



Declaration on protecting children in Ukraine and in the European Union: EU support for reforming the child protection system in Ukraine

1) Children have paid, and continue to pay, an extremely high price for Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. They have been killed, wounded and traumatised, uprooted from their homes and, in many cases, separated from their families and caregivers. In addition, thousands of Ukrainian children have been forcibly transferred within Ukrainian areas under Russian control or deported to Russia in clear violation of international law.

Children temporarily displaced in and outside of Ukraine are at greater risk of violence, exploitation and abuse. This is particularly the case for unaccompanied and separated children, including children evacuated from institutional care facilities in Ukraine, many of whom have disabilities. These children are generally more vulnerable to human trafficking, illegal adoptions, child labour, and sexual and all other forms of exploitation. Temporarily displaced children, especially girls, are at risk of sexual and gender-based violence.

It is crucial that children affected by Russia's war of aggression have access to child protection services, including mental health counselling and psychosocial support, prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, risk mitigation and response services, targeted habilitation, and rehabilitation services, as well as other social care services.

2) Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the EU has taken firm action to protect children from the immediate threats of armed conflict. EU Member States provide financial and humanitarian aid to Ukraine. Almost 4 million people from Ukraine are benefitting from temporary protection in the European Union. According to government statistics and protection monitoring, children comprise over 40 per cent of displaced persons. The Council Implementing Decision activating the Temporary Protection Directive grants, among other rights, access to health and education systems for temporarily displaced children and unaccompanied minors' right to legal guardianship. EU funds have also been mobilised to ensure that the temporarily displaced Ukrainian children are provided with key support and services.

The need to prevent and protect children from violations and abuses of their rights as a consequence of Russia's war of aggression has been recognised by the EU Member States, through the adoption of the Council conclusions on the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child from June 2022. These conclusions also underline that the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all actions relating to children, whether taken by public authorities or private institutions.

Furthermore, the European Child Guarantee calls on Member States to provide, for every child at risk of poverty or social exclusion: free and effective access to early childhood education and care, education and school-based activities, at least one healthy meal every school day, health care, and effective access to healthy nutrition and adequate housing. The European Child Guarantee National Action Plans can be helpful in the effort of Member States to use the available funds in a comprehensive manner to ensure access to quality services for children fleeing Russia's war of aggression.

The European Commission has established the Reconstruction Platform and allocated funding for fast recovery activities as well as the development of a modern alternative care strategy in Ukraine. The EU Member States and other European countries, including Ukraine, have made dedicated efforts to promote deinstitutionalisation to ensure the well-being and development of children.

3) In this respect, it is crucial that we ensure that protection of the rights of Ukrainian children affected by Russia's war of aggression remains a high priority on the EU agenda, and that child protection is mainstreamed in an appropriate manner in humanitarian, recovery and reconstruction assistance measures, as agreed with Ukraine.

We strongly condemn the forced transfer and deportation of Ukrainian children within Ukraine and to Russia by Russia. There is an urgent need to improve coordination and carry out comprehensive measures to ensure that the Ukrainian children who have been forcibly transferred within Ukraine or deported to Russia by Russia are located, reunited with their families and caregivers, and ensured the support and care that they need.

Furthermore, we emphasise that beyond the immediate needs of children from Ukraine, it is also important to look towards the future, and focus on and take effective measures to rebuild and strengthen the long-term capacity to prevent violations and abuses of children's rights and respond to child protection risks.

Therefore, we call for continued support for the long-term reform that contributes to building inclusive, integrated and resilient child protection systems in Ukraine.

There is a need for continuous exchange of best practices and dialogue within Member States and the European Commission – including civil society and implementing partners of humanitarian and development assistance – on immediate, inclusive and effective responses to child protection risks, violations and abuses of children’s rights including sexual and gender-based violence, to which children in and affected by armed conflict are at risk of being exposed. In these efforts, it is key to highlight how children, including children with disabilities, can be assured necessary support and services on an equal basis, as well as full inclusion in the community. It is also important to take into account the temporarily displaced children’s right to preserve his or her identity in terms of origin and possible return to Ukraine.

We encourage a stocktaking of EU Member States’ experiences and expertise in strengthening child protection systems and improving access to inclusive key services for children, with the aim of supporting the reconstruction and reform of a solid child protection system in Ukraine in response to their clearly articulated wishes and needs.

We call on the European Commission to prioritise the EU’s long-term support for the reform of the child protection system in Ukraine by recognising ongoing and planned reconstruction efforts by EU institutions, Member States and other stakeholders, and by facilitating discussions about how emergency responses can be inclusive and transformed into system-building measures.

Stockholm, 2023-06-02



Austria
Ms. Susanne Raab
Minister for Equality, Family, Integration
and Media in the
Federal Chancellery



Belgium
Ms. Karine Lalieux
Federal Minister of Pensions,
Social Integration and
Combating Poverty, with
responsibility
for people with disabilities
and Beliris

Croatia
Mr. Marin Piletić
Minister for Labour, Pension System,
Family and Social Policy

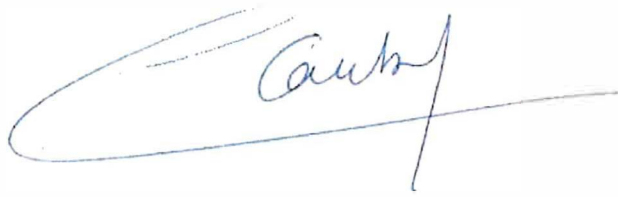
Cyprus
Ms. Marilena Evangelou Serdari
Deputy Minister of Social Welfare

Czechia
Mr. Marian Jurečka
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of
Labour and Social Affairs

Denmark
Ms. Pernille Rosenkrantz-Theil
Minister for Social Affairs and
Housing

Estonia
Ms. Signe Riisalo
Minister of Social Protection

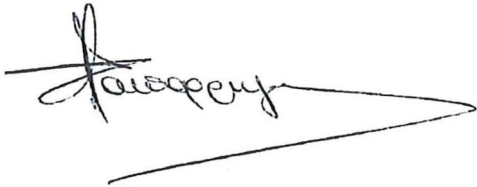
Finland
Ms. Krista Kiuru
Minister of Family Affairs
and Social Services



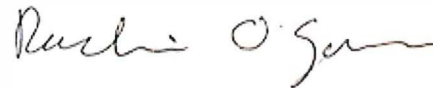
France
Ms. Charlotte Caubel
Minister of State with responsibility
for Children



Germany
Ms. Lisa Paus
Federal Minister for Family Affairs,
Senior Citizens, Women and Youth



Greece
Ms. Patrina Paparrigopoulou
Minister of Labour and Social Affairs



Ireland
Mr. Roderic O'Gorman
Minister for Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth



Italy
Ms. Marina Elvira Calderone
Minister of Labour and
Social Policies



Italy
Ms. Eugenia Roccella
Minister for Family, Natality and
Equal Opportunities



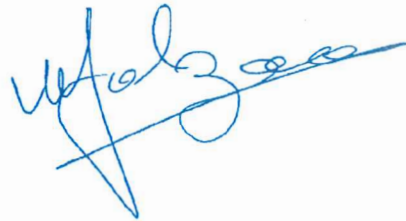
Latvia
Ms. Evika Silina
Minister for Welfare



Lithuania
Ms. Monika Navickiené
Minister of Social Security and Labour



Luxembourg
Mr. Claude Meisch
Minister for Education, Children and Youth



Malta
Mr. Michael Falzon
Minster for Social Policy and Children's Rights



Netherlands
Mr. E. van der Burg
Minister for Migration



Netherlands
Mr. Wopke B. Hoekstra
Minister of Foreign Affairs



Poland
Ms. Barbara Socha
Undersecretary of State,
Ministry of Family and Social Policy



Romania
Ms. Gabriela Firea
Minister of Family, Youth and
Equal Opportunities



Portugal
Ms. Ana Mendes Godinho
Minister of Labour, Solidarity
and Social Security



Slovakia
Ms. Soňa Gaborčáková
Minister of Labour, Social Affairs
and Family



Slovenia
Mr. Luka Mesec
Minister of Labour, Family, Social
Affairs and Equal Opportunities



Spain
Ms. Ione Belarra Urteaga
Minister for Social Rights and
2030 Agenda



Sweden

Ms. Camilla Waltersson Grönvall

Minister for Social Services



Hungary

Mr. Attila Fülöp

State Secretary for Care Policy