convention under its procedural limb. It noted in particular that, in the light of all the evidence obtained, the first-instance court, had acquitted the three individuals identified by the applicant as the persons mainly responsible for the events. That court had taken the view that the materialisation of the risk had not been foreseeable in this case and that the responsibility of the social services employees had been confined to ensuring the child's proper development and had not extended to his physical safety. Following the Court of Appeal judgment which found just one person criminally liable, the Court of Cassation had quashed that judgment without ordering a rehearing and, on the basis of essentially the same arguments as the first-instance court, had acquitted the individual concerned. Furthermore, as to the effectiveness of the investigation, the Court observed that the authorities had taken the reasonable steps available to them to secure the evidence concerning the events. In the present case, the Court found that, in so far as the obligations incumbent on the respondent State were an obligation of means, not of result, the fact that the three defendants had been acquitted did not suffice in itself to find that the criminal proceedings concerning the child's death had failed to satisfy the requirements of Article 2 of the Convention. In addition, the civil proceedings brought by the applicant had ended with the signing of a friendly-settlement agreement between the parties, and a substantial sum had been awarded to her.

### **Kurt v. Austria**

15 June 2021 (Grand Chamber)

This case concerned the applicant's complaint that the Austrian authorities had failed to protect her and her children from her violent husband, which had resulted in his murdering their son. She maintained in particular that she had specifically informed the police that she feared for her children's lives.

The Court held that there had been **no violation of Article 2** (right to life) of the Convention in the present case. It found that the Austrian authorities had displayed the required special diligence in responding swiftly to the applicant's allegations of domestic violence and in taking due account of the specific domestic violence context of the case. They had conducted an autonomous, proactive and comprehensive risk assessment and had issued a barring and protection order. That risk assessment had not indicated a real and immediate lethality risk to the applicant's son. Consequently, no obligation had been triggered for the authorities to take preventive operational measures in that regard.

### **A.E. v. Bulgaria (no. 53891/20)**

23 May 2023

This case concerned complaints brought to prosecutors in Bulgaria that the applicant, then aged just 15, had been a victim of domestic abuse, including being beaten, kicked and strangled, by the 23-year-old man with whom she was living. The applicant complained, in particular, of the State's failure to protect her from domestic violence and to investigate adequately her complaints in that regard, and that she had been discriminated against on the grounds of age and sex.

The Court held that there had been a **violation of Article 3** (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) of the Convention, finding that Bulgaria had not put in place an effective system to punish all forms of domestic violence and provide sufficient safeguards for victims. It noted in particular that, in the present case, the State had failed to protect the applicant adequately either in law – domestic-violence legislation had been deficient – or in fact – prosecutors had not opened criminal proceedings despite the applicant's vulnerable situation and the report that she had been subjected to repeated domestic violence. The Court further noted that the Bulgarian Government had failed to disprove institutional inaction on the part of the authorities. As it was not necessary for the applicant to show she had been individually a victim of prejudice on the part of the authorities, the Court concluded that there held also been a **violation of Article 14** (prohibition of discrimination) of the Convention **in conjunction with Article 3** in the applicant's case.

## Exclusion from an official witness protection programme

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### **R.R. and Others v. Hungary (no. 19400/11)**

4 December 2012

The case concerned the exclusion of a family (a Serbian national living in Hungary, his common-law, a Hungarian national, and their three minor children) from an official witness protection programme on the ground that the father, in prison, had remained in contact with criminal groups. The family alleged in particular that their exclusion from the witness programme had put their lives at risk from mafia retribution.

The Court held that there had been a **violation of Article 2** (right to life) of the Convention as regards the children and their mother. It found that the applicants had been excluded from the programme in which they had initially been enrolled without the Hungarian Government having shown that the risks had ceased to exist and without having taken the necessary measures to protect their lives. The Court concluded that the Hungarian authorities had potentially exposed the children and their mother to life-threatening vengeance from criminal circles. It further held **under Article 46** (binding force and execution) that adequate measures had to be taken to protect the family, including proper cover identities if necessary.

## Harassment by teachers

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### **F.O. v. Croatia (no. 29555/13)**

22 April 2021

The applicant, a student in a public high school at the relevant time, was subjected to several insults by his mathematics teacher. He complained about the harassment by the teacher at school, and the inadequate response of the relevant domestic authorities.

The Court held that there had been a **violation of Article 8** (right to respect for private life) of the Convention, finding that the State authorities had failed to respond with requisite diligence to the applicant's allegations of harassment at school.

## Interview without parental consent

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### **I.V.T. v. Romania (no. 35582/15)**

1 March 2022

This case concerned a television interview of a minor, without parental consent or adequate measures to protect her identity. The interview, which concerned the death of a schoolmate, had resulted in her being bullied and had caused her emotional stress.

The Court held that there had been a **violation of Article 8** (right to respect for private life) of the Convention, finding that the domestic appellate courts in this case had only superficially balanced the question of the applicant's right to private life and the broadcaster's right to free expression. They had not properly taken into account the fact that she had been a minor, failing in their obligation to protect her right to private life. In particular, concerning the interview itself, the Court was satisfied that it had been about a matter of public concern. However, the applicant had been a minor and so the requirement of parental consent – which had never been obtained – had to be weighed against that. The Court noted in particular that the relevant National Audiovisual Council regulations stated "the right of the minor to his or her private life and private image prevail[ed] over the need for information, especially in the case of a minor in a difficult position". It observed that the domestic courts had found that the applicant had suffered from severe distress and anguish following the broadcast. The Court recalled that, even where a news report made a contribution to a public debate, the disclosure of private information – such as the identity of a minor who had witnessed a dramatic event – had not to exceed editorial discretion, and had to be justified. These considerations had been more important in the present case, where the Court expressed doubts as to the relevance to a debate of public interest of the opinions of a child who had not witnessed the event in question.

## Minor's exposure to violent arrest of parent

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### **A v. Russia (no. 37735/09)**<sup>1</sup>

12 November 2019

This case concerned the applicant's allegation that she had been traumatised by witnessing her father's violent arrest by the police when she was nine years old. The applicant argued in particular that the arrest had taken place near her school and therefore the authorities should have anticipated the likelihood of her being present. She also alleged that the pre investigation inquiry into the incident had been superficial and inadequate.

The Court found that the applicant's allegations were credible. It further noted that the law-enforcement officers, who had to have been well aware that the applicant was or would be on the scene of the operation, had taken no account of her interests when planning and carrying out their operation against her father, thus exposing her to a

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<sup>1</sup>. On 16 September 2022 the Russian Federation ceased to be a Party to the European Convention on Human Rights ("the Convention").

scene of violence. That had very severely affected her, as she had suffered in particular from a neurological disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder for several years afterwards. In the Court's view, the applicant witnessing such a violent incident had amounted to ill-treatment which the authorities had failed to prevent, **in breach of their obligations under Article 3** (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) of the Convention. The Court also held that there had been a **violation of Article 3** of the Convention, under its **procedural** limb, on account of the lack of an effective investigation into the incident. In this respect, it found that the mere carrying out of a pre-investigation inquiry, not followed by a preliminary investigation, was insufficient for the authorities to comply with the requirements of an effective investigation into credible allegations of ill treatment by the police under Article 3 of the Convention.

See also:

[\*\*Dokukiny v. Russia\*\*](#)<sup>2</sup>

24 May 2022

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## Mistreatment by teachers

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[\*\*V.K. v. Russia \(no. 68059/13\)\*\*](#)<sup>3</sup>

7 March 2017

This case concerned the mistreatment of a four year old boy by teachers at his public nursery school which resulted in him developing a neurological disorder. The applicant claimed in particular that his teachers: had forcibly given him antibiotic eyedrops without a medical prescription or his parents' consent; had locked him in the dark in the toilets, telling him that he would be eaten by rats; had forced him to stand in the nursery lobby in his underwear with his arms up for prolonged periods; and, on one occasion, had sellotaped his mouth shut. He also alleged that the ensuing investigation into his allegations had been ineffective.

The Court held that there had been a **violation of Article 3** (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) of the Convention as regards both the young boy's ill-treatment by his teachers and the authorities' failure to effectively investigate his allegations. It observed in particular that the applicant's account of the abuse had been detailed, consistent and corroborated by an assistant teacher, certain parents of other pupils at the school and a report by a panel of experts. It further found that the abuse had been sufficiently serious to be considered inhuman and degrading. The Court bore in mind the applicant's extremely young age at the time, the type of punishments he had been subjected to over a period of at least several weeks, the fact that those punishments, by teachers who were in a position of authority and control over him, had been aimed at educating him by humiliating and debasing him, and the long-lasting consequences for him in the form of a post-traumatic neurological disorder. Furthermore, the Court noted, that ill-treatment had occurred while the applicant had been in the exclusive custody of a public nursery school which, under State regulation and supervision, fulfilled the public service of general interest of caring for and educating young children. Consequently, the State bore direct responsibility for the teachers' abuse of the applicant. Lastly, a three-year delay in opening a criminal investigation into the applicant's allegations of ill-treatment had had a significant adverse impact on the investigation's effectiveness, the most serious consequence of which had been that the prosecution of the teachers had become time-barred.

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<sup>2</sup>. On 16 September 2022 the Russian Federation ceased to be a Party to the Convention.

<sup>3</sup>. On 16 September 2022 the Russian Federation ceased to be a Party to the Convention.

## Placement in a psychiatric hospital against one's will

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### V.I. v. Republic of Moldova (no. 38963/18)

26 March 2024<sup>4</sup>

This case concerned the placement of an orphan who was perceived to have a mild intellectual disability in a psychiatric hospital against his will. He was under the care of the State at the time. At the end of what was supposed to be a three-week placement, he was left there for another four months, with nobody coming to visit or fetch him and being treated with neuroleptics and anti-psychotics. The applicant alleged that his placement and treatment, together with the conditions in the hospital and the conduct of the medical staff and other patients, had amounted to ill treatment. He complained that the investigation into his allegations had been ineffective and alleged that social stigma and discrimination against people with psychosocial disabilities and a lack of alternative care solutions had been to blame.

In the present case, the Court held that there had been a **violation of Article 3** (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) of the Convention as concerned the lack of an effective investigation, a **violation of Article 3** as regards the applicant's involuntary placement and treatment in a psychiatric hospital, a **violation of Article 14** (prohibition of discrimination) of the Convention **read in conjunction with Article 3**, and a **violation of Article 13** (right to an effective remedy) of the Convention **read in conjunction with Articles 3 and 14**. The Court found, in particular, that the authorities had failed to investigate the circumstances in which the applicant had been placed in the psychiatric hospital, and whether the relevant legal safeguards relating to involuntary placement and psychiatric treatment had been respected, and whether there had been any justification for in-patient treatment in the first place. They had not tried to clarify what impact the treatment with neuroleptics and anti-psychotics had had on him, nor whether that treatment had been warranted from a medical point of view or whether it had simply been used as chemical restraint. Moreover, the investigation had not factored in the applicant's vulnerability, his age or the disability aspects of his complaints. The Court also noted, in this case, that the existing Moldovan legal framework fell short of the State's duty ("positive obligation") to establish and apply effectively a system providing protection to intellectually disabled persons in general, and to children without parental care in particular, against serious breaches of their integrity. Finding that the case disclosed a systemic problem, the Court decreed, under **Article 46** (binding force and execution of judgments) of the Convention, that it fell upon the Republic of Moldova to take general measures to resolve the problems at the root of the violations found and to prevent similar violations from taking place in the future.

## Placement measures

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### Scozzari and Giunta v. Italy

13 July 2000 (Grand Chamber)

In September 1997 the applicants' two sons/grandsons, born in 1987 and 1994, were placed by court order in the "Il Forteto" children's home, where – as the national court was aware – two of the principal leaders and co-founders had been convicted of sexual abuse of three handicapped people in their care. Prior to his placement in the home, the eldest boy had been a victim of sexual abuse by a paedophile social worker.

The Court held, notably, that there had been a **violation of Article 8** (right to respect for family life) of the Convention, concerning the uninterrupted placement of the boys in "Il Forteto". It noted in particular that the absence of any time-limit on the care order, the negative influence of the people responsible for the children at "Il Forteto", coupled

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<sup>4</sup>. This judgment will become final in the circumstances set out in Article 44 § 2 (final judgments) of the [European Convention on Human Rights](#).

with the attitude and conduct of social services, were in the process of driving the first applicant's children towards an irreversible separation from their mother and long-term integration within "Il Forteto".

### **Nencheva and Others v. Bulgaria**

18 June 2013

Fifteen children and young adults died between December 1996 and March 1997 in a home for physically and mentally disabled young people in the village of Dzhurkovo, from the effects of cold and shortages of food, medicines and basic necessities. The manager of the home, observing the problems, had tried without success on several occasions to alert all the public institutions which had direct responsibility for funding the home and which could have been expected to act.

The Court found a **violation of Article 2** (right to life) of the Convention in that the authorities had failed in their duty to protect the lives of the vulnerable children placed in their care from a serious and immediate threat. The authorities had also failed to conduct an effective official investigation into the deaths, occurring in highly exceptional circumstances.

### **Jessica Marchi v. Italy**

27 May 2021

This case concerned the decision of the Juvenile Court to terminate the pre-adoption placement of a child that the applicant had temporarily fostered. The decision had been taken following the arrest of her husband on charges of child pornography and sexual abuse of minors. The applicant complained in particular about the removal of the child she had fostered temporarily for one year in the context of a pre-adoption placement "with a legal risk".

The Court held that there had been **no violation of Article 8** (right to respect for private and family life) of the Convention in respect of the applicant. After finding that the facts of the case fell within the sphere of the applicant's private life, the Court noted that the domestic courts had established that it was not in the child's interest to continue living in the applicant's family. The judicial authorities had been given the difficult and delicate task of striking a fair balance between the competing interests at stake in a complex case and had been guided by the child's best interests, in particular its individual need for security. The applicant had personally been able to take part in the proceedings, had been given access to all documents concerning her and thus had not been denied adequate participation in the decision-making process regarding the termination of the child's initial placement with her.

### **I.G.D. v. Bulgaria (no. 70139/14)**

7 June 2022

This case concerned a minor who had been placed in specialised institutions from 2011 to 2015 on the grounds of having committed a number of offences. At the time of his initial placement the applicant was 11 years old. In 2015, after the maximum time allowed by law, he was placed in "protected accommodation". He argued in particular that his placement in the socio-pedagogical boarding schools, one aspect of which was a lack of any genuine contact with his mother, had amounted to a violation of his right to respect for his private and family life.

The Court held that there had been a **violation of Article 8** (right to respect for private and family life), **taken alone and in conjunction with Article 13** (right to an effective remedy) of the Convention, finding that the Bulgarian authorities had not applied the best-interests-of-the-child test in this case, that the proceedings in issue had not included safeguards proportionate to the seriousness of the interference and the importance of the interests at stake, and that the national authorities had not discharged their obligations to take steps to facilitate bringing the mother and child back together and to accommodate the child's individual circumstances. The Court, noted, in particular, that the authorities' prime motive had been to punish the applicant for what they regarded as his deviant behaviour. In this respect, it observed that the applicant – an

adolescent in the thick of psychological and social changes whose mother was struggling to meet her responsibilities as a parent – had been placed in care at a boarding school without any real attempt to find less intrusive measures in his case. In a context where the primary aim was to protect the rights of others, the authorities had seen no need to analyse the applicant's circumstances after he suffered abuse at his first boarding school. The Court held that there had also been a **violation of Article 5 § 4** (right to have the lawfulness of one's detention decided speedily by a court) of the Convention in the present case, finding that Bulgarian law did not provide for automatic periodic review, by a court, of the detention in issue. The authorities had not, therefore, afforded the applicant periodic review at regular intervals of the need for his continued placement in a socio-pedagogical boarding school.

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## Protection from being targeted by paedophiles via the Internet

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### **K.U. v. Finland (no. 2872/02)**

2 December 2008

In March 1999 an advertisement was posted on an Internet dating site in the name of a 12-year-old boy, with a link to the boy's web page, stating that he was looking for an intimate relationship with a boy of his age or older "to show him the way". The boy only found out about the ad when he received an e-mail from an interested man. The service provider refused to identify the person responsible, claiming it would constitute a breach of confidentiality. The Finnish courts held that the service provider could not be legally obliged to disclose the information in question.

The Court held that there had been a **violation of Article 8** (right to respect for private life) of the Convention. It considered that posting the ad was a criminal act which made a minor a target for paedophiles. The legislature should have provided a framework for reconciling the confidentiality of Internet services with the prevention of disorder or crime and the protection of the rights and freedoms of others, and in particular children and other vulnerable individuals.

### **Trabajo Rueda v. Spain**

30 May 2017

This case concerned the seizure of the applicant's computer on the grounds that it contained child pornography material. The applicant complained that the police seizure and inspection of his computer had amounted to an interference with his right to respect for his private life and correspondence.

The Court held that there had been a **violation of Article 8** (right to respect for private life) of the Convention. It first noted that the police access to files in the applicant's personal computer and his conviction had amounted to an interference with his right to respect for his private life. That interference was prescribed by domestic law. It also pursued the legitimate aim of "prevention of crime" and "protection of the rights of others". In this respect, the Court emphasised in particular that "sexual abuse is unquestionably an abhorrent type of wrongdoing, with debilitating effects on its victims" and that "children and other vulnerable individuals are entitled to State protection, in the form of effective deterrence, from such grave types of interference with essential aspects of their private lives". However, the Court deemed that the police seizure of the computer and inspection of the files which it contained, without prior judicial authorisation, had not been proportionate to the legitimate aims pursued and had not been "necessary in a democratic society". It found that it was difficult to assess the urgency of the situation requiring the police to seize the files from the applicant's personal computer and to access their content, bypassing the normal requirement of prior judicial authorisation, when in fact the computer in question was already in the hands of the police and prior authorisation could have been obtained fairly quickly without impeding the police inquiries.

## Reception and care of unaccompanied foreign minors

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### Khan v. France

28 February 2019

This case concerned the failure by the French authorities to provide an unaccompanied foreign minor with care before and after the dismantling of the makeshift camps set up in the southern section of the "lande de Calais" ("Calais heath"). Large numbers of people hoping to seek asylum in the United Kingdom had for many years been living there in tents or huts, in overcrowded conditions without even the most basic sanitation. The applicant complained in particular of the authorities' failure to comply with their duty to protect unaccompanied foreign minors and that the order provisionally placing him in the child welfare centre had not been enforced.

The Court held that there had been a **violation of Article 3** (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) of the Convention, finding that, on account of the failure of the French authorities to take the requisite action, the applicant had found himself in a situation tantamount to degrading treatment. In particular, the Court was not convinced that the authorities had done all that could reasonably be expected of them to fulfil the obligation of protection and care incumbent on the respondent State vis-à-vis an unaccompanied foreign minor unlawfully present on French territory, that is to say an individual belonging to the category of the most vulnerable persons in society. For several months the applicant had thus lived in the "lande de Calais" shanty town, in an environment completely unsuited to his status as a child and in a situation of insecurity rendered unacceptable by his young age. The Court therefore held that the extremely negative circumstances prevailing in the makeshift camps and the failure to enforce the court order intended to secure protection for the applicant amounted to a violation of the respondent State's obligations.

### Darboe and Camara v. Italy

21 July 2022

In June 2016, the applicants in this case, a Gambian national and a Guinean national respectively, arrived in Italy on makeshift vessels, and claimed asylum as alleged unaccompanied minors. The case concerned their placement in an adult migrant centre and the age-assessment procedure that ensued.

The Court held that there had been a **violation of Article 8** (right to respect for private life) of the Convention, in respect of the first applicant<sup>5</sup>, owing to shortcomings in procedural guarantees afforded to him as a minor migrant. As a result, he had not been able to file an asylum request and had been placed in an overcrowded adult reception centre for more than four months. It noted in particular that, at the time of the events, domestic and EU law already provided a number of guarantees for unaccompanied minor asylum-seekers. The Court referred to the EU Directives which had been implemented in Italy, as well as to the Resolution of the Council of the European Union of 26 June 1997 and the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 1810 (2011). Those texts clearly recognised the primary importance of the best interests of the child and of the principle of presumption of minority in respect of unaccompanied migrant children, who required special protection and should be assigned a guardian and be assisted during the asylum proceedings. In this case, the Court also held that there had been a **violation of Article 3** (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) of the Convention with regard to the length and conditions of the first applicant's stay in the adult reception centre, and a **violation of Article 13** (right to an effective remedy) of the Convention **taken in conjunction with Articles 3 and 8**.

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<sup>5</sup>. As the whereabouts of the second applicant in the case were no longer known, the Court struck out that part of the application.

### **O.R. v. Greece (no. 24650/19)**

23 January 2024<sup>6</sup>

This case concerned the living conditions in Greece of an Afghan national who was born in 2003. The applicant – an unaccompanied minor and asylum-seeker at the relevant time – claimed to have arrived in Greece in November 2018 and alleged that he had remained homeless for nearly six months, without access to basic essentials and without an officially designated legal guardian.

The Court held that there had been a **violation of Article 3** (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) of the Convention in respect of the applicant, finding that the latter had found himself, through the fault of the authorities, in an inhuman and degrading situation. The Court noted in particular that throughout the period in question the Greek authorities had left the applicant to fend for himself in an environment that was entirely unsuitable for minors – whether in terms of security, accommodation, hygiene or access to food and care, or in terms of the measures taken to provide for him more generally – and in unacceptably precarious circumstances, given his status as an asylum-seeker and unaccompanied minor.

## Regulation of marriage

### **Z. H. and R. H. v. Switzerland (no. 60119/12)**

8 December 2015

The applicants, who had had a religious marriage in Iran at the ages of 14 and 18, had complained of the refusal by the Swiss authorities to recognise their marriage as valid and to take it into account for their asylum application.

The Court held that there had been **no violation of Article 8** (right to respect for private and family life) of the Convention, finding in particular that the Convention could not be interpreted as requiring a State to recognise a marriage entered into by a child of 14.

## Servitude and forced or compulsory labour<sup>7</sup>

### **Siliadin v. France**

26 July 2005

The applicant, a Togolese national having arrived in France in 1994 with the intention to study, was made to work instead as a domestic servant in a private household in Paris. Her passport confiscated, she worked without pay, 15 hours a day, without a day off, for several years. The applicant complained about having been a domestic slave.

The Court found that the applicant had not been enslaved because her employers, although exercising control over her, had not had “a genuine right of legal ownership over her reducing her to the status of an “object”. It held, however, that the criminal law in force at the time had not protected her sufficiently, and that although the law had been changed subsequently, it had not been applicable to her situation. The Court concluded that the applicant had been held in servitude, in **violation of Article 4** (prohibition of slavery, servitude, forced or compulsory labour) of the Convention.

### **C.N. and V. v. France (no. 67724/09)**

11 October 2012

The case concerned allegations of servitude or forced or compulsory labour (unremunerated domestic chores in their aunt and uncle’s home) by two orphaned Burundi sisters aged 16 and ten years.

The Court held that there had been a **violation of Article 4** (prohibition of slavery and forced labour) of the Convention under its substantive limb, in respect of the first

<sup>6</sup>. This judgment will become final in the circumstances set out in Article 44 § 2 of the [Convention](#).

<sup>7</sup>. See also the factsheet on “[Slavery, servitude and forced labour](#)”.

applicant, as the State had not put in place a legislative and administrative framework making it possible to fight effectively against servitude and forced labour. It further found that there had been **no violation of Article 4** under its procedural limb in respect of the first applicant, with regard to the State's obligation to conduct an effective investigation into instances of servitude and forced labour. It lastly found that there had been **no violation of Article 4** in respect of the second applicant.

The Court concluded, in particular, that the first applicant had been subjected to forced or compulsory labour, as she had had to perform, under threat of being returned to Burundi, activities that would have been described as work if performed by a remunerated professional – “forced labour” was to be distinguished from activities related to mutual family assistance or cohabitation, particular regard being had to the nature and volume of the activity in question. The Court also considered that the first applicant had been held in servitude, since she had felt that her situation was unchanging and unlikely to alter. Finally, the Court found that France had failed to meet its obligations under Article 4 of the Convention to combat forced labour.

## Sexual abuse

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### **X and Y v. the Netherlands (no. 8978/80)**

26 March 1985

A girl with a mental handicap (the second applicant) was raped, in the home for children with mental disabilities where she lived, the day after her sixteenth birthday (which was the age of consent for sexual intercourse in the Netherlands) by a relative of the person in charge. She was traumatised by the experience but deemed unfit to sign an official complaint given her low mental age. Her father (the first applicant) signed in her place, but proceedings were not brought against the perpetrator because the girl had to make the complaint herself. The domestic courts recognised that there was a gap in the law.

The Court recalled that although the object of Article 8 (right to respect for private and family life) of the Convention is essentially that of protecting the individual against arbitrary interference by the public authorities, it does not merely compel the State to abstain from such interference: in addition to this primarily negative undertaking, there may be positive obligations inherent in an effective respect for private or family life. In the present case, the Court found that the protection afforded by the civil law in the case of wrongdoing of the kind inflicted on the second applicant was insufficient. This was a case where fundamental values and essential aspects of private life were at stake. Effective deterrence was indispensable in this area and it could be achieved only by criminal-law provisions. Observing that the Dutch Criminal Code had not provided her with practical and effective protection, the Court therefore concluded, taking account of the nature of the wrongdoing in question, that the second applicant had been the victim of a **violation of Article 8** of the Convention.

### **D.P. and J.C. v. the United Kingdom (no. 38719/97)**

10 October 2002

A sister and brother were both sexually abused by their step-father from the age of around eight and ten respectively. They claimed they informed the local authority social services of the abuse, but that the authorities failed to protect them. The girl also attempted to commit suicide after being raped by her stepfather. She developed a personality disorder and the boy later suffered from epilepsy. Both experienced long-term depression and trauma.

The Court found in particular that there had been no effective remedy or access to compensation available to the children concerning their allegations, in **violation of Article 13** (right to an effective remedy) of the Convention.

### **E. and Others v. the United Kingdom (no. 33218/96)**

26 November 2002

See above, under “Domestic violence / abuse”.

**M.C. v. Bulgaria (no. 39272/98)**

4 December 2003

The applicant, aged 14 (which was the age of consent for sexual intercourse in Bulgaria), was raped by two men; she cried during and after being raped and was later taken to hospital by her mother, where it was found that her hymen had been torn. Because it could not be established that she had resisted or called for help, the perpetrators were not prosecuted.

The Court found a **violation of Article 3** (prohibition of degrading treatment) **and Article 8** (right to respect for private life) of the Convention, noting in particular the universal trend towards recognising lack of consent as the essential element in determining rape and sexual abuse. Victims of sexual abuse, especially young girls, often failed to resist for psychological reasons (either submitting passively or dissociating themselves from the rape) or for fear of further violence. Stressing that States had an obligation to prosecute any non-consensual sexual act, even where the victim had not resisted physically, the Court found both the investigation in the case and Bulgaria law to be defective.

**E.S. and Others v. Slovakia (no. 8227/04)**

15 September 2009

See above, under “Domestic violence / abuse”.

**P.M. v. Bulgaria (no. 49669/07)**

24 January 2012

This case concerned the applicant’s complaint that, raped at the age of thirteen, the Bulgarian authorities took more than fifteen years to complete the ensuing investigation and she had no remedies against their reluctance to prosecute her aggressors.

The Court, finding that the investigation into the applicant’s rape complaint had been ineffective, even though the facts of the case and the identity of the offenders had been established, held that there had been a **violation of Article 3** (prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment) of the Convention under its procedural limb.

**C.A.S. and C.S. v. Romania (no. 26692/05)**

20 March 2012

This case concerned a seven-year-old and his father’s complaint that it had taken the authorities five years to investigate the first applicant’s repeated rape by a man, eventually acquitted, who had forced his way into the family flat when the boy had come home alone from school in a period from January to April 1998.

The Court, finding that the authorities had failed to carry out an effective investigation into the allegations of violent sexual abuse of the first applicant and to ensure adequate protection of his private and family life, held that there had been a **violation of Article 3** (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) **and of Article 8** (right to respect for private and family life) of the Convention. In this judgment, the Court clearly recognised that States had an obligation under Articles 3 and 8 of the Convention to ensure the effective criminal investigation of cases involving violence against children. It, moreover, specifically referred to the international obligations Romania had undertaken for the protection of children against any form of abuse<sup>8</sup>, including helping recovery and social reintegration of victims, and particularly regretted that the first applicant had never been provided with counselling or been accompanied by a qualified psychologist during the proceedings concerning his rape or afterwards.

**R.I.P. and D.L.P. v. Romania (no. 27782/10)**

10 May 2012

The applicants, a brother and sister, complained about the lack of an effective investigation into the accusation of rape made by their mother against their paternal

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<sup>8</sup>. In 1990 Romania ratified the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) and in 2001 the [Council of Europe’s Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#).

grandfather in 2004, when the girl was seven years old and her brother three and, in particular, about the length of the investigation, which was still pending in 2011, in spite of evidence confirming the allegation of sexual aggression.

The Court held that there had been a **violation of** the respondent State's positive obligations under the procedural limb of **Article 3** (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) of the Convention.

### **I.G. v. the Republic of Moldova (no. 53519/07)**

15 May 2012

The applicant alleged that, at the age of fourteen, she had been raped by an acquaintance (a twenty-three-year-old man who lived in the same neighbourhood as the applicant's grandmother, whom she visited often). She complained in particular that the authorities had not investigated her allegations effectively.

The Court held that the investigation of the applicant's case had fallen short of the requirements inherent in the State's positive obligations to effectively investigate and punish all forms of rape and sexual abuse, in **violation of Article 3** (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) of the Convention.

### **P. and S. v. Poland (no. 57375/08)**

30 October 2012

The applicants were a daughter and her mother. In 2008, at the age of fourteen, the first applicant became pregnant after being raped. The applicants complained in particular about the absence of a comprehensive legal framework guaranteeing the first applicant's timely and unhindered access to abortion under the conditions set out by the applicable laws, and about the disclosure of information about the case to the public. They further complained that the first applicant's removal from the custody of her mother and placement in a juvenile shelter and later in a hospital had been unlawful, and submitted that the circumstances of the case had amounted to an inhuman or degrading treatment.

The Court held that there had been a **violation of Article 8** (right to respect for private and family life) of the Convention, as regards the determination of access to lawful abortion, in respect of both applicants, and as regards the disclosure of the applicants' personal data. It further held that there had been a **violation of Article 5 § 1** (right to liberty and security) of the Convention, finding in particular that the essential purpose of the first applicant's placement in the juvenile shelter had been to separate her from her parents and to prevent the abortion. Lastly, the first applicant had been treated by the authorities in a deplorable manner and her suffering had reached the minimum threshold of severity under **Article 3** (prohibition of inhuman treatment) of the Convention, in **violation** of that provision.

### **O'Keeffe v. Ireland**

28 January 2014 (Grand Chamber)

The case concerned the question of the responsibility of the State for the sexual abuse of a schoolgirl, aged nine, by a lay teacher in an Irish National School in 1973. The applicant complained in particular that the Irish State had failed both to structure the primary education system so as to protect her from abuse as well as to investigate or provide an appropriate judicial response to her ill-treatment. She also claimed that she had not been able to obtain recognition of, and compensation for, the State's failure to protect her.

The Court held that there had been a **violation of Article 3** (prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment) and of **Article 13** (right to an effective remedy) of the Convention concerning the Irish State's failure to protect the applicant from sexual abuse and her inability to obtain recognition at national level of that failure. It further held that there had been **no violation of Article 3** of the Convention as regards the investigation into the complaints of sexual abuse at the applicant's school.

The Court found in particular that it was an inherent obligation of a Government to protect children from ill-treatment, especially in a primary education context.

That obligation had not been met when the Irish State, which had to have been aware of the sexual abuse of children by adults prior to the 1970s through, among other things, its prosecution of such crimes at a significant rate, nevertheless continued to entrust the management of the primary education of the vast majority of young Irish children to National Schools, without putting in place any mechanism of effective State control against the risks of such abuse occurring. On the contrary, potential complainants had been directed away from the State authorities and towards the managers (generally the local priest) of the National Schools. Indeed, any system of detection and reporting of abuse which allowed over 400 incidents of abuse to occur in the applicant's school for such a long time had to be considered ineffective.

### **Manuello and Nevi v. Italy**

20 January 2015

Criminal proceedings were instituted against the applicants' son in June 2002, after his almost five-year-old daughter's headmistress had reported him to the police on suspicion of sexually interfering with the child. On 1 August 2002 the child's mother requested a youth court to withdraw parental responsibility from her husband. The applicants have not seen their grand-daughter again since that date. They complained in particular of the excessive length of the proceedings for authorisation to meet with the child and of the failure by social services to enforce the court's decision of February 2006 authorising contact.

The Court held that there had been a **violation** of the applicants' right to respect for their family life under **Article 8** (right to respect for private and family life) of the Convention. It observed in particular that forbidding meetings between the grandparents and their granddaughter, on grounds that the child associated her grandparents with her father and the suffering she had undergone as a result of alleged sexual interference, was a measure that the authorities were entitled to take in cases of maltreatment. However, whilst great care was necessary in situations of this type and measures for the child's protection could involve restricting contact with members of the family, the Court considered that the authorities had not made the necessary efforts to protect the family ties between the grandparents and their granddaughter, who had not seen each other for about twelve years.

### **M.G.C. v. Romania (no. 61495/11)**

15 March 2016

The applicant, 11 years old at the time, alleged that she had been raped between August 2008 and February 2009 at a neighbouring family's house where she often went to play with two girls of the same age. In her application she maintained in particular that Romanian law and practice did not provide effective protection of children against rape and sexual abuse. In particular, in Romania the crime of rape requires a lack of consent on the victim's part, which was impossible for her to prove because there were no signs of violence on her body. Furthermore, the authorities, ignoring the results of her psychiatric examination, had refused to take into consideration that her young age and vulnerability had been factors contributing to her attitude towards the abuse.

In this case the Court held that there had been a **violation of Romania's positive obligations under both Articles 3** (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) **and 8** (right to respect for private and family life) of the Convention.

### **I.C. v. Romania (no. 36934/08)**

24 May 2016

This case concerned the applicant's alleged rape when she was fourteen years old and the ensuing investigation. The applicant complained that, there having been no physical evidence of assault, the criminal justice system in Romania had been more inclined to believe the men involved in the abuse, rather than her. Furthermore, the authorities, refusing to take into consideration her young age and physical/psychological vulnerability, had shown no concern for the need to protect her as a minor.

The Court held that there had been a **violation of Article 3** (prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment) of the Convention, finding that the investigation of the case had been deficient, notably on account of the Romanian State's failure to effectively apply the criminal-law system for punishing all forms of rape and sexual abuse. The Court considered in particular that the Romanian authorities had put undue emphasis on the lack of proof that the applicant had shown resistance during the incident, basing their conclusions only on the statements given by the alleged rapists in which they claimed that the girl had consented to having sexual intercourse, taken together with the fact that her body had shown no signs of violence. Furthermore, neither the prosecutors nor the judges deciding on the case had taken a context-sensitive approach, failing to take into account her young age, her slight intellectual disability and the fact that the alleged rape, involving three men, had taken place at night in cold weather – all factors which had heightened her vulnerability. Indeed, particular attention should have been focused on analysing the validity of the applicant's consent to the sexual acts in the light of her slight intellectual disability. In that context, the nature of the alleged sexual abuse against the applicant had been such that the existence of useful detection and reporting mechanisms had been fundamental to the effective implementation of the relevant criminal laws and to her access to appropriate remedies.

### **G.U. v. Turkey (no. 16143/10)**

18 October 2016

The case concerned a complaint by a young woman (G.U.), a minor at the relevant time, alleging that she had been raped and sexually assaulted by her step-father (M.S.), then aged 62. The applicant complained in particular of the lack of an effective procedure. She also alleged that she had been the victim of a crime that had remained unpunished, and criticised the facts that she was obliged to give evidence in open court and that the report by the Institute of Forensic Medicine suggested that she might have consented to the acts of which she complained.

The Court held that there had been a **violation of Article 3** (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment/lack of an effective investigation) **and Article 8** (right to respect for private and family life) of the Convention. Without expressing an opinion on the step-father's guilt, it found in particular that the competent authorities failed to explore the available possibilities for establishing all the surrounding circumstances, and did not taken into consideration the applicant's particular vulnerability and the special psychological factors involved in the rape of minors committed in a family setting.

### **M.P. v. Finland (no. 36487/12)**

15 December 2016

This case concerned the applicant's conviction for defamation for expressing concerns to a social worker that her daughter might have been sexually abused by her (the child's) father. This was the second time the applicant had raised such concerns and came after a police investigation into the allegations had concluded that there was no evidence of any crime.

The Court held that there had been a **violation of Article 10** (freedom of expression) of the Convention. It found in particular that the Finnish authorities had not struck a fair balance between the need to protect the applicant's daughter against the risk of potentially serious harm and the need to protect the father against being wrongly suspected of child abuse. Indeed, it had been disproportionate to pursue criminal charges against the applicant and convict her of defamation in the context of her case, namely a confidential telephone conversation between her and a social worker.

### **V.C. v. Italy (no. 54227/14)**

1 February 2018

The case concerned a person who, as a minor suffering from alcohol and drug addiction, had been the victim of a child prostitution ring and gang rape. She complained that the Italian authorities had not taken all the necessary steps to protect her as a minor and the victim of a prostitution ring.

The Court held that there had been a **violation of Articles 3** (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) **and 8** (right to respect for private life) of the Convention, finding that the Italian authorities had not acted with the necessary diligence and had not taken all reasonable measures in good time to prevent the abuses suffered by the applicant. It noted in particular that, although the criminal courts had acted promptly, the Youth Court and the social services had not taken any immediate protective measures, even though they had known that the applicant (aged 15 at the time) was vulnerable and that proceedings concerning her sexual exploitation and an investigation into the gang rape were ongoing.

### **A and B v. Croatia (no. 7144/15)**

20 June 2019

The first applicant complained on behalf of her daughter, the second applicant, who was born in 2009, that the domestic authorities had failed to provide a proper response to the allegations that the father had sexually abused the child and that they had had no effective remedy for that issue.

In this case, owing to the relationship between the first applicant and the alleged perpetrator and a potential conflict of interests between the two applicants, the Court asked the Croatian Bar Association to appoint a lawyer to make submissions on behalf of the child. It further held that the first applicant could not claim to be a victim of a violation of her rights. Lastly, the Court held that there had been **no violation** of the procedural aspects **of Article 3** (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) of the Convention and **no violation of Article 8** (right to respect for private life) of the Convention, finding that the Croatian authorities had fulfilled their obligations to investigate. The Court noted in particular that the authorities had taken steps to look into what had been conflicting accounts of a situation involving allegations by a mother of the sexual abuse of their child by the father.

### **Stankūnaitė v. Lithuania**

29 October 2019

This case concerned complaints by the applicant about care decisions related to her daughter and the fact that her daughter was not returned to her even though the criminal investigation against her (her former partner had accused her of being complicit in the sexual molestation of their daughter) had been discontinued. She also complained about the delays in the actual return of her daughter after the court order in her favour.

The Court held that there had been **no violation of Article 8** (right to respect for private and family life) of the Convention in respect of the applicant. It found in particular that the Lithuanian authorities had acted with the requisite diligence in the care proceedings: they had had first to wait for the applicant to be cleared of involvement in the alleged sexual molestation of her daughter. Once that obstacle was out of the way and the courts had examined what was in the best interests of the child they had ordered her return to the applicant. The authorities had then faced obstruction from other family members in handing the child over but had eventually successfully taken the appropriate measures to deal with what was an extremely difficult situation.

### **X and Others v. Bulgaria (no. 22457/16)**

2 February 2021 (Grand Chamber)

This case concerned allegations of sexual abuse perpetrated against three children in an orphanage in Bulgaria before their adoption by an Italian couple in June 2012. The applicants also submitted that the Bulgarian authorities had failed in their obligations to protect them from such treatment and subsequently to conduct an effective investigation.

The Court found that the applicants, owing to their young age and their status as children left without parental care and placed in an institution, had been in a particularly vulnerable situation, and that the sexual abuse and violence to which they had allegedly been subjected, if established, had been sufficiently serious to come within the scope of application of Article 3 (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) of the

Convention. In the present case, the Court held that there had been **no violation of the substantive limb of Article 3**, finding, in particular, that it did not have sufficient information to conclude that the Bulgarian authorities knew or ought to have known of a real and immediate risk to the applicants of being subjected to ill-treatment, such as to give rise to an obligation to take preventive operational measures to protect them against such a risk. The Court held, however, that there had been a **violation of the procedural limb of Article 3**. In this respect, it considered in particular that the investigating authorities, who had not made use of the available investigation and international cooperation mechanisms, had not taken all reasonable measures to shed light on the facts of the present case and had not undertaken a full and careful analysis of the evidence before them. In the Court's view, the omissions observed appeared sufficiently serious for it to be considered that the investigation carried out had not been effective for the purposes of Article 3 of the Convention, interpreted in the light of the other applicable international instruments and, in particular, the Council of Europe "Lanzarote Convention"<sup>9</sup>.

### **N.C. v. Turkey (no. 40591/11)**

9 February 2021

This case concerned shortcomings in the criminal proceedings against a number of individuals charged with prostitution offences in relation to a fourteen-year-old girl. The applicant complained in particular that she had received no professional support during the proceedings, that she had been humiliated before the defendants and that she had been threatened by them with the knowledge of the judicial authorities. She also complained that two charges had been struck out as being time-barred, and that the defendants' sentences had been mitigated on the grounds of good conduct at the hearings. She further considered that she had not been protected during the proceedings, and that those proceedings had been ineffective on account of both their length and the outcome.

The Court held that there had been a **violation of Articles 3** (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) **and 8** (right to respect for private and family life) of the Convention, finding that the national authorities' conduct had been inconsistent with the obligation to protect a child who had been the victim of sexual exploitation and abuse. It found in particular that the lack of support for the applicant, the failure to protect her against the defendants, the unnecessary reconstruction of the rape incidents, the repeated medical examinations, the lack of a calm and secure environment at the hearings, the assessment of the victim's consent, the excessive length of the proceedings, and, lastly, the fact that two of the charges had become time-barred, amounted to a serious case of secondary victimisation of the applicant. In the Court's view, the way in which the proceedings had been conducted had not ensured effective application of the criminal law to the infringement of the values protected by Articles 3 and 8 of the Convention.

### **R.B. v. Estonia (no. 22597/16)**

22 June 2021

This case concerned the failure to conduct an effective criminal investigation into the applicant's allegations of sexual abuse by her father. The applicant was about four and a half years old at the relevant time. Her complaint concerned procedural deficiencies in the criminal proceedings as a whole, including the failure of the investigator to inform her of her procedural rights and duties, and the reaction of the Supreme Court to that failure resulting in the exclusion of her testimony and the acquittal of her father on procedural grounds.

The Court held that there had been significant flaws in the domestic authorities' procedural response to the applicant's allegation of rape and sexual abuse by her father, which had not sufficiently taken into account her particular vulnerability and

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<sup>9</sup> [Council of Europe's Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#) ("the Lanzarote Convention"), adopted by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers on 12 July 2007.

corresponding needs as a young child so as to afford her effective protection as the alleged victim of sexual crimes. Accordingly, without expressing an opinion on the guilt of the accused, the Court concluded that the manner in which the criminal-law mechanisms as a whole had been implemented in the present case, resulting in the disposal of the case on procedural grounds, had been defective to the point of constituting a **violation of** the respondent State's positive obligations under **Articles 3** (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) **and 8** (right to respect for private and family life) of the Convention.

### **J.C. and Others v. Belgium (no. 11625/17)**

12 October 2021

The applicants in this case were 24 Belgian, French and Dutch nationals, who alleged that they had been victims of sexual abuse by Catholic priests when they were children. The case concerned in particular an action for compensation brought by the applicants against the Holy See and against a number of leaders of the Catholic Church of Belgium and Catholic associations, claiming that damage had been caused by the structurally deficient manner in which the State had dealt with the problem of sexual abuse in the Church. As the Belgian courts had found that they did not have jurisdiction in respect of the Holy See, the applicants argued that they had been deprived of access to a court.

The Court held that there had been **no violation of Article 6 § 1** (right to a fair trial) of the Convention in the present case. Considering that the dismissal of the proceedings by the Belgian courts in declining jurisdiction to hear the tort case brought by the applicants against the Holy See had not departed from the generally recognised principles of international law in matters of State immunity, it found that the restriction on the right of access to a court could not therefore be regarded as disproportionate to the legitimate aims pursued.

### **A.P. v. the Republic of Moldova (no. 41086/12)**

26 October 2021

This case concerned the effectiveness of an investigation conducted by the Moldovan authorities into allegations of sexual abuse perpetrated by a twelve-year-old boy on the applicant, who was five years old at the time.

The Court held that there had been a **violation of Article 3** (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) of the Convention, finding that the investigation carried out by the authorities in the present case had been ineffective in that it had not been thorough and had taken no account of the applicant's particular vulnerability. The Court noted, in particular, that the applicant had not been accompanied by a welfare assistant, a psychologist or any other kind of specialist during the preliminary investigation. It had already had occasion to rule that such a finding was sufficient to conclude that a child having allegedly suffered sexual abuse had not, having regard to his specific vulnerability, been adequately provided for during the domestic proceedings. The lack of any assistance for the applicant, a minor, during his interview with the authorities was especially unfortunate as there was nothing to suggest that the police officer who had interviewed him had had any special training for such situations.

### **Loste v. France**

3 November 2022

The applicant in this case complained of failings by the child welfare service (ASE) regarding the follow-up of her placement with a foster family at the age of five. She submitted in particular that she had not had an effective remedy by which to obtain a determination of the ASE's liability, on account of the unduly restrictive or even erroneous application by the administrative courts of the statutes of limitation. She also argued that the ASE had not protected her against the sexual abuse to which she had been subjected from 1976 to 1988 by her foster father. She lastly complained of the failure by the family, who were Jehovah's Witnesses, to comply with the undertaking they had given in the form of a religious neutrality clause.

The Court held that there had been a **violation of Article 13** (right to an effective remedy) **taken in conjunction with Articles 3** (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) **and 9** (freedom of thought, conscience and religion) of the Convention, finding that, in the very specific circumstances of the present case, the domestic courts had displayed excessive formalism, the effects of which had been incompatible with the right to an effective remedy. In that regard, the Court noted in particular that the administrative courts had dismissed the applicant's action for damages against the *département* of Tarn-et-Garonne on the basis of the four-year limitation rule. The Court also held that there had been a **violation of Article 3** of the Convention, finding that the French authorities had failed in their obligation to protect the applicant against the ill-treatment to which she had been subjected by her foster father while in foster care. In that regard, it observed in particular that the competent authorities had not put in place the preventive measures provided for by the legislation in force at the relevant time in order to detect a risk of ill treatment, and found that the lack of regular follow-up by the ASE, combined with a lack of communication and cooperation between the competent authorities, should be considered to have significantly influenced the course of events. Lastly, the Court held that there had been a **violation of Article 9** of the Convention, finding that the national authorities had not taken the measures required of them, pursuant to their specific positive obligations in the present case, to ensure that the foster family observed the religious neutrality clause in which they had undertaken to respect the religious views of the applicant and of her birth family.

#### **B v. Russia (no. 36328/20)**<sup>10</sup>

7 February 2023

In 2019, at the age of 12, the applicant, who was living with a guardian after the death of her mother, revealed that she had been subjected to sexual abuse between the ages of 7-10. The case concerned her participation in the ensuing investigation and trial in the criminal proceedings against her alleged abusers. She complained that her repeated interviews and direct contact with her alleged abusers during the proceedings had caused her severe stress and mental hardship, leading to serious psychological disorders, and resulting in her re-traumatisation.

The Court held that there had been a **violation of Article 3** (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) of the Convention, finding that the respondent State had failed to protect the applicant's personal integrity in the course of the criminal proceedings, which had led to her secondary victimisation. The Court noted in particular that the authorities had displayed utter disregard for the suffering of the applicant who, the Court further observed, was acutely vulnerable on account of her young age, tragic family situation, placement in an orphanage and alleged sexual abuse.

#### **E.L. v. Lithuania (no. 12471/20)**

9 April 2024<sup>11</sup>

The applicant in this case alleged that he had been sexually abused by three older boys when placed in a children's home between 2008 and 2013. He complained in particular that the national authorities had failed to effectively investigate his allegations of abuse.

The Court held that there had been a **violation of Article 3** (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) of the Convention in respect of the applicant, finding that the Lithuanian State had failed in its Convention duty to effectively investigate the applicant's allegation of ill-treatment. It noted in particular that both the prosecuting authorities and the courts had been reluctant to order or to explicitly address the need for a comprehensive psychiatric and psychological examination in connection with the alleged abuse, despite the applicant's requests.

<sup>10</sup>. On 16 September 2022 the Russian Federation ceased to be a Party to the Convention.

<sup>11</sup>. This judgment will become final in the circumstances set out in Article 44 § 2 of the [Convention](#).

See also, recently:

**[Y.P. v. Bulgaria \(no. 23614/20\)](#)**

17 May 2022 (Committee judgment)

## Violence in school premises

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**[Kayak v. Turkey](#)**

10 July 2012

This case concerned the murder of the applicants' 15-year-old son and brother, who had been stabbed in front of a school by a pupil. The applicants alleged in particular that the boy had died as a result of negligence on the part of the school administration, and they also complained about the length of the administrative compensation proceedings.

The Court reiterated in this case that school authorities had an essential role to play in the protection of the health and well-being of pupils – having regard to their particular vulnerability due to their age – and a primary duty to protect them against any form of violence to which they might be subjected while placed under the school's supervision. Whilst the teaching staff could not be expected to watch each pupil all the time, movements inside and outside the school required heightened surveillance. In the instant case, the Court noted in particular that the school's administration had unsuccessfully reported security issues to the competent authorities, even calling for police assistance. It held that there had been a **violation of Article 2** (right to life) of the Convention, finding that, in the circumstances of the case, the Turkish authorities had failed in their duty to ensure supervision of the school's premises. The Court further held that there had been a **violation of Article 6 § 1** (right to a fair hearing within a reasonable time) of the Convention, on account of the excessive length of the compensation proceedings which had lasted for five years and three months.

**[Derenik Mkrtchyan and Gayane Mkrtchyan v. Armenia](#)**

30 November 2021

This case concerned the death of the applicants' grandson and son respectively, at the age of ten in 2010 following a fight in the classroom in his school. It also concerned the subsequent investigation and legal proceedings. The applicants claimed, in particular, that the boy's death had been a result of a failure by the school authorities to protect him while under their control and that the subsequent investigation had been ineffective.

The Court held that there had been **no violation** of the substantive limb of **Article 2** (right to life) of the Convention, finding that there was insufficient evidence to conclude that the school's authorities had failed to comply with their obligation under that provision to provide the requisite standard of protection for the boy's life. It held, however, that there had been a **violation** of the procedural limb of **Article 2**, finding that the investigation into the boy's death had fallen short of the requirements of that provision.

## Further readings

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See, in particular:

- **[Handbook on European law relating to the rights of the child](#)**, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and Council of Europe, June 2015
- Internet site of the Council of Europe on **[Children's Rights](#)**

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