



NGO: EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR LAW AND JUSTICE (ECLJ)

**UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW
54TH SESSION**

**STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN UKRAINE
FOR THE 54TH SESSION OF THE
UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) was founded in 1998 and is a non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights around the world. The ECLJ also holds Special Consultative status before the United Nations Economic and Social Council. This report discusses the status of human rights in Ukraine for the 54th session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

www.ECLJ.org
4, quai Koch
67000 Strasbourg, France
Phone: +33 (0)3.88.24.94.40

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Background

1. Ukraine is a country located in Eastern Europe and has a population of approximately 42.4 million people.¹ The majority of the population is Christian, with approximately 46% of the population identifying as Russian Orthodox, 42.5% as nonreligious, 6% as Ukrainian Catholic, 2% as Protestant, and 1% as Muslim.²

2. Ukraine's last review was held on November 15, 2017.³ As a result of the review, Ukraine received 190 recommendations, 163 of which it accepted.⁴ It was recommended by Portugal, and supported by Ukraine, that the government "[i]ntroduce a clear definition of child pornography into national legislation."⁵ While we understand that Ukraine is currently fighting back against the Russian invasion, the government is still operating and is able to pass legislation that can protect children from exploitation.

Legal Framework

3. Article 301-1 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine criminalizes a broad range of conduct involving child pornography, including the intentional access, acquisition, possession, importation, transportation, production, sale, and distribution of child pornography. Further, the law establishes escalating penalties based on the seriousness of the offense. The intentional access, acquisition, possession, importation, transportation, or other movement without the purpose of sale or distribution is punishable with two to six years in prison. The importation, storage, transportation, or other movement for the purpose of sale or distribution is punishable by seven to ten years in prison. The production, sale or distribution of child pornography is punishable by eight to twelve years in prison. Further aggravating factors, like repeat offenders or coercing a minor to participate in child pornography are punishable by nine to fifteen years in prison.⁶

4. Additionally, Ukraine is a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).⁷ Under Article 34 of the CRC:

States Parties undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. For these purposes, States Parties shall in particular take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent:

(a) The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity;

(b) The exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices;

(c) The exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials.⁸

Child Exploitation

5. Child pornography is a massive problem in Ukraine. In 2024, there were 1,198 cases of child pornography, a 23% increase from 2023.⁹ Since its last review, Ukraine has begun undertaking reforms to its criminal legislation regarding child pornography, focusing on strengthening protections for children against sexual exploitation. In July 2026, Draft Law No. 15294 was introduced that would strengthen criminal liability for offenses involving child pornography and the sexual exploitation of minors. Further, the law also increases penalties for those convicted of child pornography charges.¹⁰

6. The draft law also recognizes the role digital technology has in facilitating child sexual exploitation. The draft law modernizes the Criminal Code to include online offenses so that criminal liability now extends to individuals who intentionally obtain, store, or distribute child pornography through electronic communication systems and digital platforms. Through modernizing its Criminal Code to include online offenses, the legislation aims to improve Ukraine's capacity to combat online child exploitation.¹¹

7. While we are encouraged by the fact that Ukraine has begun taking steps to strengthen protections for children from child pornography and increase criminal liability for the perpetrators, these measures were introduced nearly nine years after it was first recommended by Australia. Further, the law has yet to be enacted. Additionally, we are concerned about the fact that the law would also decriminalize adult pornography.¹² Exposure to pornography can negatively impact mental health, contribute to the normalization of sexism and sexual violence, and influence unhealthy attitudes toward relationships. UNICEF has even expressed concern about how widespread and graphic online pornography is and how easily children are able to access it.¹³

8. Further, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has significantly increased the risk of child exploitation. War and mass displacement has created conditions that organized criminal groups can exploit, placing children at risk of exploitation and abuse. Children who are unaccompanied, separated from their families, or are displaced across borders are particularly vulnerable because they have limited protection and lack support systems.¹⁴

Recommendations

9. We urge Ukraine to enact and implement Draft Law No. 15294 to strengthen criminal penalties for child pornography and online child exploitation. Further, Ukraine should educate law enforcement and judicial authorities on the new law so that they can fully investigate and prosecute cases of child pornography. Additionally, Ukraine must adopt effective safeguards to prevent children from accessing online pornography by requiring effective age verification measures, such as requiring the uploading of identification, to ensure the person accessing the material is over the age of eighteen.

10. To protect children from being exploited because of the war, Ukraine must work to identify and support at risk children and ensure the protection of children remains a priority in its humanitarian efforts. Further, preventing child exploitation depends on early identification, so it is important that authorities are trained to identify children who are being exploited and can refer them to get the care they need.

¹ Oleska Eliseyovich Zasenka, *Ukraine*, BRITANNICA, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine>.

² *Id.*

³ *Universal Periodic Review – Ukraine*, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/ua-index>.

⁴ *Infographic – Ukraine*, OHCHR, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session28/UA/UKRAINE_Infographic_28th.pdf.

⁵ OHCHR, UPR of Ukraine (3rd Cycle – 28th Session) Thematic List of Recommendations ¶116.168, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session28/UA/MatriceRecommendationsUkraine.docx>.

⁶ CRIME CODE OF UKRAINE art. 301-1, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2341-14/page5.frame?lang=en>.

⁷ *Ratification Status for Ukraine*, OHCHR, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=183&Lang=EN.

⁸ Convention on the Rights of the Child art. 34, *adopted* Nov. 20, 1989, 1577 U.N.T.S. 3, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>.

⁹ *Alarming Rise in Child Pornography Cases in Ukraine – Reports*, BUCKVY (Aug. 30, 2024), <https://bukvy.org/en/alarming-rise-in-child-pornography-cases-in-ukraine-reports/>.

¹⁰ <https://unn.ua/en/amp/strengthening-punishment-for-child-pornography-and-decriminalization-of-porn-the-council-supported-the-bill>.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Decriminalization of Pornography and Child Protection: What the Verkhovna Rada Actually Adopted*, SUD PUBLICATIONS (July 15, 2026), <https://sud.ua/en/news/publication/366640-dekryminalizatsiia-pornohrafiia-ta-zakhyst-ditei-shcho-naspravdi-ukhvalyla-verkhovna-rada>.

¹³ *Protection of Children from the Harmful Impacts of Pornography*, UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/harmful-content-online>.

¹⁴ *Council of Europe Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine*, COE, https://www.refworld.org/sites/default/files/2024-11/cgu_hearing_report_on_trafficking.pdf.