



**Alternative information**

**On the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child  
by the Russian Federation**

**for the 95th session of the UN CRC (15 Jan – 2 Feb 2024)**

**Questions 12, 13, 15 of the List of Issues  
addressed by the Committee to the authorities of the Russian Federation**

**Contents**

**Questions 12-13. Violations of the rights of children deported/removed from Ukraine to the territory of the Russian Federation and temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine..... 1**

The problem of collecting data and estimating the number of children taken to the territory of the Russian Federation ..... 1

Violations of the UN CRC (Articles 9-11) and international humanitarian law related to the displacement/deportation of Ukrainian children ..... 2

    Involuntary relocation of children, not justified by security or medical reasons ..... 2

    Relocation of children outside the occupied territories to distant regions of Russia ..... 3

    Lack of required information on relocated children ..... 3

    The extended stay of relocated children in Russia and impediments to returning children to their lawful guardians ..... 4

Changes to children’s personal status: Violations of Arts. 8, 21, 28 of the UN CRC and Art. 50 of the IV Geneva Convention ..... 5

    A question of adoption / temporary fostering: Violation of Art. 21 of the UN CRC ..... 5

    Granting of Russian citizenship to children: Violation of Art.8 of the UN CRC ..... 6

    The risk of losing identity and native language: Violations of Art.28 of the UN CRC and Art. 50 of the IV Geneva Convention ..... 7

**Question 15. Militarization of education in Russia and risk of involving children in military conflicts ..... 8**

    Militarization of mainstream schools and expansion of specialized military education ..... 8

    Specific vulnerability of Ukrainian children in front of militaristic propaganda and militarization of education ..... 9

**Conclusion ..... 9**

## Questions 12-13. Violations of the rights of children deported/removed from Ukraine to the territory of the Russian Federation and temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine

### The problem of collecting data and estimating the number of children taken to the territory of the Russian Federation

Data from official Russian sources concerning the number of refugees (up to 5 mln.) were published for propagandistic effect and have varied widely. According to [data](#) from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 1,275,315 people were reported to be refugees from Ukraine in Russia as of December 31, 2022.

Data concerning the number of children who found themselves in Russia is speculative in Russian sources: Russian news stories timed to coincide with the start of the 2022-2023 school year reported that about 550,000-600,000 refugee children were on Russian territory at the time, but less than half that number went to school on September 1, 2022. Commissioner for Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova reported that more than **730,000 children** arrived in Russia from Ukraine and the "DPR/LPR" after February 24, 2022 ([press conference](#) at the Russian Foreign Ministry on April 4, 2023).

As of November 20, 2023, Ukraine has identified **19,546 children** who were deported to Russia and managed to return 386 children to Ukraine (see the government Web site [Dity Viyny](#) ("Children of War")). The same source states that, based on public Russian sources, about 744,000 Ukrainian children have been deported.

Most of children from Ukraine arrived in Russia together with their parents/guardians. The maximum estimates (more than 700,000 children) most likely cover primarily this group. The fact that the children were accompanied by parents/legal representatives does not mean that the CRC and international humanitarian law have not been violated in relation to them. Involuntary displacement (Russian military and occupation authorities prevented the evacuation of refugees to the Ukrainian side), separation of children and parents at Russian filtration points, obstacles to family reunification are documented. There are cases when children were accompanied by relatives on the territory of Russia, while their parents were in Ukraine or third countries, but the Russian authorities prevented the reunification of children and parents (for example, a well-known [story](#) of 13-year-old Veronika V., accompanied in Russia by her aunt and separated from her mother for more than a year). Parents' decision – voluntary or forced – to obtain legalization in Russia means including children in the Russian education system, imminent indoctrination and militaristic propaganda – all this destroys children's ties with Ukraine, its culture and language.

Less numerous but more vulnerable are deported children from institutions (orphans and children without parental care) and children from families who appeared to be unaccompanied at the time of deportation. The situations of them are various: being at vacation camps or sanatoriums when the frontline separated them from parents; forced evacuation and separation at the Russian filtration points, loss of relatives due to the war, etc.

As for the number of deported institutionalised and unaccompanied children, it can only be estimated approximately, but definitely there are at least thousands of them. The Russian authorities do not publish accurate statistics; the data can be taken from the media reports and other open sources, as well as from official publications of Maria Lvova-Belova's office. Here are some of them:

On February 19, 2022, a special convoy brought about 500 children from orphanages and care facilities in "the Donbas" to the Romashka sports and health camp near Taganrog, Rostov Province ([reporting](#) in Rossiiskaya Gazeta, February 19, 2023). Other reporting indicates that these children arrived from Donetsk and Vuhlehirsk care facilities, some of them turned up in Moscow Province, and 27 were put into foster care there ([investigative reporting](#) in Verstka citing the Moscow Province children's rights commissioner, June 29, 2022).

On February 20, 2022, 74 orphans were brought to Rostov-on-Don from the Luhansk Children's Home (official [notice](#) from the Rostov Province government, February 20, 2022). At that moment, before the Russian army invaded, there were already 6,500 Rostov Province's PTPs, including 2,700 children.

On October 4, 2022, [Novosti Lipetska](#) reported on 38 8-to-17-year-olds brought in from the DPR who had lost their parents, inviting those willing to foster the children (the headline read, "Orphans from Donetsk People's Republic Can Be Adopted in Lipetsk Province"). The children were placed with various organizations in Lipetsk Province.

In early October 2022, about 60 children aged 5-16, including the disabled, [arrived](#) from orphanages in the “DPR” at the Naryshkin School and Care Facility in Oryol Province.

Children from Donetsk Care Facility No.1 were dispersed to five Russian regions, among which are known to be Kirov Province (in the Volga region), where 39 children were placed in four care facilities and preparations were made to foster them (local media [reporting](#), October 1, 2022), and Bashkortostan, where 32 children aged 7-11 found themselves and were dispersed among three family care assistance centers in Uchaly, Kumertau and the Kugarchin district (media [reporting](#), October 25, 2022).

Maria Lvova-Belova’s [Bulletin](#) (April 2023) states that about 2,000 children from orphanages and care facilities in the “DPR” and “LPR” were relocated to Russian territory in February 2022 in response to an appeal from the leaders of the unrecognized republics to Russian authorities “to accept civilians on their territory”; children from the DPR were subsequently placed with Russian foster families or children’s institutions in Russian regions; All children from the LPR returned to their institutions, but some of them were subsequently placed under the care of Russian foster families. “A total of 380 orphans from the DPR and LPR were placed in Russian foster care families.”

In the summer of 2023, local authorities of some regions of Ukraine officially responded to the requests of the Kharkiv Human Rights Group as follows:

**Donetsk region:** as of 01.07.2023, 146 orphans and children deprived of parental care were taken from the territory of the region to the Russian Federation.

**Mariupol:** The Executive Committee of the Mariupol City Council reported on the deportation of 5 children from a family-type institution who were found by the Russian soldiers in a bomb shelter without a legal representative; a group of teenage orphans/children deprived of parental care who lived in a dormitory of a vocational education institution was relocated to the temporarily occupied territory, and then to the Russian Federation; there are cases of the removal of guardians with their children to the temporarily occupied territories and to the Russian Federation, with the restriction of evacuation to the territory controlled by the Ukrainian authorities.

**Kherson region:** "Oleshkovsky boarding institution" was in the temporarily occupied territory of the Kherson region, in October 2022, the occupation authorities appointed a new management and staff. Among 101 children, 12 children were taken by their parents, 4 children died, 1 was on treatment; 84 pupils were displaced to the Crimea under the pretext of rehabilitation and rest. Then 4 children were taken abroad by their parents through the territory of the Russian Federation, 1 child without parental care was returned to the city of Kherson. 2 children were taken from the Kherson Regional Orphanage to the Moscow region in September 2022; In October 2022, 46 children were taken to Simferopol.

**Kharkiv region:** 13 pupils of Kupyansk Special School were taken to the Russian Federation, 11 children were returned to their parents (the case is under investigation). 18 pupils – orphans and children deprived of parental care from the municipal institution "Olkhovatsky Lyceum of the Olkhovatsky Village Council" were forcibly deported to the Russian Federation, 4 children were returned to Ukraine. In September 2022, a group of children were taken to the Russian Federation from the "Nadezhda" Regional Center for Socio-Psychological Rehabilitation of Children (Olkhovatka village), their further route is unknown to the local authorities.

**Luhansk region:** as of 07.21.2023, information about the possible deportation of 98 minors was provided to the National Information Bureau.

## **Violations of the UN CRC (Articles 9-11) and international humanitarian law related to the displacement/deportation of Ukrainian children**

Russia’s violations of international humanitarian law regarding Ukrainian children have been documented by many expert groups. Violations of the UN CRC are also associated with the unlawful relocation of children: the right not to be separated from parents (Article 9); the right to family reunification (Article 10); obligations of the state to combat the unlawful relocation and non-return of children from abroad (Article 11).

### **Involuntary relocation of children, not justified by security or medical reasons**

The Russian side’s argument, about the appropriateness of evacuating children from the area of hostilities with the aim of saving them, is legitimate only in the event that the evacuation met the requirements established by humanitarian law (that it be temporary, provide for a safe and timely return to the previous place of residence and be communicated). As the UN’s Independent International

Commission said in its [report](#), “In none of the situations which the Commission has examined, transfers of children appear to have satisfied the requirements set forth by international humanitarian law. The transfers were not justified by safety or medical reasons. There seems to be no indication that it was impossible to allow the children to relocate to territory under Ukrainian Government control.” During the documentation of Russian war crimes, numerous instances have been noted of impeding the civilian population from evacuating to territory under Ukrainian control, blocking humanitarian corridors and shooting at the transport in which residents of areas of hostilities sought to leave for the Ukrainian side. In these circumstances, evacuating to the Russian side was the only opportunity to save oneself.

Russia itself created the danger to the children, in a planned and intentional manner. This is proven by the fact that the systematic removal of children from children’s establishments in the so-called DPR and LPR to Russia began in mid-February 2022, even before the full-scale invasion by Russian forces. At the same time, Russian regions were already adopting measures prepare to receive refugees (decrees from the executive bodies of Russian regions to organize points of temporary placement for refugees were issued before the invasion, e.g. the decree of the Leningrad Province government, February 22, 2022).

In cases where children were voluntarily transferred from already occupied territories to vacation camps, many parents did indeed agree to send their children for free for health reasons in an attempt to at least temporarily provide their children with safety and better conditions. However, one might doubt the willingness and awareness of the parents in their consent in many instances, since the very conditions of war and implicit threats from the occupation forces are factors of coercion. A [report](#) from the Yale School of Public Health (Kaveh Khoshnood, Nathaniel A. Raymond and Caitlin N. Howarth et al, “Russia’s Systematic Program for the Re-Education & Adoption of Ukraine’s Children.” February 14, 2023. Humanitarian Research Lab at Yale School of Public Health, New Haven) shows that there are many indications that this consent was coerced.

### **Relocation of children outside the occupied territories to distant regions of Russia**

According to the Yale School of Public Health [report](#), the systematic removal of children from care facilities and other children’s establishments on the territories of the “DPR” and “LPR” began no later than mid-February 2022; as other Ukrainian regions were occupied, children from Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, Mykolaiv, Zaporizhzhia and Kharkiv Provinces were taken to vacation camps and other establishments (the researchers tracked the outcomes for about 6,000 children). The research identified at least 43 facilities where children were relocated either for a short time or for an extended period. They were located throughout Russian territory, from nearby Crimea, Rostov Province and Krasnodar Territory to the Urals, Siberia and the Far East.

Lvova-Belova’s press service explained that the children from care facilities were placed with foster families in Russian regions rather than the “DPR/LPR” because families objectively could not be found for them in the “republics”: they were brothers and sisters from large families who could not be separated ([interview](#) with Miloserdie.ru: “Russian Presidential Children’s Rights Commissioner Tells How Children from the New Regions Are Placed with Russian Families, and How They Are Returned to Relatives,” November 21, 2022).

This argument is refuted by Lenara Ivanova, the Republic of Bashkortostan’s family, labor and social protection minister, who said that among 10 children in a group that arrived in Bashkortostan (32 children ages 7-11 arrived in all), brothers and sisters ended up in different Russian regions ([media reporting](#), October 25, 2022). Obviously, the desire not to separate brothers and sisters was not the reason for relocating children to Russia.

### **Lack of required information on relocated children**

Art. 49 of the IV Geneva Convention requires the occupying country to inform the Protecting Power – an intermediary country or a humanitarian organization that performs this role – of transfers and evacuations of the occupied country’s population.

Russia has declined to inform Ukraine of the removal of children and justified this by saying that its children’s rights commissioner had not received any requests from the Ukrainian side. Maria Lvova-Belova [stressed](#) it at a press conference at the Russian Foreign Affairs Ministry on April 4, 2023, when she was most likely speaking to Ukrainian parents who were searching for their children.

Maria Lvova-Belova's bulletin confirms that her office promptly assists all lawful representatives of children on an individual basis, and it also is in contact with the Red Cross. The fact that children are relocated to Russian territory systematically but children are returned on an individual basis significantly complicates the reunion of children with their lawful representatives, and returning children who were removed as part of an establishment is even further complicated.

### **The extended stay of relocated children in Russia and impediments to returning children to their lawful guardians**

Lvova-Belova's office confirms that there were no impediments to returning children who found themselves in vacation camps on the other side of the front lines from their parents: Children were immediately returned both directly to their parents and through individuals acting under power of attorney (volunteers, for example); they did so on an individual basis even though Russian authorities, as an act of goodwill, could easily have created humanitarian corridors on Ukrainian-controlled territory or an organized pathway through European Union countries.

However, there have been many accounts from parents that they were permitted to pick up their children only in person, so the return of children has dragged on for an indeterminate amount of time. Ukrainian human rights defenders confirm that the practice of returning children by power of attorney was hardly adopted immediately – the first known instance occurred only in 2023 (Darya Kasyanova, program director of the SOS Children's Villages Ukraine, BBC [article](#), April 27, 2023). In order to reach children's camps in Krasnodar Territory, parents had to go through several European countries (the Baltic states, Belarus) to get to Russia and then cross the country from north to south. Not all of them had passports or enough money. Many parents did not know about aid to return children, including financial aid, provided by the charitable foundations [Save Ukraine](#) and [SOS Children's Villages Ukraine](#).

According to the [report](#) from the Yale School of Public Health, the return of children to parents was allegedly suspended at approximately 10% of the camps where Russian authorities had sent them from occupied Ukrainian territory. In at least four camps children's planned stays were significantly extended: Artek, Luchisty, Orlyonok (Crimea) and Medvezhyonok (Krasnodar Krai).

The Bulletin from Lvova-Belova's office states that the majority of children who went "on vacation" returned to their legal guardians: Out of 2,360 children on vacation in October 2022, there were only two children left in Krasnodar Krai and 38 in Crimea as of April 3, 2023. On April 14, 2023, Maria Lvova-Belova [stated](#) on her telegram channel that "since October, 2,500 children have returned to their own families from vacation camps despite the difficulties that have occurred": All the children had been returned from the camps in Krasnodar Krai, and there were 8 children left in Crimea.

Children stuck at vacation camps were not the only ones facing delays on occupied territory or in Russian regions and difficulties with returning. There are instances of the systematic removal of children with disabilities in specialized facilities to facilities on Russian-controlled territory. In particular, this concerns approx. 100 children from the care facility at Oleshky (Kherson region), where poor treatment of children took place under Russian administration. A 16 year old disable teenager from this facility could be reunited with his mother only in 8 months ([Meduza](#), 31.03.2023).

Children who were in sanatoriums at the time of the invasion also experienced difficulties reuniting with their families. A [story](#) is known of six children from a group foster home who reunited with their foster parents only in June 2022.

In some instances, children were in the care of school and children's shelter directors were returned to Ukrainian territory, or they managed to leave for safe countries. A group of 15 children from a shelter in Mykolaiv Province were initially forcibly taken to Kherson Province and then Russia. The director of the shelter managed to leave with the children for Georgia. (Video reporting by [ABC News](#), February 3, 2023). Another example – in June 2022, the director of Mariupol Construction College returned two teenaged orphans, her official charges, from occupied Donetsk to Ukrainian Territory ([Reporting](#) by 5.ua, April 20, 2023). However, some children under the guardianship of the Mariupol Construction College director were taken to Russia and placed with foster families. One of them tried to return to Ukraine by reaching out to a lawyer, but was caught at the Belarusian border ([Novaya gazeta Europe](#), April 4, 2023). Maria Lvova-Belova asserts the boy was the victim of a sting by "Ukrainian agents" and was not preparing to leave ([press conference](#) at the Russian Foreign Ministry, April 4,

2023). It became possible to return this boy to Ukraine only in November 2023, and shortly before that he received a summons to the Russian military enlistment office ([Radio Liberty](#), November 19, 2023).

Despite the fact that most children from vacation camps and other children's establishments were able to reunite with their parents, the very fact of their extended stay in Russia can be considered a war crime. The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine [documented](#) the following facts: demanding that parents come for their children in person, which not everyone could do quickly due to complicated logistics, risks to safety and financial difficulties; placing responsibility for seeking parents and establishing contact with them largely on the children (which made the search for parents especially difficult for children of younger ages); disheartening children by telling them that they might be placed with special facilities or foster families, which they understood to mean permanent adoption; instances of inadequately caring for children with disabilities.

### **Changes to children's personal status: Violations of Arts. 8, 21, 28 of the UN CRC and Art. 50 of the IV Geneva Convention**

In the context of Art. 8 of the UN CRC that protects the identity of a child, including name, citizenship, family relations, and a clause of Art. 50 ("Children") of the IV Geneva Convention, the following practices are important: placing of Ukrainian children with Russian families (adoption vs. temporary fostering); granting children Russian citizenship; destroying children's identities.

### **A question of adoption / temporary fostering: Violation of Art. 21 of the UN CRC**

At the time of submission of this report, only one case of adoption of a child from Ukraine has been documented ([investigation](#) of "Important Stories", November 23, 2023). A high-ranking Russian politician Sergei Mironov, head of the "Spravedlivaya Rossia" Party and his wife adopted a girl from Kherson Regional Orphanage; her name and place of birth were changed. At the time of deportation to the Moscow region (August 2022) from occupied Kherson, the girl was 10 months old; according to an informed source, she has relatives in Ukraine. Many more cases of adoption should be assumed, although information about them is carefully hidden by the Russian authorities.

It should be noted that the practice of falsifying the personal data of children during their adoption in Russia took place long before the invasion of the Russian army in Ukraine. ADC Memorial has documented cases (2010-2019) – all of them concerned children from the Roma Hungarian-speaking community of the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine – when children taken from their families ended up in Russian children's institutions; were recorded as "foundlings", although information about their relatives was known; placed in the database of children applicable for adoption; and then they were adopted by Russian citizens. Not only the names of the children were changed, but also their dates of birth, which later caused problems in the upbringing and education of children (in particular, the evaluation of children's compliance with educational and psychological standards was carried out according to the age indicated in the falsified documents, and it was concluded that the children had retardation in their physical/mental development). ADC Memorial drew attention of the UN CRC to this problem back in 2014, in a [report](#) to the 65th session of the Committee.

Until recently, the term "adoption" (*usynovlenie*) was used in the official press by Russian officials, furthermore by those whose professional duty it was to make distinctions in the terms and categories for children's family placement, and this was widespread in the media. The possibility of adoption was considered and even promoted by Russian authorities in the first months of the war, although, according to confidential reports from employees of child welfare agencies, there was an unspoken order from Lvova-Belova that no child could be adopted until their status as an orphan and lack of relatives were made 100% certain.

After the ICC warrant was issued, Maria Lvova-Belova began to emphasize that there had never been adoption of Ukrainian children, and the form of family placement became guardianship or custody, most of all preliminary (i.e., temporary). The [bulletin](#) from the commissioner's office clarifies separately that the term "adoption" has been misused, and the type of care should be conveyed by the words "'guardianship' or, with a large degree of convention, 'foster care.'"

Along with this, Lvova-Belova has repeatedly said and written that preliminary (temporary) guardianship/custody (which by law is for six months or eight months in exceptional circumstances) should become permanent in the interests of the children (see "First Meetings Take Place of the

Headquarters for Synchronization of Legislation of Russia, the “LPR” and the “DPR” on Matters of Family Placement for Orphan Children,” on the [official Web site](#) of Lvova-Belova, April 27, 2022; or Lvova-Belova’s [Telegram channel](#) on the occasion of the first children from the “DPR” being granted Russian citizenship in Moscow Province, July 5, 2022).

From the point of view of children, especially those of a young age, the distinction between temporary and permanent guardianship, custody or adoption is non-existent. Most likely, those who told children that they would be transferred to an orphanage or adopted if their parents did not come for them have not wrestled with the distinction, either. Accounts from children who faced the risk of being transferred to a foster family or orphanage tell us that they saw these statements as threats of never seeing their families again.

There is no information that Russian temporary guardians sign an obligation not to prevent the return of children to Ukraine, to preserve their identity. Some foster parents publicly [stated](#) that they would not interfere with the free choice of the children's identity and return to Ukraine, however, they understood that it was difficult to do this with the children's assigned Russian citizenship.

In response to a journalist’s question about the returned of relocated children to the territories from which they had been evacuated upon the end of hostilities, Maria Lvova-Belova answered that the decision to return would be made by the legal guardians, and as for children from institutions, “the heads of our new republics” would decide whether they would return to the institutions. With regard to children who do not like living in Russia, she answered that “nobody is keeping anybody here,” and that the parents/legal guardians of the children had the opportunity to leave for the EU or Ukraine. For children who had been placed with families, she allowed for the possibility of independently leaving for Ukraine only once they reach the age of 18 (Lvova-Belova’s [press conference](#) at the Russian Foreign Ministry, April 4, 2023).

The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine concluded in its [report](#) that Russian authorities had deployed a massive campaign to place children with foster families to “*create a framework in which some of the children may end up remaining permanently in the Russian Federation.*”

### **Granting of Russian citizenship to children: Violation of Art.8 of the UN CRC**

Maria Lvova-Belova initially explained the need to grant Russian citizenship to children taken from Ukraine as an attempt to provide the maximum number of rights to orphan children (Maria Lvova-Belova’s [interview](#) with Rossiiskaya Gazeta for Children’s Day, June 1, 2022.)

However, Russian citizenship is not required to observe all children’s rights and provide them with access to education, medical care and services: These rights are guaranteed to all children who live on Russian territory.

Guardianship/custody can also be applied for family placement of a foreign child; there is naturally already a precedent for doing so, as well as experience with housing foreign children in children’s establishments without changing their citizenship (such as the experience of providing temporary guardianship for foreign children while their mothers are serving time in Russian penal colonies, or the keeping of foreign children in “transit” children’s institutions).

Adoption truly does require that the child have Russian citizenship. Having created the conditions for children taken from Ukraine to expeditiously obtain Russian citizenship, Russian authorities have overcome the formal barriers to adopting Ukrainian children established by both Russian federal legislation and a number of international agreements to which Russia is a party, meaning mandatory consent of the child’s lawful representative and the competent agency of state of which the child is a citizen.

In accordance with the rules of Ukrainian legislation, in time of martial law, which is currently in force in Ukraine, only Ukrainian citizens who are on the registry of candidate adoptive parents and who live on Ukrainian territory under the government’s control have the right to adopt children who are on Ukrainian territory outside the government’s control. Foreigners and Ukrainian citizens who live abroad or in territories outside the government’s control do not have such a right with the following exceptions: They are relatives of the child; an adopted brother or sister of the child is already part of the family; the adoption process began before martial law was introduced in Ukraine.

Immediately after the invasion of Ukraine, at a [meeting](#) with RF Children's Rights Commissioner Lvova-Belova on March 9, 2022, Putin promised to change the legislation according to her proposal in order to "rectify the bureaucratic delay" that was impeding family placement in Russia for orphan children from the Donbas. The result was [Order No. 330 dated May 30, 2022](#) on the simplified granting of RF citizenship to orphan children and children without parental guardianship.

On May 8, 2019, the Ukrainian government adopted [Ordinance No. 362](#) "On Ukraine's Refusal to Recognize Passport Documents Granted by the Authorized Agencies of a Foreign Government," which created an updatable list of designated RF Internal Affairs Ministry administrative centers for granting RF personal documents that Kyiv refuses to recognize as valid.

Thus, by assigning Russian citizenship to children taken from Ukraine, the authorities are pursuing a goal of keeping them in the country permanently, and these actions, combined with the anti-Ukrainian propaganda and militarist orientation prevalent in the public square and school environment, are geared toward completely cutting off the children from the Ukrainian identity, culture and language.

After the ICC warrant was issued, Lvova-Belova began to argue that granting RF citizenship to children does not deprive them of Ukrainian citizenship and provides them with advantages and additional opportunities in life. But children, especially younger ones, do not understand these fine points of law, and receiving Russian citizenship (often with pomp and propagandistic Russian media coverage) becomes a sign of their ties to Ukraine being cut off. Nobody tells them how to exercise their right to Ukrainian citizenship. There is no agreement between Ukraine and Russia for mutual recognition of citizenship (dual citizenship). Moreover, Russian law discriminates Russian citizens having residency/citizenship or residency in another country.

### **The risk of losing identity and native language: Violations of Art.28 of the UN CRC and Art. 50 of the IV Geneva Convention**

The lack of opportunities for relocated children to study the Ukrainian language or obtain education in it should be considered a violation of Art.28 (the right to education) and Art. 50 of the IV Geneva Convention, which relates to the destruction of children's identity.

Despite public assurances from Maria Lvova-Belova that children can study Ukrainian (the press conference at the Russian Foreign Ministry, April 4, 2023), such opportunities have not been created in Russia. Not all refugee children have been able to continue online education in Ukrainian schools, not least because their schools in the temporarily occupied territories have transitioned to the Russian curriculum.

For the entire year of the war, representatives of the Russian authorities have made declarative statements about the need to provide children with the right to study their native Ukrainian (this concerned schools on the occupied territories of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson Provinces and the study of Ukrainian as a native language within the general curriculum or as an elective according to the parents' wishes); In April 2023, the Russian Education Ministry even prepared a textbook on "classical Ukrainian" for grades 1-4, and a book for grades 5-9 was in development (deputy minister Aleksandr Bugayev, [reporting](#) by TASS, April 5, 2023).

These gestures, transmitted through the propagandistic Russian mediascape, touched off roiling anti-Ukrainian protests in Russia, and there is no doubt that Ukrainian children in the Russian education system will be the target of mass indoctrination while the Ukrainian language is pushed out of the classroom.



## **Question 15. Militarization of education in Russia and the risk of involving children in military conflicts**

### **Militarization of mainstream schools and expansion of specialized military education**

From September 1, 2024, compulsory classes on basic military training will return to Russian schools as part of a new subject "Basic Security and Protection of the Motherland". Earlier, the Ministry of Education reported that schools are allowed to introduce courses on basic military training for grades 5-9 and practical field classes for high school students.

In addition to the militarization of mainstream schools, there is an expansion of special paramilitary cadet education in Russia. It includes not only hundreds of military institutions of a closed type – Suvorov schools, cadet schools and corps (including private ones), specialized cadet schools (for sports, engineering, IT), but also thousands of specialized cadet and Cossack classes in ordinary schools, patronized by law enforcement agencies. Paramilitary educational institutions and classes are ruled by the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Emergency Situations, the FSB, the Investigative Committee, Rosgvardiya, or, formally being subordinated to the Ministry of Education and regional authorities, they have curators from law enforcement agencies. In some regions of Russia, special laws "On cadet education" have been adopted.

There are special closed-type elite institutions for girls: the boarding house of the Investigative Committee in St. Petersburg and two boarding houses of the Ministry of Defense, in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Girls from military families study there, from vulnerable and large families, most of them from the regions, the advantage is given to the daughters of the militaries participating in the war against Ukraine.

A huge demand for militarized education in Russian society is explained inter alia with practical bonuses: full state support (including food and uniforms), higher quality of education, engagement of children in various activities (not only paramilitary, but also intellectual and creative); privileges or guarantees for admission to university and future employment in the state service.

Militarization of the children's sphere is served by military structures, formally organized as voluntary children's and youth movements /associations. These are the "Yunarmia" (more than 1,300,000 children aged 8-18 in all regions of Russia and in the occupied territories of Ukraine), affiliated military-patriotic movements "Molodaya Guardia – Yunarmia DNR" and "Molodaya Guardia – Yunarmia LNR", an extensive network of patriotic clubs and societies. The program of military-patriotic classes includes military training, use of weapons, indoctrination of children in the spirit of state propaganda. Creation of military-patriotic units is imputed to ordinary schools as a duty, as well as participation in such events as drill competitions, parades, honor guards, etc.

All this serves for normalization of the war in the children's consciousness, the readiness of children to participate in hostilities is brought up. Graduates of cadet classes, both before and after reaching the age of 18, enter military educational institutions of the higher level; many participants in the events of the "Yunarmia" undergo military service and sign contracts with the Russian Army. As part of the regular army and other formations carrying out military aggression in Ukraine, there are young people who were prepared for war back in childhood. Thousands of them died: according to approximate [calculations](#) on the Rosstat database on excess mortality, only in 2022 at least 7,000 young men aged 20-29 years died in the war in Ukraine; sample data from the initial period of the war ([calculations](#) of "IStories", May 2022) show that at that time the average age the dead were 28 years old, and most of all men aged 21-23 years died.

The participation of children in hostilities on the side of Russia has not been documented, with the exception of a video [published](#) on October 19, 2022 by head of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, with his three sons, aged 14-16, who were allegedly in a war zone firing military weapons against the positions of Ukrainian troops. This was rather a performance and definitely a propaganda demarche. However, Kadyrov's action was not properly condemned by the Russian authorities. The media published a comment by Viktor Zavarzin, a member of the State Duma Committee on Defense, that children were categorically not subject to conscription, but Nina Ostanina, head of the State Duma Committee on Family Issues, [supported](#) Kadyrov.

## **Specific vulnerability of Ukrainian children in front of militaristic propaganda and militarization of education**

Children from the occupied territories, primarily children from large and vulnerable families, are actively attracted to paramilitary educational institutions – cadet corps have opened in the Crimea, children from Donetsk and Luhansk regions are enrolled in cadet corps and classes in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Volgograd without exams. Cadet classes were also opened in the occupied territory. Head of Investigative Committee (IC) A.Bastrykin, in an [article](#) on the official website of the IC (journal "Investigator's Notes" No. 3/2023, May-June 2023), indicates that from February 2022 to March 2023, officers of the IC relocated 323 children from Donetsk, Lugansk, Kherson and Zaporozhye regions, including 181 orphans; 78 of them (including 28 orphans) were enrolled to Russian schools, including cadet corps and academies under the IC. The [publication](#) of "Verstka" (August 2023) shows that after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the IC took "patronage" over children taken to Russia from the occupied territories of Ukraine: the IC provided institutions with humanitarian aid and gifts; head of the IC A.Bastrykin ordered cadet corps to accept schoolchildren from the "DNR" and "LNR"; by September 2022, more than 40 children from Donbass, including orphans, became cadets. The program involves the ideological re-education of children in line with the Russian "patriotism".

The [study](#) by the Yale School of Public Health discovered no fewer than 43 facilities throughout Russia, primarily summer camps, where children taken from Ukraine were kept and where they were forced to participate in patriotic education programs that were sometimes of a military bent. Journalists from [TV Rain](#) learned from RF Education Ministry correspondence with local child welfare agencies that "military-patriotic" education programs were provided in 21 of 24 children's care facilities where more than 400 orphans were housed on August 2022 after being taken from Ukraine's occupied territories.

One of these camps was the "Power of the Caucasus" in Chechnya, a project supported by Ramzan Kadyrov and Children's Ombudsman Maria Lvova-Belova. About 200 teenagers from different regions of Russia and from the occupied territories of Ukraine participated in military trainings in November 2022. This is not the only military-patriotic camp in Chechnya; there are also various military-patriotic camps and initiatives all over Russia.

Refugee children, having been traumatized by war, are vulnerable to militarist propaganda and the anti-Ukrainian, anti-Western ideology that is promoted through Russian schools. According to a Russian volunteer working with refugee children in temporary camps, some Ukrainian children deliberately went to paramilitary cadet classes, which psychologists interpret as a sublimation of trauma (Interview with ADC Memorial, March 2023).

Taking children to Russian territory, refusing to return them to Ukraine, transferring them to Russian families and indoctrinating them are deliberate and coherent actions geared toward cutting children's ties to Ukraine, erasing the children's Ukrainian past and destroying their identity.

## **Conclusion**

All children taken from Ukraine without the consent of their legal guardians (not only the parents, but in many instances the Ukrainian government) must be returned home. There should be comprehensive measures for cooperation between government agencies and representatives of civil society, volunteer groups and parents' initiatives.

Unlawfully applying Russian citizenship, adoption and placing children with citizens of the aggressor state under permanent guardianship must be ceased, recognized as unlawful and undone (if it has already taken place). All children who have found themselves unaccompanied in Russia should be helped to find their relatives in Ukraine, establish contact with them and have the opportunity to reunite with relatives. The right of children to keep their identity should be respected; they should be defended from the militarism and ideologized Russian instruction.

Ukrainian children should not be subject to discrimination; they need help and support to overcome the trauma of war and the loss of homes and loved ones. It is important to defend children from any manifestation of aggression and to create for them a safe environment and conditions for rehabilitation and growth.

It is urgently necessary to demilitarize the sphere of education and the sphere of children's leisure: to abolish military training in ordinary schools, eliminate paramilitary classes in ordinary schools and minimize the system of cadet education for children under 18, exclude the military component from extracurricular leisure activities for children.