



ECPAT in EUROPE: We must protect the lives of children from Ukraine from the war and its consequences!

We urge governments across Europe to take immediate action to ensure that the rights of children, caught up in this conflict, are upheld and fully respected.

EUROPE—The world has been shaken by the unprovoked and unjustified attack on Ukraine and its people. This war has not only led to the loss of lives of many citizens, including children, but also to mass displacement of families from their homes, as they try to escape the hostilities. According to UNHCR data, at least one and half million people are currently being sheltered in countries bordering Ukraine. Estimates by the United Nations and other refugee organizations place the number of people fleeing the current invasion at 4 to 7 million. At least 36 children have been killed, according to recent data from the Ministry of Health of Ukraine.

All the ECPAT members in Europe that have joined this statement, working nationally and international to end child sexual exploitation and trafficking, are deeply concerned about the dangers, including physical harm, the loss of life, the loss of family, severe emotional distress, loss of schooling and education, and lack of safe shelter, faced by children currently in Ukraine or while fleeing from the attack. Their access to food, water, shelter, medical care, psychosocial support, is seriously being threatened by the war.

This war poses an unprecedented threat to all affected, particularly to the most vulnerable in society—the children. In any conflict, children remain the ones that endure most of the physical and emotional damage. We are deeply disturbed about the violence they are being exposed to. We are dismayed at the violations to their rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). International humanitarian law requires everyone to protect the lives of civilians. The UN CRC demands additionally that States take all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by an armed conflict. Their rights must be upheld.

Since the start of this war, our member organisations and allies in Ukraine, Poland, Romania, Hungary, Moldova and across Europe have been supporting thousands of Ukrainian children and families fleeing the war and seeking protection.

According to ground reports by our members, there are numerous unaccompanied children among the refugees. In the chaos, there is a lack of information on missing children in Ukraine or in neighbouring countries. Unaccompanied and missing children are particularly vulnerable to trafficking, abuse, and sexual exploitation. Their safety and protection must be a priority!

ECPAT members in Europe that have joined this statement, urge governments across Europe, European Commission, CSO's and humanitarian missions to take immediate action to quickly identify and place unaccompanied children in safe, child-friendly, and supervised settings, with full access to child protection, health, education and psycho-social services, including the immediate appointment of a guardian, and quick reestablishment of contact with their parents, and other caregivers.

Reminder: Call for free phone number 116-000 Missing Children Hotlines or 116-111 Child Helplines, available in at least 32 European countries to report a missing or exploited child or to ask for help for a child.

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This message is endorsed by the ECPAT International membership in the following countries:

ARSIS Association for the Social Support of Youth, Greece
CRCA / ECPAT Albania
Crisis Center "Care", Kazakhstan
Defence for Children – ECPAT Netherlands
ECPAT Bulgaria - Neglected Children Society
ECPAT Austria
ECPAT Belgium
ECPAT France
ECPAT Germany
ECPAT Italy
ECPAT Luxembourg
ECPAT Norway
ECPAT Portugal
ECPAT Sweden
ECPAT UK
Empowering Children Foundation, Poland
First Children's Embassy in the World Megjashi, North Macedonia
Hintalovon Foundation, Hungary
Journalists for Human Rights, North Macedonia
La Strada Moldova
Network of Organizations for Children of Serbia
NGO Isiqbolli Avlod, Uzbekistan
Public Health Foundation of Georgia
Sana Sezim, Kazakhstan
Save the Children Finland
Tartu Child Support Center, Estonia