

# LISTEN TO US



Save the Children

## Adolescents' summary



In September 2019, an organisation called Save the Children came to speak to girls and boys about their lives in eastern Ukraine. We spoke to children from three years' old and up – including adolescents like you. We also spoke to adults, including caregivers, teachers, social workers, local authorities and people working for humanitarian organisations.

### We wanted to find out several things:

- How the conflict has affected girls' and boys' lives in eastern Ukraine
- Whether children's rights are respected
- And how life is different for boys and girls of different ages.



## WHAT ARE CHILDREN'S RIGHTS?

“Rights” are things every child should have or be able to do. These rights are listed in the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**, which was first created 30 years ago. They are for all children under age 18, in every part of the world. Every child, girls and boys of all ethnicities, religions, social backgrounds and abilities, has these rights. Almost every country – including **Ukraine** – has agreed to these rights. All the rights are connected to each other, and all are equally important. You are born with these rights, and no one can take them away. Many adults are responsible to help protect your rights and do what is best for you. As you grow, you have more responsibility to make choices and exercise your rights.

In this report we have included some of the rights children have (which are written as “articles”).





## WHAT DID WE FIND OUT?

More than five years' ago, people started fighting in eastern Ukraine. Children told us how this conflict has changed boys' and girls' lives, and their ability to attain their rights.

### ARTICLE 6:

*Every child has the right to life.*



### ARTICLE 38:

*Governments must not allow children under the age of 15 to take part in war or join the armed forces. Governments must do everything they can to protect and care for children affected by war and armed conflicts.*

Children are put in danger by the conflict. Some of the dangers (like shelling) affect boys and girls equally. However, other dangers are experienced differently by boys and girls. Boys are much more likely to be injured by mines and other explosive things like grenades. Both girls and boys said that sometimes military personnel cause problems for them and their families. Some boys fear being beaten by soldiers. Some adolescent girls reported that soldiers harass them and touch them in unwanted ways.

The conflict has a big effect on how boys and girls feel. Some children have started to get very scared by loud noises. Some have started to have nightmares or difficulty speaking. Some children have developed anxiety (a feeling of fear or panic that doesn't go away) or depression (when you feel very sad all the time).

### ARTICLE 28:

*Every child has the right to an education. Discipline in schools must respect children's dignity and their rights.*



Adolescents told us that they do not feel safe and comfortable at school. This is sometimes due to dangers such as shelling or soldiers near schools. But also both girls and boys shared that sometimes they do not feel comfortable at school because of bullying from other children or disrespectful treatment by teachers. We also heard how it is particularly difficult for children with disabilities to continue going to school. Children living in the non-government controlled areas face big challenges getting their education certificates recognised.

### ARTICLE 19:

*Governments must do all they can to ensure that children are protected from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and bad treatment by their parents or anyone else who looks after them.*



Some people told us that violence within families has got worse since the start of the conflict. Sometimes this is violence between parents, for example fathers hurting mothers. Other times it is violence from parents against children, for example parents hitting or slapping their children. We also heard that sometimes men and boys treat girls badly, touching them in unwanted ways or pressuring them to have sex.

### ARTICLE 24:

*Every child has the right to the best possible health.*

*Governments must provide good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food, and a clean environment and education on health and well-being so that children can stay healthy.*



The conflict has had a bad effect on children's health. Doctors report an increase in illnesses such as diarrhoea, flu and coughs. Damage to water supplies and not having enough food makes people's health worse. Adolescents told us that they think the quality and timeliness of medical assistance has got worse since the start of the conflict. It's also harder to get specialised medical support.



### ARTICLE 31:

*Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.*

The conflict has limited children's play and leisure options. Many of the places where children used to play, including playgrounds and forests, have been damaged by the conflict or made dangerous by explosives. Many clubs that children used to go to have stopped. It's harder to get to cities to do things like go to the cinema. Because there's not much to do, some children play in dangerous places – especially boys. Sometimes girls are expected to stay at home. Children, especially adolescents, spend lots of time watching television, on smartphones or on computers. Boys told us they liked playing computer games; girls said they went on social media or chatted with friends on the phone.



### ARTICLE 17:

*Every child has the right to reliable information from a variety of sources, and governments should encourage the media to provide information that children can understand.*

Adolescents told us that they have access to lots of information but that they don't feel they can trust that information. Adolescents said that sometimes people gave the wrong information by accident, but that sometimes people did it on purpose to fuel the conflict. Adolescents talked about what they do to try to find correct information – including looking at lots of different sources of information and comparing them.



### ARTICLE 12:

*Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously.*

Adolescents told us that adults do not listen to them or value their concerns. We heard that often in Ukraine people think that children's opinions are not important and that adults know better than children. This makes adolescents frustrated, because they know they have valuable opinions and ideas to share. The boys and girls who took part in this assessment said they were happy to take part and to have adults listen to them with respect.

### **We also found out how people expect different things from girls and boys.**

- We heard that girls were expected to behave like future housewives and mothers, helping with household chores. People said girls were also expected to pay attention to their appearance, to make themselves attractive to boys and men.
- We heard that boys were expected to be strong, independent and to protect other people. Boys were more likely to play military games. People told us how it can be hard for boys to tell people about how they feel or cry, and this can make it harder for boys to get support.

But shouldn't everybody in a family help with chores? Shouldn't personality and how we treat others be more important than what we look like? Shouldn't everybody be able to show how they feel and ask for help when they need it?

### **Many bad things have happened because of the conflict – but there are good things too**

- Many children told us that they feel happy and safe when they spend time with their families.
- Children also told us about how they support their friends.
- We heard how some adolescents and young people have started to do very kind and brave things, like donating blood and volunteering in communities heavily affected by the conflict.
- Even though children's lives are difficult, they still have hope for a future where children can grow up safe, happy, educated, healthy and decide what they want to be when they grow up.

# CHILDREN'S IDEAS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During the assessment, young children and adolescents shared their ideas about how people could improve children's lives. Here are some of their ideas:



- ✓ Adults should **listen** to children and value their opinions.
- ✓ Adults should **work** together with children to solve problems.
- ✓ Adults should **prioritise** ending the conflict. They should also vote for people who will help solve the problems children face.
- ✓ Parents should **spend** time with their children and help them if they have problems, like bullying at school.
- ✓ Teachers should **treat** children with respect and not humiliate them. Teachers should also support extracurricular activities and help children create interest clubs at school.
- ✓ Authorities should pay **attention** to the situation in remote communities and help solve their problems. For example, they should repair roads and make sure there are streetlights to help make it safer.
- ✓ Authorities and humanitarian organisations should **work** to improve the behaviour of the military towards children and their families.
- ✓ Humanitarian organisations should **keep** working to make safe places for children to play, improve schools and clear mines.

- ✓ Humanitarian organisations should **influence** local and state authorities to improve lives for children.
- ✓ Humanitarian organisations should **listen** to the ideas and opinions of children – and encourage other people to pay attention to children's ideas. They should work to combat stereotypes that say children's voices do not matter.
- ✓ Children should **behave** in ways that help keep themselves and other children safe – children shouldn't play in dangerous places and they should feel brave enough to say "no" to things that could hurt them.
- ✓ Children should **look** out for other children – if they are being hurt or abused, children should tell an adult they trust or call an emergency number.
- ✓ Children should be **kind** to others and not bully them.
- ✓ Children should not be **afraid** to express their opinions.
- ✓ Children should **remember** that they have valuable ideas and that they can work with other children and adults to solve problems.

*These are some great ideas. Because we think that children's ideas were really good, Save the Children has shared these ideas – along with some of our own – with important people and organisations. For example, we have shared the findings of the assessment and the ideas from the girls and boys we spoke to with organisations committed to protecting children from harm. Because of this assessment, some of these organisations have agreed to work together to improve children's safety and protection. We are also planning to include findings in a document called the "Humanitarian Needs Overview". This is a document that explains what the problems of children and adults in eastern Ukraine are, and what should be done to help improve their lives. Because of the participation of adolescents like you in the assessment, these important documents and decisions now have more focus on children's needs, ideas and hopes. **Thank you!***

Save the Children should be safe for children. If you wish to report a concern or provide us feedback, you can reach us at:

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