

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT COORDINATOR ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Mrs. Ylva Johansson
Commissioner for Home Affairs

Mr. Gérald Darmanin
Minister of the Interior in France

Subject: Protection of unaccompanied and separated children and children in institutional care fleeing from Ukraine to the European Union

On 24 February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine and in so doing launched the biggest military offensive in Europe for decades. As this war takes place in cities, towns and villages across Ukraine, children are directly targeted, affected and exposed to the violence and atrocities of the armed conflict and to both physical and psychological trauma, injury and loss. They also are a significant part of the current refugees' wave, which is estimated by the United Nations to reach as many as 7 million fleeing and displaced people. All of their human rights must be respected, protected, and fulfilled while they are in Ukraine and as they seek safety in other places.

We welcome the European Commission's statement calling for the protection of children in Ukraine. At the same time, we underline the responsibility of the European Union (EU) and its Member States' authorities to protect all children who cross the EU's borders seeking refuge and safety. The triggering of the Temporary Protection Directive was an appreciated and needed step and it is important that it is fully implemented in practice. We must also stay vigilant and alert towards the most vulnerable groups of children, and in particular those who are unaccompanied, separated from their families or carers, and those from institutional care, who are entering the EU on a large scale without any systematic screening and tracing. This poses immense danger to these children's safety, wellbeing, and human rights. When they move across borders, they are at heightened risk of violence, abuse and exploitation, including trafficking. We have already received alarming and disturbing reports of missing children or children who, after crossing the EU border, are being taken into care by people who may place those children at further risk of harm - either directly or indirectly.

In this regard, we call on the European Commission and Member States to cooperate with the Ukrainian authorities and relevant international and non-governmental organisations to immediately establish a mandatory screening, registration and monitoring system for unaccompanied and separated children and children from institutional care in Ukraine who enter the European Union. We call for the immediate inclusion of these children in the monitoring systems of social and child protection services in receiving Member States to oversee the provision of their care in order to ensure their safety and protection. This is the only way to prevent abuse and exploitation that these children may be unprecedentedly exposed to.

We urge you therefore as the Commissioner responsible for the EU's Home Affairs policies and as the representative of Justice and Home Affairs Council of Ministers during the French Presidency to take immediate steps in this regard, as we cannot protect the children we do not see and have no knowledge of. Let us not allow these children to go missing, be abused or exploited and left alone while they are seeking our protection.



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Theoni Koufonikolakou

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cc:

Mrs Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament
Mr Adrián Vázquez Lázara, Chair of the Committee on Legal Affairs
Mr Juan Fernando López Aguilar, Chair of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs
Mr Dragoş Pişlaru, Chair of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs