



The Abduction, Indoctrination, and Militarization of Ukrainian Children- A Network of Camps and a Campaign of Erasure

Treadstone 71



The Russian Federation is executing a systematic campaign involving the illegal deportation, ideological indoctrination, and military training of thousands of Ukrainian children from occupied territories. The operation, utilizing an extensive network of camps, aims to erase Ukrainian identity and cultivate a generation loyal to Russia, constituting severe violations of international law with profound long-term consequences for the children and regional stability.

The primary actor is the Russian Federation, with involvement from its highest political and military echelons, including President Vladimir Putin and Children's Rights Commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova, as well as various ministries and security services. State-sponsored youth organizations, such as Yunarmia and the Movement of the First, play a key role in implementation. Belarus also facilitates these operations. Victims are Ukrainian children, particularly those orphaned or from vulnerable backgrounds. International entities, such as Hala Systems, Save Ukraine, Yale University's Humanitarian Research Lab, and various intergovernmental bodies, including the UN and OSCE, are investigating and responding. Canada has provided notable funding for monitoring efforts.

Russia is forcibly transferring Ukrainian children to Russia or Russian-controlled territories, utilizing a network reported to include at least 136 camps identified by Hala Systems and Save Ukraine and 57 facilities documented by Yale HRL. These children undergo systematic "reeducation" to impose Russian language, culture, and historical narratives while suppressing their Ukrainian heritage. Many are coerced into Russian citizenship and placed with Russian families. A significant component is militarization, with children as young as eight receiving weapons training and ideological preparation for war within programs like Yunarmia. Initial "filtration" operations often precede these transfers.

These actions represent grave breaches of international law, including war crimes, crimes against humanity, and potentially genocide, as recognized by various international bodies and legal experts. The campaign aims to systematically erase Ukrainian national identity among a generation of children, leading to long-term demographic and cultural shifts in occupied regions. The strategy also serves to create a pool of individuals indoctrinated and potentially prepared for future military service to Russia while inflicting severe psychological trauma on the affected children and undermining Ukraine's future.

This campaign is an integral and escalating part of Russia's ongoing full-scale war against Ukraine. Recent technological monitoring has revealed a more extensive network of camps than previously understood, with at least 136 locations identified, and Russia has reportedly increased funding for militaristic youth programs like Yunarmia. International efforts to document these crimes and pursue accountability are active, exemplified by ICC indictments and ongoing investigations, but face challenges such as securing sustained resources for crucial data collection initiatives. The continuous nature of these violations necessitates urgent and intensified international action to rescue children, prevent further abductions, and ensure perpetrators are held responsible.

Tens of thousands of Ukrainian children have been forcibly deported or transferred, with Ukrainian authorities verifying over 19,500 cases, though the actual number is likely much higher. Organizations like Save Ukraine, aided by technological partners such as Hala Systems, have managed to return a small number of these children. The International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants for high-level Russian officials implicated in these actions. Extensive indoctrination and militarization programs, particularly Yunarmia, are operational in occupied territories, enrolling thousands of Ukrainian children. This has resulted in profound psychological trauma and an identity crisis for the affected children, alongside widespread international condemnation and detailed reporting by human rights organizations and international bodies.

Russia will likely persist with its campaign to deport, indoctrinate, and militarize Ukrainian children as long as its occupation of Ukrainian territories continues, viewing The as a long-term strategy for demographic control and future force generation. The passage of time will compound the difficulty of locating and returning these children as assimilation processes, including name changes and adoptions, become more entrenched. Returned children will require extensive, specialized, and long-term rehabilitation to address profound trauma and the effects of indoctrination. There is a significant risk that militarized youth could be deployed by Russia in future conflicts, further destabilizing the region. Sustained international pressure, consistent funding for tracking and rescue operations, and robust, multi-faceted accountability mechanisms are crucial to counter these efforts. Without continued global attention and decisive action, there is a danger of international fatigue, which could diminish the prospects for justice and the return of all abducted children. Supporting Ukraine's capacity to reintegrate returned children and counter ongoing Russian influence operations will be critical for its long-term societal resilience. The success of advanced technological monitoring offers a viable path for ongoing evidence collection, but its efficacy depends on stable and predictable international support.

1. Executive Summary

This report details a systematic and extensive campaign orchestrated by the Russian Federation involving the illegal deportation, forcible transfer, indoctrination, and militarization of Ukrainian children from occupied territories. Evidence suggests the existence of a widespread network of facilities, including 136 camps identified through technological monitoring by organizations such as Hala Systems and Save Ukraine, which are partly funded by international partners, including Canada.¹ These operations are not isolated incidents but appear to be part of a centrally coordinated, multi-faceted state-level strategy aimed at the demographic and cultural alteration of occupied Ukrainian territories by targeting its youngest generation. The involvement of high-level Russian officials, including President Vladimir Putin and Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova (both indicted by the International Criminal Court), the establishment of legal frameworks to facilitate these actions, and the systematic nature of "reeducation" programs underscore a deliberate approach.

Ukrainian children, some as young as eight, are reportedly subjected to curricula designed to erase their national identity, supplanting it with Russian narratives and patriotic ideology.⁵ A significant component of The campaign involves military-style training within programs such as the 'Youth Army' (Yunarmia), where children are allegedly taught to handle weapons and prepared for potential future conflict.⁷ These actions constitute grave breaches of international law, including war crimes and crimes against humanity, with many international bodies and legal experts also raising concerns about elements aligning with the crime of genocide.³ The report synthesizes available evidence from various sources, including investigative reports, governmental bodies, non-governmental organizations, and international legal analyses, to provide a comprehensive overview of these alleged atrocities and calls for urgent, coordinated international action to ensure the protection and return of these children and to hold perpetrators accountable.

2. The Systematic Deportation and Network of Camps for Ukrainian Children

The forced displacement of Ukrainian children by Russian forces since the full-scale invasion in February 2022 has been characterized by its systematic nature and alarming scale. The section

examines the scope of these deportations, the networks of facilities used to house and process these children, and the methods employed in their removal.

2.1. Documented Scope of Deportations- Numbers, Demographics, and Targeting

The number of Ukrainian children forcibly deported or transferred to Russian-controlled territories or Russia itself is substantial, though precise figures vary across reporting entities. Ukrainian government sources indicate that over 19,500 children have been illegally taken ³, with 19,456 cases verified by March 2025.⁵ Other estimates suggest the figure could be much higher, with concerns raised during a funding lapse for the Yale Conflict Observatory that data on some 30,000 minors might be lost.³ The Yale Humanitarian Research Lab (HRL) itself has identified over 8,400 children systematically relocated ⁴, while also noting that the true figure could be closer to 35,000.⁵ The considerable variation in reported numbers is not merely a reflection of the inherent difficulties in tracking individuals during wartime; it also points towards a probable deliberate effort by Russian authorities to obscure the true extent of these operations, particularly given Russia's documented refusal to provide lists of these children as mandated by international law.⁴ The consistent reporting of large numbers from diverse non-Russian sources, however, strongly suggests a massive, centrally directed operation.

The deportations have disproportionately targeted vulnerable groups. Reports consistently indicate that orphans, children deprived of parental care, children with disabilities, those from low-income families, and children whose parents are serving in the Ukrainian military are specifically singled out.⁴ The strategic targeting of children who are less likely to be immediately traced or advocated for facilitates their assimilation into Russian systems and diminishes the likelihood of their swift return. Such a focus aligns with a broader objective of long-term demographic manipulation and Russification, as these children can be more easily integrated and their Ukrainian identities suppressed.

The methods of removal often involve deception and coercion. Children are frequently taken under the guise of "humanitarian evacuations," participation in "recreational summer camps," offers of "medical evaluation," or for "adoption."⁵ Parents in occupied territories report being pressured or misled into sending their children to these facilities, sometimes with false promises about the duration of stay or reunification procedures.¹⁰ In some instances, consent has been reportedly violated, with children taken despite parental refusal.⁹

2.2. The "136 Camps" Network- Findings by Hala Systems and Save Ukraine

A significant development in understanding the infrastructure behind these deportations is the reported identification of a network of 136 camps by Hala Systems, a Lisbon-based technology company, in collaboration with the Ukrainian non-governmental organization (NGO) Save Ukraine. These facilities, allegedly holding as many as 20,000 Ukrainian children, were identified using a combination of satellite imagery, mobile phone data, and open-source intelligence (OSINT).¹ The geographical distribution of The network is vast, reportedly stretching from occupied territories in southern and eastern Ukraine to locations as distant as Novosibirsk in Siberia, over 3,300 kilometers from the Ukrainian border.²

This specific tracking initiative has been supported by a \$2 million grant from Global Affairs Canada to Hala Systems, aimed at assisting Save Ukraine in its efforts to rescue abducted children and gather evidence.² The funding explicitly supports "Leveraging Advanced Technologies to Address Crimes Committed Against Children in Ukraine" and is intended to facilitate the identification, contact, and return of children, as well as support investigations and prosecutions.¹⁴ The direct Canadian financial involvement in the technological monitoring of these specific crimes represents a proactive stance by a G7 nation in evidence-gathering for international accountability. Such targeted funding moves beyond general humanitarian aid to directly empower the uncovering of war crimes, highlighting a model for how international partnerships can contribute to piercing the veil of state-sponsored atrocities.

The public emergence of the "136 camps" figure was notable through a Globe and Mail article titled "The children's gulag," published on May 29, 2025, as referenced by other outlets like the Kyiv Post and UNITED24 Media.¹ While direct access to the primary Globe and Mail article has proven difficult in some contexts¹⁵, these secondary reports provide key details. If verified, the identification of 136 distinct facilities would represent a substantially more extensive network than previously detailed by other public sources, such as Yale HRL's identification of 57 facilities. The larger number could indicate a broader scope of locations, potentially including temporary holding points or smaller, less formal centers in addition to established "reeducation" camps. The collaboration with Save Ukraine, an NGO directly involved in rescue operations, may also provide access to different data streams and ground-truth information, contributing to a more comprehensive mapping of the system.

2.3. Other Identified Reeducation and Detention Facilities

Beyond the network reported by Hala Systems and Save Ukraine, other research initiatives have also identified numerous facilities involved in the deportation and indoctrination of Ukrainian children. Yale University's Humanitarian Research Lab (HRL), through its Conflict Observatory program, has identified at least 57 facilities—43 located in Russia and Russian-occupied Ukrainian territory, and 13 in Belarus—where over 8,400 children have been systematically relocated.⁴ At least 32 of the 43 camps situated in Russia or Russian-occupied areas are explicitly designated as "reeducation" facilities.⁵ These camps are geographically dispersed across eight time zones, from occupied Crimea to Magadan in Russia's Far East.¹¹

Specific camp names and locations that have emerged from various reports include the historic Artek camp in Crimea⁹, a repurposed health spa in Yevpatoria, Crimea⁶, the "Zvezdny" children's camp near Krupevitsy in Pskov Oblast, the "Orlyonok," "Medvedzhenok," and "Smena" children's camps in Krasnodar Krai, the "Antares Center" in Nalchik, Kabardino-Balkaria Republic, the "Lan" and "Gornyi" children's camps in the Adygea Republic, and the "Alyye Parusa" children's camp in occupied Crimea.¹⁸ Testimonies from children also mention camps named "Mriya," "Druzhba," and "Promenystyi" in Crimea.¹²

Russian occupation authorities have openly discussed plans for these facilities. For instance, the Kherson Oblast occupation Ministry of Education reported that 4,086 children from occupied Kherson Oblast were scheduled to attend 77 "summer camps" and organizations throughout occupied Ukraine and Russia in the summer of 2025.¹⁸ Furthermore, Russia's First Deputy Minister

of Education announced plans for approximately 53,000 Ukrainian children from occupied territories to be sent to such summer camps.¹¹ The consistent use of terms like "summer camps," "recreational camps," or "rehabilitation" by Russian officials for these facilities appears to be a deliberate euphemism. The benign language aims to normalize these operations internationally and to either coerce or reassure parents while masking the true intent of cultural erasure and militarization that often occurs within them, as evidenced by curricula and testimonies.⁶

The identification by Yale HRL of 13 facilities in Belarus ⁴ is particularly noteworthy, as it shows Belarus's role as a key partner and enabler in Russia's deportation and indoctrination scheme. This expands the geographical scope of the alleged crimes and implicates another state actor, making Belarus complicit in the forcible transfer and potential reeducation of Ukrainian children, aligning its actions with Russia's war aims and violations of international law.

2.4. Filtration Operations and Their Role in Child Displacement

"Filtration" operations conducted by Russian forces in occupied territories serve as a critical, often initial, stage in the displacement and processing of Ukrainian civilians, including children. These operations involve systematic interrogation detention and often lead to forcible deportation.²¹ During filtration, individuals are frequently subjected to strip searches for "nationalistic" tattoos, photographed, and have their fingerprints taken. Passports are confiscated, and mobile phones are searched, with Russian forces sometimes downloading contact lists and other personal data.²¹ The United States has indicated that Russia's Presidential Administration oversees and coordinates these filtration operations, employing advanced technology for data collection.²¹

Reports suggest that hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian citizens, including unaccompanied children, have been forcibly deported to Russia through The process.²¹ For children, filtration is often a precursor to further indoctrination and identity erasure. The confiscation of documents and separation from families, particularly for those who become unaccompanied or are deemed "orphans" (often after their parents are detained, killed, or their whereabouts become unknown), creates a highly vulnerable population. These children are then more easily subjected to subsequent "reeducation" programs and illegal adoption procedures.²¹ Once transferred to Russia, children reportedly undergo what Russian authorities term psychological "rehabilitation." They are forced to participate in unspecified "educational projects".²¹ Many of these children are left without identity documents or information about the location of their parents, further complicating any efforts to trace and return them.²¹

Table 1- Comparative Overview of Reported Camp Networks and Deportation Statistics

Source/Reporting Entity	Number of Camps/Facilities Identified	Estimated Number of Children Affected/Deported	Key Geographic Areas	Primary Purpose of Camps (as reported)
Hala Systems / Save Ukraine	136	Up to 20,000	Russia, Occupied Ukraine (incl. Siberia)	Indoctrination, Military Training (Yunarmia bases) ¹
Yale HRL / Conflict Observatory	At least 57 (43 RU/Occ.UA, 13 BY)	Over 8,400 were identified (estimates up to 35,000)	Russia, Occupied Ukraine, Belarus	Reeducation, Adoption Preparation, Military-Patriotic Training ⁴
Ukrainian Government Estimates	Not specified	Over 19,500	Russia, Occupied Ukraine	Forcible Deportation, Reeducation ³
Russian Occupation Authorities	77 (Kherson plan); broader plans	4,086 (Kherson plan); ~53,000 (overall plan)	Russia, Occupied Ukraine	"Summer Camps," "Recreation," "Rest," "Educational Programs" ¹¹
US State Department (Filtration)	Multiple "filtration camps."	"Hundreds of thousands" (incl. adults & children)	Russia-controlled areas of Ukraine, Russia	Interrogation, Detention, Forced Deportation, Psychological "Rehabilitation" for children ²¹

3. Indoctrination and Militarization- The Erasure of Identity and Preparation for War

The facilities holding deported Ukrainian children are not mere shelters; they are integral components of a systematic effort to erase Ukrainian national identity and, in many cases, to prepare children for future service to the Russian state. The section details the methods of indoctrination, the role of military training programs like Yunarmia, and the conditions reported by those who have endured these camps.

3.1. Systematic Reeducation and Russification Efforts

A core objective of the Russian program is the comprehensive "reeducation" and Russification of Ukrainian children. The curriculum imposed in these camps and in schools in occupied territories

focuses on Russian language, culture, and a version of history that is heavily distorted to legitimize Russia's invasion and portray Ukraine as a hostile, illegitimate, or "neo-Nazi" state.⁶ Ukrainian history and language are systematically suppressed; textbooks are rewritten or replaced, mentions of Ukraine as a sovereign nation are removed, and children are often prohibited from speaking Ukrainian.¹¹ The process is designed to instill a pro-Russian worldview and patriotic ideology.⁵

A critical aspect of Russification is the forced acquisition of Russian citizenship and the denial or erasure of Ukrainian citizenship.⁵ This is often accompanied by changes to children's personal information, including names and birthplaces, which significantly hinders their identification and potential return to Ukraine.⁴ Furthermore, there is a concerted effort to place Ukrainian children, particularly those deemed "orphans" or separated from their parents, into Russian foster care or for adoption by Russian families.⁵ High-ranking Russian officials, including Presidential Commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova, have publicly acknowledged and even participated in these adoptions.⁵ The fast-tracked adoption system is not merely a humanitarian facade but a calculated method to make the deportation and assimilation of Ukrainian children permanent and irreversible, creating formidable legal and practical barriers to their repatriation.

The cumulative effect of these actions—the linguistic and cultural suppression, historical revisionism, forced citizenship, and absorption into Russian families—is described by observers and victims as a profound assault on identity. Some Ukrainian officials and human rights advocates have characterized these practices as a form of "cultural genocide" ⁶ or akin to "death camps for Ukrainian identity".⁵ These efforts represent a deliberate, long-term strategy to eradicate Ukrainian cultural and national identity among the youth in occupied territories, aiming to cultivate a generation that identifies as Russian and is loyal to the Russian state. The application of these methods to very young children, some as young as four months old ⁴, shows the intent to alter the demographic and cultural landscape permanently.

3.2. The 'Youth Army' (Yunarmia) and Military Training

Central to the militarization of Ukrainian children is the "Youth Army" (Yunarmia), a Russian state-sponsored patriotic youth organization established in 2016 at the initiative of then-Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu.⁷ While its stated aims include fostering spiritual, moral, and intellectual development, its activities, particularly in occupied Ukrainian territories, are heavily focused on military training, instilling loyalty to the Kremlin, and preparing youth for service in the Russian Armed Forces.⁷

Yunarmia actively recruits Ukrainian children in occupied areas, with reports indicating that children as young as eight years old are drawn into its ranks.¹ Recruitment methods are often coercive or described as "voluntary-compulsory."⁸ Significant numbers of Ukrainian children are reportedly involved- occupation authorities claim over 5,500 in occupied Donetsk Oblast and over 6,000 in occupied Luhansk Oblast.¹⁸ Ukraine's National Resistance Center reports that over 5,500 children in 17 occupied communities are involved in Yunarmia cells where they are "taught not to think for themselves, but to obey orders and prepare for war."⁸ The Centre for Civic Education Almenda estimates that more than 35,000 Ukrainian children are participating in Yunarmia.²⁴

The curriculum within Yunarmia facilities and affiliated camps is overtly militaristic. It includes basic

military training, handling of firearms (including assault rifles), instruction in mine clearance, military tactics, drone operation, map reading, drill exercises, and tactical first aid.² The practical training is interwoven with intense ideological indoctrination, featuring anti-Ukrainian propaganda, lessons on loyalty to Russia, and the veneration of Russian soldiers involved in the "Special Military Operation."²⁰ At least six of the 136 facilities identified by Hala Systems and Save Ukraine are reportedly Yunarmia bases.² Testimonies and investigations suggest a rigorous daily routine at these bases, often starting at 6 a.m., followed by military training and mock combat drills. Satellite imagery has even reportedly shown trenches dug at a Yunarmia base in occupied Melitopol.² Other entities like the "School for Future Commanders" and the "Voin" military-patriotic training center network are also implicated in providing such training to Ukrainian children.⁹

The Russian state has significantly increased its financial commitment to Yunarmia. In 2025, the organization was set to receive 1 billion rubles (approximately \$11 million to USD 12.3 million), its largest budget since the 2022 full-scale invasion.² The surge in funding, coupled with the intensified activities in occupied territories and an explicit curriculum geared towards military skills and ideological preparation for war against Ukraine, strongly indicates a strategy to cultivate a future generation of combatants from within the occupied population itself. The aim, as some critics have starkly put it, is to create "cannon fodder for the empire"⁸ and prepare these children for eventual conscription into the Russian army.² The represents a long-term force generation strategy. The integration of such military training into the daily lives and "education" of children, starting at a very young age, serves to normalize violence and military service, fundamentally eroding childhood and predisposing them to participation in armed conflict.

3.3. Testimonies and Reported Conditions

Accounts from children who have been held in these camps paint a grim picture of their experiences. Many describe being forcibly taken from their homes or communities, often separated from their families with little or no information about their fate.⁶ Living conditions are frequently reported as inhumane, with inadequate access to food, proper care, and medical attention.⁴

Beyond physical deprivation, psychological abuse is a pervasive theme in these testimonies. Children recount being subjected to mockery and humiliation based on their Ukrainian nationality.¹² They report being lied to about their parents having abandoned them or that Ukraine no longer wants them, tactics clearly designed to break their emotional resilience.¹² Constant monitoring by camp staff is common, and expressing pro-Ukrainian sentiments or speaking the Ukrainian language often results in punishment, including being locked in basements or isolation cells.¹² Communication with families in Ukraine is frequently denied or severely restricted.⁴ Children are also forced to participate in Russian patriotic rituals, such as singing the Russian national anthem and learning Russian patriotic songs, and in some cases, subjected to forced labor.⁶

This combination of physical hardship, systematic psychological abuse (including the deliberate dissemination of false information about their families), and enforced isolation from their Ukrainian identity and contacts appears to be a calculated strategy. It is designed to break the children's will, create a profound sense of dependence on their captors, and induce trauma, thereby rendering them more susceptible to indoctrination efforts. Such patterns of abuse are recognized tactics for

controlling and remolding individuals, particularly vulnerable children, by systematically dismantling their existing support structures and sense of self.

Table 2- Profile of 'Youth Army' (Yunarmia) Operations Involving Ukrainian Children



Aspect	Details
Stated Mission vs. Observed Activities	Stated- Patriotic education, moral development. Observed in Ukraine- Intense militarization, anti-Ukrainian indoctrination, preparation for war against Ukraine. ⁷
Recruitment Age & Methods in Occupied Ukraine	As young as 8 years old. Coercive or "voluntary-compulsory" methods. Parents pressured. ¹
Key Military Training Components	Firearms handling (incl. assault rifles), mine clearance, military tactics, drone operation, map use, drill, tactical first aid, mock combat. ²
Key Ideological Indoctrination Themes	Loyalty to Russia, Russian patriotism, justification of "Special Military Operation," denigration of Ukrainian statehood and identity, honoring Russian military "heroes". ²⁰
Reported Number of Ukrainian Children Involved	Over 5,500 (Donetsk) and over 6,000 (Luhansk) by occupation authorities. ¹⁸ Over 5,500 in 17 communities (NRC). ⁸ Over 35,000 (Almenda estimate). ²⁴ At least 6 Yunarmia bases among 136 camps (Hala/SaveUA). ²
Geographic Areas of Operation in Ukraine	Occupied Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, Zaporizhzhia regions, Crimea. Specific bases e.g., Melitopol. ²
Affiliated Russian State Entities	Russian Ministry of Defense (founder), Ministry of Education, Ministry of Culture (supervision). ⁷ Close ties to occupation administrations.
Documented Funding Increases	The 2025 budget has been doubled to 1 billion rubles (~\$11-12.3M USD), the largest since the full-scale invasion. ²
International Sanctions Status	Sanctioned by Ukraine, EU, Canada. ⁷

4. Actors and Enablers

The systematic deportation, indoctrination, and militarization of Ukrainian children is not the work of isolated individuals or rogue groups. Evidence suggests a complex web of state actors and affiliated

organizations operating under clear direction from the highest levels of the Russian government.

4.1. Russian State Involvement

The campaign against Ukrainian children appears to be orchestrated and implemented through a whole-of-government approach within the Russian Federation. At the apex of the structure are high-level officials. Russian President Vladimir Putin has been personally implicated, notably by signing decrees that simplify the process for Ukrainian children, particularly those "left without parental care," to acquire Russian citizenship, effectively legalizing their deportation and forced assimilation.⁵ He also personally directed Maria Lvova-Belova, the Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights, to identify and streamline bureaucratic barriers, not for child protection, but to fast-track the placement of Ukrainian children into Russian families.¹¹ Both Putin and Lvova-Belova have been indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for their alleged roles in the unlawful deportation and transfer of children.³

Multiple Russian governmental bodies are involved. The Ministry of Defense played a crucial role in establishing Yunarmia and continues to oversee its military aspects.⁷ The Ministry of Education provides financial support for the camps and is responsible for imposing the Russian curriculum and propagandistic historical narratives in occupied territories.⁵ US sources report the Presidential Administration to be overseeing and coordinating the "filtration" operations that often precede deportation.²¹ Russian security services, such as the Federal Security Service (FSB) and criminal investigative agencies, are also implicated in systematically targeting children for removal.⁴

This top-down direction is executed through a network of federal and regional officials across Russia, in occupied Ukrainian territories, and even in Belarus.⁴ Occupation authorities in the self-proclaimed "Donetsk People's Republic" (DNR) and "Luhansk People's Republic" (LNR), as well as in occupied parts of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia oblasts, are actively participating in the deportation process and facilitating the recruitment of children into Yunarmia and other indoctrination programs.¹⁸ The extensive involvement across various branches and levels of government, including the enactment of specific legal measures and direct presidential directives, is indicative of a deeply embedded state policy rather than the actions of disparate elements.

4.2. Organizations Facilitating Indoctrination and Training

Beyond direct state agencies, a range of organizations are instrumental in carrying out the indoctrination and military training of Ukrainian children. The most prominent among these is the 'Youth Army' (Yunarmia), which serves as the primary vehicle for military-patriotic education and hands-on military training (detailed extensively in Section 3.2). Yunarmia is led by individuals like Vladislav Golovin, a decorated military officer honored as a "Hero of Russia," which highlights its close ties to the military establishment.⁷

Another significant entity is the "Movement of the First," a state-run youth organization established by federal law in 2022, whose supervisory board is personally headed by Vladimir Putin.²⁴ The organization aims to shape children's views around Russian "spiritual and moral values" and foster "love and respect for Russia." Reports indicate that over 56,000 Ukrainian children from occupied territories are already involved in its activities.²⁴

The "Voin" military-patriotic training center network also plays a role, reportedly taking "patronage" over orphanages in occupied Donetsk Oblast and providing children with training in drone operation, tactical medicine, and basic military affairs, often conducted by Russian combat veterans.²⁷

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is also mentioned as consolidating its control in occupied Ukraine²⁷. While its direct role in camp operations is less detailed in the provided material, religious institutions can often be leveraged to promote ideological narratives and reinforce state propaganda.

Finally, the various "summer camps," "reeducation centers," and "health spas" (some of which are repurposed civilian facilities⁶) serve as the physical locations for these activities. These are often run by local occupation administrations or directly by entities dispatched from Russia.

The existence and coordinated efforts of these diverse youth movements and training centers (Yunarmia, Movement of the First, Voin centers) suggest a multi-pronged approach by the Russian state. The strategy aims to cast a wide net, ensuring maximum reach for indoctrinating and militarizing Ukrainian children by reinforcing state narratives and military preparedness through various channels and organizational structures.

5. Tracking, Evidence, and International Response

The efforts to uncover the scale and nature of Ukrainian child deportations, alongside the international community's reaction, involve complex monitoring initiatives, significant funding commitments, and evolving legal and diplomatic responses.

5.1. Monitoring and Documentation Efforts

Several non-state actors, often leveraging advanced technology, have been crucial in documenting the forced transfer and indoctrination of Ukrainian children.

Hala Systems, a Lisbon-based technology company, has reportedly used satellite imagery, mobile phone data, and open-source intelligence (OSINT) to identify the network of 136 camp locations. The company's Sentry system, initially developed for early warning in conflict zones such as Syria, demonstrates capabilities in multi-source data collection, fusion, and analysis.²⁹ Significantly, Hala Systems has also submitted a war crime dossier featuring cryptographically secured evidence to the International Criminal Court (ICC), showcasing its commitment to accountability.³⁰ Their findings concerning Ukrainian children are shared with Ukrainian prosecutors, police, and the ICC.²

Save Ukraine, a Ukrainian NGO, is directly involved in rescuing abducted children and operates "Hope and Healing Centers" to provide comprehensive support to returned children and their families.⁶ The organization collaborates closely with Hala Systems in identifying and tracking efforts.¹ Save Ukraine gathers data from affected families, Ukrainian authorities and through its hotline. It also meticulously documents cases as war crimes for submission to the ICC and other legal bodies.³¹ Furthermore, Save Ukraine has reportedly exchanged data with Yale HRL, contributing to a broader understanding of the situation.³²

Yale University's Humanitarian Research Lab (HRL), primarily through its Conflict Observatory program (which was initially US government-funded), has played a vital role in tracking thousands of deported children. Their methodology involves analyzing satellite imagery, utilizing demographic

data, and conducting Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) research.³ Yale HRL has produced extensive reports detailing Russia's systematic program of deportation, "reeducation," and coerced adoption of Ukrainian children.⁴ However, The initiative has faced funding challenges, including a temporary cut by the Trump administration, which raised serious concerns about the potential loss of irreplaceable data critical for accountability efforts.³ Although funding was briefly restored to allow for data transfer, the episode highlighted the vulnerability of such essential evidence-gathering projects to political and budgetary shifts, underscoring the need for sustainable and diversified funding mechanisms.

The work of these NGOs and academic institutions demonstrates the indispensable role of non-state actors in situations where state perpetrators actively conceal information. Their innovative use of technology and on-the-ground networks often fills crucial gaps left by traditional intergovernmental mechanisms in uncovering and documenting state-sponsored atrocities.

5.2. International Funding and Support

Targeted international funding has been a catalyst for some of these monitoring and documentation efforts. Canada has been notably proactive, providing a \$2 million grant through Global Affairs Canada's Peace and Stabilization Operations Program (PSOPs) to Hala Systems.² The funding is specifically aimed at "Leveraging Advanced Technologies to Address Crimes Committed Against Children in Ukraine." It supports Hala Systems' work with Save Ukraine to collect and preserve information that can facilitate the identification, contact, and return of Ukrainian children and ultimately support the investigation and prosecution of those responsible for crimes involving these children.¹⁴ The type of specific, targeted funding enables specialized organizations to apply their unique capabilities directly to the problem, resulting in concrete outcomes such as the identification of 136 alleged camp locations.

The United States initially provided funding for the Ukraine Conflict Observatory at Yale's Human Rights Lab, which played a crucial role in the early tracking efforts. As mentioned, the funding experienced interruptions, which, although partially resolved for data transfer purposes, underscored the precarious nature of such support.³

5.3. Legal Ramifications- Violations of International Law

The actions documented in relation to the deportation, indoctrination, and militarization of Ukrainian children constitute multiple grave breaches of international law. War Crimes- The forcible transfer and deportation of civilians, particularly children, from occupied territory is a war crime under the Rome Statute of the ICC and the Geneva Conventions.³ Other associated actions, such as unlawful confinement, torture, denial of national identity, indoctrination aimed at compelling service in hostile forces, and the recruitment of children into armed forces or groups, also fall under The category.⁴ Crimes Against Humanity- When committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, acts such as deportation or forcible transfer of population, imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty, torture, enforced disappearance, and persecution against an identifiable group (in The case, Ukrainian children or Ukrainians more broadly) can constitute crimes against humanity.⁴

Potential Genocide- A particularly grave concern raised by numerous legal experts, international bodies, and affected parties is that some of these actions may align with elements of the crime of genocide as defined in Article II of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.³ Specifically, the forcible transfer of children from one group to another group, coupled with systematic efforts to erase their national and cultural identity (through language suppression, indoctrination in a foreign culture and ideology, forced citizenship changes, and adoption into families of the other group) with the apparent intent to destroy the Ukrainian group, in whole or in part, is central to The concern. The systematic attempt to eliminate Ukrainian identity in a generation of children and integrate them into the Russian nation points towards such an intent.

Additionally, these actions flagrantly violate multiple provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), including the child's right to an identity, nationality, family relations, and protection from illicit transfer. The Geneva Conventions, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, are also repeatedly breached, especially concerning the obligations of an occupying power towards the civilian population, the protection of children, the maintenance of their identity and education in their culture, and the facilitation of family reunification.⁹

5.4. Actions by International Bodies

The international community has responded to these alleged atrocities through various mechanisms, though the effectiveness of these responses in halting the abuses and ensuring accountability remains a significant challenge. The International Criminal Court (ICC) has taken a prominent step by issuing arrest warrants for Russian President Vladimir Putin and Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova for the alleged war crime of unlawful deportation and transfer of children from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation.³ Hala Systems has also directly submitted a war crime dossier to the ICC.³⁰ The United Nations has been actively involved through several of its bodies. The UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR) has released reports detailing widespread human rights violations, explicitly identifying the transfer of children as potentially constituting war crimes.¹⁹ The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, mandated by the UN Human Rights Council, is investigating and documenting violations, including the forced transfer of children, and has found that Russian authorities have committed torture as a crime against humanity.⁹

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), through its Moscow Mechanism, has produced reports concluding that the transfers of Ukrainian children constitute serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law and may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.³⁴ An OSCE Special Rapporteur is currently preparing a dedicated report on the forced relocation of Ukrainian children.³⁴

Prominent NGOs like Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Amnesty International have conducted their investigations, documenting forcible transfers, indoctrination, military training, and other severe abuses against Ukrainian children and civilians.²³

Regional bodies have also taken stances. The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) has gone as far as recognizing the forcible transfer of Ukrainian children to Russia as genocide ³⁶ and has

organized conferences to coordinate European action on The issue.³⁹

Several national governments have also taken action. The United States government made an atrocity determination regarding Russia's actions in Ukraine, which includes these crimes against children.⁴ Canada, as detailed, has provided specific funding for monitoring and evidence collection and has imposed sanctions.² The United Kingdom has also been active, with parliamentary reports such as "Returning the Stolen Children of Ukraine" highlighting the scale of the crisis.¹¹

Despite The broad international condemnation and extensive documentation, the actual enforcement of accountability and, crucially, the large-scale, systematic return of deported children remain formidable challenges. Russia continues its actions with apparent impunity, and the return of children is often slow, piecemeal, and reliant on the difficult efforts of NGOs and individual families.³ The highlights a significant gap between the legal recognition of these crimes and the practical remedies available, particularly when dealing with a powerful, non-cooperative state actor that holds a permanent seat on the UN Security Council.

Table 3- Summary of Alleged Violations of International Law

International Legal Instrument	Specific Articles/Provisions Violated (Examples)	Nature of Alleged Violation by Russia	Key Evidentiary Snippets
Geneva Convention IV (1949)	Arts. 49, 50, 24	Unlawful deportation/transfer of civilians (children) from occupied territory; Failure to protect children's identity education and facilitate family reunification.	⁹
Rome Statute of the ICC	Art. 8(2)(a)(vii), 8(2)(b)(viii) (War Crimes); Art. 7(1)(d), 7(1)(g), 7(1)(h), 7(1)(i) (Crimes Against Humanity)	Deportation or transfer of population; Persecution against an identifiable group; Torture; Enforced disappearance; Inhumane acts.	³
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child	Arts. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 20, 28, 29, 38	Right to name, nationality, and	⁹

(1989)		identity; Separation from parents against their will; Family reunification; Protection from illicit transfer; Education consistent with child's culture; Protection in armed conflict.	
UN Genocide Convention (1948)	Art. II(e)	Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group (with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group).	3
Customary International Law	Prohibition of forcible transfer; Protection of children in armed conflict; Prohibition of outrages upon personal dignity.	Widespread and systematic nature of actions against Ukrainian children.	25

6. Conclusion and Strategic Recommendations

The evidence synthesized in The report points overwhelmingly to a deeply institutionalized, systematic, and ongoing campaign by the Russian Federation involving the illegal deportation, forcible transfer, ideological indoctrination, and militarization of Ukrainian children from occupied territories. The campaign, characterized by the establishment of an extensive network of facilities—including the 136 camps reportedly identified by Hala Systems and Save Ukraine—and the pervasive activities of state-sponsored youth programs like Yunarmia, is orchestrated from the highest levels of the Russian state. These actions constitute multiple flagrant violations of international humanitarian law, international human rights law, and international criminal law, including war crimes, crimes against humanity, and actions that bear the hallmarks of genocide. The profound injustice inflicted upon thousands of Ukrainian children demands an urgent, robust, and coordinated international response.

6.1. Recapitulation of Systematic Crimes

The scale of deportations is vast, affecting tens of thousands of children, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups. The network of camps and facilities is geographically widespread, extending deep into Russian territory and involving allied states like Belarus. Within these facilities, children are subjected to a coercive "reeducation" process designed to strip them of their Ukrainian identity and

instill loyalty to Russia, including linguistic and cultural suppression, historical revisionism, and, in many cases, forced changes to citizenship and adoption into Russian families. Concurrently, programs like Yunarmia are actively militarizing Ukrainian children, some as young as eight, through weapons training and ideological preparation for potential future conflict, effectively grooming them to serve the interests of the occupying power.

6.2. Call for Urgent, Coordinated International Action

The international community must move beyond condemnation to implement concrete measures-

- **Prioritize Child Return and Family Reunification-** All efforts must be intensified to secure the immediate identification, location, and safe return of every deported and forcibly transferred Ukrainian child, requiring sustained diplomatic pressure on the Russian Federation and Belarus, full support for organizations like Save Ukraine that are conducting rescue missions, and demands for unhindered access for international human rights monitors and child protection agencies to all facilities where Ukrainian children may be held.
- **Enhance Monitoring, Documentation, and Evidence Preservation-** Learning from the challenges faced by initiatives like the Conflict Observatory, there is a critical need for increased, diversified, and sustainable funding for independent monitoring, documentation, and evidence preservation, including supporting technological solutions for data collection and analysis, as demonstrated by Hala Systems, and ensuring that all evidence is securely archived for future accountability processes.
- **Establish a Unified International Tracking System-** As called for by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly ³⁴, a robust, internationally coordinated tracking system for unaccompanied or separated minors and child refugees from Ukraine should be established. The system is vital in preventing children from being lost in administrative or legal ambiguity and in facilitating their eventual reunification or appropriate care.

6.3. Pathways for Ensuring Accountability

Holding perpetrators accountable is paramount for justice and deterrence-

- **Full Support for ICC and Other Judicial Mechanisms-** The international community must provide unwavering political, financial, and logistical support to the International Criminal Court's investigations and prosecutions, including concerted efforts to ensure the execution of outstanding arrest warrants. Furthermore, the exploration and support of additional international and national justice mechanisms, such as the potential establishment of an ad hoc tribunal for the crime of aggression and the application of universal jurisdiction by national courts, should be pursued vigorously.
- **Comprehensive Targeted Sanctions-** Sanctions should be expanded and rigorously enforced against all individuals and entities involved in the planning, execution, and facilitation of the deportation, indoctrination, and militarization programs, such as high-level officials and regional administrators, camp personnel, Yunarmia leadership, and operatives, and any institutions complicit in these crimes.
- **Support for Ukrainian National Justice Processes-** Ukraine's domestic justice system requires ongoing technical and financial assistance to effectively investigate and prosecute the vast number of war crimes and other international crimes committed on its territory, including those

against children.

6.4. Measures for Rehabilitation and Prevention

The long-term consequences for the affected children and regional stability necessitate proactive measures-

- **Comprehensive Rehabilitation Programs-** The return of children is only the beginning of their recovery. Extensive, specialized, and culturally sensitive long-term programs for psychological, social, educational, and medical rehabilitation are essential.¹⁴ These programs must be tailored to address the specific traumas of abduction, separation, indoctrination, exposure to violence, and militarization. International partners should provide substantial and sustained funding for such initiatives, drawing on best practices in child trauma recovery and de-radicalization where appropriate. The challenge of undoing systematic indoctrination and healing the deep psychological wounds will be immense.
- **Strengthen International Child Protection Frameworks -** The crisis highlights the need to strengthen existing international legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms dedicated to protecting children in armed conflict. Particular focus should be given to preventing identity-based attacks, forced assimilation, and the exploitation of children for military or political purposes.
- **Sustained Public Awareness and Counter-Disinformation-** Continuous international public awareness campaigns are needed to keep the plight of Ukraine's deported children on the global agenda and to counter Russian disinformation narratives that seek to legitimize or deny these atrocities.

The systematic campaign against Ukrainian children is an attack on the future of Ukraine and a grave affront to universal human values. Only a united, comprehensive, and unwavering international response—combining diplomatic resolve, robust legal action, sustained support for on-the-ground humanitarian and investigative efforts, and a long-term commitment to healing and justice—can begin to address the profound injustice inflicted upon these children and hold the architects and enablers of The campaign accountable. The imperative is not to return the stolen children but to restore their stolen childhoods and ensure that such crimes are never repeated.

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