

# **JOINT MEMORANDUM ON COMBATING GROOMING IN THE BALTIC REGION**

**This memorandum aims to unite organizations in a coordinated effort to combat grooming in the Baltic region and beyond by increasing public awareness, advocating for victim support and legislative reforms, providing professional training opportunities, supporting research, and fostering community collaboration to challenge societal norms and promote a culture of reporting and support.**

All three Baltic countries—Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia—face a significant lack of comprehensive quantitative data on grooming, particularly in-person grooming. However, case studies from all three Baltic countries emphasize the prevalence of grooming instances perpetrated by authority figures such as teachers, trainers, and youth camp leaders.

Grooming involves manipulative tactics employed by abusers to gain access to potential victims, coerce them into accepting abuse, and minimize the risk of detection. While these strategies are frequently targeted at younger children, adolescents, and vulnerable adults are also susceptible. Grooming can occur both online and offline and is often perpetrated by individuals within the victim's trusted circle, such as family members, coaches, teachers, or youth group leaders.

## **The Urgent Call to Action**

It's essential to recognize the deeply ingrained taboos surrounding topics of sexuality and relationships within the Baltic region. In Lithuania and Latvia particularly, the absence of comprehensive sexual education exacerbates the issue, leaving young people without vital knowledge about healthy relationships, consent, and personal boundaries. This lack of education leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and manipulation, especially in the context of grooming. Therefore, addressing grooming is not only about combating a specific form of abuse but also about breaking the silence surrounding these taboo subjects and advocating for comprehensive sexual education that empowers young people with the necessary tools to recognize and resist grooming tactics. It's imperative that we confront these societal barriers head-on and prioritize the well-being and safety of our youth by advocating for systemic changes in education and fostering open dialogue within our communities. In all three Baltic states grooming remains overlooked, often accompanied by a culture of victim-blaming. The higher the status of the groomer, the more protection the perpetrator tends to receive, exacerbating the vulnerability of young people. Consequently, young individuals are left without adequate support and resources, compounding the challenges they face in addressing and recovering from grooming experiences. Breaking the silence around grooming is crucial not only to combatting this form of exploitation but also to challenging the systemic injustices that perpetuate it. It's imperative that we dismantle the structures that shield perpetrators and prioritize the provision of comprehensive support services for victims in the Baltics and beyond. Recognizing that every juvenile delinquency report, which includes unauthorized production, purchase, storage of narcotic and psychotropic substances, transportation and transmission, and participation in pornographic performances or intimate nature violations, could potentially shed light on grooming cases underlying these statistics, is essential to addressing the root causes and ensuring effective intervention.

## By signing this memorandum organizations agrees to:

1. Work together to combat grooming in the Baltic region through joint initiatives, sharing resources, and coordinating efforts.
2. Increase public awareness about grooming, its signs, and its impacts through education campaigns, workshops, and community outreach programs.
3. Advocate for access to specialized support services for victims of grooming, including counseling, legal assistance, and crisis intervention.
4. Advocate for legislative reforms and policy changes that strengthen protections for grooming victims, enhance penalties for perpetrators, and promote prevention measures.
5. Provide information and/or training opportunities for professionals working with children and youth to recognize and respond effectively to grooming incidents.
6. Support research initiatives aimed at better understanding the prevalence and dynamics of grooming, as well as evaluating the effectiveness of interventions.
7. Foster dialogue and collaboration within communities to challenge societal norms that perpetuate grooming and promote a culture of reporting and support.
8. Regularly assess and monitor the implementation and impact of collaborative efforts to combat grooming, adjusting strategies as needed to achieve shared goals.
9. By committing to these actions, the signatories pledge to work together towards creating safer environments for children and vulnerable individuals in the region, free from the threat of grooming and exploitation.

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