

17/12/2025

## Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine (CGU)

### 8<sup>th</sup> PLENARY MEETING followed by

### THE THEMATIC EXPERT EXCHANGE on

## Accountability for Crimes Committed against Children during Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine: Child-Friendly Justice and Access to Remedies

**1 – 3 December 2025 (Strasbourg and via zoom for speakers intervening online)**

### Summary Note

#### Executive Summary:

- The Council of Europe Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine (CGU) convened its 8th Plenary Meeting on 1-2 December 2025, followed by a Thematic Expert Exchange on accountability for crimes committed against children during Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, co-organised with Leiden Law School of Leiden University. In total, 91 CGU members and other invited experts participated in the three-day event, including representatives from 36 member states, 5 international organisations, and around 30 civil society organisations and academic institutions, alongside senior officials and experts from across the Council of Europe's Departments and Divisions.
- During the Plenary Meeting, CGU members reviewed key developments affecting children of Ukraine and examined priority workstreams for the CGU's second phase, with a strong focus on preconditions for the safe return of children from the host countries to Ukraine, family-based care, anti-bullying in education settings and access to quality education, conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), the impact of indoctrination and militarisation on the mental health and re-integration of children of Ukraine, and the situation of children with disabilities affected by war.
- The Thematic Expert Exchange further deepened discussions on accountability, including international and national frameworks for documenting and prosecuting atrocity crimes against children, child-friendly justice standards, trauma-informed investigative techniques, and access to remedies.
- Across the three days, participants reaffirmed the CGU's role as an expert-led, cooperative platform and outlined priority areas for follow-up and strengthened coordination. Discussions were held in line with the Chatham House Rule, enabling open and candid exchanges while ensuring that views expressed are not attributed to individual participants or institutions.

## **Overview of the Plenary Discussions**

### **1) Updates from CGU Members**

Delegations provided brief updates on developments concerning children of Ukraine in host States, including trends in arrivals, access to services, guardianship arrangements and schooling. Ukrainian authorities presented new data on evacuated children, progress in reforming the child protection and care system through the Better Care reform and priorities for inter-agency cooperation. These exchanges informed the identification of areas requiring sustained CGU attention during the next implementation phase.

### **2) CGU Second Phase Priorities**

Discussions focused on the future direction of the CGU's work, emphasising the need to consolidate progress achieved to date while responding to newly emerging protection concerns. Priority areas identified for 2025–2026 include: continued work on preconditions for the safe return of children from the host countries to Ukraine, reintegration, and family-based care; strengthened access to education and whole-school inclusion; enhanced psychological support and trauma-informed approaches; addressing bullying, violence, and risks linked to digital environments; and follow-up to the CGU's mapping of support to children with disabilities. Following a discussion with experts from the child rights and youth sectors of the Council of Europe, members also underscored the importance of integrating children's and young people's perspectives into specific CGU outputs.

Building on the Thematic Expert Exchange, members and experts highlighted the need to deepen work on accountability, including support for child-friendly and victim-centred investigations, documentation and prosecution of atrocity crimes against children of Ukraine, improved access to remedies and rehabilitation, and strengthened cooperation with Ukrainian authorities and international partners. The CGU will also advance work on the impact of indoctrination and militarisation on the mental health, development and reintegration of children of Ukraine, drawing on emerging evidence and comparative expertise, and ensuring close coordination with relevant Council of Europe and other international mechanisms.

### **3) Safe Return and Reintegration**

Ukrainian authorities presented updated figures on evacuated children and described procedures for individual needs assessments, decision-making and reintegration planning. Delegations discussed ways to strengthen cooperation, improve the visibility of national procedures and support the development of practical tools - such as checklists and guidance - to facilitate consistent best-interests in decision-making. Going forward, several States expressed interest in piloting structured cooperation mechanisms aimed at enhancing timely communication and improving re-integration support for returned children.

### **4) Better Care Reform and Integrated Family Support**

Updates from Ukrainian authorities and UNICEF highlighted efforts to strengthen family-based care, support parenting and prevent unnecessary family separation. The next phase of work will focus on building unified assessment tools, improving cross-sector cooperation, advancing professional training and scaling up models for foster, guardianship and patronage care. Delegations underscored

the importance of ensuring continuity of support, including provision of mental health services, for children and families affected by displacement.

### **5) Anti-bullying and School Inclusion**

Presentations showcased methodologies that combine whole-school approaches, social and emotional learning and structured support for educators and school leaders. Participants noted that future CGU work should focus on adapting such models to diverse national contexts, linking bullying prevention with broader integration measures, and identifying complementary tools across Council of Europe bodies.

### **6) Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV)**

Experts and civil society organisations presented documentation findings, highlighting the forms of sexual violence affecting children, challenges in identification and barriers to specialised support. Issues raised included the legal status and protection needs of children born of CRSV, confidentiality safeguards and the need for cross-border coordination in investigations. Future work in this area should focus on promoting child-sensitive procedures, supporting multidisciplinary approaches, strengthening awareness among practitioners and facilitating exchanges between national experts on good practices.

### **7) Indoctrination, Militarisation and Identity-Targeting**

Ukrainian authorities and experts provided evidence of systematic practices affecting children in Russia, Belarus and Temporarily Occupied Territories, including identity suppression, replacement of the Ukrainian school curriculum by the Russian school curriculum, forced citizenship processes and exposure to military training. Research initiatives underway will examine the effects of these practices on children's identity, mental health and reintegration. The CGU will continue exploring modalities for reinforcing psychological support and reintegration pathways for returned children.

### **8) Children with Disabilities**

Mapping findings indicated that children with disabilities face persistent barriers across health, education and social services, both in Ukraine and in host States. Future CGU work will focus on strengthening cross-sector coordination, enhancing early identification and case management, supporting family-based alternatives to institutional care and ensuring continued collaboration with civil society organisations, particularly those providing essential frontline support. To streamline this work, an Advisory Group with experts from CGU member states and independent experts will be set up in early 2026 to discuss in-depth the ways in which CGU can support this field through concrete actions.

### **9) Child and Youth Participation**

Speakers presented models for ethical and structured participation, including safeguarding principles and co-management systems. Delegations expressed broad support for integrating children's and young people's views into specific CGU deliverables, where deemed relevant. The next phase will explore concrete modalities, such as thematic consultations or youth advisory formats, to ensure that participation is meaningful, trauma-sensitive and aligned with the CGU's mandate.

## Overview of the Thematic Expert Exchange on Accountability

The Expert Exchange offered a comprehensive examination of international, regional and Ukrainian mechanisms addressing accountability for crimes committed against children in the context of war. The opening session set the conceptual foundation by outlining a children's rights-based approach to accountability, followed by contributions on the ICC/OTP (ICC Office of the Prosecutor) Policy on Children, relevant ECtHR jurisprudence, and the Council of Europe's standards, including the Lanzarote Convention and the Committee of Ministers' Guidelines on Child-Friendly Justice. The Executive Director of the Register of Damage for Ukraine presented ongoing efforts to document harm affecting children.

A dedicated session reviewed Ukraine's national legal and policy frameworks, with Ukrainian authorities detailing progress and outstanding challenges in investigating and prosecuting atrocity crimes against children. International partners - including the European Commission (DG JUST), Global Rights Compliance, the Ukrainian Bar Association and Truth Hounds - outlined ongoing support to strengthen child-friendly and victim-centred investigations, noting persistent gaps related to evidence collection, documentation of identity alteration, digital environments, and cross-border cooperation.

The Exchange also featured a focused discussion on trauma-informed and child-friendly investigative techniques, including best practices for interviewing children, comparative lessons on Child-Friendly Justice, and perspectives from universal jurisdiction and international tribunals, notably the experience of the UN Special Court for Sierra Leone.

The final thematic session addressed remedies for child survivors, combining comparative insights from the CRC Committee's individual and systemic remedies, approaches emerging from transitional justice and ICC practice, and interdisciplinary models such as Barnahus, highlighting the need for integrated cooperation between justice, health and social sectors to ensure long-term rehabilitation and recovery.

## Key Takeaways and Way Forward

CGU members and experts identified the following priorities for follow-up: advancing work on pre-conditions for the safe return of children from the host countries to Ukraine and reintegration through practical tools and information exchange; strengthening accountability processes by reinforcing child-friendly and trauma-informed approaches across documentation, investigation, prosecution and access to remedies; improving identification of CRSV and ensuring multidisciplinary, survivor-centred support; documenting the impact of indoctrination and militarisation on children and supporting tailored reintegration and recovery; ensuring continuity of services and family-based support for children with disabilities based on the CGU's mapping report; supporting Ukraine's Better Care Reform to advance prevention and family-based alternatives; promoting whole-school approaches to inclusion and responses to bullying and digital risks; and integrating children's and young people's perspectives into specific CGU outputs through appropriate modalities.

The CGU Secretariat will prepare a follow-up plan reflecting these priorities and continue working closely with Ukrainian counterparts, Member States and partner organisations to support children of Ukraine affected by the war.