

Resolution 2204 (2018)¹

Protecting children affected by armed conflicts

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Children across Europe and the world are affected by wars and armed conflicts. They are victims of life-threatening violence or witnesses of such violence, they have lost or been separated from their parents or other caregivers, they are deprived of basic social services, such as health care and education, or they have been recruited as child soldiers and thus forced to take part in conflicts themselves.

2. From a European viewpoint, many of these children seem to be living in distant places that are beyond the reach of European stakeholders, such as those in the terrible conflict situations currently observed in Iraq, Syria, Yemen or Myanmar. However, many children also live in European areas marked by so-called “unresolved” or “frozen” conflicts, or by post-conflict situations. Regardless of the geographic location of conflicts, all European States are concerned in one way or another, whether as a member of relevant international organisations, as a party to ongoing conflicts, as an economic partner of conflicting parties or as one of the countries receiving refugees arriving from conflict zones.

3. The Parliamentary Assembly is very concerned about the short- and long-term consequences of armed conflicts on children: they are directly affected in their daily lives, their physical and mental development and their ability to trust other human beings and public institutions. Many of them will be traumatised for their entire lives and see their chances in life compromised. Children that experience armed conflicts also grow up with the understanding that violence is an acceptable means of settling conflicts with other countries or between ethnic or religious groups, and may reproduce it in their later lives.

4. International law is very clear about the protection of children – any person under the age of 18 – and the need to give primary consideration to their best interests in all circumstances (as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)). Children benefit from general protection to civilians and special protection granted by the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and its 1977 Additional Protocol, as recalled by Article 38.4 of the UNCRC calling on States parties to “take all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by an armed conflict”.

5. In the light of the evident gap observed between international obligations and their respect by all States parties, the Assembly calls on the Council of Europe member States to:

5.1. invest in the prevention of conflicts, and children’s involvement therein, both through continuous political dialogue and negotiation, and by promoting and supporting the peaceful, sustainable development of countries involved in ongoing conflicts or threatened by the outbreak of a conflict;

5.2. intervene, wherever they have the power to do so, to put an end to ongoing conflicts by reminding parties in a conflict and their partners of their international commitments, bilaterally or through multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) or the Council of Europe, and by promoting the peaceful resolution of conflicts, thus avoiding further innocent victims among the civilian population, including children;

1. *Assembly debate* on 25 January 2018 (8th Sitting) (see [Doc. 14461](#), report of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development, rapporteur: Ms Sevinj Fataliyeva). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 25 January 2018 (8th Sitting).



- 5.3. educate children and young people who have experienced traumatising armed conflicts on non-violent approaches to ending aggression and conflict, in order to make them resilient to the trans-generational transmission of violence and allow them to grow up in a culture of constructive dialogue as a means of overcoming substantial differences between nationalities or ethnic groups, both through European initiatives taken by the Council of Europe or the OSCE in their field work with young people and through more bilateral approaches;
- 5.4. reinforce child protection and support mechanisms and action at all levels, by:
 - 5.4.1. developing welfare programmes and improving socio-economic conditions and opportunities for children and their families, both in conflict countries and in countries welcoming refugees;
 - 5.4.2. facilitating the work undertaken by international organisations and non-governmental organisations working in the field by providing political and financial support according to actual needs and international standards (for example in terms of the number of carers guaranteed for a given number of children);
 - 5.4.3. ensuring access of international organisations and NGOs to children in need and continuity of programmes within conflict zones;
- 5.5. support and rehabilitate child soldiers and other children actively involved in conflicts by:
 - 5.5.1. treating them as children and not like adult offenders throughout all proceedings;
 - 5.5.2. placing them in the care of child-protection agencies instead of in detention centres, thus facilitating their reintegration into society, including normal education systems, job markets and social life;
 - 5.5.3. involving them in peace-building activities where appropriate to allow them to share their experiences with other young people (taking care to avoid reviving their trauma);
- 5.6. welcome and support children who have left conflict zones by:
 - 5.6.1. providing specialised support to children who are refugees, migrants or internally displaced, who have experienced violent and traumatic situations, and children and young people returning from territories controlled by Daesh, when they arrive in safe destinations, including in different European countries, and in particular by giving them psychological assistance and support, with appropriate therapy for post-traumatic stress, as quickly as possible after their arrival in the host country;
 - 5.6.2. training all professionals dealing with refugee children to avoid reviving their trauma or breaking down their personal defence mechanisms and to help them create new positive life experiences for themselves;
 - 5.6.3. ensuring the children's access to the language of the host country through appropriate and specific language integration programmes put in place by the host country as quickly as possible;
 - 5.6.4. facilitating and encouraging specific assistance in the form of vocational training to child refugees, migrants and internally displaced persons when they arrive in safe destinations, including in European countries, in order to ensure their economic and social integration in the host country.
- 5.7. get involved in European activities concerning children in armed conflicts and promote existing Council of Europe standards in this field, such as the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021), which calls for children to be protected against violence, including in armed conflicts, for action to be taken to rebuild their trust after having experienced such violence and for the setting up of child-friendly legal and administrative procedures.