



Joint statement by the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on Ukrainian children with disabilities

URGENT CALL TO ACTION REGARDING UKRAINIAN CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN RESIDENTIAL CARE INSTITUTIONS.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) are gravely concerned about the thousands of Ukrainian children with disabilities who were living in residential institutions and have been evacuated from war zones to Western Ukraine or to other countries – as well as those who have remained in unsafe areas. In particular, the Committees draws attention to children with high support requirements who are severely adversely affected by institutionalization.

Evacuated children

The Committees support the effort of the Ukrainian government to ensure evacuated children do not go missing, are not adopted by persons in other countries and will return to Ukraine once the war is over. In this regard, the Committees note the moratorium on inter-country adoption under the conditions of Martial Law.

However, the Ukrainian government regulation stipulating that all children evacuated from institutions – within Ukraine or to other countries – must remain together in those groups, results in the continued institutionalization of children, in overcrowded and understaffed facilities that cannot provide children with adequate care and exposes them to high risk of harm.

This policy is also hindering continued efforts to evacuate children from institutions, as some potential hosting countries are unable to comply with the government decision.

Children with high support requirements and the risk of death

Furthermore, the Committees are gravely concerned for the safety of children with disabilities and high support requirements. Due to the particular neglect associated with institutionalization, these children are likely to be susceptible to respiratory and malnutrition-related illnesses. As temperatures in Ukraine are expected to start dropping in October and considering the extent of the war damage upon gas, electricity and heating infrastructure, those children who remain in understaffed, underserved and overcrowded institutions in Ukraine, are subjected to a disproportional risk of mortality.

The Committees call upon all actors to work urgently to address these concerns and reduce the risk of death, trafficking and abuse of Ukrainian children with disabilities in institutions.

Specifically:

The Committees call upon the government of Ukraine to:

- Repeal the state regulations that stipulate evacuated children must remain together in groups and prioritise the development of family care for all children from institutions, including children with disabilities;
- Immediately organize individual support needs assessments for children, including for those with high support requirements who remain in institutions in Ukraine; work with international partners to develop a plan to evacuate children with disabilities from risk areas and accommodate them in accessible shelters and family settings; extend and strengthen community-based services to mitigate the risk of severe harm to and mortality of children with disabilities;
- Prioritise family reunification and the development of temporary foster family care for all children currently living in institutions.

The Committees call upon the governments of all countries hosting children with disabilities who were evacuated from Ukrainian institutions to:

- Fully include all children evacuated from the Ukrainian residential care system in their national child protection systems and ensure they are provided access to care, protection, health and education services on an equal basis with others;
- Immediately organize individual support needs assessments for children, including for those with high support requirements who were evacuated from Ukraine and accommodate them in accessible shelters and family settings; and implement individual plans to develop community-based services that are available and accessible to Ukrainian children with disabilities;
- Invest urgently in the development of a temporary foster family programme for Ukrainian refugee children currently living in institutional settings, with a preference for assigning foster families from the Ukrainian diaspora and refugee communities, and ensuring continued access to the children's language and culture.

The Committees call upon UNICEF, WHO, UNHCR, ICRC, the European Union and donors to:

- Support the Ukrainian government and the governments of hosting countries – through the provision of expertise and resources – to undertake an urgent assessment of individual support needs for Ukrainian children with disabilities, including high support requirements living in institutions;
- Support the development of a plan to evacuate children with disabilities from risk areas and accommodate them in accessible shelters and family settings; and to extend and strengthen community-based services to mitigate the risk of severe harm to and mortality of children with disabilities, particularly during the upcoming winter months;
- Provide timely funding and expertise to Ukraine and hosting countries to develop a temporary foster family care programme for children evacuated from Ukrainian institutions, including children with disabilities.
