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Situation of the children of Ukraine

Committee Opinion¹

Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons

Rapporteur: Ms Sandra ZAMPA, Italy, Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group

A. Conclusions of the Committee

1. The Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons welcomes the report by the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development on the situation of children of Ukraine. The report is based on the discussions held during the 15 December 2023 meeting of the ad hoc Committee of the Bureau on Children of Ukraine, organised jointly by the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development and the inter-parliamentary co-operation Division.² It also builds on [Resolution 2495 \(2023\)](#) and [Recommendation 2253 \(2023\)](#) “Deportations and forcible transfers of Ukrainian children and other civilians to the Russian Federation or to temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories: create conditions for their safe return, stop these crimes and punish the perpetrators” adopted by the Assembly in April 2023 (rapporteur: Mr Paulo Pisco, Portugal, SOC). The committee wishes to further enrich the proposed resolution through some amendments which are intended to address the urgent need for humanitarian support, with a particular focus on internally displaced children.

2. The children of Ukraine have been impacted most severely by the Russian Federation’s war of aggression against Ukraine. In addition to those children who were deported or forcibly displaced by Russia, and those who found refuge in Europe, the situation of internally displaced children must not be overlooked. Substantive support is needed to alleviate their suffering and to meet the immediate needs of these children and of their families. The situation of all the children of Ukraine should be kept under review by the Parliamentary Assembly, as long as necessary, to ensure the full protection of children’s rights within and outside Ukraine.

3. The Assembly should therefore act strongly to support and enhance the humanitarian support which is urgently needed for internally displaced children in Ukraine. An additional focused debate centred on the situation of the internally displaced children would allow for the building of new alliances to respond to the needs of these children and of their families. The Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons accordingly stands ready to address the situation of internally displaced children of Ukraine as soon as it is seized for a report.

1. Reference to committee: Reference 4784 of 22 January 2024. Reporting committee: Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development. See [Doc. 15901](#). Opinion approved by the committee on 23 January 2024.

2. <https://pace.coe.int/en/news/9324/-we-have-a-duty-to-make-every-possible-effort-to-help-the-return-of-deported-and-forcibly-transferred-ukrainian-children-pace-president-says->.



B. Proposed Amendments

Amendment A (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 5, add the following paragraph:

“The Assembly refers to its [Resolution 2448 \(2022\)](#) “Humanitarian consequences and internal and external displacement in connection with the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine”. It deplores the challenges faced by the internally displaced children in Ukraine and calls for specific protection measures to be put in place for them”.

Amendment B (to the draft resolution)

After the paragraph mentioned in Amendment A above, add the following paragraph:

“The Assembly calls upon member States’ parliaments to enhance their political support towards meeting the objectives of the humanitarian response plan for Ukraine, with a specific emphasis on the needs of internally displaced children and their families. It has been estimated that a total sum of round US\$4.2 billion is needed to support war-affected communities in Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees and their host communities in the region throughout 2024”.

Amendment C (to the draft resolution)

After the paragraph mentioned in Amendment B above, add the following paragraph:

“The Assembly calls upon member States to step up support to humanitarian organisations, including volunteers, civil-society organisations and other local groups working in Ukraine to protect internally displaced children, recognising their tremendous efforts and contribution”.

Amendment D (to the draft resolution)

After the paragraph mentioned in Amendment C above, add the following paragraph:

“The Assembly will remain seized on this issue with a view to a future debate, which should allow for the building of new alliances to meet the needs of internally displaced children and of their families.”

Amendment E (to the draft resolution)

After the paragraph mentioned in Amendment D above, add the following new paragraph:

“The Assembly will strengthen parliamentary co-operation by setting up an ad hoc Committee to allow parliamentarians with diverse political backgrounds and professional expertise to contribute to improving the situation of children of Ukraine, wherever they may be: children who are in Ukraine, those who are internally displaced and those who have found temporary protection in Europe, as well as children who are currently missing or have been deported or forcibly displaced to Russia and Belarus”.

C. Explanatory memorandum

1. The Assembly’s call for urgent measures to protect the internally displaced children of Ukraine

1. The Assembly, through its Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, has considerable expertise in the field of protecting the rights of internally displaced persons. In its [Resolution 2214 \(2018\)](#) and [Recommendation 2126 \(2018\)](#) “Humanitarian needs and rights of internally displaced persons in Europe”, the Assembly “welcoming the enormous efforts in favour of internally displaced persons undertaken by the member States affected by armed conflicts or other causes of forced displacement, [...] invites those States to regularly assess and make public the humanitarian needs of their internally displaced persons, possibly together with the United Nations, the European Union and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), in particular regarding the needs of internally displaced persons in terms of housing, education, health care...”.

2. When Ukraine was brutally aggressed by the Russian Federation, it rapidly became clear that the fate of millions of people in Ukraine, including children, was at stake. The Assembly is deeply saddened by the tragic deaths of over 500 children and the 1195 wounded.³ Nearly 20 000 children have been deported or forcibly displaced by the Russian Federation to Russia or to the occupied territories in Ukraine, as underscored by the Assembly in its [Resolution 2495 \(2023\)](#) and [Recommendation 2253 \(2023\)](#) “Deportations and forcible transfers of Ukrainian children and other civilians to the Russian Federation or to temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories: create conditions for their safe return, stop these crimes and punish the perpetrators”.

3. Some children have today found refuge in Europe, but many others are still in Ukraine, some of which have been internally displaced. Ukraine needs urgent and sufficient support to be able to meet their needs. The United Nations underscored that more than 14,6 million people – 40% of the population in Ukraine – will need humanitarian assistance this year.⁴

4. The situation of the children currently in those parts of Ukraine still under the control of the Ukrainian authorities, is dramatic. According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), in front-line towns and villages, people have exhausted their meagre resources and rely on aid to survive. In the Donetsk and Kharkiv regions, families shelter in damaged houses with no piped water, gas or electricity. Constant bombardments force people to spend their days in basements. Children cannot play outside, let alone attend school. As stressed by Denise Brown, the Humanitarian Coordinator for Ukraine, “children have endured the loss of their closest family members, their homes, and schools. Scars that may last a lifetime”.⁵ The internally displaced children find themselves in even harsher conditions, especially when they are separated from their parents or caregivers. They are particularly vulnerable and in need of special protection.

5. Internal displacement puts additional pressure on parents with children. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) has stressed the hardship of those internally displaced persons who reside outside collective accommodation sites, particularly in rural areas across Ukraine, and who are facing problems in accessing services and assistance. Displaced people may have been forced to move multiple times, losing their houses and livelihoods, and relying solely on humanitarian assistance. As displacement becomes prolonged, most needs have become more prevalent over time. Displaced people have identified financial support and reconstruction materials as the most prominent needs. The findings from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM's), General Population Surveys) indicate that women reported higher needs across all sectors after being displaced for over a year. People living in collective sites do not have access to alternative adequate housing solutions and continue to face significant protection risks, notably due to overcrowding, eviction risks, as well as sexual abuse and exploitation, and other forms of gender-based violence. Other risks include limited access to essential services, socio-economic vulnerability, and different types of physical and mental harm. Risks in collective sites are driven by inadequate living conditions and/or sub-standard site management, with most sites not meeting intersectoral minimum guidelines. This situation is exacerbated by the dispersed nature of the more than 2 500 sites across the country, bringing significant challenges for humanitarian relief organisations in terms of logistical capacity and allocation of resources. Given the short-term nature of assistance and that financial support for such initiatives is gradually decreasing as the crisis becomes protracted, the most vulnerable people are at risk of resorting to negative coping mechanisms should their daily needs not be met in collective sites.⁶

6. On top of the increased violence of attacks in recent weeks, Ukraine is now in the grip of a deep winter. A continued, large-scale humanitarian operation is as urgent today as it ever was. In that regard, increased humanitarian support to internally displaced children in Ukraine should be an absolute priority.

7. In its [Resolution 2448 \(2022\)](#) “Humanitarian consequences and internal and external displacement in connection with the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine”, the Assembly recalled that the situation of children required specific measures, based on the principle of the best interests of the child. This concerned *inter alia* internally displaced children affected by the war (**amendment A**).

3. <https://childrenofwar.gov.ua/en/>.

4. [Ukraine: Summary of the Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan and the Regional Refugee Response Plan \(January 2024\) – Ukraine | ReliefWeb](#).

5. “Ukraine — Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2024”, Humanitarian Programme Cycle 2024 (as of December 2023), page 3.

6. www.unocha.org/publications/report/ukraine/no-let-war-affected-ukrainians-un-launches-humanitarian-and-refugee-plans-respond-2024-enruuk.

2. A stronger support needed for the humanitarian response for Ukraine

8. Council of Europe member States should do their utmost to contribute to the provision of the support needed. According to the November 2023 UN data, the humanitarian response plan is only funded at 53% so far. On 15 January 2024, the United Nations and partners asked donors for a combined US\$4.2 billion to support war-affected communities in Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees and their host communities in the region throughout 2024 (**amendment B**).

9. More precisely, UN OCHA co-ordinates the response inside Ukraine. This Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan requests US\$3.1 billion for 2024 and targets 8.5 million people. The UNHCR co-ordinates the Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP), which requests US\$1.1 billion and targets 2.3 million refugees and host communities. In total, the two highly prioritised UN plans aim to support some 10.8 million people in Ukraine and the region.

10. “Hundreds of thousands of children live in communities on the front lines of the war, terrified, traumatized and deprived of their basic needs. That fact alone should compel us to do everything we can to bring more humanitarian assistance to Ukraine” said the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Martin Griffiths, who is also the head of UN OCHA.⁷

11. As underscored by UN OCHA, despite extreme access challenges, especially to areas occupied by the Russian Federation, aid workers reached nearly 11 million people in Ukraine in 2023, with the support of the international donor community. It is estimated that 1,5 million girls and 1,4 million boys are still in need of humanitarian support in Ukraine right now.⁸ Humanitarian organisations made every effort to increase assistance in the front-line communities, including through 105 inter-agency convoys, complementing the government’s response and the efforts of volunteers, civil-society organisations and other local groups.⁹ Their efforts must be acknowledged and further help to enable their operations is needed (**amendment C**).

12. Overall, UN OCHA estimates that over 4 million people are still internally displaced across Ukraine, and this prolonged displacement has pushed many to the brink, as they have depleted their resources and capacity to cope with the loss of job or income. There is a clear economic burden of displacement, which hits vulnerable people, including children, the most.

13. The Assembly should therefore raise its voice in calling for the rapid provision of sufficient humanitarian support to ensure that internally displaced children in Ukraine are safe and protected.

3. Next steps

14. The Assembly should act resolutely to contribute to the protection of internally displaced children in Ukraine. A focused debate on internally displaced children will allow for the building of new alliances to meet the needs of these children and of their families. The Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons stands ready to address the situation of internally displaced children of Ukraine as soon as it is seized for a report (**amendment D**).

15. Moreover, a strong parliamentary alliance at European level, on the basis of an *ad hoc* committee of the Parliamentary Assembly Bureau, would allow parliamentarians with diverse political backgrounds and professional expertise to contribute to protecting all children of Ukraine, in all their diverse situations, from the tragedy unfolding on our continent (**amendment E**).

7. [Ukraine: Summary of the Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan and the Regional Refugee Response Plan \(January 2024\) – Ukraine | ReliefWeb](#).

8. “Ukraine — Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2024”, Humanitarian Programme Cycle 2024 (as of December 2023), page 4.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 4.