



Building a Europe
for and with children



EUROPEAN CONVENTION
ON HUMAN RIGHTS
CONVENTION EUROPÉENNE
DES DROITS DE L'HOMME
1950 - 2025

75



CGU(2025)08

07 May 2025

Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine (CGU)

5th Plenary Meeting

29 April 2025, Online

Summary Note

Executive Summary:

- ✚ The Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine (CGU) held its 5th Plenary Meeting on 29 April 2025 in an online format, gathering **47 representatives from 29 member states, 21 representatives from key international organisations, 9 representatives from relevant national and international civil society organisations, as well as 10 independent experts.**
- ✚ As emphasised in the opening by the CGU's Special Advisor, while the war in Ukraine tragically continues, the CGU's role in fostering multilateral dialogue has proven essential. The new Head of the Children's Rights Division situated the CGU's work within the overall framework of Council of Europe's work in the area of children's rights. The meeting focused on the ongoing work of the CGU Dialogue Group's work on psychological support and trauma-informed care, transnational procedures and guardianship, as well as updates on Ukraine's *Better Care Reform*, and follow-up actions on CGU's special hearing on pre-conditions for the safe return from Council of Europe (CoE) member states.

1) Debrief of the Work of Dialogue Groups

a. Dialogue Group on Psychological Support and Trauma-informed Care

- ✚ The Chair of the Dialogue Group on Psychological Support and Trauma-informed Care opened the floor by presenting the outcomes of the Group's 4th meeting. Participants reviewed the first draft of the revised *Manual for Professionals on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support for Children in Crisis and Emergency Situations*, with the aim of finalising a master version (in English) for broader use by all member states wishing to adapt it into their national contexts. A subsequent session on **trauma-informed journalism** emphasised the need for ethical standards, increased awareness of children's rights, and targeted training. The Chair highlighted the importance of applying trauma-

informed approaches in interviewing children for media coverage. The Dialogue Group also identified key priorities, including the development of guidance on **trauma-informed re-integration of children**, practical tools for psycho-social support providers, and accessible materials to support **community and caregiver resilience**.

- ✚ The final draft of the revised *Manual for Professionals on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support for Children in Crisis and Emergency Situations* was presented at the Plenary Meeting.
- ✚ *Plan International* presented findings from its *Invisible Wounds* report, focusing on the mental health challenges of Ukrainian boys and young men, shaped by displacement, exposure to violence, stigma and rigid gender roles. Many feel pressured to hide emotions and shoulder adult responsibilities. The presentation highlighted the value of youth-led initiatives, such as art and sports therapy and peer mental health ambassadors, and the need for psycho-social support services in Ukrainian language. Emotional support from family, peer connections, and volunteering were identified as key to restoring a sense of agency. The presentation also emphasised key recommendations, including strengthening youth participation in program design, investing in community-based and digital mental health services. The session concluded with a call for stronger coordination to ensure inclusive mental health support for all affected children.

b. Thematic Dialogue Group on Transnational Procedures and Guardianship (TPG)

- ✚ The Chair of the Dialogue Group on TPG opened the floor by presenting the outcomes of the Group's 2nd meeting. Participants heard a **personal testimony from an unaccompanied child of Ukraine** now residing in Czechia, highlighting the emotional and logistical challenges faced when fleeing alone and the essential support received in the host country. The discussion underscored the importance of guardianship, access to services, and the role of social connections in integration. Remaining key challenges were identified as the **lack of child-friendly information, unclear roles between guardians and parents, and the absence of safe travel protocols** between Ukraine and host countries. The group members agreed to contribute to a *Mapping Study* on focal points coordinating all actions and decisions concerning the children of Ukraine.
- ✚ The first draft of the *Mapping Study on focal points coordinating all actions and decisions concerning the children of Ukraine* was presented at the Plenary Meeting, providing a summary of the experts' initial analysis of the contributions made by CGU members through an online survey. Participants suggested that **focal points could be very useful in supporting strategic coordination** with both local and Ukrainian authorities. While seen as potentially valuable, **questions were raised about their mandate, resourcing, and capacity to operate effectively within changing contexts**. Some noted the **need to clarify their role in individual case management and how they would engage with broader child protection systems**. Practical insights were shared on existing models, including **challenges in decentralised systems**. The first draft will be distributed shortly for written comments, and the research will continue through bilateral meetings with selected member states.

2) Special Update on Progress and the current challenges on the reform of the Ukrainian child protection and alternative care system: Ukraine's "Better Care Initiative" supported by the European Commission and UNICEF

a. Approaches to the Development of Family-Based Forms of Care and Family-Like Settings in Ukraine

- ✚ Goal 2 of Ukraine's 2024–2028 Better Care Reform Strategic aims is to ensure that **every child grows up in a supportive family environment by reducing reliance on institutional care and**

preventing unnecessary family separation. The reform emphasises expanding family-based care through public awareness efforts, enhanced training for foster carers and guardians, and hybrid learning modules for relatives. Strengthening the capacity of local governments is also a priority. A key innovation is the “Family Home” service, offering inclusive, community-based care for older children, siblings, and children with disabilities. While challenges persist, particularly in staffing, infrastructure, and ensuring adequate resources at local levels, a multisectoral approach is being developed to address these gaps.

b. Support from the CGU

- ✦ **Sixteen CGU member states and participants responded to Ukraine’s call for good practice examples, providing valuable tools on training, family matching, and legal frameworks.** Ukraine welcomed the input and is ready to integrate it into ongoing reforms. Next steps include bilateral exchanges, expert consultations, and continued collaboration through the CGU to support implementation.

3) Follow-up Actions to CGU’s Special Hearing on Pre-conditions for Safe Return of Children of Ukraine from CoE Member States

- ✦ This session focused on the ongoing follow-up actions to the CGU’s Special Hearing on the pre-conditions for the safe return of children of Ukraine from host states. Opening remarks emphasised that the **Special Hearing had significantly contributed to building cooperation, sharing information between Ukrainian and host state representatives, and informing Ukraine’s national reforms,** including new legal provisions requiring individual needs assessments before any return decision.
- ✦ A draft ***Checklist for Host States related to the return of children of Ukraine*** was presented as a tool to help ensure that minimum standards under international and European law are upheld in return processes. Participants took part in breakout discussions to provide initial feedback from four perspectives. **The checklist was widely viewed as a useful and timely initiative with the potential to enhance safeguards for children of Ukraine.** However, **several questions were raised** regarding the clarity of roles and responsibilities, the checklist’s applicability in a post-conflict context, and the need for greater transparency in information-sharing to support its practical implementation. Concerns were also expressed about the checklist’s monitoring requirements and who would be responsible for ensuring compliance. The first draft will be distributed shortly for written comments, and the study will continue with bilateral meetings with selected member states.
- ✦ The session continued with an outline of a **possible process to enhance bilateral cooperation between Ukraine and host states in return cases.** Legal frameworks, such as the 1996 Hague Convention and international child rights instruments, were cited as key references. It was acknowledged that return cases are already occurring, and while intentions are positive, practical cooperation between authorities remains inconsistent. A **proposal to explore pilot initiatives in selected countries** was discussed, aiming to improve coordination, ensure child participation, and align procedures with the states’ responsibilities outlined in the *Checklist for Host States*. Discussions stressed the **importance of maintaining a child protection focus and reinforcing trust, transparency, and long-term engagement between states.** Participants supported continued refinement of tools and deeper dialogue going forward.

4) Decisions and next steps

- ✦ The final draft of the revised Manual for Professionals on Mental Health and Psycho-social Support for Children in Crisis and Emergency Situations will be made available for adaptation by member states, with publication planned for 1 June 2025 to mark International Children’s Day.
- ✦ CGU members and participants will provide written comments during the month of May 2025 on the first drafts of two CGU deliverables:
 - the **Mapping Study on Focal Points coordinating actions concerning children of Ukraine**, and
 - the **Checklist for Host States related to the return of children of Ukraine**.
- ✦ Efforts to strengthen bilateral cooperation between Ukraine and host states in return cases will continue, with ongoing input from Ukrainian authorities and representatives of selected pilot host countries.

Provisional dates for the next Dialogue Group and Plenary Meetings:

Meeting	Date and Time	Location
5th meeting of Dialogue Group on Psychological Support and Trauma-informed care	12 June 2025 / Morning	Online
3rd meeting of Dialogue Group on Transnational Procedures and Guardianship	12 June 2025 / Afternoon	Online

Dates of the next Plenary Meeting:

Meeting	Date and Time	Location
6th CGU Plenary Meeting	7-9 July 2025 Plenary (7-8 July 2025) High-level Stock-taking Conference (9 July 2025)	Strasbourg (in person)