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Implementing the Lanzarote Convention: The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Combating Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Tunisia and Finland

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Master in International Studies

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SOCIOLOGIA
E POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS

Department of History

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Acknowledgements

A few years ago, while working in my previous career as a pediatric occupational therapist and volunteering internationally with children, I witnessed how fragile a safe childhood can be. The sense of helplessness I felt within existing systems left me with a strong desire to better understand the broader context of international structures and child protection. This passion eventually led me to the Master's Programme in International Studies — and ultimately, to the topic of this dissertation.

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This work is dedicated to all the heroes who dedicate their lives to protecting children from sexual exploitation and abuse. Above all, it is dedicated to the survivors.

Resumo

A exploração e abuso sexual de crianças constitui uma séria violação dos direitos das crianças e exige uma ação coordenada a nível nacional e internacional. Esta dissertação examina o papel das organizações da sociedade civil (OSCs) na implementação da Convenção de Lanzarote — a Convenção do Conselho da Europa sobre a Proteção das Crianças contra a Exploração e Abuso Sexual — através de um estudo comparativo entre a Tunísia e a Finlândia. O estudo analisa como as OSCs contribuem para a implementação da Convenção, cooperam com as instituições estatais e os desafios e obstáculos que afetam o seu envolvimento. A investigação utiliza uma abordagem comparativa qualitativa baseada em entrevistas e análise documental. As dinâmicas entre Estado e sociedade civil são examinadas à luz da teoria crítica. As OSCs em ambos os países desempenham um papel essencial na prestação de serviços de prevenção, na partilha de conhecimento especializado, na advocacia junto dos órgãos governamentais e na responsabilização do Estado. No entanto, os contextos estruturais e políticos moldam o nível e a eficácia do seu envolvimento. O estudo conclui que financiamento adequado, ambientes políticos favoráveis e planos de implementação formais e plataformas de cooperação são fatores essenciais para a atuação eficaz das OSCs. Adicionalmente, o estudo enfatiza a necessidade de considerar os contextos socioculturais na abordagem da violência sexual contra crianças, bem como os riscos e oportunidades colocados pela crescente prevalência das plataformas online e da inteligência artificial no combate a essa forma de violência. Os resultados destacam o papel crítico das OSCs em garantir que os compromissos internacionais de proteção infantil se traduzam em ações concretas e sustentáveis.

Palavras-chave: exploração e abuso sexual de crianças, direitos das crianças, organizações da sociedade civil, Convenção de Lanzarote, Conselho da Europa, Tunísia, Finlândia

Abstract

Child sexual exploitation and abuse is a serious violation of children's rights and requires coordinated international and national action. This thesis examines the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in implementing the Lanzarote Convention—the Council of Europe's Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse—through a comparative study of Tunisia and Finland. It explores how CSOs contribute to the Convention's implementation, cooperate with state institutions, and the challenges and obstacles that affect their involvement. The study uses a qualitative comparative approach based on interviews and document analysis. State-civil society dynamics are examined through the lens of critical theory. CSOs in both countries play an essential role in providing preventive services, contributing expertise, advocating to governmental actors, and holding states accountable. However, the structural and political contexts shape the level and effectiveness of their engagement. The study finds that adequate funding, supportive political environment, and formal implementation plans and platforms for cooperation are essential factors for effective CSO contribution. Additionally, the study emphasizes the need to consider the socio-cultural contexts in addressing sexual violence against children, as well as the risks and opportunities posed by the growing prevalence of online platforms and artificial intelligence in combating such violence. The findings emphasize the critical role of CSOs in ensuring that international child protection commitments translate into concrete, sustainable action.

Keywords: child sexual exploitation and abuse, child rights, civil society organizations, Lanzarote Convention, Council of Europe, Tunisia, Finland

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List of Acronyms

AI - Artificial Intelligence

African Union – AU

CSA – Child Sexual Abuse

CSE – Child Sexual Exploitation

CSO – Civil Society Organization

CSAM – Child Sexual Abuse Material

OCSE – Online Child Sexual Exploitation

CoE - Council of Europe

EU - European Union

ICT - Information and Communications Technology

ILO - International Labour Organization

MENA – Middle East and North Africa

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

UN - United Nations

UNCRC - United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNICEF - United Nations Children's Fund

1. Introduction

1.1. "Every Day, Across All Countries": The Global Reality of Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

“Every day, across all countries and levels of society, millions of girls and boys face the alarmingly common childhood experience of sexual abuse and exploitation”

- Amina J. Mohammed, the United Nations Deputy Secretary-General, in her 2018 remarks on child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Sexual exploitation and abuse of children are among the most serious violations of children’s rights and forms of violence against them (Council of Europe, 2007). They are crimes that cross national borders. The rapid growth of online platforms and artificial intelligence has made online sexual exploitation and abuse an increasingly urgent global problem (UNICEF, 2024; WeProtect Global Alliance, 2021). The international system seeks to ensure children’s right to protection. The foundation of these efforts is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. Later, it has been complemented by several international conventions and protocols. The Council of Europe’s Lanzarote Convention focuses specifically on protecting children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. Yet, despite these instruments, the problem persists, indicating that current measures remain insufficient.

Civil society has a central role in democratic governance. They intervene when governments fail to fulfil their obligations for their citizens, act as watchdogs holding the state actors accountable for their actions, and advocate for the ones under oppression (Adorno, 1973; Habermas, 1996; Oluwaseun, 2017). The Lanzarote Convention acknowledges the important role of civil society in combating child sexual exploitation and abuse, especially in preventing offences, promoting cooperation, and protecting survivors (Council of Europe, 2019c). This study aims to highlight the role of civil society organizations: the areas in which they contribute to the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention, the realities of their cooperation with the state, and the challenges and barriers they face. This will be done by focusing on two differing national contexts: Tunisia and Finland. While Finland is a member of the Council of Europe, Tunisia is not and became in 2019 the first country in the MENA region to ratify the Lanzarote Convention. The position of Tunisian civil society was strengthened following the 2011 revolution, but it now faces increasing governmental restrictions and a shrinking civic space (Ben Néfissa, 2019; Sadiki & Saleh, 2024) Finnish civil society has traditionally worked in close cooperation with the state (Cepel, 2012); however, it has recently faced growing pressure to fill gaps in state service provision with decreasing resources (Bontenbal & Lillie, 2022). While sexual exploitation and abuse of children persist in both countries, the nature of the crimes and the capacity of civil society organizations to respond are

shaped by context-specific factors. By comparing these cases, the study aims to form a more comprehensive picture and identify similarities and differences in how contextual factors shape the implementation of an international convention against sexual exploitation and abuse of children. This dissertation is part of the master's programme in International Studies at the Iscte - University Institute of Lisbon. It contributes to the field by analysing the interaction between international legal frameworks, national authorities, and civil society actors in the governance of children's rights, with a particular focus on the role of civil society organizations. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to a more effective protection of children's rights.

1.2. Research Questions and Overview of the Study

This study seeks to answer three research questions. It explores, first, how do civil society organizations engage in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention in Tunisia and Finland; second, how do civil society organizations cooperate with state institutions, and how is this cooperation coordinated; and third, what challenges and obstacles affect the involvement of civil society organizations in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention. By focusing on these questions, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of CSOs in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention, the dynamics and division of responsibilities between the state and CSOs, as well as the obstacles and challenges that limit the work of CSOs in combating the sexual exploitation and abuse of children. These research questions are examined using qualitative research methods. This study adopts a comparative approach between two case countries. The main method of data collection is semi-structured interviews, complemented by document analysis of relevant reports and to support the interview data. In addition to this, the analysis builds on the Lanzarote Convention, as well as other reports of the Lanzarote Committee, that discuss the role of civil society.

This thesis consists of seven chapters. Chapter 2 seeks to provide a theoretical background to lay the foundation for examining the role of CSOs in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention. The chapter is divided into four parts. The first part provides an overview of the international child protection framework, while the second part examines the Lanzarote Convention in more detail. The third part defines key concepts and reviews relevant literature on child sexual exploitation and abuse, addressing current phenomena such as online offences, the role of artificial intelligence, and context-specific factors' influence on the issue. The fourth part explores the role of civil society, analysing the dynamics between civil society actors and the state through the theoretical lens of critical theory scholars, including Jürgen Habermas and Theodor W. Adorno. This part also considers how the role of civil society is addressed in the Lanzarote Convention. Chapter 3 introduces the two cases under study – Tunisia and Finland. For both countries, the chapter presents the state of child protection and the situation regarding the sexual exploitation and abuse of children. It also provides an overview of civil society in each country to contextualize the later analysis of CSOs'. Chapter 4 introduces the research questions and the methodological framework, including the development of the interview guide and the processes of data collection and analysis. Findings of the study will be presented in Chapter 5. The chapter is divided into three parts, with each part addressing one of the research questions in detail. Chapter 6 summarizes the main findings, followed by Chapter 7, which presents the final conclusions.

2. Theoretical Background

This chapter introduces the main concepts and frameworks for this study. It begins by presenting the international child protection framework, including key international instruments that aim to protect children from all harm, including sexual abuse and exploitation. The role of the Council of Europe and its Lanzarote Convention will also be presented. This is followed by part that presents central definitions of child sexual abuse (CSA) and child sexual exploitation (CSE) discusses current academic debated over the topic. The chapter then addresses the role of the civil society, especially non-governmental organizations (NGOs), using critical theory as a framework to analyse their impact and structural obstacles challenging their actions.

2.1. International Child Protection Framework

The international child protection framework consists of structures, functions, and mechanisms designed to achieve specific child protection objectives (Radford, 2015). Key international instruments include the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the UN Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (2000), the ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (1999) and the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and children (2000)(ECPAT International, 2020). Furthermore, the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development addressed the need to “end abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and all forms of violence and torture against children” (United Nations, 2025). In addition to these, regional instruments exist, such as the European Union Directive 2011/93/EU on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

2.2. The Council of Europe and the Lanzarote Convention

The Council of Europe (CoE), founded in 1949, is an international organisation dedicated to promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law. It has a common legal space, centred on the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), among its 46 member states. Additionally, CoE has over 200 legally binding international treaties aimed at protecting human rights (Council of Europe, n.d.). Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027) identifies the elimination of all forms of violence against children—including sexual exploitation and abuse - as a key priority for Council of Europe’s action (Council of Europe, 2022b).

The Lanzarote Convention is the Council of Europe’s Convention on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. The convention was adopted in 2007 and entered into force in 2010. It has since been signed by all Council of Europe member states. Of non-members of the

Council of Europe, Russian Federation and Tunisia have also signed and ratified the Convention. The Lanzarote Convention sets a minimum consensus on offences that all State Parties must criminalize, while encouraging the adoption of higher standards within domestic legal framework. This harmonisation of legal standards seeks to prevent offenders choosing countries with more permissive laws to improve data comparability at national and regional levels and to facilitate international cooperation. The offences that are covered in the Lanzarote Convention will be addressed below in a chapter discussing different forms of child sexual abuse and exploitation.

2.3. Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

2.3.1. Definitions

Perspectives and definitions of the various forms of child sexual abuse (CSA) and child sexual exploitation (CSE) have varied over time and differences persist (Beckett, 2017). There is unclarity on the substantial body of literature related to the topic (Beckett and Pearce, 2018). Child sexual abuse (CSA) means engaging in sexual activities with a child that is below the age of consent or when acts involve use of coercion, force, threats, abuse of authority, trust, or the child's vulnerability, such as disability or dependence (Council of Europe, 2007). Sexual abuse is considered child sexual exploitation (CSE) when financial benefit or promised benefit is included, such as sexual solicitation and child sexual exploitation through prostitution (Council of Europe, 2007). Therefore, the notion of exchange is what distinguishes the concept of child sexual exploitation (CSE) from child sexual abuse (CSA) (Radford et al, 2015). Sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse involving an actual or implied exchange, where either the victim or perpetrator receives something in return for engaging in sexual activity, or for economic or social advantage of the perpetrator (Pearce, 2017). Such actions are defined as sexual exploitation regardless of the child's possible consent or who initiates or solicits the contact (McVeigh and Heward-Belle, 2024). However, such distinction and focus on exchange has been criticized, as abuse can also involve various forms of exchange, and exploitation can occur without any exchange (Bernard, 2017). Instead, Beckett and Pierce (2018) argue for a more comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of the phenomenon, recognizing exchange as just one of the possible features of a sexually abuse experience. Essential for the context of this study is that the Lanzarote Convention covers both, sexual abuse, and exploitation of children.

CSA and CSE affect everyone, but certain factors increase a child's vulnerability (Bernard, 2017). Poverty and overall weak socioeconomic conditions are significant risk factors (Ali et al., 2021; Bernard, 2017; ECPAT International, 2020). Cases vary from children being sexually molested by someone from their home or community environment to sexual slavery by organized groups and sexual violence in war contexts (Radford et al., 2015). Adverse childhood experiences and family dysfunction increase the risk, regardless of socio-economic background (Pearce, 2017; ECPAT International, 2021). Children with

disabilities face a heightened risk of exploitation (Smeaton, 2017). Gender is a significant factor in the sexual exploitation and abuse of children. Globally, girls are disproportionately presented among victims of CSE (Coy, 2017). However, societal norms may influence data collection, and offences towards boys often remain unrecognized and hidden (Coy, 2017; Radford et al., 2015).

2.3.2. Different Forms of Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

Next, different forms of child sexual exploitation and abuse will be addressed, with a particular focus on those forms that the Lanzarote Convention requires to be criminalized. The debate on the definitions of its most common forms and the rising prevalence of online child sexual exploitation (OCSE) will be addressed. The Lanzarote Convention’s Articles 18-23 refer to several forms of sexual offence: child sexual abuse, child prostitution, child pornography, participation of a child in pornographic performances, corruption of children and solicitation of children for sexual purposes (Council of Europe, 2007). More recent publications (see e.g., Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2022) highlight that, in some cases, the terminology used in the Lanzarote Convention is not aligned with current terminology guidelines. Since the establishment of the Convention, Council of Europe has published complementary and explanatory reports and publications, for example on terminology and implementation (see, e.g. Council of Europe, 2019; Council of Europe, 2022a), that include additional descriptions to the definitions. Forms of CSA and CSE that the Lanzarote Convention requires all member states to criminalize are presented in the following figure, adapted to include both the original terms and those updated to reflect current terminology guidelines.

Table 1. Different Forms of Child Sexual Exploitation in the Lanzarote Convention

Act	Lanzarote Convention’s Article
Child Sexual Abuse	Article 18
Child Prostitution / Child Sexual exploitation through prostitution / Child Trafficking	Article 19
Child Pornography / Child Sexual Abuse Material	Article 20
Participation of a Child in Pornographic Performances / Performance of Child Sexual Abuse	Article 21
Corruption of Children	Article 22
Solicitation of Children for Sexual Purposes / Grooming	Article 23

(Council of Europe, 2007; Council of Europe, 2019a; ECPAT International, 2016; Ministry of Social Affairs and Healt, 2022.)

Correct and clear definitions are crucial, as inappropriate use of terminology over the subject may lead to minimizing the severity of sexual exploitation and abuse of children (INTERPOL, n.d.). The ECPAT International initiated an Interagency Working Group (2016) to develop “the Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse”, also known as

the Luxembourg Guidelines. The goal was to provide clarity and alignment in terms and definitions related to the sexual exploitation and abuse of children, thereby supporting more effective international child protection efforts. The working group included several international actors, such as INTERPOL, the Council of Europe, different UN agencies and multiple civil society organizations. There has been significant debate about the terms 'child prostitution' and 'child pornography.' The term 'child prostitution' is problematic because it may be associated with assumptions of child's own responsibility. Therefore, terms like 'exploitation of children in prostitution' are preferred, as they underscore the involuntary nature of these crimes (ECPAT International, 2016). The term 'child pornography' has faced significant criticism since pornography typically refers to legal and consensual sexual content created for adult entertainment. Using that term for materials depicting the sexual abuse of children diminishes the gravity of such crimes (Interpol, n.d.). The term 'child pornography' should be avoided when possible, and 'Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM)' used instead (ECPAT International, 2016). Grooming is a widely used concept (see e.g. Ali et al., 2021; Atabekova and Filippov, 2018) for solicitation of children for sexual purposes using online platforms. This solicitation may further lead to sexual activities online or in person (ECPAT International, 2016). It is a manipulative tactic in which predators gain a child's trust through flattery and deception to facilitate exploitation (Ali et al., 2021).

2.3.3. Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Artificial Intelligence

A major focus of the academic debate and policy discussions regarding the sexual exploitation and abuse of children has been the role of ICT-facilitated and online threats (see, e.g., Atabekova & Filippov, 2018; Ali et al., 2021; Council of Europe, 2017; Council of the European Union, n.d.; Midani et al., 2024). The fast development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has led to new forms of sexual exploitation and abuse of children (ECPAT International, 2016). The majority of the population uses the internet, which increases the scale and complexity of the challenge of online CSE (Wagner et al, 2018, as cited in McVeigh and Heward-Belle, 2024). Europol (n.d.) identifies key threats in child sexual exploitation as online solicitation, sexual extortion, live streaming of abuse, peer-to-peer networks, anonymised access networks, and offender networking with forensic awareness—all linked to online or ICT-facilitated environments. According to the literature, the most prevalent forms of ICT-facilitated child sexual exploitation include online “grooming” or solicitation of children, sexual extortion, the distribution of self-generated sexual material on social media, and the streaming of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, (Ali et al., 2021; Atabekova and Filippov, 2018). With widespread access to global ICTs, offenses can occur across national and continental borders. Digital platforms increase opportunities for predators to reach children and facilitate the distribution of harmful content. This creates significant challenges in tracing offenders and those involved in the crimes (Ali et al., 2021). A significant increase in online CSE has occurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (McVeigh and Heward-Belle, 2024).

Artificial intelligence (AI) has an increasing role related to sexual exploitation and abuse of children. AI has a dual role: it can be used for both offensive and defensive purposes (Steel, 2024). AI technologies facilitate online criminality, for example by enable grooming and the creation of Child Sexual Exploitation Material (CSEM), such as deepfakes. Deepfakes are AI-created videos, images and audio that simulates realistic content. According to the European Commission's statement, approximately 98% of deepfakes consist of pornographic material (Negreiro, 2025). Simultaneously, AI's potential has also been recognised in prevention of offences, for example through tools to identify and remove child sexual abuse material (Steel, 2024; Valois et al., 2024) and in identifying offenders and analysing online environments with risks of CSE (Wolbers et al., 2025). Steel (2024) highlights the lack of sufficient research on the topic.

2.3.4. Impact of Contextual Factors

Child sexual abuse is a global phenomenon, affecting children in all cultures, societies, socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as religious- and non-religious groups (Attrash-Najjar & Katz, 2022; Sigad, 2024). Nevertheless, context shapes how child sexual exploitation and abuse are addressed in society. An important aspect is whether sexuality and sexual violence can be spoken openly about, without silencing, stigmatization, denial or taboos. McPherson et al. (2024) highlight how stigma and cultural taboos are based on society's norms, laws, and policies. According to the authors, the way child sexual exploitation is addressed is especially influenced by cultural and social norms related to sexuality. In line with this, Cromer and Goldsmith (2010) argue that misconceptions and stereotypes regarding the prevalence of cases, victims, and offenders hinder both the response and prevention of CSA and CSE. Limited knowledge and lack of the right tools and language to address the topic creates challenges for professionals to protect children and intervene in cases of abuse (Cromer and Goldsmith, 2010; Sigad, 2024). Thus, Cromer and Goldsmith (2010) emphasize the education and training of professionals as an essential part of prevention.

In contexts that are culturally or religiously conservative, discussions about sex are often considered taboos or stigmatizing, making it difficult to address the topic with children (McPherson et al, 2024; Sigad, 2024). According to Sigad (2024), closed religious communities may hinder discussion and awareness of child sexual abuse, to maintain community cohesion and protect individuals' reputations. Referring to Abdullah and Brown's study (2011, as cited in Attrash-Najjar & Katz, 2022) Attrash-Najjar and Katz discuss how collectivist cultures' traditions - such as community loyalty, family honour, and patriarchal hierarchy - make disclosure, reporting, and handling of sexual violence against children harder. Cultural-religious factors may as well create misconceptions and stereotypes about perpetrators and the survivors (McPherson et al., 2024). However, McPherson et al. (2024) emphasize that sexual violence against children should not be considered to be rooted in a certain cultural, religious or racial group. The authors further argue that the phenomenon cannot be examined without considering

socio-economic conditions, racism, and colonial legacies, which influence both individual and institutional levels.

2.4. Civil Society in the Implementation of the Lanzarote Convention

2.4.1. Introduction to Civil Society

Civil society has been described as the space between the state and the citizens, between the private and the public spheres (Baynes, 2002; Cepel, 2012). It encompasses organizations that are independent from the state. A distinguishing feature of civil society, in contrast to the state or the private sector, is its non-profit seeking nature. Relations between civil society actors and the state vary between countries depending on political, economic, socio-cultural and religious factors (Cepel, 2012). Gellner describes the dynamic of the civil society, and the state as follows:

“Civil society is that set of diverse non-governmental institutions which is strong enough to counterbalance the state and, while not preventing the state from fulfilling its role of keeper of the peace and arbitrator between major interests, can nevertheless prevent it from dominating and atomizing the rest of society" (Gellner, 1996, p.5, as cited in Baynes, 2002).

Keane highlights how differences in political systems lead to varying characteristics of civil society, for example, when comparing civil society in the Middle East and Scandinavia (1988, as cited in Cepel, 2012). Stable democracies tend to support a more participatory and active civil society (Cepel, 2012).

2.4.2. Critical Theory and Civil Society

To analyse civil society organizations (CSO) role in the implementation of Lanzarote Convention in Finland and Tunisia, this thesis adopts critical theory's perspectives. Critical theory stems from a tradition of social and political criticism. It began at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt in 1931, which led to the emergence of the so-called Frankfurt School. Despite divergent approaches and differing interpretations among critical theory scholars, a central feature of critical theory is its approach of 'immanent critique' - meaning to examine critically the institutions and practices of liberal society from within (Baynes, 2002). Critical theory provides important perspectives for understanding the relationship between civil society actors and the state. Critical theory addresses power structures and social barriers (Habermas, 1996) and emphasizes civil society's role in driving social change, both as an independent actor and in collaboration with the state (Oluwaseun, 2017). By challenging paternalistic, top-down, state-driven governance models, critical theory emphasizes the engagement of civil society in political and legal processes instead of relying only on state institutions, making civil society an essential part of democratic governance (Habermas, 1996).

Critical theory seeks social change through emancipation – the process leading to freedom of all human beings from structural oppression and other forms of injustice, of which the sexual abuse and exploitation of children is a severe example. Oluwaseun (2017) highlights the essential role of civil society organizations in the process of emancipation. They intervene when governments lack the commitment to meet human rights goals, act as watchdogs by holding governments accountable for their actions and serve as complementary actors by providing support where the state fails to fulfil citizens’ needs. Additionally, Oluwaseun highlights their role as advocates, further referring to Adorno’s (1973, as cited in Oluwaseun, 2017) statement: “Ending oppression demands giving a voice to the oppressed”. While civil society actors may act opposing the state policies, there is often strong interconnectedness and collaboration with governmental actors (Oluwaseun, 2017).

However, civil society actors may also face multiple structural obstacles that hinder their effectiveness. Habermas (1996) identifies such obstacles to be for example unequal access to information and knowledge production and limited participation in decision-making processes, as states hold concentrated power. Habermas challenges the idea that the state would remain neutral, meaning that state actions may serve the interests of dominant groups. Additionally, different actors have unequal possibilities to influence depending on their capacities to transform social power into political power. As Habermas states:

“The disposition over social power provides some parties with a privileged opportunity to influence the political process in such a way that their interests acquire a priority not in accord with equal civil rights” (Habermas, 1996, p.175).

This suggests that different civil society actors are not equally positioned in their ability to operate and influence, as this may depend on factors such as financial resources. Thus, while critical theory underscores the emancipatory potential of civil society, it also highlights the persistent inequalities that constrain its action.

2.4.3. Civil Society and the Lanzarote Convention

Civil society’s engagement in preventing and combating child sexual exploitation and abuse is crucial. The Lanzarote Convention recognizes civil society’s important role in its implementation in areas of prevention, promotion of cooperation, and protection (Council of Europe, 2019c). A report from Council of Europe’s conference on strengthening civil society participation in the implementation and monitoring of the Lanzarote Convention stated the following on the importance of civil society participation:

“Cooperation with civil society actors, particularly with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), is essential for the promotion, implementation and monitoring of the Lanzarote Convention at local, national and international levels. In addition, given the expertise and field experience of civil society actors, their involvement in the work of the Lanzarote Committee is

a key strength of the Lanzarote Convention’s monitoring mechanism and needs to be further developed” (Council of Europe, 2019c, p.2).

In terms of prevention, Article 9(2&4) notes that civil society should be involved in the elaboration and implementation of policies. In promotion of cooperation, civil society’s role is emphasized in the national multi-agency and multi-stakeholder cooperation in Article 10 (2b&3). When it comes to protection, civil society is seen to contribute to victim support and assistance, as outlined in Articles 14(2) and 31(5). Additionally, the Convention calls for civil society to be involved in monitoring its implementation. Article 40 (3) and the Committee’s Rules of Procedure (Council of Europe, 2023, Rules No. 26 and No. 27), support this by encouraging cooperation between the Lanzarote Committee and non-governmental actors. From a critical theory perspective, the involvement of civil society in the Lanzarote Convention can be seen as a way to challenge top-down government power, give a voice to vulnerable groups, such as children who have faced abuse, and ensure that promises made upon ratifying the Convention actually lead to real improvements.

3. National Contexts – Tunisia and Finland

This chapter seeks to provide an overview of the national contexts of Tunisia and Finland in relation to child sexual exploitation (CSE) and child sexual abuse (CSA). It presents both countries' engagement with the international child protection framework, especially the Council of Europe's Lanzarote Convention. The chapter explores the main problems related to CSE and CSA in each country. Finally, the role of civil society and NGOs in Tunisia and Finland will be addressed. The selection of the countries for comparison will be addressed more profoundly in the methodological chapter.

3.1. Tunisia

Tunisia is a North African country located between Algeria to the west and Libya to the southeast. Tunisia is considered a part of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. To provide an overview of the current state of sexual exploitation and abuse of children in Tunisia, the following sources were used: ECPAT International's report on CSE in the MENA region (2020), the Committee on the Rights of the Child's (CRC) 2023 report on violence against children in Tunisia, and a complementary report to the CRC's observations by the Association Tunisienne des Droits de l'Enfant (ATUDE) and ECPAT International (2019). Additionally, information was gathered from a report of ECPAT International's (2024) workshop, that brought together key Tunisian stakeholders engaged with the topic.

3.1.1. Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Tunisia

Current concerns regarding sexual exploitation and abuse of children in the MENA region include ongoing humanitarian crises, gender and minority discrimination, and the absence of comprehensive and reliable data on cases. The most prevalent forms of CSE in the region include exploitation in the context of travel and tourism, online CSE, child prostitution, or child sexual exploitation through prostitution, and child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM) (ECPAT International, 2020). More specifically in Tunisia, the prevalent concern is the widespread prevalence of violence against children, including domestic violence and sexual abuse (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2023b). Exploitation of children in the form of child trafficking for sexual purposes remain a significant issue. Tunisia is both a source and a destination country, particularly for girls in poverty and from rural areas (ATUDE and ECPAT International, 2019). Current economic hardship has increased the risk for CSE, following from more cases of domestic violence and children living on the streets. Additionally, informal work, such as domestic labour, has increased, further leading to cases of CSE (ECPAT International, 2024). Also, cases of CSE within families and childcare centres are a prevailing issue (ATUDE and ECPAT International, 2019), and the social stigma around sexual exploitation and abuse of children is rooted in societal norms and attitudes, preventing open dialogue and further leading to

underreporting of the incidents (Committee on the Rights of the Child's, 2023b; ECPAT International, 2024). Other concerns include the greater risks of minorities, such as LGBTQ+ individuals, the presence of CSE in the context of Tunisian travel and tourism, and the increasing online exploitation (ECPAT International, 2024). Additionally, some cases of "jihad ennikah", when girls are sent to prostitution for jihadists have been reported in Tunisia. While cases of CEFM are rare, for example in 2017 2% of girls were married before 18 (ATUDE and ECPAT International, 2019).

3.1.2. Child Protection in Tunisia

Within the international child protection framework, Tunisia entered the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992 and ratified the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography in 2002. The ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour was ratified in 2000 and the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and children in 2003 (ECPAT International, 2020). The UN Agenda for Sustainable Development, that addresses the need to “end abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and all forms of violence and torture against children”, Tunisia joined in 2015 (United Nations, 2025). Tunisia signed the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in 1995, yet has not ratified it (African Union, n.d.).

Tunisia is not a member of the Council of Europe. However, in 2011, Tunisia and the Council of Europe established a Neighbourhood Policy, making Tunisia a privileged partner in the region. This was followed by the Neighbourhood Partnership for 2015-2017, aimed at deepening the political dialogue & cooperation (Council of Europe, 2018). In 2019, Tunisia ratified the Lanzarote Convention as the first country from the MENA region (Council of Europe, 2019b). The partnership was extended, with the current Neighbourhood Partnership framework covering 2022-2025, to promote human rights based on European and international standards (Council of Europe, 2021). Part of the Neighbourhood Partnership is the support for the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention and aligning Tunisia's legislative and institutional frameworks, e.g. the Child Protection Code (Council of Europe, 2021). Since 2016, Tunisia has also been a member of the North-South Centre, the Council of Europe's instrument for multilateral cooperation between Europe and the South (Council of Europe, 2018). Tunisia cooperates also with the European Union, for instance the EU–Council of Europe's South Programme V (2022–2025) -an initiative with contribution of Council of Europe's Regional Office in Tunis – aiming to strengthen human rights, the rule of law, and democratic governance (Council of Europe & European Union, 2024).

At the domestic level, the revolutions in 2010-2011 laid foundations for Tunisia's democratic transition (ATUDE & ECPAT International, 2019). The democratic transition in Tunisia was notably successful, unlike in many countries in the region (Ben Néfissa, 2019). The new political system made space for protests, better established non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and broadening space for media and civic participation (Sadiki & Saleh, 2024). However, progress in democracy has been

considered limited due to political unrest, inequalities and increasing public concerns about governmental corruption (Chomiak, 2021). Sadiki and Saleh (2024) describe the current state as “degeneration of democratisation”, in Tunisia, and more broadly in the Arab region (p.9). Since 2021, President Saied has restructured the foundations of the political system, leaving the transitional phase "on hold" (p.15). The new Tunisian Constitution in 2014 established a system contributing to supporting fundamental rights through various institutions (Sadiki & Saleh, 2024). While many of these bodies have been created, some are still missing (Council of Europe, 2021). During the preparatory phase for joining the Lanzarote Convention, Tunisia implemented fundamental legislation that incorporated provisions to protect children from sexual violence and supported Tunisia’s accession – the law on preventing and combating human trafficking in 2016, and the law on eliminating violence against women in 2017 (Council of Europe, 2022c).

Upon ratifying the Lanzarote Convention, Tunisia stated that its domestic legislation aligns with the Convention’s requirements (Council of Europe, 2020, p.52). Tunisia has taken additional steps to implement the Convention, including establishing a national committee at the Ministry of Justice to monitor the implementation process, creating a legal medicine unit in a government hospital to provide medical and psychological care for child victims of sexual violence, and setting up specialized police and national guard units to handle cases of violence against women and children with specific procedures and standards (Council of Europe, 2022c). However, Tunisia’s legal framework for protecting children from sexual exploitation has been criticized as insufficiently strict, with inadequate support and consideration of child victims. There is lack of addressing specific issues, such as the prevalent sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism. Additionally, the legislation lacks provisions specifically targeting grooming, despite the requirements outlined in Article 23 of the Lanzarote Convention. Furthermore, vague and imprecise definitions of sexual violence in legislation have been recognized as obstacles to effective implementation. (ATUDE & ECPAT International, 2019). Overall, the legislation specifically protecting children from online exploitation has faced criticism for being insufficiently specific and fragmented across various legal documents (Martin et al., 2023; Midani et al., 2024). Also progress has occurred in some legislative measures, for example in including the repeal of the exemption from prosecution for perpetrators of sexual abuse who marry their victims and passing of a law to combat violence against women, which, among other measures, removed a provision from the Penal Code that had allowed rapists to avoid punishment by marrying their victims, including minors (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2023; ECPAT International, 2019).

3.1.3. Civil Society in Tunisia

The “Arab Spring” - widespread protests that began in late 2010 - had a significant impact on the mobilization of civil society across Arab countries, including Tunisia (Ben Nefissa, 2019; Sadiki & Saleh, 2024). According to Ben Néfissa (2019), Tunisian civil society only began to develop properly

after the revolution, due to freedoms of expression and publishing, and the right to organize demonstrations. Under the former authoritarian regime, civil society's possibilities to influence and act were restricted. Sadiki and Saleh (2024) highlight the significant role that civil society played in the transition period, alongside the governmental structures. The transition period was followed by a massive increase in the number of registered civil society organizations –approximately 24,000- as well as in foreign funding for Tunisian civil society, largely from the United States, the European Union, and European states (Henneberg, 2024; Sadiki & Saleh, 2024).

However, the current Tunisian administration has severely restricted civil society's space to operate. Sadiki and Saleh (2024, p.14) refer to an “immobilisation of civil society” under President Saied's governance. This can be observed, for instance, in the ongoing efforts to dismantle Law 2011-88 – a law that had a significant impact on opening the civic space in Tunisia - as well as in the strong critique towards foreign funding. The authors note that, since the 2021 events –described as the President's self-coup- the independence of civil society organizations has declined. In a study evaluating the development of civil society in Tunisia's democratization process between 2011-2021, Henneberg (2024) points out that the relationship and cooperation between civil society and the state began to weaken relatively soon after the revolution. Civil society actors faced opposition in various areas, including deliberate obstruction of registration of new organizations, and undermining their position as watchdogs, in economic development and even in non-political activities such as support for education. The study further describes how civil society organizations faced harassment, funding cuts and general unwillingness from the government to cooperate. Henneberg (2024) also addresses how domestic and global political developments have widened the division between foreign donors and civil society in Tunisia. In addition, the author emphasizes the unsustainability of civil society's reliance on foreign funding. Furthermore, a strengthening anti-Western atmosphere in Tunisia –as in the broader MENA region- has increased suspicion toward foreign funding and toward local organizations that receive such funding or have other foreign ties (Sadiki & Saleh, 2024; Henneberg, 2024).

3.2. Finland

Finland is a European Union member state located in Northern Europe, neighbouring Norway, Sweden, and Russia. To outline the current situation regarding the sexual exploitation and abuse of children in Finland, data was gathered from the Committee on the Rights of the Child's report: “Concluding Observations on the Combined Fourth to Sixth Periodic Reports of Finland” (2023a) and from a country overview report regarding sexual exploitation and sexual abuse in Finland (ECPAT International and the Lanzarote Committee, 2023).

3.2.1. Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Finland

Finland is ethnically rather homogeneous country, yet it includes a small population of Roma people and indigenous Sámi community, and the migrant population is rising. Finland is considered a highly industrialized country with one of the lowest rates of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the European Union. Its child protection standards are regarded as above average. (Council of Europe and ECPAT International, 2023). Nevertheless, there is high prevalence of sexual violence, including sexual harassment, rape, abuse, exploitation, and online offences (Council of Europe and ECPAT International, 2023; the Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2023a). Child sexual exploitation through prostitution and trafficking is a prevailing problem. For trafficked persons, Finland is usually a destination country. The victims, often asylum seekers or from minority groups, have normally been exploited abroad, during their journey or before arrival (Council of Europe and ECPAT International, 2023). Children in vulnerable situations, including those with disabilities, children of foreign origin, children from sexual or gender minority groups, children placed outside the home, asylum-seeking, refugee, and migrant children and children from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, are in a more vulnerable position to sexual exploitation and abuse (Council of Europe & ECPAT International, 2023; Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2023a) Finland's efforts to protect these groups have been criticized as insufficient (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2023a).

Recently acknowledged achievements are the adoption of the national plans for child protection, national curriculum-incorporated sex education and inclusion of sexual education in teacher's university degree. Additionally, there has been efforts in statistic collection and survey-based research. Nevertheless, the recent and specific data on CSE and CSA has been considered to remain insufficient. (Council of Europe and ECPAT International, 2023). A statement by the Finnish Central Union for Child Welfare in 2019 claimed that the necessary services and support for victims, as required by the Lanzarote Convention, were not being fulfilled. Subsequently, in 2022, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health developed a National Action Plan for the Lanzarote Convention for 2022-2025 (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2022). The Action Plan presents multiple actions under three themes: prevention, protection of children, and the promotion of national and international cooperation against sexual exploitation and sexual violence. It is linked to other national child-rights strategies, such as Finland's National Child Strategy and Non-Violent Childhoods Action Plan, as well as the Istanbul Convention - the Council of Europe's treaty on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. The plan encourages engagement of different stakeholders from the public, private and third sector, as well as cooperation among participants (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2022).

3.2.2. Child Protection in Finland

At the level of the international child protection framework, Finland joined the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991 and ratified the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution

and Child Pornography in 2012. Furthermore, Finland joined the ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour in 2000 and the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and children in 2006 (Council of Europe & ECPAT International (2023)). The UN Agenda for Sustainable Development Finland joined in 2015 (United Nations, 2025). Finland joined the Council of Europe in 1989 and ratified the Lanzarote Convention in 2011. In addition to these, as a member of the European Union, Finland is bound by the EU Directive 2011/93 on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children, which sets minimum standards for criminal law across EU member states (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2011).

Upon ratifying the Lanzarote Convention, Finland reported that its domestic legislation is aligned with the Convention's requirements, which were discussed earlier (Council of Europe, 2014). Recent progress and advancements in the legislation include the creating of the National Child Strategy and strengthened updates to the legislation on ICT-facilitated sexual exploitation (Council of Europe and ECPAT International, 2023; Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2023a). A lack of legislative framework supporting for multisectoral coordination has been noted (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2023a).

3.2.3. Civil Society in Finland

Civil society in Finland has had a historically strong role and close relationship with the state, since the establishment of the state in 1917. Different associations and unions had a strong influence during the nation-building and continue to have a significant role. A distinctive feature of the Finnish civil society is the broad registration of association, increasing the legitimacy of their role. Finland belongs to the framework of Nordic welfare states, where cooperation between the state and civil society is central to solving social problems. As the state encourages civil society participation, it also funds their services. (Cepel, 2012).

Bontenbal and Lillie (2022) studied the role of Finnish civil society organizations in relation to public services. Although their study focused on migrant labour market integration, the findings offer insights into the broader dynamics between civil society and the welfare state in Finland. According to their study, civil society organizations in Finland do not replace state-provided services or undermine state's responsibilities but play a complementary role by "compensating for gaps" in situations where official services cannot cover certain situations (p. 865). According to Bontenbal and Lillie, services provided by civil society organizations tend to be more small scale, short term and project based. However, they are often able to respond faster and more innovatively to new challenges than official systems. The authors describe this type of collaboration between the state and CSOs as a model where CSOs are co-producers (p.866).

Funding sources for civil society organizations in Finland are diverse (Bontenbal & Lillie 2022). In the study conducted in 2012, Cepel already noted the signs of decline of the welfare system, due to economic and social problems. Finland joined the EU in 1995, which increased funds to organizations

from the EU, further decreasing their direct funds from the Finnish state. Cepel argued that “high public spendings and EU harmonization process caused the Finnish state to take some measures and to limit the state support for civil society” (p. 347). More recently, in 2022, Bontenbal and Lillie addressed the existing concern about the growing pressure on civil society organizations to provide services, followed by the undermining of the Finnish welfare state’s universalism and the growth of the third sector.

3.2.4. Timeline of Child Protection Instruments’ Ratifications

Table 2 presents comparison of Tunisia and Finland regarding the ratification of key international child protection instruments, which were introduced in Chapter 2.1.

Table 2. Ratification of Child Protection Instruments, Tunisia and Finland

	Finland	Tunisia
(CRC) UN convention on the Rights of the Child	1991	1992
Optional Protocol to CRC	2012	2002
ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour	2000	2000
UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children	2006	2003
UN Agenda 2030	2015	2015
The Lanzarote Convention	2011	2019

Source: Council of Europe & ECPAT International (2023) ECPAT International. (2020)

Both Tunisia and Finland have ratified key international child protection instruments, which demonstrates a commitment to promoting children rights within the global framework. The timeline of ratifications reveals some differences. Tunisia ratified several UN Conventions earlier, whereas Finland –as a member of the Council of Europe– ratified the Lanzarote Convention before Tunisia.

4. Methodology

This chapter presents the methodological approach used to study how civil society organizations (CSOs) are involved in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention in Finland and Tunisia. The chapter outlines the development of the research questions, the justification for adopting a comparative approach, and how semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. It also explains the process of creating the interview guide, how participants were selected and how data was collected and analysed. Important ethical considerations are also discussed.

4.1. Research Questions

This study investigates the role of CSOs in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention, the Council of Europe's convention on protecting children against sexual exploitation and abuse. By focusing on Finland and Tunisia, this study aims to explore the impact of national context. The study focuses on analysing the role of CSOs in the implementation of the Convention, what challenges these actors face, and how they cooperate with government institutions. To guide the research, this study focuses on the following research questions:

1. How do civil society organizations engage in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention in Tunisia and Finland?
2. How do civil society organizations cooperate with state institutions, and how is this cooperation coordinated in Tunisia and Finland?
3. What challenges and obstacles affect the involvement of civil society organizations in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention in Tunisia and Finland?

By focusing on these research questions, this study aims to reveal both the commonalities and distinctions in CSO involvement in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention in two differing national contexts.

4.2. Qualitative Research Methodology

This thesis is conducted using qualitative research methodology, mainly semi-structured interviews. The study also utilizes additional data sources, reports and academic literature, to complement the analysis. A qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews was chosen for its flexibility, as it is a method that utilizes both open- and closed-ended questions and allows deepening the interview with follow-up questions (Adams, 2015). It is a flexible method to obtain in-depth knowledge on a chosen topic, while simultaneously ensuring that the focus and direction of the study remain controlled (Ruslin

et al., 2020). The method allows for adjustments to the interview guide along the process, enabling the exploration of new relevant questions that may arise throughout the process (Adams, 2015; Ruslin et al., 2020).

Adams (2015, p.494) highlights how semi-structured interviews can provide insights, that would otherwise be unavailable, from various stakeholders involved in a certain process. Ruslin et al. (2020) complements this perspective by pointing out how semi-structured interview aims to gain knowledge from the subject's perspective. In this study, semi-structured interviews were used to complement and expand document analysis of reports and statements, in order to gain grass-root level knowledge from the people working in the CSOs participating in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention in Tunisia and Finland.

1.1. A Comparative Case Study Approach

Comparison is a method of inquiry used to examine empirical relationships between variables (Lijphart, 1971). This study applies a comparative case study approach, focusing on Tunisia and Finland. Both cases are analysed in order to understand how national contexts influence the involvement of CSOs in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention. Comparison is a tool that allows identifying both similarities and differences that may explain how practices are shaped and influenced within different cultural and administrative frameworks. Purposeful selection of cases to be compared is important (Danyi and Danyi, 2024).

Selection procedure for this study followed the idea of Most Similar or Most Different Systems Design (MSSD or MDSD). The strategy of Most Different Systems Design (MSDS) can be used to compare differing cases that focus on the same phenomenon (Steinmetz, 2021). Finland and Tunisia were chosen based on the idea of MDSD strategy, as among the scope of countries that have ratified the Lanzarote Convention, they have differing national contexts. Both countries have ratified the Lanzarote Convention, but only Finland is a member state of the Council of Europe. The two countries differ culturally, politically and societally, as well as in terms of the historical development of civil society. Despite the differences, both cases demonstrate some level of civil society participation in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention. The national contexts of Finland and Tunisia were discussed in more detail in chapter 3.

This study focuses on the engagement of CSOs in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention by identifying the patterns of involvement and the factors that may influence these patterns, such as institutional mechanisms, cultural norms, or issues related to funding. By comparing these two contrasting national settings, the study aims to identify the factors that influence civil society engagement in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention, such as the way and intensity of cooperation with state institutions, operational conditions, and challenges and obstacles that the actors

face in their efforts. The comparison aims to examine the extent to which national context shapes these dynamics, and whether similar patterns can be found across both cases.

1.2. Interview Guide Development

Semi-structured interviews do typically not follow a questionnaire, but an interview guide that identifies topics and questions to be addressed (Adams, 2015). The interview guide for this study was drafted using Adams' (2015) guidelines (p.496). Adams suggests the researcher to conduct a pilot interview to test and possibly revise the interview guide. For this study, two exploratory interviews were conducted to test the interview guide, with one representative from Finland and one from Tunisia. Following the interviews, no changes were made, and the interviews were included in the final data. The interview guide followed the main topic, the involvement of CSOs in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention. The themes were developed based on the theoretical framework and the literature review on the topic. The final interview guide included five parts (See Annex I and Annex II). First part included questions to form an overall picture of the organization the participant was representing, and to what extent the theme of child sexual abuse and exploitation is present in their work. The second part focused on the different roles that CSOs have in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention. The third part covered the aspects of cooperation and coordination of efforts. The obstacles and challenges different organisations face were noted in the fourth part. At the end of each interview, all participants were given the opportunity to raise any aspects related to the topic that they considered important but had not yet been addressed.

Adams (2015) points out the importance of distinguishing between critical and optional questions. This kind of categorization of questions was made, yet optional questions were excluded only once, when the interview was limited to 30 minutes. The interview guide combined closed- and open-ended questions and aimed to use clear language, e.g. in the starting questions: "How would you describe your organisation's main mission and activities?" and "Is the prevention of child sexual abuse and exploitation central to your organisation's work?". Adams also suggests starting with easier questions and placing more sensitive topics and critiques towards the end of the interview. Following this, questions related to the obstacles and challenges faced by the organizations, as well as the evaluation of the state's actions, were asked towards the end of the interviews. Due to the researcher's language skills, the interviews with Finnish respondents were conducted in Finnish while the interviews with respondents from Tunisia or other nationalities were conducted in English. The interview guide was done both in English, for Tunisian participants, and in Finnish, for Finnish participants.

1.3. Sampling and Data Collection

The selection of respondents was based on a review of child sexual exploitation and abuse in Finland and Tunisia, with a particular focus on country-specific reports on the topic and the civil society actors mentioned in them. Requirement for the interviewees was to hold a position as a representative of civil

society actor involved in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention in Finland or Tunisia, or to be a person in other relevant position to offer insights into CSOs involvement. The completed interviews were carried out with representatives of NGOs from Finland and Tunisia. Both long-established and newer organizations were included. Some of the organizations focused solely on the prevention of child sexual abuse and exploitation, while others worked more broadly to promote the rights and well-being of children.

Conducting semi-structured interviews is a time-consuming method (Adams, 2015, p.493), and considering the time resources available for the study, the goal of 8 to 12 interviewees was selected. In the end, interviews were conducted with two Tunisian NGO representatives and three Finnish NGO representatives. The final number of interviews remained lower than expected. Fewer Tunisian representatives were open to participate than originally intended. Several factors may have contributed to this outcome. The Tunisian context was less familiar to the researcher, and language barriers may have had an impact. In Tunisia, a total number of seven organizations or other professionals was contacted, of which four showed interests in participating in the interview. To maintain a balanced distribution between the number of interviews from Finland and Tunisia, no additional interviews were conducted with Finnish NGO representatives. After analyzing the interviews, an additional written interview was conducted with a Tunisian child protection expert. This interview did not follow the original interview guideline but was adapted to address the themes that had emerged from the interviews with Tunisian CSO representatives. All the interviews with CSO representatives were conducted remotely via virtual meeting platforms, during a period from May 2025 to June 2025. The interviews were recorded with participants' permission for further transcribing. The duration of the interviews was from 30 minutes to one hour. Participants received an informed consent form before the actual interviews, and the content of the form was explained at the beginning of each interview.

4.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted with MAXQDA, a software program for qualitative data analysis. During the analysis, each interviewee was given an anonymized code. The organizations represented by each interviewee were also anonymized, due to the small number of organizations, to ensure confidentiality. The codes were formed by combining a letter indicating the country and the order of the interview (e.g., T1 = Tunisian interviewee 1; F3 = Finland interviewee 3). After conducting and transcribing the interviews, the data was coded into categories. First, into thirty-two initial categories, that emerged from the interviews. Codes with overlapping content were combined, resulting in sixteen categories (see Annex IV). Later, codes with overlapping content were combined. The coding process was primary inductive, with categories emerging from the collected data (Streefkerk, 2023). However, the analysis was also shaped by a deductive approach, as critical theory's perspectives on civil society-state interactions influenced the formulation of the research questions guiding the analysis. Additionally, the

analysis builds on the Lanzarote Convention, as well as reports of the Lanzarote Committee that discuss the role of civil society. Therefore, the theoretical framework offered guidelines for the analysis, yet it was strongly rooted in the data provided by participants.

For the analysis, the codes were compared seeking for repeating patterns and further separated under four overarching categories. The chapter 5 presenting the results is divided according to these four categories. First category gathered data that described what kind of civil society organizations are engaged in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention in Finland and Tunisia. The other three categories followed the three research questions. All codes were placed in these four categories. Several of the themes reflected the literature, such as the broad amount of data categorized under the code “funding limitations”. However, multiple themes emerged unexpectedly such as the code “safeguarding children from CSA/CSE in organizations’ own practices”. This highlights the dimensions of CSO participation that were not presented in the literature. As this study is a comparative analysis of CSO engagement in Tunisia and Finland, the analysis also included comparison of the two countries across all four categories. Both similarities and differences were identified.

4.4. Ethical Considerations

In addition to the initial request for participating in the interview, all participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their right to answer only the questions they want to, and their right to withdraw at any moment. All participants received an informed consent form to be signed, which presented the study’s goals, the voluntary nature of their participation, usage of the data, and the confidentiality of their responses. The content of the form was explained in the start of the interview, and participants were offered a possibility for further questions. No personal data was collected, and no identifying information was included in the published material. Interview transcriptions were securely stored on a password-protected cloud storage platform. It is worth noting that while interviews with Finnish respondents were conducted in the native language of both parties, interviews with respondents from other countries were conducted in English. This may have led to potential linguistic and cultural differences influencing the interview dynamics. All Tunisian participants, who expressed hesitation about being interviewed in English, were offered to possibility of conducting the interview in a written form. Ethical approval for this study was requested and received from the Ethics Committee of the School of Sociology and Public Policy of Iscte - University Institute of Lisbon.

5. Findings

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the study, based on data collected through semi-structured interviews with representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Tunisia and Finland. The first section of the chapter presents the CSOs engaged in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention in both countries. After this, analysis of the interview data is divided into three sections, each focusing on one of the research questions: (1) how CSOs participate in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention; (2) how CSOs cooperate with state institutions in the implementation process; and (3) what the key challenges and obstacles to CSOs participation are. Throughout the chapter, findings are contextualized with relevant articles of the Lanzarote Convention and reflected with the presented literature.

5.1. Civil Society Organizations Participating in the Implementation of the Lanzarote Convention

Before presenting the findings of the study and addressing the research questions, this section will first present the profile of civil society organizations engaged in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention in Tunisia and Finland. The table below shows the profiles of the included CSOs, as well as those of all interviewees and their anonymized codes. Several civil society organizations (CSOs) participate in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention in both Tunisia and Finland. In both Finland and Tunisia, some organizations focus solely on protecting children from sexual exploitation and abuse, and others on child protection more broadly. For organizations that do not primarily focus on CSA/CSE, this issue has recently gained more attention, especially due to the increase in online-facilitated offenses. For instance, a Tunisian representative described having attended recently a workshop on the risks of online facilitated sexual violence against children. The representative emphasized the importance of the event, highlighting how online offenses have ‘been a big problem these past few years’ (T1). In Finland, several large and historically rooted child rights organizations emphasized the prevention of sexual violence against children as a central part of their work. The Tunisian organizations represented in the interviews were relatively young, as they were founded only after the revolution of 2010-2011. The revolution’s impact on Tunisian civil society organizations has been discussed more in chapter 3.1.3. Although relatively new organizations operate also in Finland, most of the Finnish civil society organizations represented in the interviews had a long history with established structure systems, with a central organization that coordinates regional offices and many local associations (F2, F3). In Tunisia, by contrast, CSOs lacked a structured operations across different regions (T1, T2). A Tunisian child rights expert highlighted the lack of equal national coverage, stating that “there is a large gap between the work done in the capital and in rural areas” (T3).

Table 3. Profile of the Participants

Code	Country	Area of Work	Founded (approx.)	Position / Role	Scope of Work
T1	Tunisia	CSO - Youth Empowerment and Engagement	2010s	Treasurer	National
T2	Tunisia	CSO - Child protection; prevention of sexual violence and abuse	2010s	Child Protection Specialist	National
T3	Tunisia	Global Child Rights Network	1990s	Regional Coordinator in an international organization	International
F1	Finland	CSO - Child protection; prevention of sexual violence and abuse	2010s	Executive Director & Deputy Director	National and International
F2	Finland	CSO – Child Rights and Child Protection	1920s	Senior Specialist – Children’s Rights and Advocacy	National with regional offices, and International
F3	Finland	Child Protection and Family Support	1920s	Director of Advocacy	National with regional offices

Source: Author’s own elaboration

5.2. Forms of civil society organizations’ engagement

This section addresses the first research question: “How do civil society organizations engage in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention in Tunisia and Finland?” The findings of this study show that civil society organizations in both countries contribute to the implementation in many areas. In this section these contributions are categorized into three themes, aligned with the Lanzarote Convention: prevention, protection on victims and monitoring of the implementation.

5.2.1. Prevention

The Lanzarote Convention emphasizes civil society’s role in preventing child sexual exploitation (Article 9:2) and the importance of ensuring funding for their preventive efforts (Article 9:4). According to representatives from Tunisian and Finnish CSOs, prevention of child sexual exploitation and abuse is their main contribution to the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention. For example, in Tunisia prevention was described as the “most important thing that we need to work on” (T1), with some stating

that their “focus is only on prevention” (T2), underlining its importance. A Finnish participant also highlighted the organizations’ goal to be to “focus every single day solely and exclusively on the prevention of sexual violence against children” (F1). This study’s findings show that CSOs contribute to prevention through multiple efforts, including educational and awareness-raising activities, research and production of informational materials, political advocacy, as well as practices aimed at ensuring the safety of children in their own services and programmes. CSOs approaches in Tunisia and Finland had both commonalities and differences.

5.2.1.1. Education and Awareness-raising

“It is said in the Convention that we have to raise awareness about the gravity of the problem.” (T2) As some of the interviewees pointed out, the Lanzarote Convention obliges parties to conduct awareness raising campaigns on child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSA/CSE), and on preventive measures to be taken (Article 8:2). In addition to advocacy targeting decision-makers and media—which will be discussed later - CSOs in Tunisia and Finland contribute with educational and awareness-raising activities with children, families and professionals. The importance of such a role was highlighted by CSO representatives from both countries. A Tunisian interviewee described that “civil society is the one who is on site, who works in the regions and influences the way teachers think, the way caregivers think” (T1), and another described their core mission to be “to sensitize and elevate awareness about the subject among all the population” (T2). A report by ECPAT also highlights that Tunisian CSOs’ have an important role in organizing educational school clubs on safety skills, especially regarding online environments (ECPAT International, 2024). Similarly, a Finnish respondent stated: “What we have strongly emphasized is the importance of education—not only for children and young people, but also for adults and professionals—which is also strongly rooted in the Lanzarote Convention itself” (F3).

In Tunisia, a CSO representative emphasized their organization’s role in raising awareness among both children and parents. As the interviewee explained: “we organize participating workshops with the children. We built their capacities to auto protection. We explain to them their body, and how they could understand the gravity of the problem, and we also talk to them and work with them about the abuse and exploitation online” (T2). Furthermore, the representative underlined the importance of involving parents: “we never accept to work with children without working with the parents” (T2). Similarly, CSOs in Finland also organize participatory workshops for children. For instance, one interviewee described workshops for children on digital safety and body boundaries (F1), and another highlighted media literacy sessions, in which the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse of children plays an essential part (F3). In Finland, part of these awareness-raising and educational activities appears to be more incorporated in institutional structures. An example of this is the Finnish Safer Internet Center (SIC), consisting of two CSOs, the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare and Save the

Children Finland, together with the National Audiovisual Institute (KAVI). Together, they organized a project that included activities such as national campaigns, for example the Media Literacy Week, the operation of helplines for children and parents, and a hotline for reporting online child sexual abuse material (Finnish Safer Internet Center, 2022).

In addition to children and families, the importance of educating professionals was emphasized by CSO representatives from both countries. A Tunisian respondent described how their organization trains professionals in early detection of child abuse, through education on safety rules and protection against sexual abuse in early childhood (T2). Providing trainings for professionals, for example teachers, was included also in the activities that a Finnish CSO representative described (F3). A notable characteristic from Finnish CSOs was the trainings and data providing on sexual exploitation and abuse of children for the national law enforcement authorities, namely the local police and the National Bureau of Investigation (F1, F2).

Awareness-raising among civil society organizations themselves was also highlighted. A Tunisian interviewee described how a representative from their organization contributed to a regional meeting of North African CSOs by presenting strategies for protecting children involved in each organizations' activities and raising awareness on the methods used by perpetrators to target children (T1). Similarly, a Finnish CSO representative highlighted how they provide training for professionals working within their own services – such as helplines for children and parents – to raise awareness of the issue (F3).

5.2.1.2. Material Creation and Research

In both countries, an important part of CSOs' preventive efforts against child sexual abuse and exploitation is the development of informational and educational materials for children, families, and professionals. Both Finnish and Tunisian CSOs have, for example, translated educative material produced by the Lanzarote Convention (F1, T2). In Tunisia, part of an organization's contribution was adapting the Lanzarote Convention's material to the Tunisian context. Finnish CSO actors did not mention similar need to adapt materials from the Lanzarote Convention to the Finnish context. A Finnish CSO representative pointed out that the materials they create are grounded in their own research and data: "We produce preventive materials for children, which are based on our analysis of image material as well as our work with victims, survivors, and their families" (F1). Overall, Finnish CSO actors emphasized their role in generating evidence-based knowledge. For instance, one organization focuses on conducting academic research on the topic (F1), while another collects reports of suspected online child sexual abuse material and produces data on the nature and prevalence of online-facilitated offences (F2). In comparison, Tunisian CSO representatives did not describe engaging in similar research-focused activities.

5.2.1.3. Advocacy

A considerable part of the preventive efforts that the civil society organizations in Tunisia and Finland engage in consist of advocacy directed at decision-makers and the media. The Lanzarote Convention also encourages civil society participation in prevention-related policy processes (Article 9:2). In both countries, CSOs advocacy efforts aim to influence legislation and political decision-making, promote sexual education, and impact society's attitudes and public discourse regarding the sexual exploitation and abuse of children.

In Finland, a CSO representative summarized the advocacy role by stating that "you [CSOs] have to influence those who should be doing the job in the first place" (F2). Accordingly, several Finnish CSOs are directly involved in policy advocacy. Their efforts include, for example, submitting statements to policymakers (F3), raising awareness through research and reports based on practical work experience and survivor perspectives (F1), and lobbying for integration of structures –that have been successful in projects- into official practices (F3). CSOs' role was described as significant also in promoting Finland's National Action Plan for the Lanzarote Convention by all the interviewees. Finland's National Action Plan offers civil society organizations a structured, state-recognized platform, as a framework that supports their advocacy efforts.

Similarly, a Tunisian CSO representative described a structured collaboration agreement between their organization and state institutions working with issues related to children, offering them a platform for policy advocacy (T2). Yet, the context in Tunisia appears to be more fragmented, due to the lack of formal cooperation mechanisms, that would be more expansive and open for broader amount of CSOs' engagement. Furthermore, some of the Finnish representatives (e.g. F1) emphasized their capacities to produce research-based knowledge as a base for their advocacy work. This area, research and knowledge production, was less highlighted by the Tunisian representatives.

One aspect of policy advocacy emphasized by CSOs in both countries was the inclusion of sexual education in the national curriculum. In Finland, sexual education is already incorporated in the national curriculum and is part of teacher's university degree (Council of Europe and ECPAT International, 2023). However, Finnish respondents still highlighted the role of civil society organizations in stressing the importance of this education (F2, F3). One representative further emphasized their advocacy for including also education on safety skills and legal rights (F3). In contrast, Tunisian respondents described more resistance to sexual education. One of the representatives brought up the existing opposition to the inclusion of sexual education in schools and another how the introduction of sexual education has been "a big problem that we've been having these last years" (T1). Yet, the same respondent highlighted how, through advocacy efforts – particularly by the Tunisian Medical Society of Sexology - the Minister of Education has included certain elements, such as consent and body image, into the curriculum. This demonstrates the differing context, in which Finnish CSOs work to strengthen an existing framework, whereas Tunisian CSOs advocate for the initial inclusion of sexual education, as one representative described how they "have to convince the deciders to make that [sexual education]

happen in schools” (T2). Policy advocacy is an essential part of the cooperation with the state institutions in both Tunisia and Finland. The aspect of cooperation will be addressed more in a later section

In the context of advocacy, Finnish CSO representatives also highlighted the role of civil society's role in making the voices of victims and survivors heard, as well as strengthening their participation. As one interviewee stated: “Strengthening civil society, meaning that our task is to listen to children, young people, and families with children, and to strengthen their participation” (F2). CSOs in Finland also contribute to this goal: “We have collected a large amount of data from victims and survivors” (F1). However, the need to strengthen the inclusion of children who have experienced CSA/CSE was acknowledged: “How much we actually gain information about how children who have experienced sexual violence in Finland are being heard? It could be said that this is still lacking — that kind of information or the strengthening of it.” (F2).

One aspect of CSOs’ advocacy efforts is their engagement with the media. CSO representatives from both Tunisia and Finland recognized the media’s important role but criticized how it addresses the issue. For example, one Tunisian representative noted that the media “talks about it as an event, and never, never in the appropriate depth” (T2), and a Finnish representative described how it often “writes very vaguely about sexual violence against children and uses the wrong terminology” (F2). Collectively, representatives from both countries emphasized the responsibility of CSOs to correct and guide how the media addresses the issue of child sexual exploitation and abuse and addressed how this has already been part of their advocacy efforts. A Finnish interviewee described: “in Finland, organizations do have a constant need to correct things and to say things the right way” (F2). Same respondent highlighted the CSOs’ role in advocating the use of accurate terminology, based on the Luxembourg Guidelines (F2). The Luxembourg Guidelines (2016) were presented in more detail in the chapter 2.3.2. Meanwhile, a Tunisian representative addressed their ambition to have more influence on the media, yet limited resources have posed challenges. The issue of funding, together with other obstacles to CSOs’ engagement, will be discussed in a later section.

5.2.1.4. Ensuring Safety in Own Services

In both countries, organizations working directly with children highlighted the safeguarding of children within their own practices as an important aspect of prevention. For instance, a Tunisian CSO representative described their protocols for photographing children at their own events, to prevent any potential misuse or exploitation online (T1), and a Finnish representative pointed out their mandatory verification of criminal records for all volunteers engaging in activities with children (F3). Additionally, civil society organizations that are not clearly dedicated on prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse of children also play a significant role in creating safe environments for children. As one Tunisian CSO representative put it: “We know about associations that are working with children

in theatre and leisure, things like that, sports and everything. And all of this is prevention [of child sexual exploitation and abuse]" (T2).

5.2.2. Monitoring

According to Rules of Procedure 26(4) and 27(1) of the Lanzarote Convention, the perspectives of civil society representatives on the implementation of the Convention should be considered in the Convention's monitoring process. Reflecting this role, a Finnish CSO representative noted: "We kind of have a dual role: on one hand, we're watchdogs, and on the other hand, we also implement it [the Convention] ourselves" (F2). The findings of this study indicate that CSOs in both countries engage in the monitoring process. In Finland, CSOs participated in national-level monitoring processes through more formal structures, such as the National Action Plan. In contrast, the involvement of Tunisian CSOs was more limited, possibly due to lack of formal structures and sufficient resources.

In Finland, a significant step in the engagement of civil society organizations in monitoring the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention was the adoption of the National Action Plan as the working group -including several CSO representatives- continued to work with monitoring the implementation (F3, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2022). Another example of CSO engagement in more structured monitoring efforts is the Country Overview Report on child sexual abuse and exploitation in Finland, written by the Council of Europe and ECPAT International (2023), which was drafted together with Save the Children Finland. However, one Finnish interviewee pointed out that, even before the National Action Plan, CSOs were involved in following how the Convention was implemented in Finland (F2). In addition to reports created by multiple actors, a Finnish CSO interviewee also pointed to national-level reports produced independently by individual organizations on child sexual exploitation and abuse in Finland (F1). One interviewee emphasized the broader role of CSOs in state's accountability in the implementation, noting that "Civil society organizations have a very important role in digging a little deeper into those violations of children's rights and examining them much more broadly than what the states themselves would technically report to the committee regarding implementation" (F2).

The Tunisian interviewees did not highlight any involvement of their organizations in the monitoring of the Lanzarote Conventions implementation in Tunisia. One CSO representative described a past initiative to establish a joint coordination system, whose role would have been to monitor the efforts undertaken to implement the Convention. The representative emphasized the potential and importance of such a system, which has so far been unable to operate due to a lack of resources. (T2). However, a report from ECPAT International's national workshop in Tunisia shows an example of Tunisian CSO contribution in the monitoring, as it gathered experiences and views of 17 representatives of Tunisian civil society organizations on the current trends and concerns regarding sexual exploitation and abuse of children in Tunisia (ECPAT International, 2024). Same report highlights, how CSOs'

work has increased the recognition of children as victims of sexual exploitation and abuse. Another example of Tunisian CSOs involvement in international level projects aiming to monitoring is the Disrupting Harm –project by ECPAT International, INTERPOL, Safe Online and UNICEF Innocenti, which aims to provide data on children’s exposure to online sexual and abuse (Safe Online, 2023). A Finnish organization’s representative also described how the national and international levels overlap, in terms of monitoring, in cases where the views of a nationally active organization are communicated to the Lanzarote Committee through an international organization, such as the Save the Children International.

Additionally, as the Article 40(3) states, civil society representatives may contribute as observers to the Committee of the Parties. From Finland, a non-governmental organization Protect Children was granted the observer status to the Lanzarote Committee in 2024 (Council of Europe, 2024). One organization’s professionals also work as experts for the Council of Europe. So far, no Tunisian organization holds observer status. Nevertheless, one Tunisian CSO representative described, that the organization has connections with the Council of Europe office in Tunisia: “they are participating financially and technically because we wrote guides for the professionals, so they help us with this [...] We are always invited to their workshops, conferences etc. on the topic” (T2).

5.2.3. Protection

Article 14(2) of the Lanzarote Convention emphasizes the important role of civil society and non-governmental organizations in supporting victims, as it states how “Each Party shall take measures, under the conditions provided for by its internal law, to co-operate with non-governmental organisations, other relevant organisations or other elements of civil society engaged in assistance to victims. The findings of this study show that while both CSOs in both Tunisia and Finland are not the primary actors responsible for victim protection, they still act where gaps in official services exist. In Finland, CSOs provide more formalized services for victims and their families, whereas in Tunisia, civil society’s role is more limited but the importance and potential of CSOs broader role was recognized.

A representative from a Tunisian CSO explained that, while they do not directly work with victim protection, they recognize the potential for civil society organizations to play a role in that area as well: “The civil society, it works more I guess on prevention, but also on protecting the victims” (T1). Another representative from Tunisia emphasized that their mission is prevention yet continued that “when there is a real case, we do orientation” (T2).

In Finland, CSOs offer also formalized services to support victims and their parents. For instance, a youth helpline, chat services and parents’ online counselling service. One organization offers support groups for the survivors, as well as for parents and caregivers whose children have experienced sexual violence (F1). Yet, similarly as in Tunisia, CSO representatives shared the view that official authorities

should take responsibility for victim protection, but civil society steps in when urgent need arises. One Finnish CSO representative explained their approach as following:

"The first core principle is that we operate wherever there is an urgent need. [...] where actions are needed but the state or primary duty-bearers are unable to respond—then, as an organization advocating for children's rights, we have a responsibility to act and provide support. [...] However, working at that level alone is not enough; all of that work must also serve as a basis for influencing those who are primarily responsible for doing that job." (F2)

Overall, the perspectives from both countries highlight a similar perspective on CSOs' role in victim protection as complementary.

5.3. Cooperation Between CSOs and State Institutions

The focus of this section is the second research question: "How do civil society organizations cooperate with state institutions, and how is this cooperation coordinated in Tunisia and Finland?" It begins by introducing the role of the state in implementing the Lanzarote Convention. Next, the level of formality in the cooperation structures between official institutions and CSOs will be discussed, including the question of state-provided funding. Following that, the division of responsibilities between the actors will be addressed. Finally, the last section explores the cooperation of CSOs with other public institutions, such as schools and social and health care services.

5.3.1. The role of states in the Lanzarote Convention

The states that ratify the Lanzarote Convention have the primary responsibility for its implementation. As one Finnish CSO representative stated: "The Lanzarote Convention is a human rights treaty, which means that –as other human rights treaties- it places its legal obligations on public authorities, especially the state" (F3). Therefore, when studying the role of civil society organizations in the implementation of the Convention, their cooperation with state institutions becomes particularly important. Furthermore, it underlines the importance of co-operation between state authorities, civil society and the private sector (Article 10:3), thus indicating that the state is the responsible one to promote such cooperation.

5.3.2. The Level of Formality in Cooperation Structures

When comparing cooperation between civil society organizations and state institutions in the Lanzarote Convention's implementation, a key difference between Finland and Tunisia is how institutionalized and formalized that cooperation is. In both countries, the expertise of CSO representatives is trusted at the ministry-level in the prevention of sexual violence against children. A Tunisian CSO representative described having close ties with different ministries working with matters involving children –such as the Ministry of Education- stating that the organization is regularly invited to participate to give

opinions, as well as conduct projects together (T2). Another Tunisian interviewee indicated a less direct form of cooperation with state institutions. One interviewed expert pointed out that Tunisia has a High Council for Childhood, as well as a national working group established by UNICEF (T3). However, none of the Tunisian CSO representatives described involvement with either these.

All Finnish interviewees mentioned their participation in ministry working groups as experts. The cooperation was described as extensive and deeply rooted in formal structures: We certainly do engage in extensive cooperation with authorities at all levels.” (F3) A Finnish interviewee reflected the structural foundation for the cooperation of CSOs and state institutions as following:

“In Finland, cooperation between public authorities and civil society organizations has traditionally been very close. The state has also traditionally provided strong financial support for CSOs, and involved them in many ways—for example, in legislative drafting, various working groups, hearings, and requests for statements, as well as in practical implementation. Examples include include the National Action Plan for the Lanzarote Convention and the 'Violence-Free Childhood' action programme. This forms a strong foundation, and Finland has a particularly strong civil society sector, especially in the field of social and health services.” (F3)

A central element of government-CSO cooperation in Finland is the National Action Plan of the Lanzarote Convention (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2022). A Finnish interviewee highlighted that, in addition to the platform provided by the implementation plan, cooperation is built on existing structures and frameworks, such as ones related to the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, as well as the 'Non-Violent Childhood' (Väkivallaton lapsuus) programme, organized by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (F2). Additionally, the Advisory Board on Children’s Affairs is a platform for certain CSOs to address issues related to sexual violence, and cooperation takes places also with the Foreign Ministry when drafting reports for the Lanzarote Committee (F3).

One distinctive feature is whether the state provides funding for CSOs’ contributions. According to Tunisian CSO representatives interviewed, the Tunisian government does not have any funding for CSOs to engage in the implementation of the Convention. In contrast, in Finland the state provides funding for CSOs to promote the goals of the Lanzarote Convention. However, the interviewees raised concerns about the recent decrease in funding, and on its distribution (F1, F3). The issues with funding will be addressed in a later section.

5.3.3. Division of Responsibilities

The division of responsibilities between organisations and the state was raised by interviewees in both countries. A Finnish CSO representative reflected: "To what extent are we doing the work of the state or the primary duty-bearers, and to what extent are we ensuring that they carry out their responsibilities themselves? This is probably an eternal question, but in Finland, I feel the lines are not drawn that sharply." (F2) A Tunisian representative emphasized the government’s role in developing policies and

legal frameworks and providing services for the victims: “the government’s role is to drive policy change and to look for laws that help the civil society to do its work in terms of this topic [...] they [the government] work mostly on victims post the abuse.” (T1) The representative highlighted the CSOs role in having real grass-root impact: “the CSOs are the ones who are going to drive the change in Tunisia because that’s what they did with other things [...] the role of civil society is to be on site in their regions, as the government cannot reach every region.” Similarly, a Finnish interviewee highlighted the role of CSOs in responding to grass-root needs: "If we notice a clear gap in society—an area where there should be action, but the state or the primary duty-bearers are unable to respond—then as an organization advocating for children's rights, we have a responsibility to step in and act. That might mean providing our own services or engaging in development work." (F2)

5.3.4. Cooperation with Schools and Health and Social Services

In addition to government institutions, civil society organizations in both countries collaborate with other public institutions. Cooperation between CSOs and schools emerged as a central theme with both Tunisian and Finnish representatives. Furthermore, CSOs in both countries cooperate also with the social and health services. In Finland, CSOs work with schools operating under state authority, integrating their preventive work within structured national programmes. An example of such programme is the School Peace (Koulurauha) programme, coordinated by the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare (Mannerheim Lastensuojeluliitto). A representative of a large-scale national CSO described how the topic of prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse of children is integrated in their cooperation with local social and health services (F3). Tunisian CSO representatives emphasized also the importance of school collaboration, particularly to reach many children (T1). The interviewees did not distinguish between cooperation with private and public education, or present similar structured programmes with schools. Alternatively, a Tunisian representative described that different institutions – educational-, social protection-, and leisure institutions - approach them to request the organization of workshops and other preventive activities: “We receive applications from the institutions. We work in educational institutions, leisure institutions, child social protection institutions and everywhere children already go [...] they can contact us, and we organize things together.” (T2) Additionally, all Finnish CSO representatives emphasized the importance of cooperation with the national law enforcement bodies, namely the local police and National Bureau of Investigation.

5.4. Challenges and Barriers to CSO Participation

As discussed earlier in chapter 2, in the section on critical theory, several obstacles may hinder the effectiveness of civil society and limit its participation (Habermas, 1996). Addressing this issue, this section explores the third research question: “What challenges and obstacles affect the involvement of civil society organizations in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention in Tunisia and Finland?”

The findings of this study highlight several key challenges to effective participation of civil society organizations in both countries. These include limited financial and human resources, inefficient coordination of efforts between state actors and civil society and within CSOs themselves. Obstacles arising from the interviews include also broader societal barriers, such as cultural taboos and the non-prioritization of the issue on the political agenda, as well as the challenges CSOs are facing when addressing online-based risks and offences. Most themes were identified in both Tunisia and Finland, though the intensity varied and country-specific characteristics exist.

5.4.1. Insufficient resources and funding

According to the interviews, the scarcity of resources, funding in particular, is a significant challenge for civil society organizations in both Tunisia and Finland. Insufficient resources and funding affect the reach and effectiveness of their work. According to the Tunisian interviewees, as stated in the previous section, CSOs in Tunisia do not receive funding from the state but rely only on private sector's funds for their efforts to contribute to the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention. Lack of resources was highlighted as the major obstacle: "funding is the biggest problem" (T2). In Finland, in contrast, the government funds CSOs activities. However, limited resources were similarly highlighted as a key challenge: "This resource issue. Politicians might think that these law provisions are enough, but actually quite a lot of resources are needed." (F3). Interviewees from both countries underlined that, even when professionals are highly committed, sufficient funding is crucial for the sustainable implementation of the Lanzarote Convention's requirements. A Finnish interviewee addressed the government's responsibility in allocating sufficient resources:

"Well, the issue here is that these government officials are doing really great work and are, of course, committed to it — but the state hasn't really allocated sufficient resources for it. These things are often handled alongside their regular duties, and I would criticize that. The realization of human rights requires resources and a commitment to allocating them. Human rights do not implement themselves. Just writing something into law is only the beginning. Often, we're talking about human resources — there needs to be staff in place to carry out the actions, many of which are outlined in great detail in the Lanzarote Convention." (F3)

A Tunisian interviewee described how they compensate for insufficient funding by relying on volunteers and contributing with their own resources:

"We are a small association, and we work seven days a week [...] we work with our own cars. Our group is all volunteers. We only provide the fuel. So, we can work with what we have. We begin to feel that we don't have enough funding because we want to move all over the country."
(T2)

According to the same representative, insufficient resources have also led to the delay of establishment of a planned working group, composed of CSOs working on the issue. This lack of adequate funding

from public authorities contradicts Article 9(4) of the Lanzarote Convention, which highlights the importance of state support for civil society's efforts: "Each Party shall encourage the financing, including, where appropriate, by the creation of funds, of the projects and programmes carried out by civil society aiming at preventing and protecting children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse."

In Finland, the contradiction between the objectives of the National Action Plan and the resources allocated for putting them into practice was brought up: "That excellent report, where these measures are outlined, there is basically no funding at a concrete level to implement it. So, a working group is formed, a great paper is produced about what needs to be done, and then there is no real funding for how to make it happen in practice" (F1). Additionally, All Finnish CSO representatives noted the recent notable cuts on financial resources: "the current government has made significant cuts specifically to the funding of social and health organizations [...] even long-running activities will face cuts" (F3). One presentative raised concern that the potential privatization of funding may lead to uneven and potentially ineffective distribution of resources, leaving important areas like prevention without support if private funders don't see their value: "Themes like sexual and gender-based violence, including preventive work, can be overshadowed, because they don't attract the same kind of funders, especially when we look at private donors" (F3). Respondents also raised concerns about the distribution of funding among different actors, for example how "organizations that have a fundraising machine — meaning a professional, well-functioning fundraising system — are the ones that tend to receive the funding, which leads to a strong concentration around them", as well as how "funding often goes to those who have always received it, without necessarily evaluating the actual outcome" (F1, F3). Additionally, a CSO representative from Finland described how the organization working on the topic does not have stable funding in Finland and therefore seeks funding from international donors also for their national work (F1).

5.4.2. Ineffective Coordination of Efforts

Both Finnish and Tunisian respondents recognized the importance of coordinated action among civil society organizations, as well as between CSOs and governmental institutions. CSOs in both countries highlighted the need for more structured cooperation and underlined how better coordination could help civil society organizations' efforts to increase their effectiveness and avoid unnecessary overlapping.

According to Finnish respondents, CSO working on the issue of child sexual exploitation and abuse do collaborate, for example through joint statements (F2). However, the interviews also showed a need for more systematic coordination of responsibilities. One interviewee highlighted that more effective information sharing, and better awareness of others' activities could help coordination and reduce overlapping efforts: "If information could be shared more effectively and everyone were more aware of what others are doing [...] Everyone reinvents the wheel instead of using the existing resources and materials and building on top of them, which would allow us to get much further than we do now — when everyone starts from scratch and does everything all over again" (F1). In addition to this,

bringing cross-cutting projects closer together was also brought up, particularly when the same professionals are involved — for example, the working group of the Istanbul Convention (F2).

Same topic was raised by the Tunisian CSO representatives: “we need to work more in partnership with each other” (T1). A Tunisian representative described the existing initiative for more efficient collaboration and coordinated division of responsibilities among CSOs, public partners, and the private sector: “Our final goal was to establish a coordination system to monitor and develop and evaluate the joint action and make a coordinated plan” (T2). The interviewee underlined the influence this group could have to increase effectiveness and avoid overlapping: “When you have this system to coordinate and monitor and evaluate, this is very important, to see what you already did and what you have to do” (T2). Due to limited resources, the plan has not yet been realized. One interviewed expert noted that although Tunisia has a High Council for Childhood and UNICEF has established a national protection working group to support government coordination, bureaucratic barriers and government hesitancy to cooperate have limited their effectiveness in practice (T3).

Additionally, one Finnish interviewee mentioned the Barnahus model implemented in Finland, in which all services for a child who has experienced sexual violence, and for the child’s family, are intended to offer services coordinated under one structure. The interviewee reflected on whether CSOs could have a coordinated role in the model: “Right now, it’s very much the state’s own work, and there are no civil society actors involved. It’s managed by various public officials. So, whether there might be some kind of role for CSOs there, I don’t know. But the Barnahus, as a concept, is really good.” (F2)

5.4.3. Challenges in Addressing Online Threats

As discussed in chapter 2.3.3., a significant and growing global challenge related to the sexual abuse and exploitation of children is the rise of ICT (Information and Communications Technology) – facilitated offences, such as the online grooming of children and the streaming of child sexual abuse material. Both Finnish and Tunisian respondents pointed to the increase in cases of online abuse, especially emphasizing the role of social media. One Finnish interviewee described: “And also, how sexual violence happens online and on social media. I see this as a particularly worrying trend.” (F3) A Tunisian representative similarly stated: “Especially online, it’s been a big problem these last years with the Deep Fakes and with the games and the online and the live stuff and TikTok and things like that.” (T1) In addition to the general rise of online sexual violence online, one Finnish representative also highlighted the increasing prevalence of gender-based offences: “There is a lot of minimization and even denial of it [violence against women] on social media. I’d even call it misogyny – it’s clearly on the rise.” (F3) Another Finnish interviewee emphasized the growing need for online-focused services provided by their organization: “The amount of that [child sexual abuse material] has increased significantly recently.” (F2)

According to a Tunisian CSO representative, one of the challenges in Tunisia is the limited familiarity with digital environments and knowledge of digital risks and protective measures: “We have low digital literacy [...] The culture of child protection and making some settings in your phone so kids do not go into those sites, and things like that, is not very known culturally.” (T1) The same interviewee further described: “In terms of prevention, it's not very known and especially online things [...] it's not very addressed.” (T1) This suggests that as online-based risks are not appropriately recognized, the space to build preventive efforts is also limited.

CSO representatives from both countries described gaps in legislation regarding online offences, which also affect their possibilities for action. In Finland, the difficulties in developing EU-level regulation were discussed: “There is that EU regulation [on child sexual abuse material] [...] That regulation has been very difficult to draft and to get legislation in place regarding that material.” (F1) In Tunisia, the insufficient legislation considering online offences was seen as a central obstacle: “But in terms of online, it has not been very updated in terms of the legal stuff and the legislation, so that is the biggest problem that we can face, because it is not really adequate [...] The platforms [of social media] they're not regulated here in Tunisia.” (T1) Additionally, a report gathering multiple Tunisian CSO representatives' views states how the current laws are not sufficient to address online risks (ECPAT International, 2024).

5.4.4. Cultural and Political Barriers to CSO Action

One of the challenges affecting the actions of CSOs, more raised by Tunisian than Finnish respondents, was the presence of cultural taboos regarding child sexual exploitation and abuse. Cultural taboos hindering efforts on this topic were also highlighted in ECPAT International's report (2020) on the sexual exploitation of children in the MENA region. One Tunisian CSO representative described the impact of cultural taboos on awareness and progress with the issue as following: “Things like this are not very known culturally, so that may be one of the causes that hinder this progress in terms of child protection [...] People are not aware that this is a big problem.” (T1) The Tunisian interviewees highlighted that this challenge exists particularly in advocacy work related to education and in school-based activities. One respondent explained: “We are still very far from actually getting it [sexual education] into the educational programme.” (T1) Another pointed out that the topic is not prioritized: “There is always priority for the classical subjects and not for modernization and this matter to go to schools.” In some cases, school leadership denied the existence of the problem in all: “Sometimes the director says: ‘no, we don't have this problem in our school’.” (T2) However, professionals have demonstrated both a need and a willingness to engage with CSO-led activities on the topic. As one interviewee explained: “We were afraid that people would not accept talking about this subject because it's a taboo. But we were very surprised to have professionals who say, 'I need to be trained about that’.” (T2)

Although Finnish CSO representatives did not highlight cultural taboos as an obstacle in the same way as their Tunisian counterparts, they also raised concerns about the non-prioritization of preventive actions, where they direct their contributions to: “The punishments and the criminal code provisions are necessary, but I would still place even greater emphasis on the importance of those other actions in preventing crime.” (F3) Similarly, Tunisian CSO representative underlined state’s underestimation of the importance of preventive measures: “The legislation is there to protect, to criminalize - but it's not enough. You have to go before that, before that happens.” (T2) Beyond cultural taboos and the limited prioritization of preventive efforts, one Tunisian expert interviewed pointed out that broader political factors also restrict the work of civil society organizations in Tunisia. According to the expert, governmental repression over civil society has led to many organizations, even UNICEF in Tunisia, facing difficulties to operate (T3). In their view, the main challenges are the government’s repression, bureaucratic obstacles, and fear of independent CSO action.

6. Conclusions

This study examined the role of civil society organizations in implementing the Lanzarote Convention—the Council of Europe’s Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse—by comparing the cases of Tunisia and Finland. In both countries, civil society organizations have an essential role in achieving the Convention’s objectives. The Lanzarote Convention itself highlights the essential role of state cooperation with civil society actors in its implementation and monitoring processes (Council of Europe, 2019c, p.2). In both countries, CSOs take part in these areas. However, the extent of their participation is shaped by multiple factors.

The first research question addressed in this study focuses on the ways in which CSOs engage in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention in Tunisia and Finland. The primary area where CSOs in both countries contribute is the prevention of child sexual exploitation and abuse. CSOs in Tunisia and Finland aim to create safe spaces for children, provide children and families educational activities on the topic, as well as train and raise awareness among professionals and the public to better prevent sexual violence against children and identify offences. Additionally, in Finland, CSOs organize training for the national law enforcement authorities on the topic. In Finland, part of these CSOs’ awareness-raising and educational initiatives is more incorporated in institutional structures with a national coverage, such as campaigns and reporting hotlines. In both countries, CSOs contribute to prevention by developing informational and educational materials, for example by translating materials produced by the Lanzarote Committee. In addition to translating, CSOs in Tunisia adapt the materials to their local context. Some Finnish CSOs produce academic research and systematically monitor offences, a role that Tunisian CSOs did not describe. Another central part of CSOs’ efforts to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse of children in both countries are different forms of advocacy. Both Tunisian and Finnish CSOs seek to influence the legislation and political decision-making, as well as shape public discourse on the topic and promote the use of accurate terminology. As Adorno (1973) emphasizes, overcoming oppressive structures requires that all actors have the opportunity to be heard. Acting as a bridge between the grassroots level and decision-makers, CSOs aim to bring the voices and experiences of children and survivors into policy processes. Critical theory positions civil society actors in a central role in democratic governance, underlining their essential role when state institutions fail to fulfil their obligations (Habermas, 1996). They act as drivers of social change, both independently and in collaboration with the state (Oluwaseun, 2017). As suggested by the theoretical framework, and shown by the study’s findings, CSOs in both country contexts frequently address areas where state responsibilities remain unfulfilled. In addition to preventive efforts, this is present in actions that aim to protection of victims. In both countries, CSOs emphasized the state’s responsibility to offer adequate support for victims. However, CSOs fill in gaps when necessary. In Finland, CSOs have more services directed to survivors and their families, such as online chat services and helplines. The emphasis should lie on states cooperating *with* CSOs, not *delegating* their responsibilities of the implementation process

to civil society. The third area in which CSOs contribute is monitoring. Tunisian CSO representatives did not emphasize a monitoring role. However, CSOs have contributed to the preparation of a national report on violence against children in Tunisia. In Finland, CSOs contribute to monitoring through the National Action Plan and by participating in the production of various reports.

The second research question explored how CSOs in Tunisia and Finland cooperate with state institutions, and how this cooperation is coordinated. Findings from this study suggest that key factors for such cooperation include formal structures or platforms. Habermas (1996) highlights that the concentration of power within the state creates structural obstacles to civil society participation, including unequal access to information and knowledge production, as well as limited opportunities for involvement in decision-making processes. Based on the findings, this concentration of power can be balanced with formal structures that help CSOs to participate in the processes. When comparing the two country contexts, the presence of such formal structures in Finland — and the absence of such in Tunisia — emerged as a major differentiating factor. Finland's CSOs benefit from a long tradition of collaboration with the state. Regarding the Lanzarote Convention, Finland's National Action Plan for its implementation provides CSOs with a formal platform for, for example, advocacy, participation in policy processes, and monitoring. Formal platforms seem to support both the cooperation between state institutions and CSOs, as well as among different CSOs themselves. Additionally, nationally coordinated programs in which official authorities work together with CSOs — for example, Finland's nationwide school-based initiatives that included addressing the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse — enabled CSOs to operate within a formal initiative with broader coverage. In Tunisia, cooperation was facilitated mainly through formal agreements between individual organizations and state institutions. However, a broader and more inclusive structure could offer a platform for participation and cooperation among multiple organizations and state institutions, rather than relying solely on bilateral arrangements. Tunisian interviewees recognized the need for a coordinated joint action. However, according to the study's findings, limited resources and government's hesitancy to cooperate, as well as broader repression of civil society, have constrained these initiatives.

With the third research question, this study examined the challenges and obstacles affecting CSOs' involvement in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention in Tunisia and Finland. According to Habermas (1996), the capacity of civil society to influence depends on the resources available to them. In line with this, the study identified limited resources – particularly insufficient funding – as a key factor affecting CSOs' participation. In Finland, many CSOs receive funding from the state. However, organizations faced decline in funding, concerns over the allocation of resources, and growing dependence on private donors. Tunisian CSOs, by contrast, relied entirely on private funding. These findings raise several questions about the implementation of the Convention. If states fail to fulfil their responsibilities, and CSOs continue to fill numerous gaps with very limited resources, the Convention is in risk of remaining only symbolic rather than leading to concrete action and change. The growing role of private funders also raises questions about power: who decides how resources are

allocated, and which activities are prioritized? However, as Habermas (1996) notes, the state's distribution of resources is not neutral either. Interviewees expressed concern that both state- and private funding often overlook prevention of sexual violence against children. Prevention, as the CSO representatives emphasized, is the most important area for sustainable outcomes. Attitudes toward the issue and CSOs' contributions influence not only the resources provided by the state and private actors but also the overall capacity of CSOs to operate effectively. Findings of the study indicate, that the overall weakened position of civil society in Tunisia has led to government's hesitancy to cooperate with CSOs and support their work. Additionally, CSOs' work is influenced by cultural factors that may limit intervention, reporting, or disclosure. An important aspect in combating child sexual exploitation and abuse is whether sexuality and sexual violence can be discussed openly and without stigma in the society (McPherson et al., 2024). Representatives from both countries described the need to correct false assumptions and address the lack of awareness surrounding the issue. In Tunisia, cultural taboos around the topic were identified as a particularly significant challenge. As Cromer and Goldsmith (2010) highlight, education, awareness raising and training of professionals on the topic are essential parts of prevention. Cooperation with schools and the promotion of sexual education appeared as central forms of CSOs' work. According to the findings, the openness of schools to such cooperation is a crucial factor. In Finland, formal, nationwide programs provided a framework that supports CSOs' involvement. In Tunisia, CSOs depended more on the attitudes of individual school professionals, varying from highly positive cooperation to denial of the issue and rejection of CSO activities. These findings suggest that formal frameworks for educational and awareness-raising activities enhance the reach of CSOs' work, yet cultural factors should be considered. Additionally, as McPherson et al. (2024) note, sexual violence against children should not be viewed as rooted in any particular cultural or religious group. It would therefore be important to examine more deeply how cultural factors may hinder prevention efforts in both country contexts. Finally, CSOs – like all actors working to combat child sexual exploitation and abuse – are facing a growing global challenge of online offences and the impact of artificial intelligence. This phenomenon affects both the challenges that CSOs try to address and the environments in which they operate. CSOs from both countries pointed to gaps in current legislation regarding online offences. Finnish interviewees highlighted difficulties in developing EU-level regulation, while Tunisian representatives emphasized the national legislation's insufficiency and lack of regulation.

By ratifying the Lanzarote Convention, states commit to taking the necessary measures to protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse. Civil society organizations play a central role in achieving this goal, and supporting and enabling their work should therefore be a priority. Based on the findings of this study, several policy recommendations can be made to strengthen the role of CSOs in implementing the Lanzarote Convention. First, establishing formal cooperation frameworks between state institutions and CSOs—or strengthening existing ones—and ensuring that these platforms remain adequately funded and inclusive is essential. Second, governments should provide sufficient and stable

financial resources for CSO activities, as suggested by Article 9(4) of the Lanzarote Convention. CSO representatives' expertise should be considered in decisions on resource allocation. Third, nationwide awareness-raising and sexual education programmes and campaigns could help reduce stigma, cultural taboos, and lack of knowledge related to child sexual exploitation and abuse. CSOs should be actively involved in these initiatives. Further academic research on the cultural and social factors that hinder prevention efforts would also be valuable. Fourth, the growing prevalence of online offences calls for stronger regulation and coordinated international efforts, as the crimes have a very international nature. While much attention has been given to the risks and challenges created by emerging online platforms and artificial intelligence, research should also explore their potential to enhance child protection. This topic has so far been addressed by, among others, Steel (2024), Valois et al. (2024), and Wolbers et al. (2025). Finally, a fundamental condition for the sustainable implementation of the Lanzarote Convention and the protection of children from sexual abuse and exploitation is the existence of an enabling environment that allows civil society organizations to act, express themselves freely, and cooperate with the state.

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Annexes

Annex I – Interview Guide for CSOs in English

Interview Guide

General:

1. How would you describe your organisation's main mission and activities?
2. Is the prevention of child sexual abuse and exploitation central to your organisation's work?
3. Is the Lanzarote Convention present in your organization's work?

The Lanzarote Convention and the Role of Civil Society Organisations:

4. Is your organisation involved in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention in Tunisia? (For example, in preventing child sexual exploitation and abuse, or protecting children from it)
5. Is your organization in some way involved in monitoring how the Lanzarote Convention is implemented in Tunisia?
6. How do you see the role of civil society organizations in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention - combating child sexual exploitation and abuse – in Tunisia?

Cooperation and Coordination

7. Do you cooperate with government / state actors in efforts against child sexual exploitation and abuse?
8. Do you cooperate with other civil society actors in efforts against child sexual exploitation and abuse?
9. Has your organization had any contact with, or cooperation with, the Lanzarote Committee?

Barriers and Challenges

10. In your view, are there any barriers that restrict your organisation's or other civil society actors' ability to work in this field? (For example, financial or legal restrictions, lack of cooperation etc...)
11. Do you consider the actions taken by the state in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention are enough?

Closing Question:

12. Is there anything else you consider important regarding the involvement of civil society organisations in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention in Tunisia?

Annex II Interview Guide for CSOs in Finnish

Haastattelurunko

Aluksi

1. Miten kuvailisitte lyhyesti järjestönne päätehtävää ja toimintaa?
2. Onko lapsiin kohdistuvan seksuaalisen hyväksikäytön ja riiston vastainen työ osa toimintaanne?
3. Onko Lanzaroten sopimus läsnä toiminnassanne?

Lanzaroten sopimus ja kansalaisjärjestöjen rooli

4. Osallistuuko järjestönne sopimuksen tavoitteiden edistämiseen, toimeenpanoon tai seurantaan Suomessa?
5. Onko jokin konkreettinen hanke tai muu toimi, jossa sopimus on ollut erityisen keskeinen?
6. Miten näette yleisemmin ei-valtiollisten/ järjestökentän toimijoiden roolin sopimuksen toimeenpanossa Suomessa?

Yhteistyö ja koordinointi

7. Teettekö yhteistyötä viranomaisten tai valtion toimijoiden kanssa Lanzaroten sopimuksen toimeenpanossa?
8. Onko yhteistyötä muiden kansalaisjärjestöjen tai yksityisten toimijoiden kanssa?
9. Onko järjestönne tehnyt yhteistyötä Lanzarote- komitean kanssa?

Esteet ja haasteet

10. Koetteko, että järjestönne tai muiden ei-valtioillisten toimijoiden mahdollisuuksia lasten seksuaalisen hyväksikäytön ja riiston vastaisessa työssä rajoittavat jotkin esteet (esim. lainsäädäntö, resurssit, koordinaation puute...)?
11. Ovatko valtion toimet teidän näkökulmastanne riittäviä Lanzaroten sopimuksen toimeenpanossa?

Lopuksi

12. Onko jotain muuta olennaista, jonka haluaisitte nostaa esiin liittyen kansalaisjärjestöjen / muiden ei-valtiollisten toimijoiden osallistumiseen Lanzaroten sopimuksen toimeenpanoon Suomessa, jota emme vielä käsitelleet?

Annex III – Consent Form

Informed consent

This study is part of a research project taking place at Iscte – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa. The study aims to investigate the non-governmental actors' role in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention, comparing Finland and Tunisia. The study is conducted by Roosa Viitala (roosa.viitala@gmail.com), who you may contact to clear up any doubts or share comments. Your participation in the study, which is highly valued as it will contribute to the advancement of knowledge in this field of science, consists of an interview taking place online. There are no expected significant risks associated with participation in the study. Participation in the study is strictly voluntary: you may choose freely whether to participate or not to participate. If you have decided to participate, you may stop your participation at any time, without having to provide any justification. In addition to being voluntary, your participation is also anonymous, as no personal data will be processed. At no point of the study will you be asked to identify yourself. I declare that I have understood the aims of what was proposed to me, as explained by the investigator, that I was given the opportunity to ask any questions about this study and received a clarifying reply to all such questions, and accept participating in the study.

_____ (place), // _____ (date)

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Annex IV – Coding Categories Derived from the Interviews

Initial codes (32)	New Identified Codes (16)
Human resources, financial resources, funding limitations	Resources
The importance of CSOs, CSO's characteristics, Geographical notes, Historical role of civil society	CSOs' role
Non-prioritization of the issue of CSA/CSE by the State, Society's denial, Cultural taboos	Cultural taboos and non-prioritization of the issue
Trainings for professionals and parents, teaching children, attending workshops	Educational and awareness-raising activities
Research & knowledge production, reports, monitoring	Research and data production
Cooperation with the state, cooperation with schools, cooperation with police, cooperation with health care and social services, Finland's national implementation plan	Cooperation with state and public institutions
Advocacy, media	Advocacy
Material production	Material production
Legal factors	Legal factors
Protection of children	Protection of children
Direct engagement with the Lanzarote Committee or the Council of Europe	Direct engagement with the Lanzarote Committee or the Council of Europe
Division of responsibilities, coordination	Coordination
Challenges of online CSA/CSE	Challenges of online CSA/CSE
Safeguarding children from CSA/CSE in own practices	Safeguarding children from CSA/CSE in own practices
Evaluation of the state's performance	Evaluation of the state's performance
Protection of children	Protection of children