



Омбудсман України
Ombudsman of Ukraine

CROSS- POLLINATED

**Russia's Systemic Policy of Destroying
Children's Ukrainian Identity**



SPECIAL REPORT
by the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner
for Human Rights on the Observance of Children's Rights
in the Context of Armed Aggression against Ukraine

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From the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights



**Human Rights Commissioner
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Dmytro Lubinets**

In the spring of 2022, the world was shocked by inhumanity of the Russian Federation and the unjustified full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The occupation of the south, east, and north of the country was accompanied by unprecedentedly grievous and massive war crimes against civilians, including children.

We saw Bucha, Irpin, Izium, Kherson. Thousands of dead civilians suffered not only from the warfare, but mostly from the crimes committed by Russian soldiers. Civilians were forcibly kept in basements and warehouses. People were tortured and raped in their own homes in front of their children, and children themselves were subjected to sexual violence. Civilians were put to death right on the streets, and buried in the yards of their own homes.

The world saw the children's torture chambers organised by Russians in Kherson, where minors were taken merely for supporting the Ukrainian state, their parents' belonging to the defence forces, or on suspicion of "espionage." Photos of mass graves in Izium, the Kharkiv region, where an entire family could be buried in common graves, hit the headlines around the world.

But against the backdrop of apparent atrocities, another equally grave international crime was committed, the crime of deportation. The crime that takes away the future, but its victims are unobservable after the de-occupation. They disappeared, thousands of children were forcibly taken by Russian military servants deep into the temporarily occupied territories (TOT) of Ukraine and the territory of the Russian Federation. These were institutionalised children: orphans, children deprived of parental care, children who had parents but for various reasons were not with them during the occupation. These were children in family-based care. These were also children whose parents died or who were separated from their parents during the "filtration" process.

Forced displacements and deportations have been numerous, and continue to this day, in 2024. Under the guise of "rehabilitation" or "treatment," children continue to be relocated to the territory of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus. All of this is happening despite the arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Court to Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova.

In last year's special report, released in April 2023, "Unbloomed. Violation of the Rights of Ukrainian Children in the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine and in Russia: Deportation, Militarisation, Indoctrination"¹ we focused on the crime of deportation and forced displacement of Ukrainian children. The new report "Cross-pollinated. Russia's Systemic Policy of Destroying Children's Ukrainian Identity" aims to show the long-term consequences of Ukrainian children's stay in the Russian Federation and the "allied" Re-

public of Belarus, as well as in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. In the territories where Russia has spread not only its legislation, but also its repressive machine and propaganda tools. In the report, we relied on the experience of children who survived deportation and forced displacement, who were subjected to militarisation, re-education and coercive influence aimed at completely destroying their national identity and relocating children from the Ukrainian to another national group. This is a sign of genocide. These children have been interviewed at the Child Rights Protection Centre in Kyiv established by us, and are currently undergoing full psychosocial rehabilitation.

For more than two years of the "great" war, Russia has not allowed the creation of a single "green" evacuation corridor that would allow children to leave the dangerous occupied territories. Children living in the territory of Ukraine occupied by the Russian Federation have been perceived by the aggressor country as its property, with whom the occupation authorities allegedly have the right to do anything they want: to move, deport, place them in Russian families under guardianship or give them up for adoption, destroy information about their Ukrainian origin by changing their names and surnames, dates of birth, and force them to acquire Russian citizenship. But most importantly, they are allegedly entitled to remould hundreds of thousands of children into new Russian citizens, as according to various estimates, more than one and a half million children continue to live in the TOT of Ukraine. All of them are at risk of war crimes, including deportation.

An atmosphere of fear reigns in these territories. And today, children in the occupied territories of Ukraine have begun their day by listening to the anthem of the Russian Federation, even in kindergartens. And then some of them will meet with a hero of the so-called "special military operation," who will tell how he killed Ukrainians. Some schoolchildren will sit at desks named after yesterday's murderers. Unfortunately, this is the reality of today's occupation.

The report analyses information from open sources that indicate the systematic and planned actions of the Russian Federation to destroy everything Ukrainian: this is evidenced by the adopted citizenship, education, and social policy legislation, and the tactics applied in the occupied territories to create an atmosphere of fear due to the presence of Ukrainian identity, to destroy cultural sites and educational institutions. Prohibiting the manifestation of Ukrainian identity through language, honouring holidays and traditions. Physical harassment, intimidation and destruction of identity carriers – Ukrainian teachers, cultural figures, local government leaders and the public.

The report also contains information about the actions of the Ukrainian state and the efforts of civil society and government authorities to return, rehabilitate and reintegrate Ukrainian children. Separate sections are devoted to efforts to consolidate the international community around the issue of return of children, in particular, through the implementation of paragraph 4 of the Ukrainian Peace Formula of the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy, coordinated by my office, and the establishment of the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children in December 2023, which has already included more than 37 countries.

The recommendations in the report are addressed to both the Ukrainian authorities and the international community. We call not only for decisions to be made to protect Ukrainian children, but also for these decisions to be implemented. Every Ukrainian child should have the right to know that he or she is a Ukrainian, and that he or she has the right to live in a family, in peace, and in his or her own country.

I express my sincere gratitude to the experts of Civil Network OPORA, IUCV - International Centre for Ukrainian Victory, ZMINA Human Rights Centre, Regional Centre for Human Rights for their participation in the preparation of the Special Report "Cross-pollinated. Russia's Systemic Policy of Destroying Children's Ukrainian Identity."

¹ Special Report by the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights "Unbloomed. Violation of the Rights of Ukrainian Children in the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine and in Russia: Deportation, Militarisation, Indoctrination": <https://ombudsman.gov.ua/childrenofwar-2023/>

Introduction

The large-scale armed aggression against Ukraine, which is now in its third year, has a significant impact on the entire population of Ukraine. However, children, due to their age and dependence on adults or the state, are in a particularly vulnerable position, which imposes additional obligations on both Ukraine and the aggressor state to ensure children's rights, guarantee their safety, family unity, prevent their involvement in the armed conflict and protect them from changing their identity. In addition to the general rights of a child, special protection is envisaged for children in armed conflict – special respect and protection from any kind of indecent assault. Parties to the conflict must also provide the protection and assistance that children need in view of their age or for any other reason.² Special rules also apply to the evacuation of children (including the identification of a single ground for moving children outside the occupied territory to a foreign country – urgent reasons related to the health or treatment of children³), care for them, taking into account their religion, cultural traditions⁴, language and nationality⁵, identification of children and registration of their family ties⁶, etc.

The occupation of part of the territory of Ukraine, which began in 2014 with the seizure of the Crimean peninsula by the Russian army, continued with the occupation of some areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, and in 2022 with the occupation of a number of regions of Ukraine, some of which are still occupied. As of the beginning of February 2024, about 26% of the territory of Ukraine⁷ within the Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Luhansk, Kharkiv, Kherson regions, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol are considered occupied. Ukrainian citizens, including children, continue to live in this territory temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation. According to human rights activists, about 1.6 million Ukrainian children continue to be in the TOT of Ukraine⁸, which poses significant risks to them. The exact number of children is currently unknown due to the lack of access to the territories and low confidence in Russian statistics on the situation in the TOT of Ukraine.

In 2014, the Russian Federation illegally spread its legislation first to the temporarily occupied territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, and in 2022 to the territories of the Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Luhansk, and Kherson regions. As a result, the regions of Ukraine occupied by the Russian Federation face forced passportisation and imposition of Russian citizenship, introduction of educational standards of the aggressor country, destruction of Ukrainian libraries and cultural monuments, etc. Since the beginning of the armed aggression against Ukraine, the Russian Federation has been deporting Ukrainian children. After the start of Russia's large-scale invasion in 2022, the scale of deportations increased significantly, but the principle and purpose of deportation has remained unchanged, all of Russia's actions against Ukrainian children are aimed at destroying the Ukrainian identity of children and re-educating them.

Both the Russian Federation and Ukraine are parties to humanitarian law treaties applicable to international armed conflicts: Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Geneva Convention IV, 1949) and Protocol Additional to the Geneva

Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I, 1977). Other relevant international treaties include the UN Charter (1945), the Council of Europe's European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5, 1950), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), and the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention of 1948), the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998), the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (2010), and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and its additional protocols. However, the Russian Federation does not fulfil its international obligations and continues to commit not only armed aggression against Ukraine, which is a serious violation of international law in itself, but also implements a systematic policy of eradicating the Ukrainian identity of children who stay in the TOT of Ukraine or are deported to the territory of the Russian Federation.



The Geneva Conventions contain a provision that the “Occupying Power shall take all necessary steps to facilitate the identification of children and the registration of their parentage. It may not, in any case, change their personal status, nor enlist them in formations or organisations subordinate to it. Should the local institutions be inadequate for the purpose, the Occupying Power shall make arrangements for the maintenance and education, if possible by persons of their own nationality, language and religion, of children who are orphaned or separated from their parents as a result of the war and who cannot be adequately cared for by a near relative or friend.”⁹

In addition to the international legal measurement, there is also a personal measurement. Well-known identity researchers E. Erikson and H. Tajfel¹⁰ have identified such components of identity as cognitive, emotional and behavioural. The Russian Federation affects

² Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 8 June 1977, revised on 08 December 2005, Article 77: https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995_199#Text

³ Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 8 June 1977, revised on 08 December 2005, Article 78: “ibid”

⁴ GENEVA CONVENTION relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, revised on 23 February 2023, Article 24: https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995_154#Text

⁵ Ibid, Article 50

⁶ Ibid

⁷ About 26% of Ukraine's territory remains occupied by Russia – Zelenskyy / Ukrinform, 05 February 2024: <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-polytics/3822910-blizko-26-teritorii-ukraini-poki-zalisautsa-okupovanimi-rosieiu-zelenskij.html>

⁸ Almenda Centre for Civic Education, RECOMMENDATIONS on the policy for reintegration of children and young people who have been under occupation. Access mode: <https://almenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Dorozhnyia-karta-shchodo-polityky-reintehratsii-ditey-ta-molodi.pdf>

⁹ GENEVA CONVENTION RELATIVE TO THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIAN PERSONS IN TIME OF WAR, revised on 23 February 2023, Article 50: https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995_154#Text

¹⁰ Tajfel H. Social identity and intergroup relations/ H. Tajfel. - Cambridge and Paris. 1982: https://books.google.com.ua/books?hl=uk&lr=&id=q0wFY3Dcu1MC&oi=fnd&pg=PR11&dq=Tajfel+H.+Social+identity+and+intergroup+relations/+H.+Tajfel.+Cambridge+and+Paris.+1982&ots=qxoqxa9oHu&sig=zYmu27cdB207Lbb4JPCJrCQ8Vs4&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Tajfel%20H.%20Social%20identity%20and%20intergroup%20relations%20F%20H.%20Tajfel.%20-%20Cambridge%20and%20Paris.%201982&f=false

children's identity in all three measurement: cognitive (knowledge about oneself as a Ukrainian, about their people, about Ukrainian culture, history and language, about differences between peoples); emotional and value (something that creates a sense of belonging, Russians offer children a sense of fear and shame for Ukrainian identity, which can be shaped by the environment, legislation and practice); behavioural (loss of skills to speak and communicate, write in Ukrainian, study history, know and respect holidays and traditions of the family and country, read books of their people).

The Russian Federation continues to implement a comprehensive systematic state policy to destroy the Ukrainian identity of children, in particular through:

(1) the forced displacement of children to the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and deportation of children to the Russian Federation, which does not fall under the standards of evacuation under international humanitarian law, as the only legal grounds for the displacement of children within the occupied territory are security reasons or particularly compelling military reasons¹¹, and the displacement of children to another state is possible only if there are urgent reasons related to the health or treatment of children¹². Accordingly, the displacement by the Russian Federation violates international humanitarian law and may constitute a war crime and/or a crime against humanity.¹³

(2) the introduction of Russian educational standards in the occupied territories, which contradicts the obligations of the occupying power to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her individuality,¹⁴ to take into account in any care for the child his or her ethnic origin, religious and cultural affiliation and native language.¹⁵ In addition, it is necessary to entrust the education of children under 15 years of age who have been orphaned or separated from their families as a result of the war to persons of the same cultural traditions, if possible, persons of their nationality, language and religion.¹⁶

(3) the militarisation of Ukrainian children displaced to the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and the Russian Federation, which violates the prohibition of military service propaganda aimed at residents of the occupied territories.¹⁷ In addition, given the systematic nature of these actions, as well as the vulnerability of the category at which these actions are aimed, namely minors, they may constitute a war crime in the form of coercion to serve in the armed forces of the enemy¹⁸.

(4) the forced change of citizenship of children in the occupied territories of Ukraine, and

(5) the placement of Ukrainian children in families of Russian citizens violate the prohibition on changing the civil status of children.¹⁹

Together with forced displacement and deportation, the imposition of Russian culture and education, such actions are aimed at severing children's ties with their national group and preventing their further return to their homeland. The vulnerability of children as a category



The visit of children from the new regions to the two capitals is part of the All-Russian program of cultural and educational routes for schoolchildren from the Donetsk People's Republic, Luhansk People's Republic, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions, "Cultural Map 4+85"

ry is also due to the unformed consciousness and, as a result, an increased risk of external influence on it. In the context of an armed conflict, and even more so in the context of occupation, which creates a dangerous and at the same time alien environment, destroying the child's established ties in the community, additional influence on the child's consciousness causes even more harm. The actions of the Russian Federation, described below, are aimed at changing children's perception of their national identity and belonging. Through gross violations, such as deportation and forced displacement, children are subjected to physical severance of ties and removal from their familiar environment. In order to sever mental ties, the Russian Federation also takes actions that violate other obligations, including ensuring education in the mother tongue, taking into account religion and ethnicity. While the imposition of Russian culture is not a violation in itself, it is important to consider the intent of these actions, as well as the overall context in which they are applied. Together with the physical severance of ties, as well as the substitution of education, the imposition of culture is part of the change of national identity. Moreover, the education of children also involves taking into account their cultural background. The militarisation of both education and leisure, in turn, is aimed at further exploiting the change in children's national consciousness to turn them not only into representatives of another national group, but also into servants of the aggressor state's armed forces, and encouraging the physical destruction of members of their own national group.

Taken together, these actions have signs of the crime of genocide in the form of the forced relocation of children from one human group to another.^{20 21}

This Special Report by the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights focuses on systemic violations of children's rights in the TOT of Ukraine in the context of changing and destroying children's Ukrainian identity, as well as in relation to Ukrainian children who are in the Russian Federation and Belarus as a result of the crime of deportation. The report covers the period from 24 February 2022 to 1 June 2024. The report is based on the information received by the Commissioner from the state authorities of Ukraine, reports by national and international NGOs, open sources, as well as data obtained directly from children who were returned to the territory controlled by the Government of Ukraine from the temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine or the Russian Federation.

¹¹ GENEVA CONVENTION RELATIVE TO THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIAN PERSONS IN TIME OF WAR, revised on 23 February 2023, Article 49: https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995_154#Text

¹² Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 8 June 1977, revised on 08 December 2005, Article 78: https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995_199#Text

¹³ The ROME STATUTE OF THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT, revised on 17 July 1998 (effective as of 01 July 2002), Articles 7 (1) (d), 8 (2) (a) (vii)-1 and 8 (2) (b) (viii): https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995_588#Text

¹⁴ Convention on the Rights of the Child, revised on 16 November 2023, Article 20: https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995_021#Text

¹⁵ GENEVA CONVENTION RELATIVE TO THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIAN PERSONS IN TIME OF WAR, revised on 23 February 2023, Article 24: https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995_154#Text

¹⁶ Ibid, Article 50

¹⁷ Ibid, Article 51

¹⁸ The ROME STATUTE OF THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT, revised on 17 July 1998 (effective as of 01 July 2002), Article 8 (2) (a) (v): https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995_588#Text

¹⁹ GENEVA CONVENTION RELATIVE TO THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIAN PERSONS IN TIME OF WAR, revised on 23 February 2023, Article 50: https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995_154#Text

²⁰ Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, revised on 09 December 1948 (effective as of 13 February 1955), Article 2 (e): https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995_155#Text

²¹ The ROME STATUTE OF THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT, revised on 17 July 1998 (effective as of 01 July 2002), Article 6 (e): https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995_588#Text

SECTION 1. Forced Displacement of Children to the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine and Deportation of Children to the Russian Federation and Belarus

Forced Displacement and Deportation of Ukrainian Children: an Overview of the Situation

The forced displacement and deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia began during the armed aggression against Ukraine in 2014. In particular, in 2014, 12 such cases were registered upon the implementation of The Train of Hope social project²² of Radio Russia, and in 2015, 43 orphans from the occupied Crimean peninsula were adopted by Russian citizens. They were taken to the Krasnodar and Trans-Baikal Territories, as well as to the Leningrad region²³. Similar processes had taken place in the occupied territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions before the full-scale invasion. However, the facts of possible displacements became known more often than in the case of Crimea, and at the request of Ukraine, the Federal Migration Service of the Russian Federation returned the children to the territory controlled by Ukraine.²⁴

The large-scale campaign of forced displacement and deportation that had begun a few days before the full-scale invasion was covered in detail in the Special Report "UNBLOOMED."²⁵ This includes deportations as part of the so-called "evacuation" from the occupied territories of the Donetsk, Luhansk, and later the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions, as well as "sending to camps," for "rehabilitation" and "medical examination" within the occupied territory, to the Russian Federation and Belarus.

²² Issues 274-275. The Train of Hope-Crimea. Access mode: <https://yandexwebcache.net/yandbtm?fmode=inject&tm=1718301087&tld=ru&lang=ru&la=1717553152&text=https%3A//deti.radiorus.ru/hopetrain/118&url=https%3A//deti.radiorus.ru/hopetrain/118&l10n=ru&mime=html&sign=1a2bd902920605671137449f2fc9d043&keyno=0&mode=text>

²³ RIA Novosti. Crimea. More than 40 children have been adopted in Crimea over the year. Access mode: <https://crimea.ria.ru/20160605/1105416548.html>

²⁴ It is impossible to adopt a child from the DPR and LPR in Russia. Access mode: <https://izborskiy-club.livejournal.com/232723.html>

²⁵ Special Report by the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights "Unbloomed. Violation of the Rights of Ukrainian Children in the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine and in Russia: Deportation, Militarisation, Indoctrination": <https://ombudsman.gov.ua/childrenofwar-2023/osoblyvosti-stanovyshcha-ditei-na-tymchasovo-okupovanykh-terytoriiakh#prymusove-peremishchennia>



Two girls born in 2021 were brought up in the Kherson Regional Children's Home (KRCH) and have been in the facility since April 2021 with a "temporary" status. In March 2022, the girls' parents improved their living conditions and were preparing to return the children to their families. Due to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, this did not happen: the occupation authorities refused to return the children and the girls were forcibly displaced with other children from the facility to the temporarily occupied territory, namely Simferopol, Crimea, to the so-called YOLOCHKA orphanage. In December 2023, the girls' parents exploded on a mine left behind by Russian soldiers, both of them were killed. The paternal uncle asked the Commissioner's Office of Ukraine to assist in establishing custody and returning the children from the TOT. Only in February 2024, with the assistance of the Commissioner, the children were returned to their legal representative.

As of 15 May 2024, 19,546 Ukrainian children are considered to be deported and/or forcibly displaced.²⁶ However, this figure is inconclusive, as it reflects only the number of children deported and/or forcibly displaced to the TOT of Ukraine known to the state of Ukraine. Establishing the facts of forced displacement and deportation is complicated by limited access to the occupied territory, lack of access to the territory of the Russian Federation, and systematic refusals by Russian representatives to provide information about deported and forcibly displaced children.

In late 2023 and 2024, the number of news stories about the so-called "evacuation" of children significantly decreased in the Russian media. This is likely due to greater caution by state officials in connection with the International Criminal Court's issuance of arrest warrants for the Russian President and the Commissioner for Children's Rights under the President of the Russian Federation, as well as the absence of "new" occupied territories in Ukraine. However, the Russian Federation is actively pursuing its campaigns by sending children from the occupied territories to camps and for "treatment."

Оздоровительный лагерь в Адыгее принял почти 400 детей из Херсонской области

Адыгее уже несколько лет ведет профсоюз над Геноцидом районной и оказывает всестороннюю поддержку жителям этой территории



The Russian Federation uses the "chief regions" programme to send children to camps, under which Russian regions appointed as "chiefs" of regions in the occupied territory of Ukraine ensure that Ukrainian children are sent to camps both within the occupied territory and in the Russian Federation. In particular, in April 2024, it was reported that almost 3,000 free vouchers to camps in the occupied Crimea, as well as in the Kuban, Adygea and the Volga region, were allocated to schoolchildren from the occupied part of the Kherson region of Ukraine.²⁷

350 schoolchildren from the occupied part of the Zaporizhzhia region, in turn, will be sent to camps in the Murmansk region of the Russian Federation.²⁸

²⁶ Children of War portal, as of 15 May 2024: <https://childrenofwar.gov.ua>

²⁷ Children of the Kherson region will spend this summer in the best children's camps in Russia/Latest news - Kherson.life: <https://kherson.life/kherson/deti-hersonskoj-oblasti-etim-letom-otdohnut-v-luchshih-detskikh-lageryah-rossii/>

²⁸ 350 schoolchildren from the Zaporizhzhia region will go on holiday to the Russian North - KP.RU: <https://www.zap.kp.ru/online/news/5805811/>



According to information gathered by the ZMINA Human Rights Centre, Ukrainian children are sent from the occupied territory to camps in the Republic of Belarus. Back on 15 September 2021, the self-proclaimed President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, signed a decree on the rehabilitation of a “group of children from the Donetsk region” in the Zubryonok Children’s Educational and Recreation Centre.²⁹ Most of the 150 children who arrived in Belarus during this “rehabilitation” are from Donetsk orphanages.³⁰

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion and until 30 October 2023, at least 2,442 children from the occupied territory of Ukraine have been sent to camps in Belarus.³¹ At the same time, the official Belarusian media report the figure of “more than 3,000 children.”³²

In particular, in June 2022, a group of 30 children from Donetsk and Mariupol, some of whom have disabilities, were in the Volma sanatorium (Belarus).³³ In September 2022, 150 children aged 5 to 15 from Donbas were brought to Dubrava for “rehabilitation.”³⁴

With the assistance of Oleksii Talai, in October, a group of more than 300 children from Donetsk, Mariupol, Yenakiieve, Debaltseve, Horlivka, Ilovaisk, Holubivka (listed as Kirovsk) and Volnovakha arrived at Dubrava. It was also noted that children from the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions arrived as well.³⁵ Similar news appears nearly every month.

Most of these children have parents who give permission for the child to be taken away, but it is difficult to assess how free this choice is under occupation. It is also worth paying attention to the information that people in charge of educational institutions in the occupied territories are required to provide lists of students aged 6 to 15 who belong to certain “privileged categories” and who wish to go “for recreation and rehabilitation” to the Dubrava children’s camp in Belarus.³⁶ Of particular concern are the cases of orphans and children deprived of parental care being taken to Belarus, and the lack of any confirmed information on the return of these children.

In January 2024, 35 orphans and children deprived of parental care from the Antratsyt special boarding school were held in the Dubrovyonka sanatorium in Belarus.³⁷ In March 2024, there was information about 40 children from the occupied part of the Kherson region, including children who lost their parents during the full-scale invasion and orphans, being “rehabilitated” in the Republic of Belarus.³⁸

29 A decree has been signed on the recreation and rehabilitation of children from the Donetsk region in the Belarusian Zubryonok / Official web-portal of the President of the Republic of Belarus: <https://president.gov.by/ru/events/podpisan-no-rasporyazhenie-ob-organizacii-otdyha-i-ozdorovleniya-gruppy-detey-iz-doneckoy-oblasti-v-belorusskom-zubrenke>

30 More than 150 young children from the Donetsk region came to Belarus for rehabilitation / Panorama: <https://youtu.be/ngVu14-qgOg>

31 BELARUS' COLLABORATION WITH RUSSIA IN THE SYSTEMATIC DEPORTATION OF UKRAINE'S CHILDREN, 12 December 2023: <https://hub.conflictobservatory.org/portal/sharing/rest/content/items/b024b68ca6e54ecdadec2e79fa779f2d/data>

32 More than 3000 children from Donbas have spent a vacation and undergone rehabilitation in Belarus since 2021/Telegram channel ATN_NEWSATN_NEWS, 20 November 2023: https://t.me/ATN_BTRC/105129%20%5b69

33 Belarus today. Children from Donbas are being rehabilitated in the Chervyn district. Access mode: <https://www.sb.by/articles/leto-bez-vzryvov-snaryadov-i-svista-pul.html>

34 DONBAS CHILDREN CAME TO BELARUS FOR REHABILITATION /Telegram channel ATN_NEWS, 05 September 2022: https://t.me/ATN_BTRC/74096

35 Another group of children from Donbas arrived in Belarus / Sputnik Belarus, 13 October 2022: <https://sputnik.by/20221013/ocherednaya-gruppa-detey-iz-donbassa-pribyla-v-belarus---video-1067946881.html>

36 Belarus is stealing Ukrainian children / Kiborg News, 05.06.2023: <https://kiborg.news/2023/06/05/bilorus-krade-ukrayin-skyh-ditej/>

37 Children from the Kherson region have not come on vacation yet / Solidarnasc, 11 January 2024: <https://gazetaby.plus/post/eshhe-iz-xersonshhiny-ne-otdyxali-detki/197391/>

38 Children from large families evacuated from the combat zone are prioritised / Solidarnasc, 20 March 2024: <https://gazetaby.plus/post/v-prioritete-deti-iz-mnogodetnyx-semej-evakuirovannyx-iz-zony-boevyx-d/198976/>



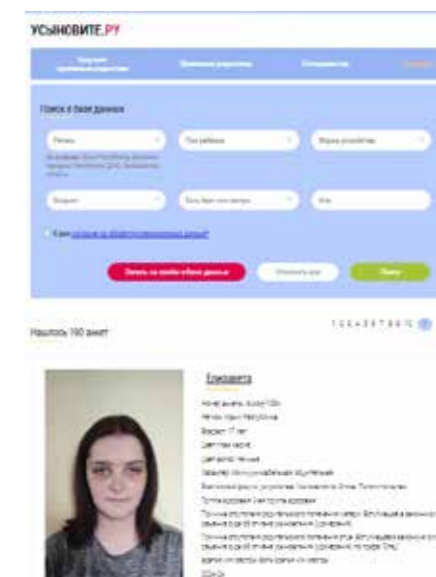
The atmosphere in Mogilev on May 9th and a tour to Buinichskoye Field. Photos from the Instagram account talai_fond

Russian representatives continue to send Ukrainian children for “treatment.” The United Russia Humanitarian Headquarters, in particular, reported that since its establishment in April 2022 until April 2024, 1,500 children from the occupied territory of Ukraine and the Belgorod region of the Russian Federation were sent to federal clinics for “treatment”, and they do not plan to stop this “assistance.”³⁹

Continued implementation of these programmes indicates that Ukrainian children in the TOT of Ukraine are at risk of forced displacement and deportation, whether in the form of “evacuation” or “sending to camps” and for “rehabilitation.” Notwithstanding the fact that in some cases parents or legal guardians voluntarily give permission for their children to be sent to camps or for “treatment,” the general atmosphere of coercion and fear in the occupied territory of Ukraine must also be taken into account. In such circumstances, questions arise as to whether the consent to such a sending to camps was free. Of particular concern is the situation of orphans, children deprived of parental care and those children whose parents or legal guardians were killed during the full-scale invasion. The consent to the displacement of such children, contrary to international humanitarian law, is given by heads of institutions located in the occupied territory appointed by the occupying authorities.

Forced Displacement of Ukrainian Children to Russian Families

One of the most dangerous consequences of deportation is the forced displacement of Ukrainian children to Russian families, which began with the occupation of the Crimean peninsula. The adoption of Ukrainian orphans from the Crimean peninsula became possible due to the illegal extension of Russian legislation to the occupied territory, as well as the automatic recognition of these children as Russian citizens. Thus, orphans and children deprived of parental care were included in the regional database of children deprived of parental care, the information from which is reflected in the unified Federal Data Bank of the Russian Federation. This allows families from any region of Russia to adopt Ukrainian children from the temporarily oc-



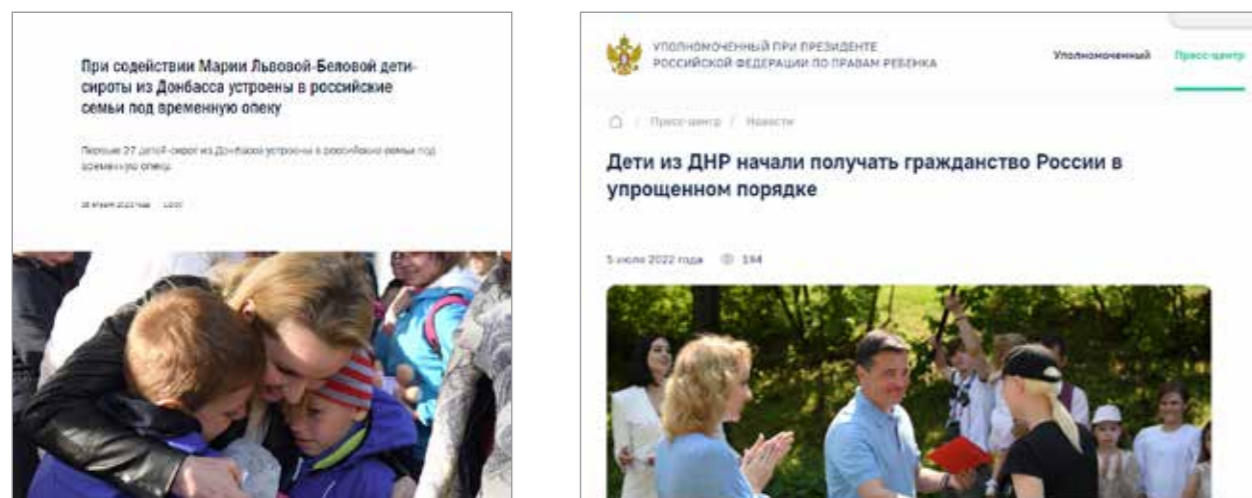
39 The United Russia Humanitarian Headquarters sent 1.5 thousand children from Donbas for treatment / 15th REGION: <https://region15.ru/gumanitarnyj-shtab-er-otpravil-na-lechenie-1-5-tysyachi-detey-iz-donbassa/>

cupied territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea as normal in accordance with Russian law. Currently, at least 153 orphans from the territory of the so-called "Republic of Crimea" and 11 orphans from the city of Sevastopol, who had been born before the occupation of the Crimean peninsula, are looking for families in Russia.⁴⁰

Similar processes had been common in the occupied regions of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions before the full-scale invasion.

After the full-scale invasion, efforts aimed at the forced displacement of Ukrainian children to Russian families not only continued, but also became widespread and systematic.

The first case of forced displacement of Ukrainian children to Russian families after the start of the full-scale invasion was registered on 23 April 2022. On that day, 27 children taken from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine were placed under the care of 10 Russian families. Maria Lvova-Belova herself, Moscow region Governor Andrii Vorobiov, adviser to the head of the so-called DPR on children's rights Eleonora Fedorenko, and children's ombudsman of the Moscow region Ksenia Mishonova were involved in the displacement process. According to the Russian Federation, all the children had brothers and sisters. The age ranged from 3 years to 17 years. Four of the children had disabilities due to phenylketonuria, mental disorders (including autism), epilepsy and musculoskeletal disorders. Among the families to which Ukrainian children were transferred, there were some "experienced in receiving children from Donbas since 2014." The families and deported Ukrainian children now live in Bogorodskoye, Domodedovo, Volokolamsk, Serpukhov, Taldom, Chekhov and other urban districts of the Moscow region.⁴¹ On 5 July 2022, the children were issued the documents on acquiring Russian citizenship in a fast-track procedure.⁴²



On 15 July 2022, 108 Ukrainian children were taken to the other six regions of the Russian Federation and placed in families. In the Moscow region, one family took custody of 9 children, and three families took custody of 8 children. In Tula, three families took into care 4 children each, and one family took 5 children. During the displacement of children, Maria Lvova-Belova reported that 50 children were living in foster families in the Moscow region. Plans were also announced to place children in foster care in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, Voronezh and Kaluga regions.⁴³

⁴⁰ Usynovite.ru portal. Access mode: <https://www.usynovite.ru/db/>

⁴¹ With the assistance of Maria Lvova-Belova, orphans from Donbas were placed in Russian families under temporary guardianship / President of Russia: <http://kremlin.ru/events/administration/68286>

⁴² Children from the DPR began to receive Russian citizenship in a fast-track procedure // Press Service of the Commissioner under the President of the Russian Federation for Children's Rights, 05 July 2022: <https://deti.gov.ru/Press-Centr/news/962>

⁴³ In the near future, foster families in 6 regions of Russia will take custody of 108 children from the DPR / Press Service of the Commissioner under the President of the Russian Federation for Children's Rights, 15 July 2022: <https://archive.ph/Z19n6#selection-1043.13-1043.95>

The active implementation of measures aimed at establishing a guardianship over deported Ukrainian children resulted in the transfer of at least 380 of them to Russian families in April-October 2022 alone. At the same time, according to the open data of the Regional Centre for Human Rights, forced displacement also took place in 2023 and spread to 24 regions of the aggressor state.

In December 2023, the family of Viktor Filonov, a member of the so-called "special military operation," and Maria Filonova, head of the regional headquarters of the Committee of the Fatherland Warriors' Families, took 7-year-old Oleg from the occupied Donetsk region under their care. The child with a disability was deported to Russia in November 2022 and registered in the orphan database of the Velikolutsk orphanage. The family insists that they will raise the boy as a "patriot of Russia."¹ It is noteworthy that Commissioner Lvova-Belova did not mention the transfer of Ukrainian children to families in 2023, nor did she mention the Pskov region as the region of the relevant acts.

In April 2024, another case was reported: a Russian woman took custody of a boy who, together with his brother and sister, had been taken to Russia from the occupied territory of the Donetsk region and placed in a boarding school in the Moscow region. The foster mother refused to take the child's brother and sister, and a Russian court also dismissed the 16-year-old sister request for custody of the boy. As a result, the boy was adopted, and his personal data – name, patronymic, last name and place of birth – were changed, despite the child's opposition.⁴⁴

A comprehensive analysis of open data (conducted by the Regional Centre for Human Rights) on 48 resource families and 85 foster parents to whom 158 deported Ukrainian children were forcibly transferred, as well as on 378 minors from Ukraine, superficial information about whom can be found on the Internet, revealed that:

- the largest gender and age group of Ukrainian children forcibly transferred to Russian families are boys aged 14-17. In this age group, there are 71% more boys than girls;
- educators prevail among the persons who have unlawfully established custody of deported Ukrainian children;
- the so-called "resource families," i.e. families with Russian children in their care, were involved in the forced transfer through incentives (financial or ideological) and incitement by guardianship authorities or religious communities;
- the territories of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions occupied since 2014 became a kind of hub where Ukrainian children, including those from other regions, were held until further deportation and forced transfer to Russian families.⁴⁵

Among the Russian regions to which Ukrainian children were relocation, the Moscow region is a leader in the number of cases of guardianship – 118 children (31% of the total number of children transferred to families as announced by Russian officials). This can be explained, first of all, by the rate of involvement in the implementation of criminal policy, proximity to the state border of Ukraine, and financial incentives. For example, the official website of the Government of the Moscow region states that in the Moscow region, a foster family raising orphans from the so-called LDPR receives up to RUB 65 thousand per child per month, depending on age and health. This amount includes:

- annual pay – RUB 38 thousand;
- monthly allowance – RUB 11 thousand to 20 thousand;

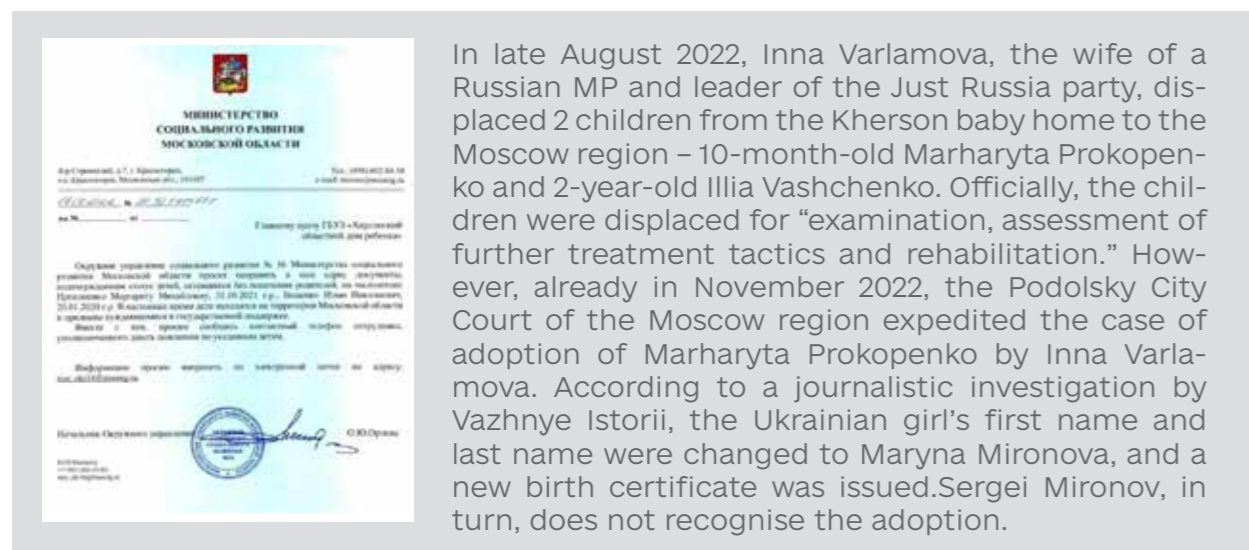
⁴⁴ Investigation: how children stolen from Ukraine are adopted. Dozhd Exclusive / Dozhd TV Channel, 27 April 2024: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5DOIAB1RO8>

⁴⁵ The Regional Centre for Human Rights analysed in detail the information about 136 Ukrainian children who were forcibly transferred to Russian families: age, gender, regions from which the children were deported, and the Russian Federation subjects that participated in facilitating the registration of illegal guardianship. / Regional Centre for Human Rights, 22 January 2024: https://www.facebook.com/RCHR.Crimea/posts/688537093433298?locale=uk_UA

- remuneration to parents depending on the child's health – RUB 9.2 thousand to 25 thousand;
- compensation for transport fares;
- compensation for travel to a holiday destination and a holiday voucher for all family members;
- Governor's scholarship – RUB 6 thousand⁴⁶.

In general, the level of financial incentives depends on the region of the Russian Federation. In addition, in each of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation, foster families with Ukrainian children are helped to purchase housing,⁴⁷ transport,⁴⁸ toys,⁴⁹ etc.

In 2023, it became known that Russian citizens illegally adopted Ukrainian children deported after the start of the full-scale invasion. At the same time Commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova has consistently denied this fact, calling it a “fake.”⁵⁰



In late August 2022, Inna Varlamova, the wife of a Russian MP and leader of the Just Russia party, displaced 2 children from the Kherson baby home to the Moscow region – 10-month-old Marharyta Prokopenko and 2-year-old Illia Vashchenko. Officially, the children were displaced for “examination, assessment of further treatment tactics and rehabilitation.” However, already in November 2022, the Podolsky City Court of the Moscow region expedited the case of adoption of Marharyta Prokopenko by Inna Varlamova. According to a journalistic investigation by Vazhnye Istории, the Ukrainian girl's first name and last name were changed to Maryna Mironova, and a new birth certificate was issued. Sergei Mironov, in turn, does not recognise the adoption.

According to the Medusa media outlet, citing the Russian Ministry of Education, in 2023, at least 78 Ukrainian children were adopted by Russian citizens.⁵¹ Adoption is accompanied by numerous violations of the child's rights (including the right to identity, name, family reunification, etc.) and is not in the child's best interests. On 27 January 2023, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Filippo Grandi emphasised that granting (Russian) citizenship to children or adopting them contradicts the fundamental principles of child protection in time of war.⁵²

⁴⁶ The Governor awarded families who have adopted children from the DPR and LPR / Moscow Region Governor's Press Service / Sergei Khakimov, 13 December 2022: <https://archive.ph/DLX34>

⁴⁷ Vorobyov visited the largest foster family in Russia, which took 9 children from Donbas / RIAMO: <https://riamo.ru/article/572494/vorobev-navestil-samuyu-mnogochislennuyu-priemnyuyu-semyu-v-rf-vzyavshuyu-9-detej-iz-donbassa-xl>

⁴⁸ Children of Donbas are our children: Siberian Larisa Lukina adopts four children / VN.RU: <https://dzen.ru/a/Y6U5v2laShVT-tykb>

⁴⁹ In Noyabrsk, I met with the Flegantov family. This year Svetlana and Andrei took three sisters from Donbass under their guardianship. /Telegram channel, 24 August 2022: https://t.me/artukhov_da/425

⁵⁰ Lvova-Belova debunked five Ukrainian fakes about Russia's child protection policy / <https://rg.ru/2023/08/09/lvova-belova-razvenchala-piat-ukrainskih-fejkov-o-politike-rossii-po-zashchite-detej.html>

⁵¹ “They might start to antagonise” Russian authorities are afraid of children forcibly displaced from Ukraine. They are trying to “re-educate” them and put them under strict digital control. Medusa investigation / Medusa, 11 March 2024: <https://medusa.io/feature/2024/03/11/oni-mogut-nachat-protivodeystvovat>

⁵² Max Funder. U.N. refugee chief: Russia violating principles of child protection in Ukraine. / Reuters, 28 January 2023: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/un-refugee-chief-russia-violating-principles-child-protection-ukraine-2023-01-27/>

Imposing Russian Citizenship on Ukrainian Citizens

Another tool for the forced transfer of children from one group to another is the imposition of Russian citizenship on them. 2023 amendments to Russian legislation that simplify the acquisition of Russian citizenship for Ukrainian citizens and create conditions for imposing such citizenship on them were discussed in the UNBLOOMED report.⁵³



However, on 4 January 2024, the President of the Russian Federation issued a Decree determining the categories of persons who may apply for Russian citizenship in a fast-track procedure. According to the Decree, guardians, trustees and heads of children's institutions may apply for Russian citizenship on behalf of children.⁵⁴

Provisions on the fast-track system of acquiring Russian citizenship for minors are also contained in all four Federal Laws by which the Russian Federation illegally incorporated the occupied territories of the Donetsk,⁵⁵ Luhansk,⁵⁶ Zaporizhzhia⁵⁷ and Kherson⁵⁸ regions. In particular, Article 5 of each of them stipulates that Ukrainian citizens who permanently resided in the territory on the day of its “incorporation” into the Russian Federation, as well as their minor children, acquire Russian citizenship as a result of their recognition as

Russian citizens, the only condition being that they take an oath. At the same time, persons under the age of 14 are exempt from taking the oath.

An application submitted by a child's legal representative is sufficient to recognise a child under 14 as a Russian citizen. After that, the federal executive body in the field of internal affairs or its territorial body will put a mark on the child's birth certificate confirming the child's Russian citizenship.

In addition, according to Russian law, a child acquires Russian citizenship at birth if his or her parents are Russian citizens and if one of the parents is a Russian citizen and the other is a foreign citizen, if the child was born in the Russian Federation.⁵⁹ Given the illegal incorporation of the occupied territory of Ukraine into the Russian Federation, children born on this territory are subject to this provision under the Russian legal regime.

This information is confirmed by the Russian side. In its responses to the reports of the participating states, the Russian Federation stated that “as a result of the current polit-

⁵³ Special Report by the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights “Unbloomed. Violation of the Rights of Ukrainian Children in the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine and in Russia: Deportation, Militarisation, Indoctrination”: <https://ombudsman.gov.ua/childrenofwar-2023/>

⁵⁴ Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of 04 January 2024 No. 11 / Official publication of legal acts: <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/document/0001202401040003>

⁵⁵ Federal Constitutional Law of 04 October 2022 No. 5-FKZ “On the admission of the Donetsk People's Republic to the Russian Federation and the formation of a new constituent entity within the Russian Federation – the Donetsk People's Republic”: https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_428188/

⁵⁶ Federal Constitutional Law of 04 October 2022 No. 6-FKZ “On the admission of the Luhansk People's Republic to the Russian Federation and the formation of a new constituent entity within the Russian Federation – the Luhansk People's Republic”: https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_428184/

⁵⁷ Federal Constitutional Law of 04 October 2022 No. 7- FKZ “On the admission of the Zaporizhzhia People's Republic to the Russian Federation and the formation of a new constituent entity within the Russian Federation – the Zaporizhzhia People's Republic”: https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_428185/952b9ed707c9b0af0ae4eef8eb513f1063f-1da74/

⁵⁸ Federal Constitutional Law of 04 October 2022 No. 8- FKZ “On the admission of the Kherson People's Republic to the Russian Federation and the formation of a new constituent entity within the Russian Federation – the Kherson People's Republic”: https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_428186/

⁵⁹ Federal Law “On the Russian Federation citizenship” of 28 April 2023 No. 138-FZ (as revised) Article 13/ ConsultantPlus: https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_445998/

ical situation, citizens of the Russian Federation who simultaneously hold Ukrainian citizenship and are not bound by political and legal ties with Ukraine, for reasons beyond their control, are deprived of the opportunity to renounce Ukrainian citizenship and, as a result, to acquire the full range of rights and freedoms of a citizen of the Russian Federation. For children, in particular orphans and children without parental care, the presence of Ukrainian citizenship may become an obstacle to their life arrangement in the Russian Federation..."⁶⁰

Given the dependence of the child's citizenship on the citizenship of the parents, it is also worth mentioning the policy of imposing Russian citizenship on adult Ukrainian citizens living in the TOT. In particular, among the means of coercion used against them are threats of dismissal from work, termination of social benefits for children, denial of pensions, inability to receive bank cards, denial of medical services, including access to essential medicines, inability to obtain a school certificate, and confiscation of property.⁶¹ Means of coercion also include threats to take children away from their parents.⁶²

Kateryna, born in 2010, lived with her mother and grandmother in Verkhni Rohachyk, Kherson region, at the beginning of the full-scale invasion. Kateryna did not attend school during the first months of the occupation, she took distance learning, although her mother was repeatedly informed about the need to attend school under occupation and was subsequently forced to send her child to a "renovated Russian school." Then the school was destroyed by shelling and the issue of education was never raised again. The mother was threatened with deprivation of parental rights if she did not obtain a Russian passport, so she was forced to get one. The house where the family had lived all their lives was destroyed. After the shell hit the yard of another house where they were staying with friends, the family decided to leave. However, previous attempts to leave failed, as the Russian military did not allow them to leave the village, arguing that there were active hostilities on the road they intended to use. There were no evacuation corridors or opportunities to leave on their own. Her mother did not let Kateryna out of the yard because of the cases of kidnapping of children by the Russian military. Thus, two girls she knew because they had attended the same school disappeared. The girls' parents reported the disappearance to the village council, but there was no response. It was impossible to report to other authorities. There was no electricity, water or gas, so the family bought a generator and heated with firewood. At the end of the garden where the family lived, there was a military installation like a cannon. They were shelled every day, and reconnaissance aerial vehicles were constantly flying above them, so they did not go out into the yard unless necessary.

The family left Verkhni Rohachyk in January 2023. They left through the TOT of Crimea and the territory of the Russian Federation. The child and the mother currently live in the Kyiv region and are undergoing psychosocial rehabilitation.

Such measures violate the fundamental principles of international law, rules of human rights law, as well as certain principles and rules of international humanitarian

⁶⁰ Replies of the Russian Federation to the list of issues with regard to its combined sixth and seventh periodic reports / CRC/C/RUS/RQ/6-7 / paragraphs 92, 93: <https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2FPPRI-CAqhKb7yhssn7Yf1zx0h12Adt9bkLmheuJNqCUBAQoeexX8MVG2nHN9wKTT7e%2FHbqhPwqCIMRJ0y%2FcB9ztF9ujcDR8Y-FZ9zHv25QN8gucBVp2Dfx%2BliZa1>

⁶¹ Imposing Russian citizenship on Ukrainian citizens in the occupied territory of Ukraine and in Russia - Analytical report / Coalition "Ukraine. Five in the Morning": https://zmina.ua/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/03/passport_web.pdf

⁶² Russia Threatens Ukrainians Who Refuse Russian Citizenship / Human Rights Watch, 16 May 2023: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/16/russia-threatens-ukrainians-who-refuse-russian-citizenship>

law, in particular, regarding the preservation of the same situation as existed before the occupation of the territory, as well as the prohibition of forcing residents of the occupied territory to swear allegiance to the enemy state.⁶³ In the context of measures against minors, these actions also violate the prohibition on changing the civil status of children.^{64 65}

Before the full-scale invasion, the family of Tetiana and her daughter Liza (names changed for security reasons) had lived in Mariupol. However, in late February, a tank hit the house where the family lived, causing significant damage and making it impossible to live there. Tetiana and her daughter Liza took refuge in a church, but it was not safe there either. Missile fragments fell into the courtyard of the temporary shelter, having injured the head of her daughter. This was the last straw, and Tetiana decided to leave for a place safe for her child.

They left Mariupol on foot, then were driven by strangers to a temporary accommodation centre in Taganrog (Russian Federation), from where the family was picked up by distant relatives and transported to the city of Simferopol. Since the family did not plan to stay in the temporarily occupied territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, they avoided obtaining Russian passports in every way possible. At the same time, they had to survive, so in order to receive medical and educational services, they had to apply to the Russian migration service, where they received a document with the "temporary asylum" status. At the same time, their Ukrainian passports and their children's birth certificates were seized. When Tetiana and Liza were ready to leave for the Ukraine-controlled territory, they requested the migration to return the seized documents, and immediately faced a refusal to return their Ukrainian documents. It took the family two months to collect their documents and leave the temporarily occupied Crimea. During the interview at the Child Rights Protection Centre, Liza said that she was forced to attend a Russian school, where once a week a student responsible for raising the flag of the aggressor country and singing the Russian anthem was chosen, which caused her to feel unsafe. The girl needs psychosocial rehabilitation after her return.

Thus, the Russian Federation pursues its consistent policy of forced displacement and deportation of Ukrainian children, initiated in 2014, without taking measures to find their relatives or inform Ukraine about such displacement. The children are then placed in Russian families. In addition, Russian citizenship is imposed on minors and their parents, which also has a direct impact on the civil status of children. These actions of the Russian Federation are aimed at preventing the return of children to Ukraine and completely severing their ties with the Ukrainian national group. Such actions of the Russian side may contain signs of a crime of genocide, as they potentially lead to the biological extermination of a part of the future generation of Ukrainians.

⁶³ Imposing Russian citizenship on Ukrainian citizens in the occupied territory of Ukraine and in Russia - Analytical report / Coalition "Ukraine. Five in the Morning": https://zmina.ua/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/03/passport_web.pdf

⁶⁴ GENEVA CONVENTION relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, revised on 23 February 2023, Article 50: https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995_154#Text

⁶⁵ Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine (1 December 2023 - 29 February 2024), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, para. 75: <https://ukraine.un.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/2024-03-26-ohchr-38th-periodic-report-ukr.pdf>

SECTION 2. Implementation of Russian Education Standards and Cultural Policy in the Temporarily Occupied Territory of Ukraine

The restructuring of the education system in the territories of Ukraine occupied by the Russian Federation after 2022 began immediately after the occupation and followed the so-called "Crimean" scenario, an algorithm previously implemented by the Russian Federation after the occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. Since the beginning of the occupation of the territories of the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions, as well as the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in 2022, Ukrainian studies and the Ukrainian language have been reduced, discontinued or banned in schools, the educational process has been militarised, and out-of-school youth movements for patriotic education have been launched.



Educational Process: Russian Education Standards and "Patriotic Education"

After the occupation of "new" territories of Ukraine during the full-scale invasion, Russian authorities quickly began to harmonise the education system in the occupied territories with the Russian education system. According to the Almenda Centre for Civic Education, the illegal administrations of the territories occupied after 2022 forced educators to defect to the Russian side through intimidation or replacement with those loyal to the Russian Federation, and in some schools the management was replaced.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Analytical report "Crimean scenario": how the Russian Federation destroys the Ukrainian identity of children in the occupied territories" / A. Vorobiova, M. Sulialina - Kyiv, 2023. - 72 p.: https://almenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Analitichnyy-zvit-%E2%80%9EKryms%CA%B9kyy-stsenariy-yak-Rosiy%CA%B9ka-Federatsiya-znyshchuye-ukrayins%CA%B9ku-identychnist%CA%B9-ditey-na-okupovanykh-terytoriyakh_ukr_Almenda_2022.pdf

For example, in the Kherson region, educators received letters from the occupation administration⁶⁷ demanding that they continue the educational process "in accordance with the Geneva Convention to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe" and threatening them if they refused.

Despite references to the Geneva Convention on the obligation to ensure the operation of educational institutions, contrary to these provisions, students are taught in Russian according to the Russian curriculum. Although the possibility of optional study of the Ukrainian language is declared by the representatives of the occupation administrations if there is a sufficient number of applicants, de facto, the Ukrainian language is not learnt. This is also confirmed by the fact that only in September 2023, Aleksandr Bugaiev, Deputy Minister for Education of the Russian Federation, stated that textbooks for learning the "classical" Ukrainian language for grades 1-4 were sent to the "new regions," while there were no textbooks for secondary and high school.⁶⁸ Cycles of Ukrainian studies have either been significantly reduced or cancelled. School teachers are being replaced or retrained,⁶⁹ which the so-called "head of the Crimean parliament" Vladimir Konstantinov directly calls "mopping-up."⁷⁰ Shadowy or online Ukrainian education also provokes repression by the occupiers. For example, two secondary school students from different settlements in the Kherson region who contacted the Child Rights Protection Centre after returning to the Ukraine-controlled territory testified to constant checks of their devices by Russians. All the witnesses, speaking about the occupiers' education system, stated that their parents or guardians were threatened with deprivation of parental rights if they refused to study in a Russian-controlled school. Education also became an additional tool for imposing Russian citizenship, as parents or guardians had to obtain a Russian passport in order to send their children to school.

In October 2022, Valeriia left the temporarily occupied Kherson region for Yevpatoria (Crimea) to the Luchystyi camp with the consent of her guardian. She was 15 years old at the time. The school insisted on her vacation in the camp. According to the child, the buses with children were accompanied to the camp by soldiers with machine guns. The so-called "rehabilitation" was planned for 14 days, but Valeriia stayed in the camp for almost two months. In the camp, she was forced to sing the Russian national anthem and stand up when she heard it, as well as learn Russian songs. She was forbidden to communicate, read and correspond in Ukrainian. The Russian authorities also organised schooling in a school next to the camp. Valeriia says that the school also forced her to attend classes and "talk about important things," taught "distorted" history and other lessons in Russian. Valeriia's native language is Ukrainian, and she said it was difficult for her to learn, and she was scolded for using Ukrainian words and had her grades lowered. During their stay in the camp, the children were not provided with proper clothing or other hygiene kits. Since the stay in the camp was significantly prolonged and the child did not have appropriate winter clothes, Valeriia called her grandmother and told her to come and pick her up from the camp. At that time, the grandmother was also taken from the Kherson region to Dzhankoi (TOT of Crimea) by Russian servicemen who used to displace civilians

⁶⁷ Educators under occupation have little choice: to go to jail now for disobedience or after de-occupation for collaboration. The story of a teacher from the Kherson region/ Texts.org.ua, 30 June 2022: <https://texts.org.ua/articles/107110/vybir-v-osvityan-v-okupaciyi-nevelykyj-sisty-zaraz-za-nepokoru-abo-pislya-zvilnennya-za-koloboraciyu-rozpovid-uchytelya-z-her-sonshyny/?src=main>

⁶⁸ Russia's Education Ministry has sent Ukrainian language textbooks to new regions. TASS, 12 September 2023: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/18719811>

⁶⁹ Analytical report "Crimean scenario": how the Russian Federation destroys the Ukrainian identity of children in the occupied territories" / A. Vorobiova, M. Sulialina - Kyiv, 2023. - 72 p.: https://almenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Analitichnyy-zvit-%E2%80%9EKryms%CA%B9kyy-stsenariy-yak-Rosiy%CA%B9ka-Federatsiya-znyshchuye-ukrayins%CA%B9ku-identychnist%CA%B9-ditey-na-okupovanykh-terytoriyakh_ukr_Almenda_2022.pdf

⁷⁰ Head of the Crimean state council says teachers from the peninsula will go to the liberated territories of Ukraine to teach / Telegram channel Russkaya Vesna Z: special operation in Ukraine and Donbas, 18 April 2022: <https://t.me/rusvesna-su/17556>

in order to cover the withdrawal of troops from the Kherson region. The grandmother was able to come to Yevpatoria and pick up the girl. Together with the child, the grandmother went to her relatives in Henichesk (TOT of the Kherson region), where they rented an apartment in December 2022, but Valeriia was able to leave for the Ukraine-controlled territory only in August 2023. Valeriia left the occupied territory on her own. She was interviewed by the Child Rights Protection Centre and enrolled in a medical college in Kyiv. In 2023, with the support of specialists from the Commissioner's Office, Valeriia found a foster family. Olga became Valeriia's new guardian. They are currently learning to live as a new family and travelling the world.

The indoctrination and militarisation of children in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine is also taking place through the extracurricular education programme **"Conversations about important things."** This programme has been in place since September 2022 and was introduced by the Russian Ministry of Education for all schools in Russia and the occupied territories of Ukraine. Classes are held every Monday, the first lesson after the mandatory line-up, with the Russian national anthem and the Russian flag raised.⁷¹ Such "conversations" are part of the "patriotic education" of the aggressor country.



The lesson
"RUSSIA IN THE WORLD".
Skadovsk, Kherson region

During these "conversations," children are told about Russia's achievements in various fields and imposed a sense of duty to the "Motherland," with justification of historical ties between the "regions" and Russia and the so-called "special military operation." In September 2023, on the anniversary of the pseudo-referendums in the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied after 2022, in particular, in the schools of the Zaporizhzhia region, talks were held⁷² where the illegal incorporation of the TOT of Ukraine into the Russian Federation was called "restoration of historical justice."⁷³

These lessons often serve as a point of contact between children and Russian politicians. For example, in November 2023, Henichesk school No. 2 was visited by Igor Kashtuevich, the so-called "senator of the Kherson region" from Joint Russia. He spoke

71 Conversations about important things. A cycle of extracurricular activities. A set of methodological materials for teachers: <https://razgovor.edsoo.ru/>

72 Conversations about Important Things were held in Nove Village Club / ZOV Melitopol, 29 September 2023: <https://melitopol-news.ru/society/2023/09/29/53587.html>

73 Conversations about important things "On the accession of the LPR, DPR, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions to Russia." Lesson plan (6th grade): <https://nsportal.ru/shkola/vneklassnaya-rabota/library/2022/10/03/razgovory-o-vazhnom-o-pris-oedinenii-lnr-dnr-hersonskoy>

about the role of schoolchildren in the future of Russia and stressed that **"technological sovereignty should be protected in the same way as state sovereignty."**⁷⁴ Specially for schoolchildren in the Kherson region, the regional branch of Joint Russia launched the Historical Conversations project, aimed at shaping a pro-Russian perception of the history of the USSR and Russia.

In addition to regular "conversations about important things," the so-called "Courage lessons" are also held on public holidays and memorial dates, glorifying the exploits of the Soviet, Russian and "international" armies in wars in which Russia was involved. The purpose of these lessons is to "instil respect for the Russian armed forces" and to mould children's readiness to "defend their homeland with arms in hand." Often, Russian veterans who took part in the wars for Afghanistan⁷⁵ or the so-called "special military operation" are involved in these lessons.⁷⁶ At the end of courage lessons, children are often forced to participate in the "Letter to a soldier" campaign, i.e. to write letters of support for the Russian armed forces and express "gratitude" to Russian soldiers for the seizure of Ukrainian lands.⁷⁷ During these classes, children are also encouraged to join the Yunarmiya (Youth Army).⁷⁸ At the same time, for example, in some Crimean schools, students' annual grades are lowered because they did not write letters to "participants of the special military operation."⁷⁹

Children who are in camps or on "rehabilitation" in Belarus are also involved in local educational programmes, they are on vacation without interrupting their studies, however, according to the Belarusian curriculum.⁸⁰ According to information gathered by the ZMINA Human Rights Centre, in addition to the narratives about the unity of the history and future of the Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian peoples inherent in the Russian programme, the Belarusian programme pays special attention to the concept of the "genocide of the Belarusian people." In presenting this concept, special attention is paid to "Nazi collaborators" and their nationality – representatives of Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish and Ukrainian national groups are singled out as the main perpetrators of the crimes.⁸¹



74 Joint Russia" held a Conversation about Important Things in Henichesk, Kherson region, 13 November 2023: <https://er.ru/activity/news/edinaya-rossiya-provela-razgovor-o-vazhnom-v-genicheske-hersonskoj-oblasti>

75 Courage lessons have become traditional in schools of the Kherson region / Tavria. Kherson region, 09 December 2023: <https://archive.ph/dq5yf>

76 As part of the military-patriotic education of the younger generation, courage lessons are held in all schools of our country - ZOV Berdiansk, 23 November 2023: <https://berdiansk-news.ru/society/2023/11/23/29902.html>

77 Analytical report "Crimean scenario": how the Russian Federation destroys the Ukrainian identity of children in the occupied territories" / A. Vorobiova, M. Sulialina - Kyiv, 2023. - 72 p.: https://almenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Analichnyy-zvit-%E2%80%9EKryms%CA%B9kyy-stsenariy-yak-Rosiyis%CA%B9ka-Federatsiya-znyshchuye-ukrayins%CA%B9ku-identychnist%CA%B9-ditey-na-okupovanykh-terytoriyakh_ukr_Almenda_2022.pdf

78 Courage lessons have become traditional in schools of the Kherson region / Tavria. Kherson region, 09 December 2023: <https://archive.ph/dq5yf>

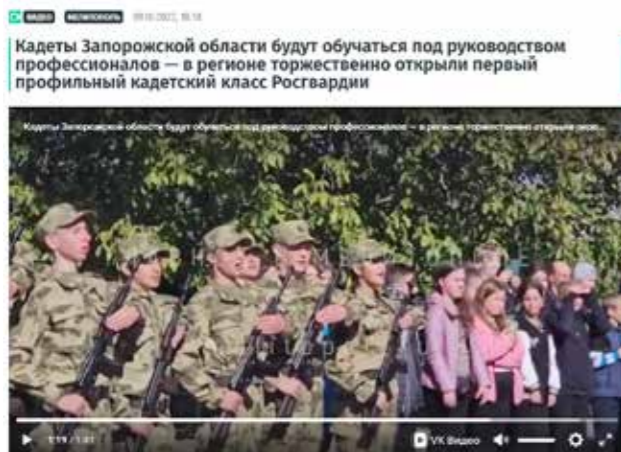
79 In Crimea, students' annual grades are lowered because they did not write letters to "participants of the special military operation" / The Crimean Human Rights Group, 22 May 2024: <https://crimeahrg.org/uk/u-krimu-richni-oczniki-uchnyam-znizhuyut-cherez-te-shho-voni-ne-pisali-listi-uchasnikam-svo/>

80 Children of Donbas arrived in Novopolotsk for recreation and rehabilitation / Vitebskie Vesti, 22 September 2023: <https://vitvesti.by/index.php/obshchestvo/v-novopolotck-pribyli-na-ozdorovlenie-i-reabilitaciiu-deti-donbassa.html>

81 Genocide of the Belarusian people: Information and analytical materials and documents / Prosecutor General's Office of the Republic of Belarus; under the general editorship of A.I. Shved. – Minsk : Belarus, 2022. – 175 p.

Militarisation of Formal and Extracurricular Education

Since September 2023, schools in the occupied territories of the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions, as well as in Crimea, have been implementing a programme of “cadet classes.” These paramilitary classes are established based on agreement between the educational institution or “ministries of education” of the regions of Ukraine occupied by the Russian Federation and the relevant Russian authorities, often with the support of the regional branch of the Joint Russia party. In the Zaporizhzhia region, military trainings for children are conducted by the Russian National Guard,⁸² and in Kherson region, “cadet classes” are opened by the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation.⁸³ There are currently 128 such classes in the temporarily occupied Crimea.⁸⁴



According to Sergei Petrov,⁸⁵ head of the educational work department of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation, 40% of the students in the four cadet corps of his department (in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Volgograd and temporarily occupied Sevastopol) are orphans and children deprived of parental care, so Petrov encourages such children from the “new regions” to join the cadet corps and classes. In addition to Sevastopol, a full-fledged cadet corps as a separate paramilitary educational institution has been operating in Luhansk since 2014,⁸⁶ and in Alchevsk since 2018.⁸⁷

In 2022, Andrii (name changed for security reasons) went to the Kupiansk Special Boarding School of the Kharkiv Regional Council to receive a certificate of basic secondary education. On the same day, Russian soldiers, preparing to retreat, closed the entrance and exit to the town, and blocked transportation. 13 children from the municipal institution were forcibly taken by the occupation authorities to the temporarily occupied territory of the Luhansk region. The children were transported through the towns of Svatove and Starobilsk, and then placed in an orphanage in Perevalsk.

Andrii said that he had no telephone connection or access to the Internet and could not tell his mother where he was. The conditions were terrible: at first, they slept on mattresses on the floor, were not provided with adequate food and did not study.

⁸² Cadets of the Zaporizhzhia region will be trained under the guidance of professionals – the first profile cadet class of the Russian National Guard was inaugurated in the region / ZOV Berdiansk, 09 October 2023: <https://berdyansk-news.ru/other/2023/10/09/25617.html>

⁸³ A cadet class will be opened in a school in Skadovsk, Kherson region / Gorod 24, 17 May 2024: https://gorod24.online/hersonskaya_oblast/news/318162-v_odnoy_iz_shkol_skadovska_hersonskoy_oblasti_otkroyut_kadetskiy_klass.html

⁸⁴ Analytical report “Crimean scenario”: how the Russian Federation destroys the Ukrainian identity of children in the occupied territories” / A. Vorobiova, M. Sulialina - Kyiv, 2023. - 72 p.: https://almenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Analitichnyy-zvit-%E2%80%99EKryms%CA%B9kyy-stsenariy-yak-Rosiy%CA%B9ka-Federatsiya-znyshchuye-ukrayins%CA%B9ku-identychnist%CA%B9-ditey-na-okupovanykh-terytoriyakh_ukr_Almenda_2022.pdf

⁸⁵ Orphaned children from new regions will be able to enrol in IC cadet corps / RIA Novosti, 04 June 2023: <https://ria.ru/20230604/postuplenie-1876094163.html>

⁸⁶ History of the Lugansk Cadet Corps / State Budgetary Educational Institution of the LPR Republican Cossack Cadet Corps named after Air Marshal Alexander Efimov: <https://xn--80aidmfdbcb2blhghy.xn---7sb3aecmcv8d.xn--ptai/page/static/school-history?uid=da6baecc-5660-48d5-ba34-b724d352760c>

⁸⁷ Cossack cadet corps opening ceremony held in Alchevsk / Lugansk Information Centre, 01 September 2018: <https://lug-info.com/news/torzhestvennoe-otkrytie-kazachego-kadetskogo-korpusa-sostoyalos-v-alchevske-foto-38037/>

Later, studies were organised, but the management of the boarding school exerted pressure, prohibited communication in Ukrainian between children, and forced children to listen and learn the anthem of the Russian Federation, study special subjects related to the “Russian world”, wear Russian-style military clothing and participate in special events covering the events of the “special military operation.” If children refused, they were subjected to pressure and intimidation. The children were also forced to perform physical labour, such as digging up earth and unloading humanitarian aid.

Given that the territory of the Kharkiv region was occupied and the child's mother did not have access to telephone and the Internet, the boy was able to contact his mother only in early October via WhatsApp. It was the director of the boarding school who gave him a mobile phone.

The boy's mother contacted the management of the boarding institution and informed them during the conversation that the child had parents and they planned to return the child home. The management of the institution threatened that the child would be granted the “deprived of parental care” status for further placement in a Russian family. Due to the active hostilities and the absence of humanitarian corridors, with the assistance of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, in March 2023, the boy's mother personally took him out of Perevalsk and found out that her child had been granted the status of a child deprived of parental care and documents were being prepared for his placement in a Russian family.

On the territories seized after the start of the full-scale war, cadet classes have already appeared in Starobilsk, Luhansk region,⁸⁸ Kostiantynivka, Zaporizhzhia region,⁸⁹ Skadovsk⁹⁰ and Shchaslytseve,⁹¹ Kherson region. The cadets undergo a programme of physical and military training that will enable them to participate in patriotic events of the Russian National Guard and, when they grow up, serve in the Russian army. The organisers of cadet schools promise their graduates privileges when entering Russian higher education institutions, such as selection without competition for military and civilian specialities.⁹²

Russians have actively developed a **system of extracurricular movements** and organisations aimed at military and patriotic education at all stages of a child's development. Teaching “love for the Motherland” begins in the first grade, although the Russian Federation is currently piloting the expansion of patriotic education to kindergartens. Below is the infrastructure of youth movements developed in the TOT of Ukraine.

The **Dvizheniie Pervykh (the Movement of the First)** is a federal movement of children and youth, launched in late 2022, allegedly at the suggestion of Crimean schoolgirl Di-ana Krasovska, who was able to personally convey her idea to Vladimir Putin.⁹³ In fact,

⁸⁸ The first cadet corps in the liberated territories opened in Starobelsk / Lugansk Information Centre, 01 September 2023: <https://lug-info.com/news/pervyj-na-osvobodzhennyh-territoriyah-kadetskij-korpus-otkrylsya-v-starobel-ske/>

⁸⁹ Cadets of the Zaporizhzhia region will be trained under the guidance of professionals - the first profile cadet class of the Russian National Guard inaugurated in the region / ZOV Melitopol, 09 October 2023: <https://archive.ph/2EdqL#selection-425.0-425.152>

⁹⁰ Russian troops establish “cadet classes” in Skadovsk district schools – General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine / Radio Svoboda, 06 February 2023: <https://ru.krymr.com/a/news-ukraina-skadovskiy-rayon-rossiyskiye-voyska-sozdayut-kadetskiye-klassy/32258824.html>

⁹¹ The first cadet class was opened in Shchaslytseve school / Tavria. Kherson region: https://dzen.ru/video/watch/6501b3f-942d9c54a5306bc39?utm_referrer=www.google.com

⁹² The first cadet class of the Russian National Guard will be created in the Zaporizhzhia region / ZOV Melitopol, 17 August 2023: <https://archive.ph/nWEwC#selection-427.0-427.64>

⁹³ The schoolgirl who proposed to create the Movement of the First visited the Russia exhibition / Regnum, 05 December 2023: <https://regnum.ru/news/3850925>

the movement is a “reincarnation” of Soviet “pioneers.” The organisation unites most of Russia's youth movements, including Yunarmiya (Youth Army), Russian Movement of Schoolchildren, Bolshaia Peremena (Big Break), and others.⁹⁴ The organisation's declared mission is to ensure comprehensive patriotic education for children and encourages students to become “worthy heirs of discoverers, founders and pioneers who are distinguished by their desire to win.”⁹⁵



The main areas of its activities⁹⁶ include, *inter alia*:

- diplomatic and international relations “Learn to be friends” involving children in the creation of international youth projects. In this area, solemn ceremonies are organised to hand over Russian passports to movement members; similar events have already been held for 14-year-olds from the occupied Donetsk and Luhansk regions;
- cultural and artistic direction Create and Inspire, which offers both general artistic programmes such as actor classes and ideological programmes such as Classics of Victory, where schoolchildren are encouraged to “congratulate their country” on the “great victory” in World War II and to “preserve historical memory together” in songs, poems and theatrical performances;
- patriotic and historical memory direction Serve the Motherland! which invites teenagers to become “guardians of history” and take “patronage” of memorial sites.

Centres, known as “primary hubs,” are established at the facilities of educational institutions. Children aged 6 to 18 can join the movement. Adults can join the movement as “mentors.” To be selected, it is necessary to fill out an application on the movement's website and confirm it with an electronic or physical signature at the primary hub of the organisation within 30 days.

It is noteworthy that one of the first centres of the movement appeared in the TOT of Ukraine, it was opened in December 2022 in the city of Henichesk at the facilities

94 The Movement of the First: What the new organisation will do, what values it professes and how to join it / RG.RU, 20 December 2022: <https://rg.ru/2022/12/20/dvizhenie-pervyh-chem-budet-zanimatsia-novaia-organizaciia-kakie-cennosti-ispoveduet-i-kak-k-nej-prisoedinitia.html>

95 The Movement of the First's website: <https://xn--90acagbhgpca7c8c7f.xn--p1ai/directions>

96 Ibid

of school No. 1 and a medical school.⁹⁷ The movement's Coordination Council in the Russian-occupied part of Kherson region was headed by the head of the regional occupation administration, Volodymyr Saldo. Currently, according to the occupation authorities, the movement in the occupied Kherson region has 59 primary hubs and almost a thousand members. Members of the movement from the occupied territories of Ukraine are sent to all-Russian congresses of children and youth in Moscow.

In the Zaporizhzhia region, the first centre of the movement appeared in January 2023 at the Melitopol Multidisciplinary College. As of the end of 2023, there were 194 branches in the occupied territories of the Zaporizhzhia region with more than 7,000 members. According to Russian media reports, as of December 2023, the Movement of the First united more than 40,000 children in more than 1,300 primary regional hubs in the occupied territories of the Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Luhansk and Kherson regions of Ukraine.⁹⁸

Almenda Centre for Civic Education recorded cases of the use of symbols used by the Russian army in hostilities, such as the Z, V, and St George's ribbon. For example, in November 2023, the WarZone training ground hosted a key stage of the Zerkalo Istorii (History Mirror) project for young people aged 14-17, which included workshops on basic military training, target practice, and drone control training. The name of the event uses the Latin letter Z as a symbol of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.⁹⁹

The “Firsts” also actively involve children in activities to “support” the Russian military, such as writing letters of “gratitude” to Russian military servants, making “amulets” and other gifts for them, etc.



The younger wing of the Movement of the First is **Orliata Rossii (Eaglets of Russia)**, which provides patriotic education for the youngest, primary school students, and is currently piloting the expansion of the programme to preschools in Russia.¹⁰⁰ This programme is an analogue of the Soviet “oktiabrionok” (Little Octobrists). “Eaglets” are called the first stage of “patriotic education” in the Russian Federation. According to a statement by the so-called “Ministry of Education of the Kherson region,” 5,700 schoolchildren in the Kherson region alone have joined the movement.¹⁰¹ Although formally voluntary with parental consent, in fact, joining the organisation is compulsory.

97 The first Russian branches of the Russian Movement of the First for children and youth were opened in the Kherson region. Website of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation, 20 December 2022: <https://web.archive.org/web/20221220210438/https://edu.gov.ru/press/6346/v-hersonskoy-oblasti-otkryli-dva-pervichnyh-otdeleniya-rossiysko-go-dvizheniya-detey-i-molodezhi-dvizhenie-pervyh>

98 The Movement of the First is working in new regions / RG.RU, 30 December 2023: <https://rg.ru/2023/12/13/vmeste-my-silnee.html>

99 Youth movements as an indoctrination and militarisation tool in the TOT of Ukraine. Report / A. Vorobiova, V. Potapova - Kyiv: Almenda, 2023. – 40 p. – P. 14: <https://almenda.org/molodizhni-ruxi-yak-instrument-indoktrinacii-i-militarizacii-na-okupovanix-teritoriyax/>

100 Kindergartener, have you become a patriot?! The Minister of Education said that the Orliata Rossii (Eaglets of Russia) project should be extended to kindergartens. What awaits the kids / Novaya Gazeta, 16 December 2023: <https://novyagazeta.ru/articles/2023/12/16/detsadovets-a-ty-stal-patriotom>

101 More than 5.7 thousand children in the Kherson region joined the Orliata Rossii (Eaglets of Russia) / TASS, 05 February 2024: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/19906271>

According to the rules, all members of the organisation must adhere to the “eaglets’ laws”: to be proud of their “Motherland,” to do good deeds together, to respect their elders and take care of their younger counterparts, to strive to learn new things and to keep their word.¹⁰² Similar to the Movement of the First, Eaglets are also trained in a number of areas: Leader Eaglet, Scientist Eaglet, Athlete Eaglet, Master Eaglet, Volunteer Eaglet (meaning volunteering), Environmentalist Eaglet and Keeper of Historical Memory Eaglet. High school students can also become “mentors” for younger eaglets. During eaglet initiation, children swear to abide by the “eagles’ laws,” and teenagers from the Movement of the First solemnly tie iconic ties to eaglets.

According to the National Resistance Centre,¹⁰³ in November 2023, all first-graders in the occupied territory of the Kherson region were ordained into the Eagles, where they will receive propaganda education from an early age. The programme also operates in the occupied Zaporizhzhia region, where Eagles classes have been formed on the basis of 104 schools in the region.¹⁰⁴

Yunarmiiia (Youth army) is a militarised patriotic youth movement founded by former Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu in 2016. In the temporarily occupied territories of the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions, Yunarmiiia centres appeared in November 2022.¹⁰⁵ The children who joined the initiative undergo professional military training with the support of “veterans” of the Russian armed forces and the Battle Brotherhood, and study weapons and military equipment. Children aged 8 to 18 can join the movement by applying through the Yunarmeets (Young Army Man) mobile application and submitting documents to the local branch of the movement.



On 9 December 2023, on the Russian Day of Heroes of the Motherland, the occupiers announced that 40 schoolchildren from Melitopol had solemnly “sworn allegiance to the youth army brotherhood” and “promised to uphold the traditions of heroism, courage and camaraderie, to honour the memory of the heroes who fought for the homeland and to be worthy citizens of Russia.”¹⁰⁶ In 2023, children were involved in military training, patriotic education, and the reburial ceremony of Soviet soldiers. In 2024, the occupiers plan to open new Yunarmiiia units in Melitopol and Berdiansk, as well as a Yunarmiiia House in the Zaporizhzhia region. The Yunarmiiia trainees undergo compre-

¹⁰² Eaglets’ laws and traditions: <https://orlyatarussia.ru/zakony-i-traditsii-orlyat/>

¹⁰³ The enemy has developed a new brainwashing programme for Ukrainian children / National Resistance Centre, 13 November 2023: <https://sprotyv.mod.gov.ua/vorog-rozroblyv-novu-programu-promyvyk-mizkiv-ukrayinskym-dityam/>

¹⁰⁴ Orliata Rossii (Eaglets of Russia) continue their work in the Zaporizhzhia region / MK.RU Zaporizhzhia, 26 February 2024: <https://www.mk-zap.ru/social/2024/02/26/orlyata-rossii-prodolzhayut-rabotu-v-zaporozhskoy-oblasti.html>

¹⁰⁵ Youth movements as an indoctrination and militarisation tool in the TOT of Ukraine. Report / A. Vorobiova, V. Potapova - Kyiv: Almenda, 2023. – 40 p. - PP. 32, 35: <https://almenda.org/molodizhni-ruxi-yak-instrument-indoktrinacii-i-militarizacii-na-okupovanix-teritoriyax/>

¹⁰⁶ Dozens of children swore allegiance to the Yunarmiiia (Youth Army) brotherhood / ZOV Melitopol, 09.12.2023: <https://melitopol-news.ru/society/2023/12/09/62046.html>, archive <https://archive.ph/jh4Nr>



hensive military training, including firearms training, they are taught to disassemble and assemble a Kalashnikov rifle, and introduced to Russian military personnel.¹⁰⁷

It is also worth noting that elements of militarisation and military propaganda are also present during the “holidays” of Ukrainian children in the Republic of Belarus. In particular, children visit military units, as well as communicate with underage members of Belarusian military-patriotic clubs.¹⁰⁸

Expansive Cultural Policy of the Russian Federation in the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine: Erasure of Ukrainian Identity

Access to perception, reproduction and development of culture and national cultural heritage is one of the key methods to form and understand national identity, in particular for children. That is why the Russian authorities are instrumentalising culture to indoctrinate both the Russian population and assimilate the residents of the TOT of Ukraine. The values encouraged by the Russian authorities – the cult of violence, patriarchal traditionalism, the “civilisational uniqueness” of the Russian people and superiority to other cultures, condemnation of individualism and disregard for human rights – are reflected in visual art works, through music, films, literature and other instruments of soft power. In addition, Russia’s cultural policy is based on the idea of Russian culture as a single and common culture for both residents of the Russian Federation and Ukrainian citizens living in the territories of Ukraine occupied by the

¹⁰⁷ Youth movements as an indoctrination and militarisation tool in the TOT of Ukraine. Report / A. Vorobiova, V. Potapova - Kyiv: Almenda, 2023. – 40 p.: https://almenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/%D0%9C%D0%BE%D0%B%D0%BE%D0%B4%D1%96%D0%B6%D0%BD%D1%96-%D1%80%D1%83%D1%85%D0%B8-%D1%8F%D0%BA-%D1%96%D0%BD%D1%81%D1%82%D1%80%D1%83%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%82-%D1%96%D0%BD%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BA%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%86%D1%96%D1%96%CC%88-%D1%82%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D1%96%D0%BB%D1%96%D1%82%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%B0%D1%86%D1%96%D1%96%CC%88-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%A2%D0%9E%D0%A2-%D0%A3%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%96%CC%88%D0%BD%D0%B8_%D0%90%D0%BB%D1%8C%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B4%D0%B0-1.pdf

¹⁰⁸ Children from Donbas were invited by special forces of military unit 3214 / Belta, 10 June 2022: <https://www.belta.by/society/view/detej-iz-donbassa-priglasili-v-gosti-spetsnazovtsy-vojskovoj-chasti-3214-507084-2022>

Russian Federation, as well as for Ukrainian citizens staying in the territory of the Russian Federation for various reasons. Assimilation and destruction, non-recognition of the existence of a separate Ukrainian identity are achieved by promoting the ideology that residents of the occupied territories of Ukraine are not carriers of Ukrainian culture, but have always been and are carriers of Russian culture. Russian propaganda claims that this reality for the residents of the occupied territories was distorted by the invention of an “artificial” separate culture, and that Russia is not imposing, but rather returning its culture.



In late February 2023, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that the development of the cultural sphere would become one of the priorities for **“the revival of peaceful life in Donbas and Novorossiia.”**¹⁰⁹ He also noted that **“the restoration of cultural sites... is necessary to enable the local population to feel the interconnection of the past and present, to connect it with the future, to feel belonging to a single cultural, historical, educational space of centuries-old and great Russia.”**¹¹⁰

Based on the analysis of legal regulations, statements by Russian politicians and representatives of the occupation authorities, reports by Russian media, facts documented by the Ukrainian authorities, eyewitness accounts from liberated cities and towns, investigations by Ukrainian and international media, and other open source data, it can be concluded that the goal of the cultural policy of the Russian authorities in the TOT of Ukraine is to turn the propaganda myth of “one people” into reality, depriving Ukrainian children growing up in the occupation of the opportunity to form a Ukrainian identity and ensuring systematic contact of TOT residents of all demographic groups with Russian culture.

In the so-called LPR and DPR, cultural policy was initially implemented in a “hybrid” way: on the one hand, it was formed within the framework of the all-Russian policy and under the control of the central government of the Russian Federation, and on the other hand, it was still dominated by representatives of the local occupation authorities. After the occupation was “legalised” under Russian law through pseudo-referendums in 2022, the Russian authorities began building a vertical management of culture in the TOT, which includes both involving Russian personnel to administer the processes and manage the budgets invested by the Russian Federation in the TOT, and ensuring ideological control over cultural events in the TOT and censorship of cultural institutions such as libraries, museums, cinemas and cultural centres.

The first step towards centralising Russia's control over culture was the preparation of a regulatory framework. According to the decision of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation, immediately after the occupation, a **“transitional period”** began

¹⁰⁹ New cultural priority / Gazeta Kultura, 11 April 2023: <https://web.archive.org/web/20231129215657/https://portal-kultura.ru/articles/kulturnaya-politika/349632-novyj-kulturnyj-prioritet/>

¹¹⁰ Ibid

in the so-called “new regions” to last until 1 January 2026. During this period, **“the new territories should be fully integrated into all spheres of state life,”** including Russian national cultural programmes. The occupied territories of Ukraine will participate in the Culture Russian national project. The stated goal is to **“expand access to cultural goods and opportunities to create cultural values for residents of not only large cities but also remote settlements.”** According to Putin, the project **“should gain a strong regional dimension, stimulate the improvement of the quality and diversity of cultural life in small towns and villages of the country.”**¹¹¹



According to Olga Lyubimova, Minister of Culture of the Russian Federation, the “new regions” are being handled manually, with an “individual approach” to each of them.¹¹² As of October 2023, there are “more than a thousand libraries, almost a thousand cultural centres, almost 160 children's art schools and 77 museums” in the TOT (except Crimea), all of which are “patronaged” by federal cultural institutions. This includes property and equipment, personnel support (bringing Russian specialists to the TOT), and the organisation of professional “training” in Russia, i.e. methodological training of specialists according to Russian standards.¹¹³

The key component of the Culture federal programme is also material and technical. After the occupation, the Russians began to restore and develop cultural infrastructure wherever possible: cultural centres, libraries, museums, cinemas and “auto clubs” – the so-called “multifunctional mobile cultural centres” which have appeared in the TOT since 2023: in 2023, 28 “auto clubs” appeared in the so-called LPR and DPR, as well as in the occupied parts of the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions.

The occupation authorities also report on the creation of “model libraries.”¹¹⁴ It is about renovation of premises, installation of the Internet, purchase of equipment (e.g. laptops) and replacement of the book stock – delivery of Russian literature to replace the “extremist” Ukrainian literature that was seized or destroyed. In 2023, the Russian Ministry of Culture “modernised” 12 libraries in the TOT of Ukraine,¹¹⁵ and plans to “modernise” the same number in 2024. The Russian Ministry of Culture claims that in 2023, 410,000 books were brought to local libraries in the TOT of Ukraine and is conducting scien-

¹¹¹ Culture national project: <https://culture.gov.ru/about/national-project/about-project/>, archive <https://web.archive.org/web/20230331095441/https://culture.gov.ru/about/national-project/about-project/>

¹¹² Russian Culture Minister Olga Lyubimova: Integration of new regions into the cultural life of the country is our unconditional priority / Komsomolskaya Pravda, 24 February 2023: <https://www.kp.ru/daily/27482.5/4738137/>, archive <https://archive.ph/jmkhZ>

¹¹³ Head of Russian Culture Ministry reports to President on cultural integration of new regions / Lugansk Information Centre, 09 October 2023: <https://lug-info.com/news/glava-minkul-tury-rf-dolozhila-prezidentu-o-kul-turnoj-integracii-novyh-regionov>

¹¹⁴ New regions of Russia will renew their libraries / RG.RU, 08 November 2023: <https://rg.ru/2023/11/08/v-novyh-regionah-rossii-obnoviat-biblioteki.html>

¹¹⁵ 12 model libraries and 5 #ZnaiChitai (KnowRead) libraries were created in new regions / Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation, 02 February 2024: https://culture.gov.ru/press/news/12_modelnykh_bibliotek_i_5_laboratoriy_znaychitay_sozdany_v_novykh_regionakh/?sphrase_id=981802



tific and methodological re-profiling of Ukrainian libraries in the occupation to “**join the cultural community of the country [the Russian Federation].**”

In December 2022, cultural projects in the TOT of Ukraine began to be supported from the budget of the Presidential Foundation for Cultural Initiatives began under the Common Cultural Space: Projects of New Regions programme.¹¹⁶ Between 2022 and the first quarter of 2024, the Foundation funded 181 cultural projects to be held in the TOT of Ukraine. The total expenditure reached

RUB 1,123,793,616 (almost USD 12 million).¹¹⁷ For example, this Foundation financed the children's play *The Steadfast Tin Soldier* in Mariupol, which was intended to “**instil traditional moral values accepted throughout our country [Russia],**”¹¹⁸ and the filming of the detective series *Peaceful Atom*¹¹⁹ about the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant seized by Russia in the temporarily occupied city of Enerhodar, Zaporizhzhia region. In addition, the Presidential Foundation finances a system of “re-education camps” where Ukrainian children deported from the TOT are placed for political indoctrination.¹²⁰ New cinemas are being renewed and opened. According to the head of the Russian Ministry of Culture, as of October 2023, 51 cinemas were operating in the mainland TOT, as it is “**extremely important that the younger and older generations can watch the same films that are shown in other regions of Russia.**”¹²¹



New museums are also opened in the TOT of Ukraine. In late September 2023, a multimedia historical park called *Russia is My History* was opened in Melitopol.¹²² Similar parks operate in 24 cities of the Russian Federation and in the city of Luhansk, temporarily occupied since 2014. This project is called “the largest exposition complex” in Russia. Among its permanent exhibitions are those dedicated to the Ruriks, the Romanovs, and the 20th century (in particular, 1914-1945).

The development of the Russian cultural sphere in the TOT of Ukraine is accompanied by the simultaneous destruction of Ukrainian cultural objects in these territories, the Russian authorities have been actively clearing space for the effective imposition of the “Russian world.” To this end, objects of Ukrainian material cultural heritage, Ukrainian literature, both classical and contemporary, artworks, etc. are being seized or

116 Common Cultural Space: Projects of New Regions: a session of the Presidential Foundation for Cultural Initiatives was held at the Russia exhibition: <https://vk.com/@pfci.grants-edinoe-kulturnoe-prostranstvo-proekty-novyh-regionov-na-vyst- archive> <https://archive.ph/TxGvH>

117 At the rate as of 20 April 2024 (USD 1 = RUB 93.9)

118 How the Kremlin uses theatre in its war against Ukraine / BBC News Ukraine, 15 December 2023: <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/articles/ckr8nv417eno>

119 RUSSIANS FILM A PROPAGANDA SERIES ABOUT NPP PROTECTION FINANCED BY PUTIN'S FOUNDATION / Institute of Mass Media, 23 November 2023: <https://imi.org.ua/news/rosiany-znimayut-propagandystskiy-serial-pro-zaporizku-aes-za-groshi-fondu-putina-i57158>

120 Re-education camps. How Russia is trying to turn Ukrainian children into enemies of Ukraine / Suspilne News, 30 October 2023: <https://suspilne.media/605893-tabori-perevihovanna-ak-rf-namagaetsa-peretvoriti-ukrainskih-ditej-na-vorogiv-ukraini/>

121 Russian Culture Minister spoke about the development of cinemas in new regions / Zaporizhzhia News Agency, 09 October 2023: <https://zonews.ru/news/lyubimova-rasskazala-o-razvitii-kinoteatrov-v-novyh-regionah/>

122 RUSSIA IS MY HISTORY HISTORICAL PARK INVITES YOU! / PM: <https://melitopol.myhistorypark.ru/>

destroyed. Wherever possible, Russia tries to appropriate Ukrainian art by framing its authors as Russian figures. In this way, the Russian central and occupation authorities are deliberately and systematically trying to suppress the preservation and transmission of Ukrainian culture in the occupied territories, erase traces of its existence, and create “native Russian lands” in the occupied cities and villages.

In order to legalise the theft of Ukrainian historical and cultural heritage, Russia adopted the law “On the peculiarities of legal regulation of cultural relations in connection with the accession of the Donetsk People's Republic, Luhansk People's Republic, Zaporizhzhia region and Kherson region to the Russian Federation and the formation of new constituent entities - the Donetsk People's Republic, Luhansk People's Republic, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions – within the Russian Federation.”¹²³ This law provides for the possibility to automatically, without any expertise, include cultural heritage sites located on the territory of the so-called LPR, DPR, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions of Ukraine in the register of cultural heritage sites (historical and cultural monuments) of the peoples of the Russian Federation and cultural heritage sites of regional or local (municipal) significance.

However, cultural heritage sites can lose their special status just as easily as entering state registers, which puts their preservation at significant risk. The law allows for the free movement of historical and cultural heritage sites, archival documents, and library collections from the TOT of Ukraine to the territory of the Russian Federation without unnecessary paperwork and bureaucracy. Similarly, after the occupation of the Crimean peninsula in 2014, more than 150,000 cultural property items belonging to Crimean Tatars were included in Russian state registers.¹²⁴

The Russian Ministry of Culture also allowed newly created companies to “repair and restore” cultural and historical sites in the TOT without appropriate licences, which is prohibited in Russia.¹²⁵ Russian media have already estimated that more than 44,000 works of art worth more than a billion roubles have been “transferred” to the Russian museum fund from the occupied museums and galleries.¹²⁶

The occupation authorities are looting local museums and archives. For example, more than 15,000 unique artefacts were taken from Kherson, and 80% of the museum's collection was stolen from the Kherson Art Museum.¹²⁷ Scythian gold dating back to the fourth century BC was stolen from the Melitopol Museum of Local Lore,¹²⁸ and all valuable exhibits were taken away from the Mariupol Museum of Local Lore and the Kuindzhi Art Museum.¹²⁹

123 Federal Law of 18 March 2023 No. 63-FZ “On the peculiarities of legal regulation of cultural relations in connection with the accession of the Donetsk People's Republic, Luhansk People's Republic, Zaporizhzhia region and Kherson region to the Russian Federation and the formation of new constituent entities - the Donetsk People's Republic, Luhansk People's Republic, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions – within the Russian Federation”: <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202303180002>

124 Theft of cultural heritage. How to return the treasures looted by Russia? / Svidomi, 16 June 2023: <https://svidomi.in.ua/page/vykradennia-kulturnoi-spadshchyny-yak-povertaty-nahrabovani-rosiieiu-skarby>

125 Order of the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation of 05 July 2023 No. 2008 “On the establishment of temporary mandatory requirements for activities for the preservation of objects of cultural heritage (historical and cultural monuments) of the peoples of the Russian Federation (in terms of repair and adjustment of objects of cultural heritage (historical and cultural monuments) of the peoples of the Russian Federation) in the territories of the Donetsk People's Republic, Lugansk People's Republic, Zaporizhzhia region and Kherson region without obtaining a licence and the list of their gross violations”: <https://culture.gov.ru/documents/ob-ustanovlenii-vremennykh-obyazatelnykh-trebovaniy-pri-osushchestvlenii-deyatelnosti-po-sokhraneniyu0507202301/>

126 Collected collections: The Museum Fund of the Russian Federation will be replenished with valuables worth a billion / Izvestia, 14 October 2022: <https://iz.ru/1409315/andrei-tumanov/sobrali-kollektsii-muzeinyi-fond-rf-popolnitsia-tcennosti-ami-na-milliard>

127 Stolen cultural heritage: where did the occupiers take the most valuable museum exhibits of southern Ukraine? / Radio Svoboda, 10.03.2024: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/novyny-pryazovy-vkradena-kulturna-spadshchyna-kudy-vyvozyat-okupanty-ekspanaty/32853927.html>

128 Russians did steal Scythian gold - Prosecutor General's Office / Ukrainska Pravda Life, 10 May 2022: <https://life.pravda.com.ua/culture/2022/05/10/248597/>

129 Cultural evacuation: was it possible to save the lost objects? / DW, 10 February 2023: <https://www.dw.com/uk/evakuaciya-kulturnih-cinnostej-do-i-pid-cas-vijni-ci-mozna-bulo-vratuvati-vtracene/a-64658810>



The consequences of Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine. The Mariupol Local History Museum, which was burned down after shelling. Mariupol, April 28, 2022.

Ukrainian places of memory are being destroyed. For example, the occupation administration of the Kherson region has announced that monuments to the victims of the Holodomor in Ukraine are allegedly a “tool of manipulation” created specifically to incite hatred of Russia.¹³⁰ Instead, the occupiers erect their own monuments, for example, the “young builders of Kherson” “restored” Soviet memorials demolished during decommunisation.

The hunt for Ukrainian literature began from the very start of the full-scale phase of the war. As early as March 2022, the Defence Intelligence of Ukraine reported¹³¹ that Russian “military police” units were seizing, destroying or taking away Ukrainian historical and fiction books from libraries in the occupied settlements of the Luhansk, Donetsk, Chernihiv, and Sumy regions. According to the National Resistance Centre's report dated September 2022, the occupiers seized all Ukrainian-language literature in Melitopol.¹³²

In late May 2022, the Ministry of Justice of the so-called DPR announced the harmonisation of its list of “extremist materials” with the lists of prohibited materials in the Russian Federation.¹³³ At the same time, the “DPR Ministry of Culture” instructed the staff of the Donetsk Republican Universal Scientific Library named after Krupskaya to remove “literature aimed at falsifying history, distorting events, in particular of the periods of the First World War, the Great Patriotic War and the present.”¹³⁴

The situation is similar in the Luhansk region.¹³⁵ In late January 2023, the head of the Luhansk Regional Military Administration reported that the LPR Ministry of Education and Science had instructed the heads of city and district administrations and subordinate educational organisations to remove books from school libraries according to a list of 365 items.¹³⁶ Ukrainian books were reported to be burnt in boiler rooms in the region.¹³⁷

¹³⁰ Russia demolishes monuments to Holodomor victims in the Kherson region / ZMINA, 24 November 2023: <https://zmina.info/news/rosiya-znosyt-pamyatnyky-zhertvam-golodomoru-v-hersonskij-oblasti/>

¹³¹ Occupation troops seize and destroy Ukrainian literature and history textbooks / Telegram channel of the Defence Intelligence of Ukraine, 24 March 2022: <https://t.me/DIUkraine/194>

¹³² Occupants are fighting with books: all Ukrainian literature was seized from Melitopol libraries / Ukrainska Pravda, 20.09.2022: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2022/09/20/7368252/>

¹³³ Peculiarities of maintaining the Republican List of Extremist Materials: <https://minjust-dnr.ru/osobennosti-vedeniya-respublikanskogo-spiska-ekstremistskih-materialov/>

¹³⁴ Work is underway to identify extremist literature in public libraries in liberated territories / ZOV Mariupol, 25 May 2022: <https://mariupol-news.ru/culture/2022/05/25/4126.html>

¹³⁵ Russians in the TOT of eastern Ukraine destroyed almost all Ukrainian literature / National Resistance Centre, 14 November 2023: <https://sprotiv.mod.gov.ua/rosiyany-na-tot-shodu-ukrayiny-znyshhyly-majzhe-vsyu-ukrayinsku-literaturu/>

¹³⁶ Russians confiscate Ukrainian books on the TOT / National Resistance Centre, 24 January 2023: <https://sprotiv.mod.gov.ua/rosiyany-vyluchayut-ukrayinski-knygy-na-tot/>

¹³⁷ Occupants burn Ukrainian books in boiler rooms in TOT / National Resistance Centre, 05 February 2023: <https://sprotiv.mod.gov.ua/okupanty-spalyuyut-na-tot-ukrayinski-knygy-v-kotelnyah/>

According to the National Resistance Centre, in 2023, Russians brought about 2.5 million Russian books to the TOT of Ukraine.

The Russian authorities have instrumentalised Russian culture for the purposes of indoctrination and militarisation of children. Following the illegal extension of Russian legislation to all the occupied territories of Ukraine, the impact of Russian cultural products began to extend to children living in the TOT of Ukraine, as well as to Ukrainian children who were deported to the territory of the Russian Federation. Numerous cultural programmes, such as the Pushkinskaya Karta (Pushkin Card), were also extended to Ukrainian children.¹³⁸

Of note are the so-called **University Shifts**, a career guidance programme run by Russian higher education institutions that involves 10-day trips to Russian university campuses. The programme is aimed at teenagers aged 12-17, although some universities accept children as young as 9. Unlike other projects, organisations and practices, University Shifts were developed exclusively for the TOT of Ukraine on the personal instructions of Vladimir Putin, with the aim of “educational integration” and “formation of Russian civic identity” in children under occupation.¹³⁹ Moreover, Marina Filipova, an adviser to the head of the so-called LPR, noted that before this programme, high school students in the Luhansk region had been considering entering Ukrainian universities, but after the programme, “**they are ready to continue their studies in Russian educational institutions.**”¹⁴⁰ The programme consists of six modules: educational, cultural and patriotic, super-professional, sports, excursion and recreation.



Boys from the “Donetsk People's Republic” participate in the military-patriotic camp “Power of the Caucasus”

The programme is implemented by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation in cooperation with the Ministry of Education with the participation of Rosmolodyozh (Federal Agency for Youth Affairs) specialists and lecturers from the Znanie Society (Knowledge Society), and since 2023, the Movement of the First has been involved in organising the “shifts”. After that, the programme has become an ad-

¹³⁸ Pushkinskaya Karta (Pushkin Card) is a project launched in August 2021 with the support of the Russian Ministries of Culture and Digital Development and Pochta Bank to promote Russian culture among young people aged 14 to 22. The programme funded out of the state budget allows children to visit more than 26.5 thousand cultural institutions in Russia, including 101 in the temporarily occupied Crimea.

To receive a card, children must register on the Russian government services portal (they can register there only from the age of 14 after receiving a Russian passport), download the Gosuslugi.Kultura application and apply for card issuance – create an account at Pochta Bank. The card can be issued either as a virtual card in the Gosuslugi.Kultura application or as a physical card at a bank branch. The card has a balance of RUB 5,000, which can be used to pay for tickets to cultural events, including RUB 2,000 for cinemas.

¹³⁹ Analytical report “The University Shifts programme as a tool for indoctrination and destruction of the Ukrainian identity of children and youth from the temporarily occupied territories” / T. Lychko, A. Vorobiova, M. Sulialina, O. Shapoval, O. Okhredko - Kyiv: Almenda, 2024. 78 p.: https://almenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/%D0%90%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%B%D1%96%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%87%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B8%CC%86-%D0%B7%D0%B2%D1%96%D1%82-%D0%A6%D0%93%D0%9F-%D0%90%D0%BB%D1%8C%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B4%D0%B8_%D0%A3%D0%BD%D1%96%D0%B2%D0%B5%D1%80%D1%81%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5%D1%82%D1%81%D1%8C%D0%BA%D1%96-%D0%B7%D0%BC%D1%96%D0%BD%D0%B8_2023-2024.pdf

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, P. 14

ditional mechanism for involving children in the Movement of the First: to participate in the “shifts,” the organisation offers either to join their ranks immediately or to attend one thematic day dedicated entirely to the Movement of the First during the “shift.” If an already registered member of the movement takes part in the shift, the child must pass a competitive selection, which also includes the task of making a video on one of the topics: “being with Russia,” “being human,” “being together,” “being on the move” or “being the first.” School teachers in the TOT are campaigning for participation in the University Shifts. According to Almenda Centre for Civic Education, there were also cases of children being taken without the consent of their legal representatives, including orphans and children from boarding schools from TOT whose legal representative is the state of Ukraine, which did not grant permission for their movement to the territory of the Russian Federation. According to the “deputy head of government” of the so-called LPR, more than 3,000 schoolchildren from the Luhansk region took part in the “shifts” in the summer of 2022 alone.¹⁴¹

Thus, the Russian Federation has illegally extended its own legislation to the territories of Ukraine occupied by it, introducing educational standards and practices, including extracurricular activities, aimed at indoctrinating and militarising Ukrainian children. The introduction of Russian educational and cultural programmes, while destroying Ukrainian cultural heritage, books, historical monuments, and looting museums and archives in the TOT of Ukraine, is aimed at destroying the Ukrainian identity of the residents of these territories. Children and young people are a particular target of these policies, as from preschool age they are indoctrinated with the idea of the greatness and unalterable nature of Russian culture and identity.

¹⁴¹ Over the summer, more than 3.4 thousand children from the LPR took part in the University Shifts in Russian universities / Lugansk Information Centre, 02 September 2022: <https://lug-info.ru/news/bolee-3-4-tys-detey-iz-lnr-za-letu-prinyali-uchastie-v-universitetskih-smenah-v-vuzah-rf/>

SECTION 3. Actions Taken by the Ukrainian Authorities to Protect Ukrainian Children and Return Them to the Ukraine-Controlled Territory

The devastating consequences of Russia's war against Ukraine for children are becoming more and more apparent with every day of the ongoing Russian aggression. The work of Ukrainian state authorities to ensure the rights and freedoms of children during the legal regime of martial law involves responding to violations of children's rights by the aggressor country, but the tools for such a response are significantly limited.

Searching for and verifying the information about children deported from the TOT of Ukraine, establishing the circumstances of displacement, finding families for children who lost their parents during the hostilities, developing safe routes of return, and conducting relevant negotiations – all this cannot be entrusted to one state authority of Ukraine and requires systematic coordination between all actors. The need for such coordination of efforts lies not only in the state and public sector within the country, but also in the involvement of international partners, negotiators and the attention of the world media.

UN Security Council Resolutions 1261 (1999), 1882 (2009), 1998 (2011) and 2225 (2015)¹⁴² identify six grave violations against children in armed conflict: 1) recruitment and use of children; 2) killing and maiming of children; 3) rape and other grave sexual violence against children; 4) attacks on schools, hospitals and protected persons associated with them; 5) abduction of children; and 6) denial of access to humanitarian assistance. All of the above violations have been brutally committed by the Russian Federation (hereinafter, the RF) against Ukrainian children since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. These violations constitute international crimes that have no statute of limitations and, depending on the circumstances, qualify as genocide, war crimes or crimes against humanity.

In the previous special report by the Commissioner “UNBLOOMED. Violation of the Rights of Ukrainian Children in the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine and in Russia: Deportation, Militarisation, Indoctrination”¹⁴³ (the report covered the period from February 2022 to April 2023) described in detail six serious violations against children during armed conflicts and their manifestations in the context of armed aggression against Ukraine.

In the year since this report was prepared, neither the aggressor country's general approach to waging war against the civilian population of Ukraine, nor the intensity of this war and grave violations against children have been softened. On the contrary, representatives of both national and international organisations have noted¹⁴⁴ aggravation of both direct harm to children and damage to the country's critical infrastructure and the entire population of Ukraine, including children. At the same time, a significant part

¹⁴² UN Security Council resolutions: <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ru/content/resolutions>

¹⁴³ Gross violations of children's rights as a result of armed aggression against Ukraine: general overview / Special report by the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights “UNBLOOMED. Violation of the Rights of Ukrainian Children in the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine and in Russia: Deportation, Militarisation, Indoctrination”: <https://ombudsman.gov.ua/childrenofwar-2023/hrubi-porushennia-prav-dytny-vnaslidok-zbroinoi-ahresii-proty-ukrainy-zahalnyi-ohliad>

¹⁴⁴ Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict – May 2024. Access mode: <https://ukraine.un.org/en/270888-protection-civilians-armed-conflict-%E2%80%94-may-2024>

of the territory of Ukraine remains temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation,¹⁴⁵ and therefore the exact number of children affected and the facts of gross violations against them are currently unknown.

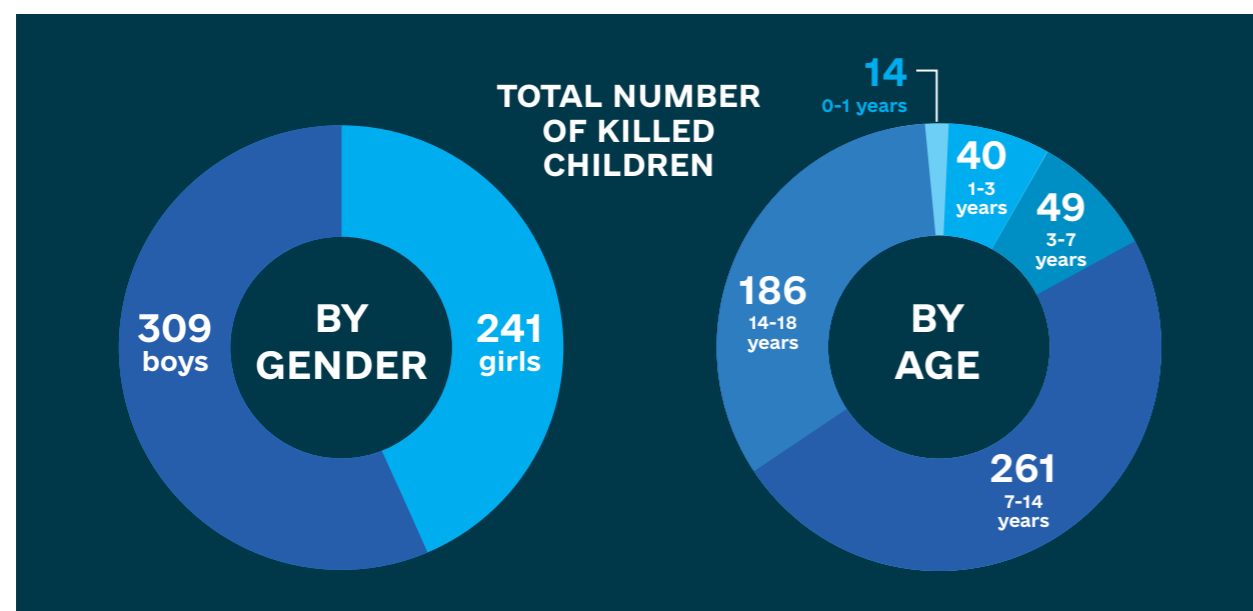
Documenting and Investigating War Crimes against Children and Prosecuting Perpetrators: National and International Efforts

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, the Prosecutor General's Office has focused on documenting international crimes committed by the Russian military against Ukrainian children, as children are a category subject to special protection under international humanitarian law.

The Commissioner's Office is constantly collecting information on violations of children's rights as a result of hostilities. The Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights informs the Prosecutor General of detected international crimes against children and, within the mandate, assists in the investigation of crimes against children in armed conflict.

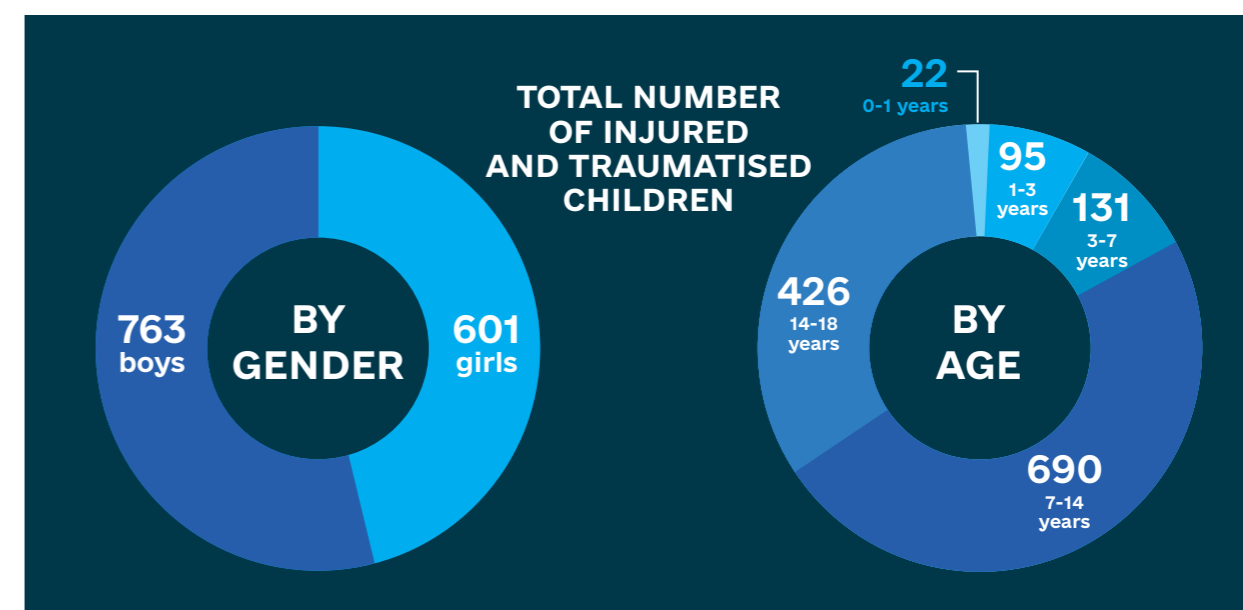
Thus, prosecutors oversee the observance of laws during pre-trial investigations in the form of procedural guidance of pre-trial investigations in criminal proceedings on 3,867 criminal offences related to the armed aggression of the Russian Federation committed against children and in the field of child protection, of which 2,322 were armed attacks on children's institutions and facilities.

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion of the territory of Ukraine by Russian troops, 1,914 children have been affected by attacks by the Russian Armed Forces and war crimes against children between 24 February 2022 and 01 June 2024, 550 of whom were killed and 1,364 injured.¹⁴⁶



¹⁴⁵ Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Luhansk region, large areas of the Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson regions, part of the Kharkiv region

¹⁴⁶ These data are not final due to the impossibility of inspecting the sites of shelling in the areas of active hostilities and on the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.



According to the Ministry of Health of Ukraine, 1,316 children sustained mine and gunshot injuries. Most of them are children with complex combined traumas, polytraumas with complication and the need for further post-acute and long-term rehabilitation.

Among the affected children, 30 cases of amputations at different levels of the upper and lower limbs were registered, which is 2% of the total number of affected children, of whom 17 children needed or need prosthetic upper and lower limbs to enable them to live and develop normally, and 5 children with amputations died.

Thousands of children are reported missing in special circumstances, i.e. in the context of armed aggression against Ukraine. According to the Secretariat of the Commissioner for Persons Missing in Special Circumstances of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, between 24 February 2022 and 17 May 2024, reports on 2,016 persons under 18 years of age missing in special circumstances were registered, including 945 girls and 1,071 boys.

At least 15 children, including 14 girls and one boy, have been affected by conflict-related sexual violence. As reported by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, rape and other sexual violence against children were committed during or after house searches by Russian authorities looking for individuals who supported the Ukrainian armed forces. The Commission established the cases of the war crime of rape and, in some cases, the war crime of sexual violence. These acts also constitute torture.¹⁴⁷

Five criminal proceedings were initiated on the facts of involvement of 5 minors in the armed conflict by Russian military servants (Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kyiv, Kharkiv and Chernihiv regions).

According to the Children of War information portal, at least 1,546 children were illegally deported or forcibly displaced to the temporarily occupied territories by the Russian authorities. According to the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, 715 children who were deported, forcibly displaced or threatened with deportation to the TOT of Ukraine have been returned to the Ukraine-controlled territory.

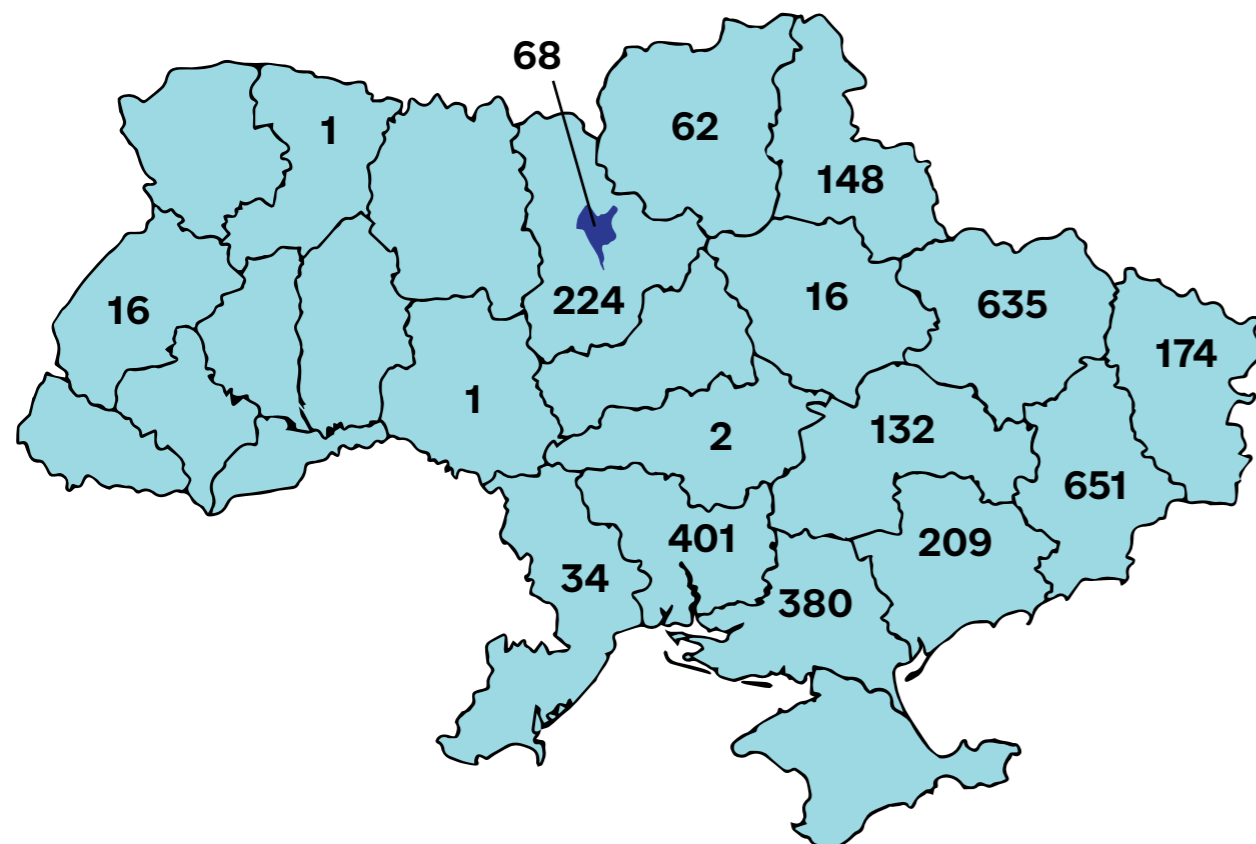
According to the information provided by the National Police of Ukraine at the request of the Commissioner, since the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the

¹⁴⁷ Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on violations in Ukraine /A/HRC/55/66: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/coiukraine/a-hrc-55-66-unofficial-ukrainian.pdf>

Russian Federation, investigators of the National Police of Ukraine have initiated 111 criminal proceedings under Article 438 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine ("Violation of the laws and customs of war") on reports of deportation from the territory of Ukraine to the territory of the Russian Federation, Belarus and forced displacement to the TOT of Ukraine of more than 13,000 children. In 108 criminal proceedings, the jurisdiction was changed in accordance with Article 216 of the Criminal Procedure Code of Ukraine, and the pre-trial investigation was entrusted to authorised officers of the Security Service of Ukraine. If we talk about known cases broken down by regions, 9,683 children were temporarily deported/displaced from the Donetsk region, 1,514 from the Zaporizhzhia region, 947 from the Luhansk region, 137 from the Kharkiv region, 1,597 from the Kherson region and 1 from the Kyiv region. Over the period from 24 February 2022 to 14 May 2024, 9,380 criminal proceedings were registered into the disappearance of 14,382 civilians, including 2,784 children. As of 14 May 2024, the whereabouts of 1,937 children have not been established.

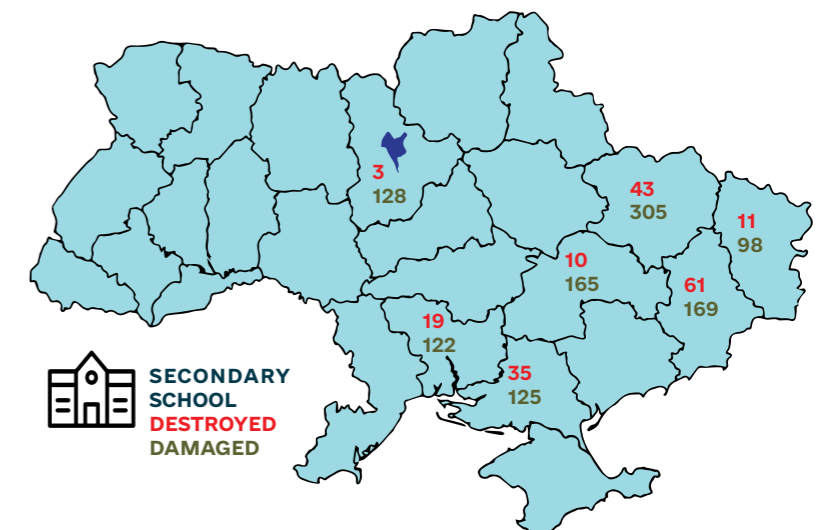
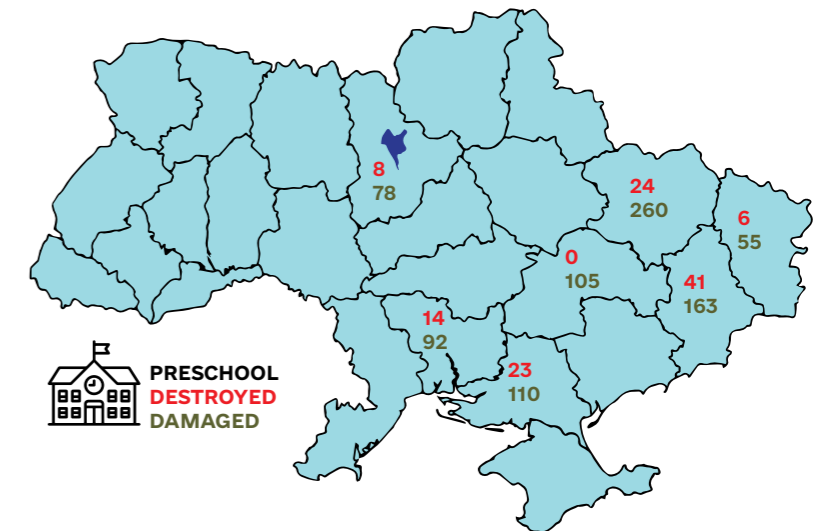
According to the information provided by the Security Service of Ukraine at the request of the Commissioner, between 24 February and 14 May 2024, 154 criminal offences were investigated into the forced deportation of children to the territory of the Russian Federation and Belarus, in which 4,855 children have already been recognised as victims. In addition, during this period, the Security Service of Ukraine investigators conducted investigations in almost 85,500 criminal proceedings into the commission of a crime under Article 438 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine, in which 1,430 civilians, including 87 children, were reported missing (the number is constantly being updated).

According to the information provided by the Prosecutor General's Office at the request of the Commissioner, between 22 February 2022 and 01 June 2024, 3,213 educational and preschool institutions were destroyed or damaged



According to the information provided by the Prosecutor General's Office at the request of the Commissioner, between 22 February 2022 and 01 June 2024, 3,213 educational and preschool institutions were destroyed or damaged (Vinnytsia 1, Dnipro 132, Donetsk 651, Zhytomyr 58, Zaporizhzhia 209, Kyiv 224, Kirovohrad 2, Luhansk 174, Lviv 16, Mykolaiv 401, Odesa 34, Poltava 16, Rivne 1, Sumy 148, Kharkiv 635, Kherson 380, and Chernihiv regions 62, and the city of Kyiv 68).

In particular, according to the information provided by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine at the request of the Commissioner, since the beginning of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation and as of 25 May 2024, 117 preschool education institutions have been destroyed and 1,152 damaged; 191 general secondary education institutions have been destroyed and 1,603 damaged. Most of these institutions are located in:



- the Dnipro region (105 preschool education institutions were damaged; 10 general secondary education institutions were destroyed and 165 damaged).
- the Donetsk region (41 preschool education institutions were destroyed and 163 damaged; 61 general secondary education institutions were destroyed and 169 damaged).
- the Kyiv region (8 preschool education institutions were destroyed and 78 damaged; 3 general secondary education institutions were destroyed and 128 damaged).
- the Luhansk region (6 preschool education institutions were destroyed and 55 damaged; 11 general secondary education institutions were destroyed and 98 damaged).
- the Mykolaiv region (14 preschool education institutions were destroyed and 92 damaged; 19 general secondary education institutions were destroyed and 122 damaged).
- the Kharkiv region (24 preschool education institutions were destroyed and 260 damaged; 43 general secondary education institutions were destroyed and 305 damaged).
- the Kherson region (23 preschool education institutions were destroyed and 110 damaged; 35 general secondary education institutions were destroyed and 125 damaged).

Also, according to the information provided by the Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine at the request of the Commissioner, since the beginning of the armed aggres-

sion of the Russian Federation, 517 sports infrastructure facilities have been damaged, of which 101 facilities have been destroyed and 416 have been significantly or partially damaged.

The Russian Federation also continues to restrict humanitarian access to the TOT of Ukraine, areas of active hostilities and places of temporary stay and forced detention of Ukrainian citizens in the TOT of Ukraine and the territory of the Russian Federation. In violation of international humanitarian law, as a party to an international armed conflict controlling civilians in the occupied territory, the Russian Federation must ensure the proper functioning of medical and educational institutions, maintain public order, and supply food and medicine to the population in the occupied territories, and, if necessary, allow third parties to provide humanitarian assistance. However, Russia is not fulfilling its obligations as an occupying power. In particular, there are about 4,000 children in the frontline zone in the Donetsk region. Currently, the Donetsk region is under constant shelling by Russian troops, and almost every day the enemy kills and injures civilians, destroys residential and administrative buildings, energy and infrastructure facilities. The Donetsk region has the longest frontline, which is about 300 km long.¹⁴⁸ The issue of evacuating children to safe places is a priority for the Government of Ukraine. The Russian Federation systematically refuses to introduce a "ceasefire" regimen for the evacuation. Among the documented crimes committed by the Russian army against children, there have been numerous cases of deaths and injuries of children during the evacuation attempts, in particular from the Kharkiv and Kherson regions. The National Police has initiated 74 criminal proceedings regarding the shelling of evacuation convoys by the occupiers; 45 such attacks have been registered, killing 33 people, including five children.¹⁴⁹

Oleksii (all names have been changed for security reasons), who was 15 years old at the start of the large-scale invasion, sustained injuries to his lower limbs while trying to evacuate with his family from the Luhansk region. His mother and older brother, who were with him during the evacuation, died. The occupation authorities of the Luhansk region took Oleksii to the Luhansk Regional Hospital and appointed a guardian for him. His mother's sister, Viktoria, was waiting for him on the Ukraine-controlled territory, but due to active hostilities and the lack of humanitarian evacuation corridors, she could not go to the boy to pick him up and prepare guardianship documents. Viktoria informed the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights that she wanted to return the boy to their family for treatment and rehabilitation. In early September 2022, there was an attempt to return the boy to the territory controlled by Ukraine, but the occupation authorities refused to return the child due to the presence of a legal representative and pressure from the occupation authorities. Efforts to return the child from the occupied territory and reunite him with his family lasted more than a year and a half. In February 2024, with the assistance of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, Oleksii was returned. Oleksii is a witness and victim of an international crime. He currently resides in central Ukraine and is undergoing medical psychosocial rehabilitation.

After the start of the full-scale invasion, 43 countries appealed to the International Criminal Court (hereinafter, the ICC) regarding the situation in Ukraine.¹⁵⁰ The ICC launched an investigation and on 17 March 2023 issued arrest warrants for the President of the

¹⁴⁸ In the Donetsk region, there are 70.6 thousand people in the area of active hostilities, of whom 4.1 thousand are children / Ukrinform, 17 May 2024: <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-regions/3864996-na-doneccini-u-zoni-aktivnih-bojovih-dij-zai-sautsa-ponad-4000-ditej.html>

¹⁴⁹ Russian shelling of evacuation convoys killed 33 civilians, including five children / Ukrinform, 11 May 2022: <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-ato/3480847-vid-obstriliv-rosianami-evakuacijnih-kolon-zaginuli-33-civilnih-z-nih-patero-diti.html>

¹⁵⁰ Ukraine | International Criminal Court: Jurisdiction in the general situation, ICC-01/22: <https://www.icc-cpi.int/situations/ukraine>

Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, and the Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights, Maria Lvova-Belova,¹⁵¹ based on a request from the ICC Prosecutor's Office. In September 2023, the International Criminal Court Field Office, which is the largest ICC office outside The Hague, began operations in Kyiv.¹⁵² The Office was established to facilitate the work of the ICC in Ukraine in connection with all situations and cases pending before the Court, but primarily to ensure effective investigation and prosecution of those responsible for international crimes during the Russian aggression in Ukraine in accordance with the Agreement between the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and the International Criminal Court.¹⁵³

The Joint Investigation Team (JIT), established on 25 March 2022 to investigate Russian aggression and war crimes in Ukraine, continues its operation. On 6 October 2023, Europol, the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, joined the JIT. Also in 2023, the International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine (ICPA) was established. The Centre's task is to form a functional structure for international cooperation in documenting and investigating the crime of aggression against Ukraine, which will become the foundation of the future Special Tribunal.

According to the Prosecutor General's Office, more than 25 countries are conducting their own investigations or collecting evidence of crimes committed during the Russian aggression, including crimes against children: Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Groups of experts from partner countries regularly work in Ukraine to help prosecutors and investigators document war crimes, collect evidence and assess damages. Poland, France, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Lithuania and Spain have sent expert missions to Ukraine.

Sanctions Policy

Over the past year, in response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, various countries have expanded their sanctions regimes, including targeting individuals and organisations involved in the deportation or forced displacement of Ukrainian children. Below is a list of the most recent additions to these existing sanctions regimes.

United States. At the end of 2022, the US Department of State imposed sanctions on Russian nationals Mongush Ochur-Suge Terimovich and Lyudmila Nikolaevna Zaitseva, who were reportedly involved in human rights violations against civilians in Ukraine. Mongush was reportedly involved in torture, while Zaitseva was involved in the abduction and forced relocation of children from Ukraine.¹⁵⁴

United Kingdom. On 17 July 2023, Foreign Secretary James Cleverly announced 14 new sanctions in response to Russia's attempts to destroy Ukrainian national identity, including 11 against individuals involved in the forced deportation of Ukrainian children.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Situation in Ukraine: ICC judges issue arrest warrants against Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin and Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova | International Criminal Court: <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-ukraine-icc-judges-issue-arrest-warrants-against-vladimir-vladimirovich-putin-and>

¹⁵² International Criminal Court Field Office opens in Kyiv / Prosecutor General's Office: <https://www.gp.gov.ua/ua/posts/u-kijevi-rozpocav-robotu-polyovii-ofis-miznarodnogo-kriminalnogo-sudu>

¹⁵³ AGREEMENT between the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and the International Criminal Court on the Establishment of an Office of the International Criminal Court in Ukraine, revised on 23 March 2023: https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/en/980_001-23?lang=uk#Text

¹⁵⁴ 'Treasury Sanctions Over 40 Individuals and Entities Across Nine Countries Connected to Corruption and Human Rights Abuse', US Department of the Treasury, 9 December 2022. Available at: <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1155>

¹⁵⁵ 'UK announces new sanctions in response to Russia's forced deportation of Ukrainian children', Foreign, Commonwealth

The list included Russian officials Ksenia Mishonova, the Moscow region's children's ombudsman, and Sergei Kravtsov, Russia's education minister.

New Zealand. On 21 July 2023, Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta announced 23 sanctions as part of New Zealand's ongoing response to Russia's illegal and unjustified invasion of Ukraine.¹⁵⁶ Three Russian individuals subject to these sanctions were involved in the separation of children from their families, and facilitating the deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia.

Canada. As part of the amendments to the Special Economic Measures (Russia) Regulations, on 18 May 2023, Canada listed 30 individuals and 8 organisations involved in Russia's ongoing human rights violations, including the relocation and custody of Ukrainian children in Russia.¹⁵⁷

The European Commission. On 26 February 2023, the Council adopted the 10th package of sanctions against Russia and those supporting it in its illegal aggression against Ukraine. The EU added approximately 121 individuals and entities to its sanctions list, including four key figures involved in the abduction of Ukrainian children to Russia:¹⁵⁸

- The Russian Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights,
- Deputy Chairman of the Moscow Regional Duma,

Deputy Prime Minister of the Government of the Republic of Bashkortostan and the Minister of Family, Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Bashkortostan,

- Board Chairman of the Gulfstream Foundation and participant in the so-called "charity" campaign "Into the Hands of Children" in Russia.

The Defence Intelligence of Ukraine has launched the War and Sanctions portal, which contains a separate section Child Abductors.¹⁵⁹ Currently, the site contains information about 223 people involved in the deportation of Ukrainian children: decision-makers, members of "re-education" youth organisations, Russian educational and cultural institutions, who should be made known to the world and brought to justice.

Coordinating the Efforts of Various State Authorities to Ensure the Best Interests of the Child

2023 became the year of building state capacity to respond to the challenges of deportation and forced displacement of children from the TOT of Ukraine. Effective coordination between state authorities and non-governmental partners facilitates the search for information about children who were victimised or witnessed international crimes, the verification of information, diplomatic negotiations that facilitate the return of children subject to deportation and forced displacement, and the restoration of the rights of affected children through the implementation of rehabilitation and reintegration programmes.

& Development Office and The Rt Hon James Cleverly MPA, 17 July 2023. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-announces-new-sanctions-in-response-to-russias-forced-deportation-of-ukrainian-children>

¹⁵⁶ 'Further sanctions on Russian military support and Belarusian financial sector,' The New Zealand Government, 21 July 2023. Available at: <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/further-sanctions-russian-military-support-and-belarusian-financial-sector>

¹⁵⁷ 'Canadian Sanctions Related to Russia', Government of Canada. Available at: https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/international_relations-relations_internationales/sanctions/russia-russie.aspx?lang=eng

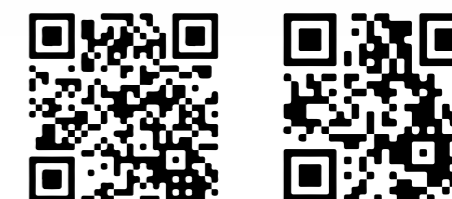
¹⁵⁸ 'EU agrees 10th package of sanctions against Russia', European Commission, 25 February 2023. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_1185

¹⁵⁹ War and Sanctions / the Defence Intelligence of Ukraine: <https://war-sanctions.gur.gov.ua/kidnappers/persons>

The BRING KIDS BACK UA Action Plan

In late May 2023, President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy presented the BRING KIDS BACK UA action plan,¹⁶⁰ which aims not only to return all children to Ukraine but also to ensure their best interests. The action plan consists of seven key blocks that include specific actions and measures:

- return of Ukrainian children deported by Russia (with the involvement of UN agencies, other international organisations and governments);
- development of family-based forms of education;
- reintegration of children returned from Russia, organisation of their socialisation and return, and educational initiatives;
- establishment of the Child Rights Protection Centre;
- documentation of crimes and prosecution of the Russian Federation;
- inter-parliamentary cooperation;
- communication and public events.



Each block is assigned to a responsible government agency. The Coordination Council on Child Protection and Safety under the President of Ukraine will coordinate the implementation of the Bring Kids Back UA Action Plan.

On 5 July 2023, the President renewed¹⁶¹ the composition of the Coordination Council on Child Protection and Safety. The following was added to the existing tasks of the Coordination Council:

- monitoring the situation with illegal adoption by Russian citizens, change of citizenship of children who were forcibly displaced to the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and deported from Ukraine, establishing the location, and return of such children;
- monitoring the situation regarding the temporary displacement (evacuation) of children, including orphans, children deprived of parental care, children with disabilities, children with special educational needs, who live or are enrolled in institutions of various types, forms of ownership and subordination for round-the-clock stay, as well as children placed in family-based care, from territories located in the area of military actions (hostilities) or temporarily occupied, encircled (blocked) or bordering such territories, observance of their rights, return and placement of such children in the post-war period.

The BRING KIDS BACK UA action plan requires assessing the implementation of measures, updating the challenges and tasks, taking into account the work done during the year (June 2023 – June 2024) and approval of the updated plan.

¹⁶⁰ The President familiarised himself with the Bring Kids Back UA plan of returning children illegally deported by Russia and took part in the opening of the Child Rights Protection Centre, 31 May 2023: <https://www.president.gov.ua/news/prezident-oznajomivsia-z-planom-povernennya-nezakonno-deport-83261>

¹⁶¹ Decree of the President of Ukraine of 05 July 2023 No. 372/2023 "Issues of the Coordination Council on Child Protection and Safety": <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/372/2023#Text>

Child Rights Protection Centre

On 31 May 2023, the Child Rights Protection Centre (CRPC) was opened at the facilities of the Secretariat of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights. The opening of the Centre was supported by the United Nations Children's Fund in Ukraine. The Child Rights Protection Centre is a physical space where children who have returned from deportation or temporary occupation are waited for and provided with all the necessary primary assistance.

The return of children from the temporarily occupied territories and the Russian Federation is a complex and lengthy process, which requires the best efforts of the CRPC team and partners. As of 1 June 2024, due to the efforts of state authorities, Qatar's mediation, relevant actions of law enforcement agencies, and a number of partner organisations from the public sector, 715 children have been returned. Among them, 83 children were returned under the Bring Kids Back UA action plan.



Upon returning to Ukraine, minors are interviewed by law enforcement officers. The Barnahus model¹⁶² applied by the Centre allows for comfortable communication with children who have suffered or become victims of crime. For this purpose, the premises are equipped with appropriate playrooms, rooms for private communication, meals and meetings of the team of specialists. In order to avoid re-traumatisation of children, investigators involve a psychologist in the interview process, who adapts and asks non-traumatising questions. The psychologist interviews the child, taking into account the child's readiness to communicate, while his or her psychological state should be stable. This helps to minimise for the child the negative consequences of sharing their



¹⁶² Barnahus (from barna hús, translated from Icelandic as "home for children") is a place where a multidisciplinary inter-agency team, including the representatives of law enforcement, criminal justice, child protection services, as well as medical and mental health professionals, collaborate to ensure that children – victims and witnesses of violence – receive coordinated, effective protection, services and child-friendly justice/ https://www.unicef.org/ukraine/media/21316/file/BARNAHUS_web_2.pdf

experiences. All collected materials are subsequently forwarded by the investigating authorities to the courts, and used by the International Criminal Court.

During the year of the Centre's operation, as of 1 June 2024, according to the Department for Monitoring the Observance of Children's Rights of the Secretariat of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, the Centre interviewed 103 underage victims and/or witnesses of international crimes.

The Child Rights Protection Centre also has a multidisciplinary team of specialists working on the reintegration of children.

Rehabilitation and Reintegration

The multidisciplinary team of the CRPC specialists, which includes representatives of the Coordination Centre for the Development of Family-Based Care of the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, representatives of the Department for Monitoring the Observance of Children's Rights of the Secretariat of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, lawyers and psychologists, works to help every child who has been deported or forcibly displaced. Specialists prepare an individual reintegration plan: they assess the psycho-emotional state, provide the necessary psychological support and accompany children and their families, providing comprehensive assistance, including humanitarian aid (short-term rental housing, purchase of necessary items and medicines, gadgets for studying, etc.). The team arranges for full medical check-ups, temporary housing and restoration of the lost documents.

The Ukrainian Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights, together with civil society organisations, has developed guidelines on the ethics of working with children affected by military actions and armed conflict¹⁶³, as this category of children is closely monitored by national and international media, politicians and other stakeholders. Understanding the importance of providing the world community with reliable information about the crimes committed by the Russian Federation against children in Ukraine, it is important to do so only if the child is ready to testify and has been provided beforehand with the necessary psychological support.



At the same time, it is worth noting that the State of Ukraine should strengthen its efforts aimed at the long-term rehabilitation and reintegration of children returned from the territory of the Russian Federation, Belarus or TOT of Ukraine. The Ukrainian Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights, while exercising parliamentary control over the observance of human rights, has repeatedly stressed the need for systematic work with children affected by international crimes, as opposed to the existing services provided on an ad hoc basis.

In the summer of 2023, the Bring Kids Back UA action plan assigned the responsibility for developing a coordination procedure between state authorities, investigators, international and national NGOs to the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied

¹⁶³ Ethics of interaction with children affected by military actions and armed conflicts / Official website of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights: <https://ombudsman.gov.ua/storage/app/media/uploaded-files/%D0%95%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B0%20%D0%B2%D0%B7%D0%B0%D1%94%D0%BC%D0%BE%D0%B4%D1%96%D1%97%20%D0%B7%20%D0%B4%D1%96%D1%82%D1%8C%D0%BC%D0%B8.pdf>

Territories. On 14 May 2024, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine finally adopted two government resolutions aimed at ensuring appropriate coordination in the return of children.

Resolution No. 551 “On approval of the procedure for identification and return of children deported or forcibly displaced as a result of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine”¹⁶⁴ aims to establish the mechanism of interaction between the actors involved in the search, return, social protection and reintegration of children deported or forcibly displaced and those at risk of deportation or forced displacement as a result of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. The actors involved in the search, return, social protection and reintegration of children include representatives of central and local executive authorities, local self-government bodies, the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, the Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War, the Security Service of Ukraine, SE Ukrainian National Centre for Peacebuilding, which performs the functions of the National Information Bureau, public associations, and charitable foundations.

Resolution No. 552 “Certain issues of the use of state budget funds provided for the implementation of measures to return children deported or forcibly displaced as a result of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine”¹⁶⁵ approved the Procedure for the Use of Funds to Meet the Needs of Persons Evacuated from Settlements Located in Areas of Military (Combat) Operations (Possible Combat Operations) to Safe Areas, and Persons Residing in De-occupied Settlements. At the same time, the adopted resolutions do not regulate the issue of determining the entity responsible for searching for information on deported and forcibly displaced children, verifying the relevant information and searching for their location on the territory of the Russian Federation or the TOT of Ukraine. Excessive reliance on regional child services to identify and return children does not appear to be an effective tool. The Commissioner also notes insufficient funding for post-return support measures. Currently, these needs are funded by Ukraine's partner donors, while the long-term reintegration of children and their families requires sustainable state support, taking into account the individual needs of each child and their family.

Collecting Information and Documenting all Cases of Violations of Children's Rights

One of the key tasks that should contribute to the protection of children's rights in the context of armed aggression and occupation of part of the territory of Ukraine is the systematic actions of the state to search for, verify and document all possible cases of violations of children's rights. State agencies and human rights organisations systematically document war crimes, including those committed against children.

Given the lack of access to the TOT of Ukraine, to places of temporary residence and detention of Ukrainian citizens, including children, in the territory of the Russian Federation, the available information does not reflect the true number of children who have witnessed or suffered from international crimes. At the same time, Ukraine continues to insist on the need for such access for international organisations, in particular, UN organisations and the International Committee of the Red Cross, which have the relevant mandate under the Geneva Conventions.

¹⁶⁴ Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of 14 May 2024 No. 551 “On approval of the procedure for identification and return of children deported or forcibly displaced as a result of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine”: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/551-2024-%D0%BF#Text>

¹⁶⁵ Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of 14 May 2024 No. 552 “Certain issues of the use of state budget funds provided for the implementation of measures to return children deported or forcibly displaced as a result of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine”: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/552-2024-%D0%BF#Text>

The Children of War Platform

The Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, together with the National Information Bureau, the Prosecutor General's Office, the National Police of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Office of the President, represented by the Advisor to the Commissioner for Children's Rights and Child Rehabilitation, joined forces to create the Children of War platform.¹⁶⁶

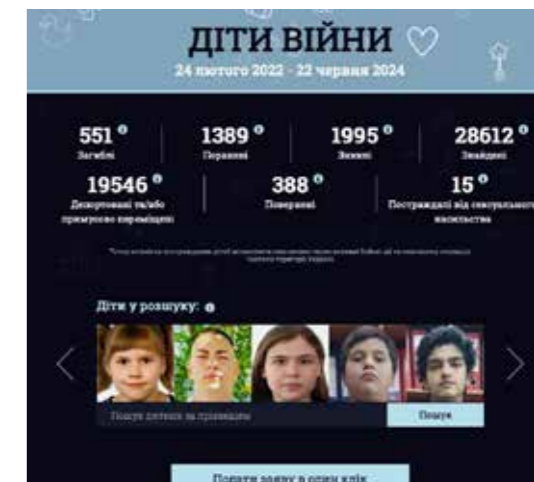
This platform contains information on the number of children affected by the war (killed, wounded, missing, deported), as well as information on cases where children were found and returned.

In addition, the platform serves as a channel for reporting cases of missing children, crimes committed against children, identification of unaccompanied children, deportation, forced change of citizenship and documents, and other violations of children's rights during the war to law enforcement agencies, the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, and the National Information Bureau by registering appeals on the website.

It is important to note that the website itself generates information on the number of deported children – these figures are accumulated and provided by the National Information Bureau. At the same time, work is underway to verify information on children who have been deported to the territory of the Russian Federation. This information is not static, as children are subjected to repeated displacement within the Russian Federation, return to the temporarily occupied territories, and try to leave Russia on their own upon reaching the age of majority. It is also important to remember that more than 600,000 children live in the temporarily occupied territories at risk of deportation. In the summer of 2024 alone, the Russian occupation authorities plan to move several dozen children from the temporarily occupied territories to camps in Russia under the guise of “rehabilitation.”

Unified Register of Persons, Including Children, Deported or Forcibly Displaced as a Result of the Armed Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine

In March 2022, immediately after the start of the full-scale invasion, Ukraine launched a hotline of the National Information Bureau,^{167 168} where anyone could report a missing person, alleged enforced disappearances, captivity, as well as forced displacement and deportation. All information was stored by the National Information Bureau. The National Information Bureau is responsible for maintaining the Unified Register of Persons, Including Children, Deported or Forcibly Displaced as a Result of the Armed Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. On 18 April 2023, the Cabinet of Min-



¹⁶⁶ The Children of War portal. Access mode: <https://childrenofwar.gov.ua/>

¹⁶⁷ The National Information Bureau. Access mode: <https://nib.gov.ua/>

¹⁶⁸ The NIB is SE Ukrainian National Centre for Peacebuilding, which belongs to the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories and performs the functions of the National Information Bureau in accordance with the Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War of 12 August 1949, according to Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 228-r of 17 March 2022: <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/npas/pro-viznachennya-derzhavnogo-pidpriemstva-yake-vikonuye-funkciyi-nacionalnogo-informacijnogo-byuro-228->

isters of Ukraine adopted Resolution No. 339 "Certain issues of protection of persons, including children, deported or forcibly displaced as a result of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine,"¹⁶⁹ which approved the Procedure for the Establishment, Maintenance, Access to Information of the Unified Register of Persons, Including Children, Deported or Forcibly Displaced as a Result of the Armed Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine.

This Register was created and operates based on Law of Ukraine "On public electronic registers," Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of 31 May 2022 No. 434 "The issues of implementation of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 12 August 1949," which contains restricted information, including information about children.

It is envisaged that the Unified Register of Persons will accumulate information on all deported or forcibly displaced persons, and the National Information Bureau will collect and enter information into the Register based on monthly submissions from ministries, central and local authorities, heads of regional and Kyiv city military administrations.

As of May 2024, the register documented 1,546 cases of forced displacement and deportation of children.

Cooperation with International Partners and Ukraine's Efforts to Shape the Child Protection Agenda

On 17 March 2023, the International Criminal Court in The Hague issued arrest warrants for Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova over the illegal deportation of Ukrainian children, and on 27 April, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a resolution recognising the forced transfer of Ukrainian children to Russia as genocide. The President of Ukraine presented the 10-point Ukrainian Peace Formula. The fourth point of the Ukrainian Peace Formula is the return to Ukraine of all prisoners of war, civilian hostages, and deported and forcibly displaced children,¹⁷⁰ and the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights is responsible for coordinating the implementation of this point. In 2023, the global community rallied around the new challenge of Russia's deportation of Ukrainian children, developing new tools of response. Ukraine offers a number of formats in which partner countries and organisations can join joint actions and work separately: as negotiators, they can support focus areas related to the protection of children's rights.

The International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children

The Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights coordinates the implementation of point 4 of the Ukrainian Peace Formula, "Release of all prisoners and deportees." The Ukrainian Peace Formula stipulates that the implementation of



¹⁶⁹ Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of 18 April 2023 No. 339 "Certain issues of protection of persons, including children, deported or forcibly displaced as a result of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine." Access mode: <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/npas/deiaki-pytannia-zakhystu-osib-u-tomu-chysli-ditei-deportovanykh-abo-prymusovo-peremishchenykh-u-zviazku-iz-zbroinoiu-ahresieiu-rosiskoi-federatsii-proty-ukrainy-1180423-339>

¹⁷⁰ Ukraine's Peace Formula Philosophy / Official website of the President of Ukraine: https://www.president.gov.ua/storage/j-files-storage/01/19/53/32af8d644e6cae41791548fc82ae2d8e_1691483767.pdf

this point will result in the return of all Ukrainian citizens held in Russia and in all TOT of Ukraine: prisoners of war, internees, civilians, forcibly displaced and deported persons, including children. At the same time, the Bring Kids Back UA action plan created by Ukraine is aimed at implementing point 4, "Release of all prisoners and deportees."

In October 2023, at a meeting in Malta, the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, as part of the Ukrainian delegation, presented the results of the work done by the Ukrainian side, as well as potential areas requiring the participation of other countries for negotiations, increased pressure, documentation of crimes, as well as the important task of rehabilitation and reintegration of those Ukrainians who have returned home. In negotiations, the Canadian side took the initiative to launch an International Coalition for the Return of Deported Children and to consolidate the efforts of different countries for this purpose.

On 8 December 2023, the first meeting of the International Coalition of Countries for the Return of Ukrainian Children was held. The event, which was opened by President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy, brought together representatives of more than 70 countries and international organisations. The main goal of the Coalition was to coordinate mutual efforts and intensify cooperation between Canada, Ukraine and partner countries to address the problem of illegal deportation and forced displacement of Ukrainian children by Russia. As of 1 June 2024, the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children has 37 member states, and several countries have joined the Coalition as observers.¹⁷¹

In February 2024, the first meeting of the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children was held in Kyiv under the chairmanship of the Head of the President's Office of Ukraine Andriy Yermak, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada Melanie Joly.¹⁷² The Canadian side declared its readiness to strengthen Ukraine's work in the international arena in terms of communication and advocacy for the return of Ukrainian children, in particular by expanding the list of countries joining this initiative by the Global South states.



On 11 April 2024, the second plenary meeting of the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children was held, co-chaired by the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, the Ambassadors of Canada and Norway, where specific projects to engage coalition member countries in the efforts to return and reintegrate Ukrainian children abducted by Russia were presented.

During the meeting, Ukraine presented specific projects and proposals to engage countries in active work on the return of children illegally deported and forcibly displaced by Russia.

The proposed initiatives cover the following areas:

- location of illegally deported and forcibly displaced children in Ukraine;
- developing mechanisms for their return and participation in diplomatic negotiations;
- preparation and issuance of documents for the identification of children and their

¹⁷¹ Ukraine and Canada held the 2nd plenary meeting of the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children with the participation of 35 countries /Bring Kids Back UA, 11 April 2024: <https://www.bringkidsback.org.ua/media/ukraine-and-canada-held-th3e-2nd-meeting-of-the-international-coalition-for-the-return-of-ukrainian-children-involving-35-countries>

¹⁷² International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children launched under the leadership of Andriy Yermak and Melanie Joly – Official web-site of the President of Ukraine, 02 February 2024: <https://president.gov.ua/news/pid-kerivnictvom-andriya-yermaka-ta-melani-zholi-zapusheno-r-88709>

family members, including those necessary for crossing the border and, accordingly, the physical return of children to Ukraine;

- support for children upon their return, facilitating reunification with their families or placement in family-based care, and providing necessary rehabilitation assistance;
- ensuring access to justice for children affected by and witnessing crimes;
- prosecuting those responsible for organising unlawful acts against Ukrainian children.

Participation of Mediators in the Return of Ukrainian Children and Support of International Partners

In July 2023, the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights met with the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani. This meeting enabled further cooperation throughout the year and establishment of Qatar as mediator in the return of Ukrainian children from the Russian Federation to Ukraine. In July, the Commissioner visited Qatar, formalising the agreements and stipulating certain collaborative actions aimed at returning Ukrainian children. Due to Qatar's mediation, a number of children returned to Ukraine to their parents and legal representatives.



The State of Qatar, as a leading mediator in the process of reunification of children in the Russian-Ukrainian international armed conflict, has also launched a Rehabilitation and Recovery Programme for families that the Office of the Ombudsperson of Ukraine helped to reunite upon the implementation of the Bring Kids Back UA action plan approved by the President of Ukraine. The Commissioner is working on further return of children home. During the last visit to Qatar, a list with names of 561 children to be returned to Ukraine was submitted.¹⁷³

Ukraine keeps looking for partners to return every deported and forcibly displaced child. During the year, the Commissioner had a number of meetings with representatives of the Vatican, in particular with the Vatican's Special Representative, Cardinal Matteo Zuppi,¹⁷⁴ who arrived in Ukraine on behalf of Pope Francis. Ukraine highly appreciates the Vatican's efforts to return children and establish peace in Ukraine.



¹⁷³ In the crosshairs of the Russian Federation: people whose future is unknown / Digest of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights No. 4, 2024: <https://ombudsman.gov.ua/storage/app/media/uploaded-files/3-ukr-web.pdf>

¹⁷⁴ Ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets met with the Vatican's Special Representative, who arrived in Ukraine on behalf of the Pope / Official website of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights: https://www.ombudsman.gov.ua/uk/news_details/ombudsman-dmitro-lubinetec-zustrivysya-iz-specpredstavnikom-vatikanu-yakij-pribuv-v-ukrayinu-za-doruchennyam-papi-rimskogo

Support at certain stages of the return, rehabilitation and reintegration of children is provided by the United Nations Children's Fund, UNHCR and the ICRC.

Inter-parliamentary Cooperation

On 27 April 2023, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted the Resolution "Deportations and forcible transfers of Ukrainian children and other civilians to the Russian Federation or to temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories: create conditions for their safe return, stop these crimes and punish the perpetrators" and its recommendations during the debate at the spring session.¹⁷⁵

The above Resolution states that the Russian Federation, through the forced displacement and deportation of children, often imposes Russian citizenship on Ukrainian children, which violates children's rights to identity and facilitates the illegal adoption of Ukrainian children by Russian families. Such practices are prohibited and should be prosecuted as war crimes and crimes against humanity, and forced displacement should be qualified as a crime of genocide.¹⁷⁶

The consistent position of PACE reaffirms its commitment to its role as a facilitator in supporting the Ukrainian authorities and a number of international organisations in "identifying the fastest ways of locating and facilitating the effective search for children" with access to the most detailed information possible about their identities and the conditions of their deportation or forced displacement by the Russian Federation.

After an urgent debate, on 23 January 2024, PACE unanimously adopted a Resolution on the situation of children in Ukraine¹⁷⁷ based on the report of the Ukrainian delegation led by Member of the Committee on National Security, Defence and Intelligence, Vice-President of PACE and Chairperson of the PACE Ad Hoc Committee on the situation of Ukrainian children, MP Olena Khomenko (Ukraine, EC/DA), which emphasises the urgent need to address the situation and fate of Ukrainian children forcibly displaced and deported to the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, the Russian Federation and Belarus.

The adopted text of the Resolution emphasises that "all Ukrainian children have the right to enjoy the rights and freedoms enshrined in the relevant international human rights instruments" and notes that "the best interests of the child must prevail in all decision-making processes affecting them", reinforcing the principle that children should never be used as "instruments of pressure or as spoils of war."



Olena Zelenska speaking at a PACE meeting: Our children are the future of the whole world, we need to rescue them from Russian captivity as soon as possible

¹⁷⁵ We stand together against Russian aggression - PACE adopts the eighth resolution on Ukraine since the beginning of the full-scale invasion/Press Service of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 28 April 2023: <https://www.rada.gov.ua/news/razom/235796.html>

¹⁷⁶ Deportations and forcible transfers of Ukrainian children and other civilians to the Russian Federation or to temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories: create conditions for their safe return, stop these crimes and punish the perpetrators / Res. 2495 - Resolution - Adopted text: <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/31776/html>

¹⁷⁷ Situation of the children of Ukraine/ Report | Doc. 15901 | 24 January 2024: pace.coe.int/en/files/33322/html

Work is underway to create a PACE-based inter-parliamentary platform for ongoing efforts to return deported and forcibly displaced children. The 46 member states of the Council of Europe will join in addressing the situation of Ukrainian children by creating an appropriate platform, and the delegation will be headed by PACE President Theodoros Roussopoulos.¹⁷⁸

At the same time, the Inter-Parliamentary Union is a unique institution that regularly brings together parliamentarians from all over the world, representing all types of government and the entire spectrum of political parties.¹⁷⁹ Ukraine became a member of the IPU in July 2019.¹⁸⁰ Currently, the Inter-Parliamentary Union has 173 members and 11 associate members.¹⁸¹ The members of the IPU Working Group are committed to engaging in parliamentary diplomacy and focusing on small steps that can ultimately lead to dialogue, better understanding and possible positive humanitarian outcomes.

During its eleventh meeting in October 2023, in the framework of the 147th IPU Assembly in the Republic of Angola (Luanda), the Working Group agreed to include a fifth item for discussion: the topic of children displaced by the conflict. In particular, the Working Group expressed its readiness to address the problem identified in the UN's verified reports on separated children who are blocked on the Russian-Ukrainian border or along the line of military control in the conflict zone without parents or legal representatives. As a result of work, information on this issue was collected from the delegations of Ukraine and the Russian Federation, and several reports were received containing contradictory descriptions of the situation of children displaced by the conflict. The IPU Working Group noted that while both Ukrainian and Russian officials acknowledge that thousands of children have been displaced from Ukraine to the Russian Federation or to Russian-controlled territories since the beginning of the war, the explanations differ (abduction or humanitarian evacuation).

On 14 March 2024, the IPU Working Group held an online briefing together with the IPU Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law, with a special focus on children, and with the participation of experts from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons. During this session, the Working Group was informed of the need for greater political support to strengthen international mechanisms for parent-child reunification.

On 25 March 2024, the IPU Working Group held its twelfth meeting during the 148th IPU Assembly and subsequent hearings with the delegations of Ukraine and the Russian Federation.

The parties agreed to enhance their cooperation with the IPU on the issue of children displaced by the conflict, to exchange additional information upon request and to work towards developing more specific and structured procedures to support family reunification. Two years after its first visit to Ukraine and the Russian Federation, the Working Group is committed to continuing its efforts to contribute to a peaceful resolution of the war in Ukraine.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Situation of the children of Ukraine: PACE calls for urgent measures and international co-operation /25 January 2024: <https://pace.coe.int/en/news/9362/situation-of-the-children-of-ukraine-pace-calls-for-urgent-measures-and-international-co-operation>

¹⁷⁹ INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION / Department for Interparliamentary Relations of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine: https://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/mpz/docs/1723_IPU_General_Info.htm

¹⁸⁰ Ukraine | Inter-Parliamentary Union. Access mode: <https://www.ipu.org/parliament-UA>

¹⁸¹ IPU members. Access mode: <http://archive.ipu.org/english/membshp.htm>

¹⁸² 148th Assembly and related meetings | Inter-Parliamentary Union, Results-148Assembly-WEB-e.pdf: <https://www.ipu.org/event/148th-assembly-and-related-meetings>,

On 30 June 2023, following a unanimous decision adopted by the Standing Committee during the 30th Annual Session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Vancouver, Canada, the Assembly established a Parliamentary Support Group for Ukraine to consolidate the OSCE PA's practical and political efforts in support of Ukraine in the light of the Russian Federation's invasive war against Ukraine.¹⁸³ In February 2024, OSCE PA President Pia Kauma visited Kyiv and addressed the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, calling on the Russian Federation to take responsibility for its actions and expressing support for the people of Ukraine in their fight against the aggressor. In the framework of the visit, the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights Dmytro Lubinets met with OSCE PA President Pia Kauma and the delegation of the OSCE PA Special Committee Parliamentary Support Group for Ukraine at the Child Rights Protection Centre. The participants of the meeting discussed the issue of Ukrainian children and the cynical war crimes committed by the Russian Federation against them. The Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights informed about the mass deportations and deliberate abduction of Ukrainian children for their further Russification, and noted that these are not just cruel accidents of war, but a planned genocidal policy.

¹⁸³ OSCE parliamentarians meet in Vancouver for Annual Session, establish new parliamentary working group on Ukraine: <https://www.oscepa.org/en/news-a-media/press-releases/press-2023/osce-parliamentarians-meet-in-vancouver-for-annual-session-establish-new-parliamentary-working-group-on-ukraine>

SECTION 4. International Tools for Monitoring the Observance of Children's Rights and Documenting International Crimes

During the reporting period, from the beginning of the full-scale invasion until 1 June 2024, a number of international organisations used special tools to study the situation of human rights violations in Ukraine in the context of the international armed conflict, in particular, paying attention to the issue of deportation and forced displacement of Ukrainian children. There is a great potential to enhance the influence of such tools on states that violate the UN Charter and international humanitarian and human rights law.

At the same time, it is worth noting that, during the reporting period, the key body responsible for global international security, the UN Security Council, became a platform for Russia's propaganda and disinformation campaigns in the meeting room during discussions on the security and humanitarian situation in Ukraine. Six of the nine informal Arria-formula meetings held from February 2022 to June 2024 on issues related to Ukraine were initiated by the aggressor state.¹⁸⁴ The status of a permanent member of the UN Security Council allows Russia to choose the number of such meetings and determine the participants and invited speakers. Such informal meetings were initiated in 1992 as an opportunity to have a frank and private exchange of views in direct dialogue with high-level representatives of governments and international organisations within a flexible procedural structure with persons invited by a Council member or members.¹⁸⁵ At the same time, currently, such meetings serve more to legitimise the Russian Federation's unfounded claims of Ukraine's guilt and "collective Western involvement" in the war, and to justify the use of armed forces against civilians.

It should be noted that for the first time in the history of the UN, a permanent member of the UN Security Council, the Russian Federation, was listed among grave violators of children's rights. At the same time, Russia is subject to fewer requirements than other countries that are monitored for violations of children's rights in armed conflict. For example, Russia is the only UN country that is not required to provide humanitarian access and access of international organisations to the territory temporarily occupied by it and to places of stay and detention of children in the Russian Federation.

Accordingly, the international armed conflict in Ukraine and the armed aggression of the Russian Federation directly indicate the need for reform within the UN. At the same time, Ukraine is making every effort to use the existing tools of international organisations to document international crimes and convey truthful information to the international community.

¹⁸⁴ Arria-formula Meetings Dashboard | United Nations Security Council. Access mode: <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/repertoire/research-tools/Arria-formula>

¹⁸⁵ Working Methods Handbook | United Nations Security Council. Access mode: <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/background-note>

The UN Secretary-General's Report on Children and Armed Conflict

In June 2023, the UN Secretary-General's Report on Children and Armed Conflict A/77/895-S/2023/363 was released.^{186 187} The report is prepared by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict¹⁸⁸ and is submitted to the Secretary-General in accordance with Security Council Resolution 2427 (2018).¹⁸⁹ The report contains information on trends in the impact of armed conflict on children and information on violations committed, as required by the Council in its resolution 1612 (2005) and subsequent Resolutions. This report is one of four reports for which the MRM (Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism) generates information and has the following elements:

- Provides information on violations committed by parties to the conflict in specific country-situations.
- Updates progress in the implementation of Security Council Resolutions on children and armed conflict, including the establishment of a Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) and dialogue with parties to conflict on child protection commitments and action plans.
- Contains targeted recommendations to a wide range of stakeholders to advance the child protection agenda.
- It is accompanied by lists of state and non-state actors who commit grave violations against children.

As noted above, the Russian Federation is included in the list of child rights violators. According to de-listing criteria,¹⁹⁰ a party to the conflict, whether a state or non-state person, must enter into a dialogue with the UN to prepare and implement a certain plan of action within a specified time frame to end and prevent grave violations against children, as outlined in the Secretary-General's report on children in armed conflict pursuant to Security Council Resolutions 1539 (2004), 1612 (2005) and 1882 (2009).

Importantly, despite the criteria¹⁹¹ determined by the Secretary-General back in 2010, the Plan for the Russian Federation¹⁹² does not contain a mandatory provision to ensure access to the territory controlled by the relevant party, as well as to bases, camps, training centres, recruitment centres and other similar facilities in order to monitor and verify compliance with decisions under an access agreement to be jointly agreed between the United Nations and a particular party.

It should be noted that the website of the Office of the Special Representative indicates that the last state to sign an Action Plan was Iraq, back in March 2023.¹⁹³ As of 9 June 2024, the website does not contain any information about the Russian Federation as a violator of the child rights in armed conflict, despite the existence of the relevant Resolution and the UN Secretary-General's report.

At the time of preparation of this Report, an updated report of the Special Representative is expected to cover the events of 2023.

¹⁸⁶ Secretary-General Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict. URL: <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/document/secretary-general-annual-report-on-children-and-armed-conflict-2/>

¹⁸⁷ S/2023/363 - Children and armed conflict Report of the Secretary-General: <https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=S%2F2023%2F363&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False>

¹⁸⁸ Virginia Gamba de Potgieter / UN: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/profiles/virginia-gamba-de-potgieter>

¹⁸⁹ S/res/2427(2018) - Adopted by the Security Council at its 8305th meeting, on 9 July 2018: [https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=S%2FRES%2F2427\(2018\)](https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=S%2FRES%2F2427(2018))

¹⁹⁰ ANNEX XIII: LISTING AND DELISTING CRITERIA: https://www.mrmtools.org/files/13_Annexe_XIII_Listing_and_Delisting_Criteria.pdf

¹⁹¹ Ibid

¹⁹² UN Special Representative of Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict Concluded Visit to the Russian Federation: <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/2023/05/un-special-representative-of-secretary-general-for-children-and-armed-conflict-concluded-visit-to-the-russian-federation/>

¹⁹³ Action Plans – Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict: <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/tools-for-action/action-plans/>

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

In the 35th report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on the human rights situation in Ukraine for the period from 1 August 2022 to 31 January 2023, based on the work of the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU), OHCHR documented¹⁹⁴ cases of displacement of civilians, including children and adults from social care facilities, adults from pre-trial detention centres and penitentiary institutions, and unaccompanied children from the occupied parts of the Donetsk, Kharkiv, Kherson, Kyiv, Odesa and Zaporizhzhia regions to the Russian Federation. Some of the documented cases may be treated as forced displacement and deportation in violation of Geneva Convention IV. The actual scale of forced displacement and deportation remains difficult to assess, partly due to the lack of access to Russian-occupied territory in Ukraine and to the territory of the Russian Federation. On 27 May 2022, a group of 31 children (16 boys and 15 girls) from the Donetsk region were deported from occupied Donetsk to the Russian Federation. These children studied at boarding schools, were lost or separated from their parents or guardians during the hostilities. For example, a girl who had been receiving treatment in Mariupol was moved to Donetsk in March with a group of other children. From Donetsk, she was sent to an institution near Moscow and in the autumn was placed in a foster family in the Moscow region. Her family in Ukraine-controlled territory knew nothing about the girl's fate or whereabouts. Although they knew from the media that she was in the Russian Federation, as of 31 December 2022, they had no contact with her. Three children from the same group were taken to the Russian Federation after their father failed to pass "filtration," was detained and subjected to enforced disappearance by the Russian Federation Armed Forces and associated groups. Four other children from this group were taken to the Russian Federation after their foster mother disappeared during the hostilities in Mariupol. One boy was moved from the Mariupol district, where he lived with relatives, to Donetsk and then to the Russian Federation, despite his family ties in Ukraine. He was placed in a foster home in the Moscow region and issued a Russian passport. The Russian Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights reported that she had personally taken one of the boys from this group into her care and that he had received Russian citizenship in September. According to Article 50 of Geneva Convention IV, the Russian Federation is prohibited from making changes to the personal status of displaced children, including changing their citizenship.

The UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine

The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine was established by the UN Human Rights Council on 4 March 2022 by Resolution 49/1¹⁹⁵ to investigate all alleged human rights violations, violations of international humanitarian law and related crimes in the context of the aggression against Ukraine by the Russian Federation. On 4 April 2023, the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry was extended by the Council for another year in its Resolution 52/32.¹⁹⁶

The Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine of 19 October 2023 states¹⁹⁷ that the Commission found that in some of the cases it inves-

¹⁹⁴ Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine, 24 March 2023: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/ukraine/2023/23-03-24-Ukraine-35th-periodic-report-UA.pdf>

¹⁹⁵ A/HRC/RES/49/1 - Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 4 March 2022: <https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FHRC%2FRES%2F49%2F1&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False>

¹⁹⁶ A/HRC/RES/52/32 - Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 4 April 2023: <https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FHRC%2FRES%2F52%2F32&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False>

¹⁹⁷ A/78/540 A Ukrainian translation of a signal unedited copy: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbod->

tigated, such displacements were in violation of international humanitarian law and qualify as illegal displacements or deportations. The individual cases investigated by the Commission collectively contravene the legal requirement that the evacuation of children be temporary, and therefore the displacement of children constitutes unlawful deportation, which is a war crime. The Commission continued to investigate allegations of the displacement and deportation of children from Ukraine to the Russian Federation or to parts of Ukraine occupied by Russia.

In 2024, the Commission focused on the case of the transfer of 46 children from the Kherson Regional Children's Home to the temporarily occupied Crimea on the order of the Russian authorities, which took place on 21 October 2022. The children were aged 0-5 years. After reviewing various sources of information, the Commission concluded that the transfer of a group of children from the Kherson Regional Children's Home to Crimea was not temporary and therefore constitutes a war crime of illegal displacement.¹⁹⁸

The OSCE Moscow Mechanism

On 30 March 2023, the delegations of 45 participating States of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), after consultations with Ukraine, activated the Moscow Mechanism in accordance with paragraph 8 of the Moscow Document. They requested that the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) request Ukraine to approve the invitation of an expert mission to "address the issue of child deportation in the context of human rights violations and the humanitarian consequences of Russian aggression against Ukraine." Based on this request, on 4 April 2023, Ukraine formed a mission consisting of three experts – Professor Veronika Bilková (Czech Republic), Dr Cecilie Hellestveit (Norway) and Dr Elīna Šteinerte (Latvia).

In the Report on Violations and Abuses of International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law, War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity, related to the Forcible Transfer and/or Deportation of Ukrainian Children to the Russian Federation,¹⁹⁹ the Mission found that since 24 February 2022, and even before that date, a significant number of Ukrainian children have been transferred from the territory of Ukraine to the temporarily occupied territories, as well as to the territory of the Russian Federation. While the exact numbers remain unknown, the fact of a large-scale displacement of Ukrainian children is not denied by either Ukraine or Russia. This report focuses on orphans and unaccompanied children, as they are the most vulnerable groups among displaced children.

The Mission also found that unjustified prolonged stay or unreasonable logistical obstacles violate the duty to facilitate reunification and contravene the principles embodied in GC-IV that family unity must be protected and respected. Furthermore, the Mission considers that the transfer by Russia of Ukrainian children to the temporarily occupied territories or Russian territory, in conjunction with hostilities, violates its obligation under GC-IV to establish mandatory mechanisms to trace these children, to report their whereabouts and to facilitate their repatriation or family reunification, and constitutes a violation of the Geneva Conventions (GC), aggravating the other violations. Furthermore, the Mission concludes that the placement of unaccompanied children for adoption or similar assimilation measures is incompatible with GC-IV. The change of nationality of Ukrainian children is in breach of Article 50(2) of GC-IV. It is also contrary to the principles embodied in GC-IV that family unity must be protected and respected. The promotion of re-education and permanent integration into Russian families evidence that displaced Ukrainian children are indeed victims of deportation within the meaning of Article 49 of GC-IV.²⁰⁰

[ies/hrbcouncil/coiukraine/A-78-540-UA.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrbcouncil/coiukraine/A-78-540-UA.pdf)

¹⁹⁸ A/HRC/55/66 An unofficial Ukrainian translation of a signal unedited copy: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrbcouncil/coiukraine/a-hrc-55-66-a-uv-ua.pdf>

¹⁹⁹ Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 180/2023: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/1/546560.pdf>

²⁰⁰ GENEVA CONVENTION relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, revised on 23 February 2023, Article

Recommendations

To the State of Ukraine

- To ensure systematic support for children affected by the armed aggression against Ukraine, in particular children who have been deported or forcibly displaced by the Russian Federation, through the implementation of a state long-term support programme;
- To establish a permanent collection and systematisation of information on violations of the rights of Ukrainian citizens, including children, in the temporarily occupied territory and the territory of the Russian Federation under martial law;
- To develop a network of potential foster parents who are ready to place children in families after their return from deportation/forced displacement and provide the necessary training;
- To continue efforts aimed at expanding the circle of members of the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children and exploring opportunities for cooperation with other countries to assist children who have suffered or witnessed violence in the context of the armed conflict, including gender-based violence, family separation, etc;
- To develop and integrate long-term programmes to provide psychological and medical rehabilitation to children who have suffered or witnessed violence in the armed conflict, including gender-based violence, family separation, etc;
- To develop special curricula to fill the gaps in education for children who have been under occupation or in the area of active hostilities and are behind in studies; to develop an educational reintegration and re-militarisation programme that includes work with children and their legal representatives, and provides for the training of specialists to work with children affected by armed aggression against Ukraine, including children who have been deported or forcibly displaced by the Russian Federation.

To international organisations and partner countries

- To take an active part in meetings on the implementation of the Ukrainian Peace Formula, in particular point 4 of the Peace Formula, which provides for the return of deported children to Ukraine;
- To join the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children;
- To intensify efforts to obtain information from the authorised bodies of the Russian Federation on the number and location of Ukrainian children deported to the Russian Federation or displaced within the temporarily occupied territories;
- To demand the implementation of the recommendations made to the Russian Federation by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child during the last reporting cycle in 2024;
- To make every effort to obtain humanitarian and monitoring access to institutions where children deported from Ukraine to the Russian Federation are held;
- To facilitate communication between representatives of Ukraine and the Russian Federation on the effective and safe return to Ukraine of children deported to the Russian Federation;
- To support financially and organisationally programmes aimed at the rehabilitation and reintegration of child victims of international crimes;
- To demand the unconditional return to Ukraine of all children deported to the Russian Federation.

List of Abbreviations

DPR – the so-called “Donetsk People’s Republic” (part of the territory of the Donetsk region of Ukraine temporarily occupied before 24 February 2022)

SE – state enterprise

HEI – higher education institution

AFU – Armed Forces of Ukraine

LPR – the so-called “Luhansk People’s Republic” (part of the territory of the Luhansk region of Ukraine temporarily occupied before 24 February 2022)

IHL – international humanitarian law

IAC – international armed conflict

ICC – International Criminal Court

IPU – Inter-Parliamentary Union

NIB – National Information Bureau

OSCE – Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe

PGO – Prosecutor General’s Office

UN – United Nations

PACE – Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

RB – Republic of Belarus

RF – Russian Federation

SSU – Security Service of Ukraine

“SMO” – the so-called “special military operation” (as Russia calls its war against Ukraine)

JIT – Joint Investigation Team

TOT – temporarily occupied territories

NOTES



Омбудсман України
Ombudsman of Ukraine