

BICE special report for 25 years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Eastern Europe and Russia - The view of **Maria Alekseyenko**

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Most countries of the former USSR signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child as members of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Ukraine, which has a distinct voice in the UN, ratified individually, in February 1991.

It is difficult to measure the level of implementation of an international instrument of human rights and the Convention is no exception. In 25 years, much has been done to inform opinions on the child as subject of rights and to adapt national legislation to the standards set by the Convention and its various protocols.

But unfortunately we see too often in practice that courts do not make their judgment based on these standards. In addition, certain violations of children's rights are presented as belonging to a political will to protect children from so-called "harmful information", without specifying the nature of this information.

Public awareness is the key to a better implementation of children's rights. When we reach a higher level of awareness, adults and children will be able to protect each other in their everyday lives. But in recent years there have been some groups in our region waging a misinformation campaign that the application of the Convention on the Rights of the Child would lead to loss of parental authority over children. In Ukraine, for example, this pressure has hampered the implementation of a system of juvenile justice that has been transformed into "criminal justice".

In this context, civil society remains the most powerful tool to promote the Convention through awareness campaigns and the implementation and exchange of best practices.

Thus, thanks to many children's rights defenders in governmental and non-governmental fields, great achievements have been made, in the first place the reform of public orphanages. Some countries like Georgia have made great progress in completely transforming these "collective establishments" into family-type homes. In the Russian Federation and Ukraine on the other hand, these large institutions are still in place and the temptation is to place "social orphans" there rather than address the problems faced by their families. But the vision is changing. Today the institutionalization of children is the last resort and not one option among others. This should serve as a springboard for further advances.

Discrimination of children for religious reasons or opinion remains a problem in our region. This is especially evident now in Ukraine, where the children were moved to other parts of the country and are influenced by conflicting parties. We are told that students reproduce these conflicts within schools. To manage them, it is necessary to have better trained teachers to develop respect for differences among children.

If I could send a message to policymakers, I would suggest that they learn more about the rights of the child, not to make it a manipulative tool but to be better able to address violations against children.