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Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine (CGU)

Second phase kick-off meeting (7th Plenary Meeting)

19 September 2025 / online

Summary Note

Executive Summary:

- ✚ The Council of Europe (CoE) Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine (CGU) held its **Second phase kick-off meeting** online on 19 September 2025 (with the participation of representatives of **23 member states, nine representatives of relevant international organisations, five representatives of four relevant national and international civil society organisations, and two independent experts**).
- ✚ The opening of the Second phase kick-off meeting by the Director of Equal Rights and Dignity within the Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity, Hallvard Gorseth and Special Advisor to the CGU, Jennifer Schuetze-Reymann included welcoming words, recalling a unique and **state-led, non-political and technical-level working methodology** of the CGU and a short stock-taking of what was achieved in the first phase.
- ✚ The Kick-off meeting started with a *tour de table* with **updates on efforts to support children of Ukraine by member states, international and civil society organisations**. The participants **discussed possible additional areas of work** during the CGU's second phase. Notably, the need to enhance collaboration between various services; follow-up to the work on pre-conditions for the safe return of children to Ukraine from host states and finding ways to address the long-term needs of children in host states, such as access to quality education, housing and employment opportunities for their parents, as well as other priority areas. This was followed by **updates of the priorities of the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity of Ukraine as well as on Ukraine's Better Care Reform**.

1) *Tour de Table*

- ✚ Several CoE member states noticed **an increase in children's arrivals** (including unaccompanied children) from Ukraine during the summer. It is unclear whether these arrivals were for summer work purposes, or the children intended to stay. The CGU members and participants shared updates on their national and international efforts to support the children of Ukraine, along with

some of the challenges they face. The EU representatives informed that President Ursula von der Leyen announced in her annual State of the Union address that the EU will organise a Summit to raise awareness of unlawfully deported children under the auspices of the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian children in due course.

2) Presentation of CGU's Second phase:

Team

- ✚ It was announced that the **SGU Secretariat will have an enlarged team, comprised of** the Special Advisor to the CGU, a Senior Project Officer, a Project Officer and a Project Assistant based in Strasbourg, as well as a Project Officer in the CoE's field office (Kyiv).

Format

- ✚ The discussions will **continue following the earlier established plenary meetings format.**
- ✚ As for more focused discussions, the *Dialogue Group on Psychological Support and Trauma-informed Care* **will maintain its regular meetings** while the *Dialogue Group on Transnational Procedures and Guardianship* **will discontinue in this format¹**, with the agreement from all four co-chairs. At the same time, **Ad hoc Advisory Groups/Focus/Reflection Groups could be created on a needs basis** to provide follow-up to special thematic hearings and exchanges and to discuss any relevant issues in a more focused format.
- ✚ It is planned to establish a **Youth / Children's Advisory Council** to ensure involvement of the main beneficiaries in key aspects of the CGU's work and to provide guidance on areas where such participation is essential.
- ✚ As specific matters arise, the **CGU Secretariat will be prepared to facilitate bilateral discussions and co-operation.**

Topics

- ✚ The second phase will run until 31 December 2026, continuing to focus on key topics from the first phase, such as the **impact of war on children with disabilities, the pre-conditions for the safe return of children from CoE host countries to Ukraine, as well as psychological support and trauma-informed care.** The CGU will also explore new priority areas, including the **role of children in the accountability process, trauma-informed investigations and access to justice, conflict-related sexual violence against children, and bullying and harassment of children of Ukraine within educational settings** (a survey has been sent out to gather additional input from CGU members and participants on the new topics).

3) Discussion of possible additional areas of work during CGU's 2nd phase:

- ✚ During this session, the CGU members and participants discussed the possibilities to work on the following topics: **coordination between state services and/or departments within the same member state and between different member states in relation to the safe return of evacuated children to Ukraine; supporting children following their return from unlawful deportation; adequate housing, education and integration of children and their families in host states; follow-up on the situation of children who have returned to Ukraine from CoE host states; bullying, violence and AI as well as involving youth / children's advisory groups in CGU's work.**

4) Update on changes in the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity of Ukraine with relevance to CGU

- ✚ The update outlined the new Ministry's mandate and the new **government's Action plan for 2025.** The Action plan includes the following topics relevant to the CGU work: **combatting poverty and providing more targeted and effective social protection intervention as well as modernisation of**

¹ with the possibility to discuss topics falling within this area outside of a formal Dialogue Group.

principles of social protection; child and family support; supporting women to return to the labour market by providing early childcare; disability inclusion and the provision of adequate services for children and adults with disabilities; integration of Internally Displaced Persons; special programmes on foster care of children returning from the host states or unity hubs for children and people residing in host states.

- ✚ The Ministry reiterated the **importance of cooperation within the framework of CGU and learning from the CGU members' practical examples.**

5) The Better Care Reform: Progress Review

- ✚ The update outlined the Strategy's progress and noted the **increase of patronat families (professional short-term foster care)** from less than 200 families at the Strategy's launch to 577 families in 2025. 2594 children have received care.
- ✚ The update noted the **high turnover** due to the fact that many foster families' set-ups stop functioning despite the new recruitment.
- ✚ The **insufficient family-based options and access to services led to children entering residential care.** This results in 25,983 children remaining in residential care, including 4,568 orphans or children deprived of parental care.
- ✚ The **key challenges include the financial gap** (state allowances cover 51 – 63%), **shortage of social workers; insufficient availability and quality of family support services and placement difficulties for children with disabilities and large sibling groups.**
- ✚ The **next steps** will include the revision of childcare allowances and foster carers' remuneration; strengthening case management; providing psycho-social support and support to foster families for children with complex needs.
- ✚ The expected **transformational outcomes by 2028 include:** 30% reduction in institutional care; 95% children would be raised in family settings; 80% reduction in baby homes; 587,600 children enjoying a minimum package of services; more than 1600 evacuated children reintegrated, and 2500 trained professionals.
- ✚ The National Strategy Investment's **external gap is 521.5 million USD (33%).**
- ✚ **CGU members and participants will continue to support the reform by sharing good practices examples and following the progress closely.**

Next meeting:

- **CGU 8th Plenary Meeting (in Strasbourg): 1 – 3 December 2025, with 3 December being dedicated to a thematic seminar on the role of children in the accountability process, trauma-led investigations and access to remedies**