

Special Envoy of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe on the situation of children of Ukraine

1. Context

The plight of the children of Ukraine, both those 7,5 million children deprived of a normal life inside Ukraine and those who have fled to other Council of Europe (CoE) member states, as well as those unlawfully deported to the Russian Federation or to the areas temporarily controlled or occupied by it, was subject of discussions at the highest political level at the Reykjavik Summit of May 2023 and remains a priority issue of the CoE, as well as in the recent conference on the Human dimension of Ukraine's peace formula, which ended up in a [joint communiqué](#) joined by the Council of Europe.

In their [Declaration on the Situation of the Children of Ukraine \(Appendix II to the Reykjavik Declaration\)](#), the Heads of States and Government of the Council of Europe member states expressed their “grave concern with regard to the evidence of (...) unlawful transfers and deportation of Ukrainian children by Russian forces to the Russian Federation and Belarus, or to the areas temporarily controlled or occupied by the Russian Federation, and their forcible placement under custody or adoption by Russian citizens, and other violations of their dignity and rights.”

Furthermore, since the start of the war of aggression of the Russian Federation, **millions of children are estimated to have been forced to flee Ukraine**, the vast majority of them being hosted in Council of Europe member states. In the abovementioned **Declaration on the situation of the children of Ukraine**, the Heads of State and Government further underlined “the need to intensify efforts, at all levels of governance” to ensure “the effective protection of the rights of children of Ukraine” in accordance with “the applicable Council of Europe standards”. To this end, they called on the Council of Europe “**to facilitate co-operation between States, the European Union and relevant international organisations, through an appropriate mechanism**”.

As a practical implementation of this Declaration, a **Council of Europe Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine (CGU)** was formally launched in Strasbourg on 30 November 2023. The CGU serves as a platform between Council of Europe member states, the EU, other IOs and civil society to discuss legal and policy issues affecting children of UA in Council of Europe member states. Three priority areas identified are: 1) transnational procedures and co-operation; 2) effective guardianship and 3) psychological support and trauma informed care for children of Ukraine. The Council of Europe is also working on protecting rights of Ukrainian children on post-war context through a project aimed at strengthening Ukraine's response to violence against children, including child sexual exploitation and abuse, in the context of the armed aggression by the Russian Federation.

Standard setting, monitoring and co-operation activities (e.g. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/ukraine-protecting-the-rights-of-ukrainian-children-during-and-in-post-war-context>) within the Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law and the Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity are also relevant for this work.

The Council of Europe became a member of the Coalition for the return of children of Ukraine, and the Council of Europe Focal Point on the Situation of the Children of Ukraine has participated in plenary meetings of the Coalition.

2. Mandate of the Special Envoy on the situation of children of Ukraine

Guided by the Reykjavik Declaration and the relevant Council of Europe standards, the Special Envoy shall:

- Raise awareness of the challenges faced by the children of Ukraine and promote Council of Europe standards, initiatives and activities in support of children of Ukraine, both internally and externally;
- Ensure internal co-ordination and cooperation with all Council of Europe relevant entities, including the CGU and the Register of Damage;
- Foster international co-operation. This includes representing the Secretary General in international events and liaising with

- international partners, such as the Coalition for the return of children of Ukraine;
- Suggest ways of enhancing the Council of Europe activities in supporting the children of Ukraine, in the light of current and strategic priorities, and identify opportunities for synergies with international partners.

The Special Envoy will report to the Secretary General and provide regular information to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on the activities in support of children of Ukraine, including on the implementation of the Reykjavík Declaration.