

6 April 2022

Declaration on the consequences of the aggression of the Russian Federation for the children in Ukraine

issued by six Council of Europe member States
(Andorra, Belgium, Luxembourg, Monaco, San Marino and Slovenia)

and supported by 38 other Council of Europe member States:
Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark,
Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia,
Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland,
Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Slovak Republic, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland,
Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom.

The 44 Council of Europe member States mentioned above condemn in the strongest possible terms the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine and express their grave concern about its immediate and long-term impact on millions of Ukrainian children.

In accordance with the provisional measures granted by the European Court of Human Rights on 1 and 4 March 2022, we urge 'the Government of Russia to refrain from military attacks against civilians and civilian objects, including residential premises, emergency vehicles and other specially protected civilian objects such as schools and hospitals, and to ensure immediately the safety of the medical establishments, personnel and emergency vehicles within the territory under attack or siege by Russian troops'.

Children have been specifically targeted with attacks on their homes, schools, kindergartens, hospitals, orphanages, care institutions. Children have been killed and maimed, hundreds have been injured and millions forced to flee their homes. Children and their families are left with no or limited access to shelter, food, water, heating, basic physical and mental healthcare. Evacuation routes are not safe and are being targeted on purpose. Children are being exposed to risks of being killed, injured, trafficked, abducted, exploited, and sexually abused. They need immediate protection and shelter. We are particularly concerned about the fate of more than 100.000 orphans, including many children with disabilities.

Half of the approximately ten million refugees and internally displaced persons from Ukraine are children and an increasing number of them are traveling unaccompanied. More than half of the children living in Ukraine have now had to leave their homes. The overwhelming solidarity by Council of Europe member States in their commitment to meeting the needs of families, women and children fleeing Ukraine, arriving in or transiting through their countries, to ensuring their protection, in the short, medium and long term demonstrates the commitment of our member States to the core values of our Organisation.

There is an urgent need to take measures to provide protection to all children whether they are still in the immediate war zone, are internally displaced, fleeing or seeking refuge and shelter in neighbouring or other countries. Their immediate safety, peace and protection need to be ensured. Children must be systematically registered, robust guardianship mechanisms must be put in place and children must be provided access to education, health care, family based care and psychological support. Orphans, unaccompanied children, children with disabilities, children with special needs and children left without parental care need special attention and support. In the case of children separated from their families (those arriving with adults other than their usual guardians or legal representatives), national authorities should check the relevant documents to confirm their identity and, if available, parental consent. Family search programmes should seek to reunite unaccompanied minors with family members.

As member States of the Council of Europe we reaffirm the central role of our Organisation, its core values and human rights protection mechanisms, which are even more relevant in the context of the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. Our Convention system, in particular the European Convention on Human Rights, the Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention) and the Convention on Action against

Trafficking in Human Beings are valuable tools to address the consequences of the war in Ukraine. We acknowledge the work of our Court, the Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees in this regard and encourage them to take further steps wherever possible.

We welcome the adoption of the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022 -2027) to be launched at a High-Level Conference in Rome on 7 April 2022 and underline the relevance of its strategic objective dedicated to children's rights in crisis and emergency situations. We emphasise its central role in upholding the rights of all children across our continent, including in the context of the dramatic situation of children affected by the war in Ukraine. The Strategy clearly states that Europe is not a safe haven for children.

We, as member States of the Council of Europe, will strive to coordinate our actions and adjust the Organisation's co-operation projects to the needs of the children in Ukraine.