



EAP Statement on Ukraine

Executive statement

The European Academy of Paediatrics (EAP), representing children, their families and their carers throughout Europe, expresses its deep concern at the war in Ukraine, and the effect this will have on the children of both countries. War disproportionately affects children, who are innocent bystanders in conflict, and yet are increasingly targeted. We call on the Russian state to recognise their legal obligations to protect children, as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which they are signatories, and on the rest of the world to ensure that sanctions they take do not adversely affect the health and wellbeing of children. Lastly, we call for all European paediatricians and families, including those in Russia, to campaign actively for children's welfare across the continent.

The European Academy of Paediatrics, incorporating the section of paediatrics of the European Union of Medical Specialists, exists to promote the health of children and young people in Europe and to advocate for children and young people worldwide.

In this statement, **we speak for the children of Ukraine and Russia, and for the children of Europe.**

We note that Russia has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the optional protocol to the CRC addressing children in armed conflicts, and demand that they honour their legally binding commitments to the children of Ukraine

Legal declarations and treaties protect the health of children during armed conflicts. The most important are the Geneva Conventions (1949), the United Nations (UN) Refugee Convention (1951) and 1967 Protocol, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989), with accompanying Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict.

Most crucial of these is the UNCRC, to which the Russian Federation is a signatory. It is a legally binding treaty outlining 40 substantive rights for children which can be grouped into 3 categories: protection, promotion, and participation:

Table 1 UNCRRC Rights ¹

Articles	Rights
1) Rights of protection: Keeping safe from harm	
6	Right to life
9	Right not to be separated from parents
19	Right to be protected from all forms of abuse
20	Right to special protection (e.g., adoption and fostering if deprived of family)
32	Right to be protected from economic exploitation
33	Right to be protected from illicit drugs
34	Right to be protected from all forms of sexual exploitation
2) Rights of promotion: Life, Survival and Development to full potential	
24	Right to the highest standard of healthcare
27	Right to a standard of living adequate for a child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development
3) Rights of participation: Having an active voice	
7, 8	Right to an identity (name, family, nationality)
12, 13	Right to express views freely, and be listened to
17	Right to have access to information
23	Right for children who are disabled to enjoy life and participate actively in society

War affects children in many ways, we deliberately cite a Croatian colleague whose country was one of the last in Europe to be affected by armed conflict:

Listing the impacts of war on children is a sadly straightforward task:

Death. Hundreds of thousands of children die of direct violence in war each year. They die as civilians caught in the violence of war, as combatants directly targeted, or in the course of ethnic cleansing.

Injury. Children suffer a range of war injuries. Certain weapons affect them particularly. A landmine explosion is more likely to kill or seriously injure a child than an adult. Thousands of children suffer landmine injuries each year.

Disability. Millions of children are disabled by war, many of whom have grossly inadequate access to rehabilitation services. A child may have to wait up to 10 years before having a prosthetic limb fitted. Children who

¹ Ayesha Kadir, Sherry Shenoda, Jeffrey Goldhagen, Shelly Pitterman, Section on International Child Health, Parminder S. Suchdev, Kevin J. Chan, Cynthia R. Howard, Patrick McGann, Nicole E. St Clair, Katherine Yun, Linda D. Arnold; The Effects of Armed Conflict on Children. Pediatrics December 2018; 142 (6): e20182586. 10.1542/peds.2018-2586

survive landmine blasts rarely receive prostheses that are able to keep up with the continued growth of their limbs.

Illness. Conditions for maintenance of child health deteriorate in war – nutrition, water safety, sanitation, housing, access to health services. There may be loss of immunity to disease vectors with population movement. Refugee children are particularly vulnerable to the deadly combination of malnutrition and infectious illness. There is also interruption of population immunization programs by war which may be responsible for increases in child mortality.

Rape and prostitution for subsistence. These phenomena which often occur in situations of war, ethnic cleansing, and refugee life leave lasting physical impacts in sexually-transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, psychological impacts and changes in life trajectory.

Psychological suffering. Children are exposed to situations of terror and horror during war – experiences that may leave enduring impacts in posttraumatic stress disorder. Severe losses and disruptions in their lives lead to high rates of depression and anxiety in war-affected children. These impacts may be prolonged by exposures to further privations and violence in refugee situations.

Moral and spiritual impacts. The experience of indifference from the surrounding world, or, worse still, malevolence may cause children to suffer loss of meaning in their construction of themselves in their world. They may have to change their moral structure and lie, steal, and sell sex to survive. They may have their moral structure forcibly dismantled and replaced in training to kill as part of a military force.

Social and cultural losses. Children may lose their community and its culture during war, sometimes having it reconstituted in refugee or diaspora situations.

Child soldiers. It is estimated that there are tens of thousands of young people under 18 serving in militias in about 60 countries. They are particularly vulnerable to all of the impacts listed above².

Little has changed, yet more can be added to the list. The disproportionate effect of conflict on children now includes the effect of cyberattacks on healthcare and educational infrastructure. Deliberate bombing of schools and hospitals is increasingly reported in conflict, and must not occur in Ukraine. The disruption to education, and the displacement of children and families is all too familiar in

² Santa Barbara J. Impact of war on children and imperative to end war. *Croat Med J.* 2006;47(6):891-894

recent years. The severe damage to the mental health and wellbeing of Europe's children from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is, sadly, now worsened by war on their continent.

Children and conflict – our obligations

- **EAP requires European paediatricians to continue to campaign for children's welfare in their nation states, across Europe and worldwide**
- **EAP calls on paediatricians and parents in Russia to insist that all aggression against other countries ceases, and that their state recognises all its obligations under international law.**
- **EAP requests the European Union, other European countries and all countries of the UN to consider the children of countries they impose sanctions on, and ensure sanctions cause minimal harm to children.**
- **Prevention of any escalation of this conflict to other European states, especially former Eastern-bloc countries, is paramount, and we must stand with the paediatricians of those countries in safeguarding the emotional wellbeing of children and their families living through a time of unprecipitated aggression.**