



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE 95th Joint FSC – PC meeting Vienna, 9 July 2025

EU Statement on Protection of children in armed conflicts

1. Chairs, thank you for putting the topic of Protection of children in armed conflicts on our agenda. We also welcome the distinguished speakers to this meeting and thank them for their presentations and their valuable insights into this topic. This matter clearly remains of paramount importance for discussion and concrete action within this organisation, including through the work of its institutions and the SPU. The OSCE, with its extensive mandate, toolbox and expertise in conflict prevention and resolution can make a significant contribution in alleviating the consequences of conflict and violence on children and in supporting participating States in further advancing the international children and armed conflict agenda. This was also recalled last November by the UN Secretary General Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict in her first ever address to the Permanent Council.
2. The recent report of the UN Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict once again showed an alarming increase in grave violations committed against children in conflict situations. Following an already deeply concerning rise in the numbers for 2023, we are now confronted with a further staggering 25 per cent upsurge of verified violations in the report for 2024. The message is clear: children are bearing the brunt of the rise in conflict-related violence we observe around the globe. This is unacceptable. We must do more to prevent such violations, and ensure accountability is brought to bear against perpetrators.
3. The EU and its Member States are gravely concerned about the rise of violations of children's rights in the context of armed conflict, exacerbated by the proliferation of wars, including Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and its unlawful deportation and forcible transfer of Ukrainian children. We recall the findings from the Moscow Mechanism, ODIHR monitoring reports, the UN Commission of Inquiry, and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which document the unlawful practice of deportation and forcible transfer of Ukrainian children committed under the responsibility of Russian authorities as part of

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. We resolutely condemn such acts. We call Russia to immediately and unconditionally return all forcibly displaced and deported Ukrainian children for their reintegration and rehabilitation with their families and communities, in line with International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law. Children are not negotiable.

4. Furthermore, as you note in the concept note for today's Security Dialogue, earlier this year, the OHCHR reported widespread violations of children's rights as a result of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, which constitutes a manifest violation of international law, including, inter alia, the UN Charter. This includes the killing and injuring of children due to the extensive use of explosive weapons in populated areas, the destruction of civilian infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals, and the disruption of essential services. We remain steadfast in our commitment to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine, grounded in the principles of the UN Charter and international law. We call for a full, unconditional ceasefire which could also serve as a vital step toward reducing civilian suffering.
5. Chairs, as we underlined in the past, armed conflict and situations of violence impose immense suffering on children, who, because of their age, physical and psychological maturity, dependency and legal status are more vulnerable to the risks, destitution, violence, and neglect that conflict dynamics impose on people. If they survive, they are left with deep physical and psychological scars while having missed out on months or years of education, jeopardising their future opportunities. Children living in wars and conflict zones are the primary victims of armed conflicts they did not start.
6. We recall last year's update of the EU Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict and of the related Checklist for the Integration of Protection of Children Affected by Armed Conflict. These guidelines strengthen the EU's contribution to the respect, protection, and fulfilment of rights of children in armed conflict and other situations of armed violence. The update includes an emphasis on implementation responsibilities, as well as sustainable funding and accountability measures. We will enhance coordination with UN mechanisms in line with the updated EU Guidelines towards eradicating all forms of discrimination against children.

7. Within the OSCE, the Code of Conduct on Politico-military Aspects of Security and its paragraphs 29, 30 and 31, as pointedly identified in your concept note, provides an important framework covering these issues. The additional voluntary questionnaire on children and armed conflict annexed to the Code of Conduct represents an important tool in this regard to foster exchange of information, disseminate best practices and support implementation of international obligations and standards. It is now key for all participating States to live up to their commitments as enshrined in the Code and ensure its comprehensive implementation. We should all work towards a future where children are protected from the horrors of armed conflict – it is our legal and moral obligation.

Thank you, Chairs.

Albania, Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Republic of Moldova, San Marino and Ukraine align themselves with this statement.