

European Network of Ombudspersons for Children

Ad-hoc Position Statement on *the protection of the rights of children affected by the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine*

***Adopted by the ENOC 28th General Assembly, 20 September 2024, Helsinki, Finland**

ENOC - the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children - expresses deep concerns about the continuous massive violations of the rights of children of Ukraine since the beginning of the full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine by the Russian Federation on 24th February 2022.

Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine has caused devastating human losses, including the killing and maiming of hundreds of children, physical and sexual violence, forced displacement and deportation of children, extensive damage and the destruction of the homes and vital infrastructure of the population, including hospitals and schools.

The war has resulted in thousands of civilian casualties – almost two thousand of whom are children. Thousands of children are reported missing. According to data provided by the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine, since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, 575 children have been killed and 1609 injured. According to data provided by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, 1941 children have been reported missing.

All children affected by the war in Ukraine are in an extremely vulnerable situation. Children residing in the frontline area are forced to bear the direct consequences of the war on a daily basis and suffer from the lack of drinking water, food, essential medicines and adequate healthcare, many are forced to live in dilapidated and unheated residential buildings and do not have access to adequate healthcare and education.

Children witness the deaths of their loved ones and live in constant fear of bombing and shelling. An entire generation of children is growing up in conditions of constant stress and insecurity. This has caused great damage to their mental health; millions are suffering from psychological trauma. Half of young teenagers report having trouble sleeping, and 1 in 5 have intrusive thoughts and flashbacks.¹

The horrors of war and the humanitarian crisis caused by the war have affected also those children who are internally displaced in Ukraine and those who have found temporary protection in Europe, as well as children who are currently missing or have been deported or forcibly displaced to the Russian Federation and Belarus.

¹ UNICEF [press release statement](#) 13 May 2024.



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According to the Ukrainian state [portal 'Children of War'](#), 19,546 deported children have been identified to date, and only 388 children have been returned to Ukraine. There are reports that forcibly transferred or deported Ukrainian children residing, including temporarily, in Russian territory or the territory of Ukraine temporarily occupied by Russia, are being deprived of their Ukrainian nationality and Russian citizenship is provided to them under simplified procedure. There are also reports of adoptions of these children by Russian families and the enforcement of Russian curricula and military training in schools in the Ukrainian territory occupied by Russia². According to data provided by the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine, 5 criminal proceedings have been initiated over the involvement of 5 minors in the armed conflict by members of the Russian Federation's Armed Forces.

Nearly half of children enrolled in schools in Ukraine are missing out on in-person schooling, with almost one million children across the country not able to access any in-person learning at all.³ Due to the lack of access to the Internet, appropriate technical means for online learning, the interruptions in electricity supply due to the shelling of critical infrastructure, and the lack of equipped classrooms for internally displaced children, many children cannot participate in the educational process at all or do so irregularly.

Around half of Ukrainian refugee children who have found temporary protection in Europe —nearly one million—aren't currently enrolled in their host countries' schools. While many access Ukrainian education online, they miss social interaction with peers.⁴ They have been deprived of their homes, often separated from their families, especially fathers, older brothers or uncles.

ENOC joins the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in stressing that it is essential for these children to receive education and healthcare, including mental health support, which is tailored to their specific situation, and to maintain their connections with their language and culture, which will facilitate their future return to Ukraine, taking into account the best interests of the child.⁵

On 24 June 2022, ENOC issued a [position statement](#) on *The protection of the rights of children fleeing the war in Ukraine*. The statement contains actionable and detailed recommendations for the protection of the rights of children arriving from Ukraine to other European countries. Many of these recommendations are still to be enforced.

Every child has the right to life, the right to live in safety, to have access to food, water, housing, education, and adequate healthcare. The ongoing war and the

² Committee on the Rights of the Child, [Concluding observations](#) on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of the Russian Federation 1 March 2024 CRC/C/RUS/CO/6-7, p 45.

³ UNICEF [press release statement](#) 13 May 2024.

⁴ UNICEF [press release statement](#) 12 June 2024.

⁵ Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe [Resolution 2529 \(2024\)](#) on *Situation of the children of Ukraine*, p 4.



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humanitarian crisis caused by the war breach all those rights and have caused a dramatic loss of innocent lives, displacement, and trauma for countless children.

We urgently call on the Russian Federation to prioritise the safety and well-being of children, respect international humanitarian law and end the grave violations against all children, including killing and maiming of children.

We urge all parties involved and the international community to take immediate action to save the lives and protect the rights of Ukrainian children and ensure their needs are met, in all areas.

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