



European Network of Ombudspersons for Children

## ENOC Statement calling for urgent action to protect children's rights in Ukraine

28 February 2022

The European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC) expresses its deepest concerns regarding the safety and well-being of children trapped in the outbreak of the devastating war in Ukraine and reiterates its support and solidarity to the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights in its role to protect and promote the human rights of children and young people.

Over the last 8 years the Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights of Ukraine has consistently reminded that the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine continues to impact on the rights of children. The current armed conflict affecting the whole territory of Ukraine will only aggravate the already fragile situation of children. This was also echoed in the recent statement<sup>1</sup> of UNICEF Executive Director, Catherine M. Russell:

*“The past eight years of conflict have inflicted profound and lasting damage to children on both sides of the line of contact. The children of Ukraine need peace, desperately, now.”*

The Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights has drawn attention to the fact that approximately 200,000 children have been internally displaced since 2014 and this number will significantly increase in the next days and months. The Commissioner has addressed concrete recommendations to ensure these children access and enjoy their rights under the UNCRC<sup>2</sup>.

Armed conflicts **breach all the rights of the child**; the right to life, the right to live in a united family, the right to health and to education, the right to protection against all forms of violence and exploitation, including sexual abuse, the right to receive humanitarian assistance.

Taking into account the urgency of the situation as well as the fact that there are already reports on casualties affecting children, ENOC calls on:

- **Russia to immediately halt its invasion to protect the lives, safety and well-being of children. While both Russia and Ukraine have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child it is impossible for the Ukrainian Government to protect the rights of its child citizens under conditions of war;**
- **All parties involved in the conflict to refrain from any action that would endanger children's lives, safety and well-being, and compromise their rights. Children should continue to have access to essential facilities, and to a safe education and childhood;**

<sup>1</sup><https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/statement-unicef-executive-director-catherine-m-russell-children-ukraine>

<sup>2</sup> They have highlighted the loss of life and injury, and the importance of [Safe Schools Declaration](#), an inter-governmental commitment to protect students, teachers and educational institutions during armed conflict, and the [Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict](#).



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- **All parties involved to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches safely and quickly children and families in need. ENOC and individual ENOC members will cooperate with relevant international organisations to provide support and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine's most vulnerable children and young people;**
- **Neighboring ENOC members already expressed readiness to accept refugees from Ukraine and we call on the Governments of all the other ENOC members to share responsibility and open their borders to refugee children and families from Ukraine. More than anything, children need peace and safety.**

ENOC reiterates that the Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights should be able to continue to monitor the situation and report and investigate any breaches of the fundamental rights of children during the armed conflict, and to gather and disseminate relevant information about violations against children in situation of armed conflict.

Now it is time for all European institutions and governments to collectively prove their dedication and commitment to the UNCRC and to actively demonstrate empathy and willingness to protect children from this desperate situation.

As Ombudspersons for Children, in each of our countries, we will strive, within our remit, to ensure that these commitments are maintained by our governments.

As a Network, we remain alert to offer our assistance and expertise in any way possible.

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