



Mission  
Of The President Of Ukraine  
In The Autonomous Republic Of Crimea



CRIMEA  
PLATFORM

# Forcible deportation of Ukrainian children to/via occupied Crimea





As it is widely known, the International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants for the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, and the Russian Children's Ombudsman, Maria Lvova-Belova. Both are implicated in the forcible deportation of Ukrainian children and accused of unlawfully transferring them from Ukraine's occupied territories to the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus. **Notably, this practice by the Russian Federation can be traced back to the occupation of Crimea in 2014.** The basis for this policy is the forceful passportization of Ukrainian citizens in the temporarily occupied territory. The most vulnerable group of these illegal practices are orphans and children deprived of parental care, who did not have the opportunity to independently renounce the imposed citizenship and protect their rights as they could not make the decisions by themselves.

Important to note that it's not the first time that Crimea faced the forcible deportation processes. In 1944, almost the entire indigenous population of the peninsula, Crimean Tatars, were deported to the far east of Russia and Central Asia. Along with Crimean Tatars, national communities of Crimean Germans, Armenians and Greeks were also unlawfully transferred by Kremlin decrees. This is how Soviet Russia attempted to change the ethnic landscape of the Crimea and keep their rule there.



## What happened to the orphans of Crimea after 2014?

According to Ukraine's Ministry of Social Policy, **as of January 1, 2014, there were 4,323 orphans and children without parental care in Crimea, with Sevastopol having an additional 672.** Following the peninsula's occupation, only 6 children from this group were relocated from various childcare institutions to Ukraine-controlled territories and were put under governmental control. An additional 25 ward children from families of guardians and custodians left occupied Crimea. Consequently, it's inferred that **over 4,000 Ukrainian children were most probably illegally transferred to Russian territory, and their traces are lost as of now.**

### Illegal adoption of Crimean children

The illegal adoption of Ukrainian children also started in 2014. On October 14, 2014, the project [Train of Hope — Crimea](#) opened, within which families who came to Crimea from the Russian Federation got acquainted with orphans and children deprived of parental care for further adoption. Then, 9 families from Moscow, Belgorod, the Republic of Adygea, the Krasnodar and the Voronezh Regions participated in the project. An agreement was signed on the adoption in the family of 12 children from boarding schools on the peninsula (7 in the Republic of Crimea and 5 in Sevastopol). 7 children (from 10 months to 8 years old) were immediately transferred from Crimea to Russia. The other part was moved to the territory of Russia after the registration of the necessary documents. According to human rights organisations, over 1,000 Ukrainian children from Crimea were displaced through the Train of Hope — Crimea project.

Additionally, video profiles of children in this category were produced and disseminated via media outlets and a dedicated website to highlight Crimean children available for potential placement with Russian families. Specifically, 125 children from the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and 77 from Sevastopol were profiled.

**As of early 2019, the website [usynovite.ru](#) (meaning “adopt” in Russian) hosted 334 profiles of orphans: 312 from the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and 22 from Sevastopol. By March 2023, the number of profiles stood at 216.**



The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine called on Russia to take, under its international legal obligations, all necessary measures to prevent the illegal adoption of Ukrainian citizens by foreigners and their further illegal movement from the territory of Ukraine, but the corresponding call was ignored.

## Deportation of Ukrainian children during the full-scale Russian invasion

After the full-scale Russian invasion on February 24, 2022 these illegal practices have become much more severe because of the scale of the occupied territory and legal acts imposed by the Russian Federation, namely a president's decree simplifying the procedure for obtaining Russian citizenship for Ukrainian orphans or children left without parental care.

### Transferring children to or via Crimea to Russia

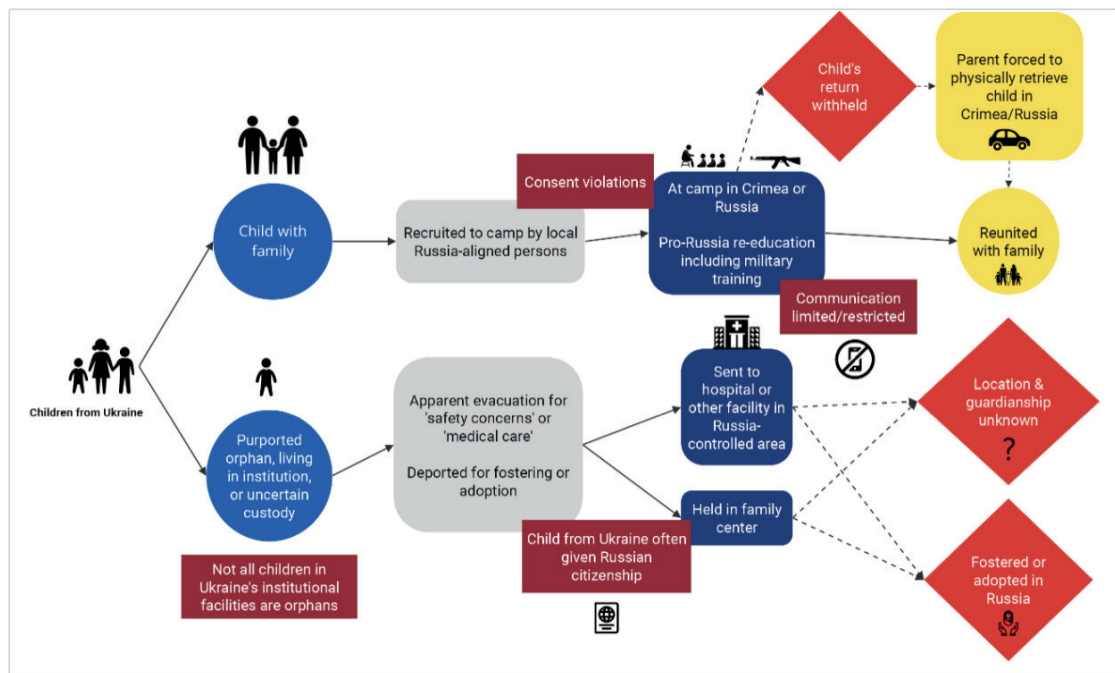
First reports of forced deportation of children to Russia and the temporarily occupied Crimea were published in mid-March 2022, during the battles for Mariupol. On March 22, 2022, the Ukraine and the United States authorities announced the kidnapping of more than 2,300 children from the Donetsk and Luhansk regions by Russian troops. On April 5, 2022, Russia acknowledged during a speech at the UN Security Council meeting that since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, **more than 600,000 people, including more than 119,000 children, have been transported to the Russian Federation.** However, the number of children transported precisely to Crimea or via the peninsula is impossible to establish.

**Given the data available, we may claim that throughout the previous year, Crimea has been used as a hub for the deportation and illegal transfer of Ukrainian children.** Currently, it is very difficult to establish the full scope of illegal operations conducted by Russia with Ukrainian children as we don't have access to the data from the occupied territories. Our knowledge about children deported to Crimea or via Crimea is quite limited. We can obtain this information from families



whose children are back from so-called camps in Crimea or the media and NGOs dealing with the problem.

On February 14, 2023, the Conflict Observatory published a report, “Russia’s systematic program for the re-education & adoption of Ukraine’s children”. The report contains information on 43 institutions, including at least 6 of them in the temporarily occupied Crimea, where Ukrainian children from Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions are held: Artek, Luchystyy, Laspi, Druzhba, a camp in Pischane and Psychiatric Hospital N°5.



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There is also a [map](#) by the Center for National Resistance of the camps where Russians resettled deported Ukrainian children. The map is based on open data and is constantly updated. According to the map, there are 6 locations in the temporarily occupied Crimea where deported children are placed, namely: children camp “Purpurovi vitryla”, sanatorium “Perlyna”, sanatorium “Parus”, sanatorium “Russia”, Artek and children camp “Delfin”.



We can assume at least 11 places in the temporarily occupied Crimea where children from the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions are held. Also, as indicated on the map, such children's camps are located on the territory of Russia close to the occupied Crimea, such as Novorossiysk and Anapa. Therefore, we can assume that, most likely, children are deported there via the occupied Crimea. So, the so-called Kerch bridge might be used not only for transporting troops and weapons but also for kidnapping Ukrainian children.

## Re-education and militarisation of Ukrainian children

Another alarming aspect of the forcible deportation of Ukrainian children is the so-called re-education and militarisation. Russian propagandists [claim](#) that the first step to “denazify” Ukraine is upbringing and educating children who have lost their families. Lvova-Belova [said](#) what exactly should be changed in the children’s behaviour: *“When we brought them [Ukrainian children] to the territory of the Moscow region so that they could recover a little, they spoke negatively about the president [Putin], said all sorts of nasty things, sang the anthem of Ukraine, ‘Glory to Ukraine’ etc.”*

One of the organisations that help to implement this policy is the Kremlin-managed **Youth Army** forcibly recruits and militarises Ukrainian children in Russia-occupied territories.

As Russia’s death toll mounts, the Youth Army’s role is getting increasingly important and increasingly sinister, especially for Ukrainian minors who found themselves trapped in the Russian occupation. **By 2021 the Youth Army had recruited 29,000 children in Crimea** and roughly 7,500 in Donetsk and Luhansk regions that had been occupied by Russia in 2014. Since the all-out invasion broke out, numerous accounts of forced recruitment have been documented throughout the newly occupied areas of Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions.

Relying on intense anti-Ukrainian [propaganda](#) and glorification of Russian military feats (alongside whitewashing its war crimes), the organisation serves Moscow’s genocidal strategy that seeks to assimilate Ukrainian children culturally and re-meld them into the loyal Kremlin’s subjects politically. However, as the Russian army keeps sustaining casualties on the battlefield, the real danger of Putin’s “child army”





expands far beyond indoctrination. Moscow raised fears it may deploy Ukraine teenagers to fight against their state, which classifies as a war crime according to the Article 8 of The Rome statute. And this perspective seems appallingly realistic: during the full-fledged invasion, Russia has forcibly [conscripted](#) up to 60,000 Ukrainian men including 3633 students from occupied Donetsk and Luhansk region, 75 of whom have been killed.

## Documented stories of deported Ukrainian children

One of the NGOs working to return the illegally deported children to their families is the charity fund [Save Ukraine](#). They report their stories to the media.

### **Veronika Tsymbolar and the return of her 8-year-old daughter Margaryta**

During the occupation of the Kherson Region, a young girl was kidnapped while her mother was away. The child's father lost contact amidst the chaos. An unidentified woman, believed to have collaborated with the occupiers, attempted to move the child to Crimea. However, at a checkpoint, due to a lack of documentation for the child, the woman abandoned her. Unbeknownst to the parents, occupying authorities sent the child to a children's camp. The mother later discovered her location via social media. To retrieve her daughter, Veronika Tsymbolar and other parents undertook a two-week journey through Belarus and Russia to the occupied Crimea. In the camp, 8-year-old Margarita became ill, but her concerns were ignored. After almost a year apart, Margarita was finally reunited with her mother.

### **2 children of Maryna Lomova**

Maryna Lomova's two children were taken from occupied Kherson under the guise of a health retreat in Crimea. Initially agreeing to this arrangement, Maryna was assured they would be cared for in a sanatorium. However, her 15-year-old son and 17-year-old daughter were separated and sent to different camps. Weeks turned into months without their return. They desperately contacted their mother, pleading to be fetched,



but the occupying officials refused to release them. With the help of NGOs, Maryna successfully retrieved her children. She later revealed that other children remain in the camp, unable to contact their families.

## **Anastasiia from Kherson**

Children from these 2 families and 14 other families that were rescued as well. 15-year-old Nastya from Kherson says that she was threatened to be taken to the Urals and sent to an orphanage. “The attitude towards us has changed a lot in a month or two. Everyone started hating us because we are Ukrainians, because we came from Kherson. We were called ‘khohlushkas’,” Nastya recalls the bullying in the camp both by the administration and by local children. According to the girl, at the beginning, hundreds of Ukrainian children were brought to the camp, where they played the Russian national anthem, “*We were told: “Sing the national anthem, if you don’t know it, just open your mouth. No one did it — some laughed.” For this, she says, the children were reprimanded, reproached with ingratitude, “The deputy director told us that ‘you are nobody here, we feed you, give you water, comfort, and you are ungrateful, go back to yourselves, to your fascists.’”*

In the meantime, the Insider journalistic investigation reported about the violent actions regarding children illegally deported to the temporarily occupied Crimea. The media reported that it had identified a person who intimidated and beaten children deported from Ukraine to camps in the temporarily occupied Crimea. This person turned out to be a former Ukrainian riot police unit Berkut employee named Valery Astakhov. The journalist spoke with 17 children and their parents who were recently returned to the territory of Ukraine. A 16-year-old boy named Vitalii recognized Valery Astakhov on the photo and told that the children were beaten, threatened, and kept in the basement. 16-year-old Vitalii and other children talked about poor quality food. The children said that there were no bed linen in the camp, only a dirty mattress and a pillow.





## Why we can't repatriate deported Ukrainian children

**01.** One of the most stressing issues is how to return the deported Ukrainian children as it's a recognized war crime. However, it's important to notice that not only children are deported but also over 2 mln adults. The legal repatriation mechanism already exists, but it can't be properly implemented because Russia refuses to cooperate even on the subject of children. Russians refuse to provide any information about the deported, they change identities of children. Ukraine and its partners can't even build a list of the deported as there's no access to the occupied territories or deported people in Russia. **It is hard to find the solution for the return of the deported while Russia has resources to continue the war and occupation of Crimea and other Ukrainian territories, and meanwhile this time is used by Russia for the assimilation of the deported Ukrainian citizens.**

**02.** Every war crime (including the deportation of children) committed by the Russians is continuing because the aggressor still has enough resources to wage wars. The world has put unprecedented sanctions on Russia since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. However, **Russia has adapted to the sanctions and has sought ways to mitigate their impact through various means, including engaging other countries to receive what they need.** All of this allows the aggressor country to continue its full-scale war and imperialist ambitions.

**03.** The repatriation of children is now implemented on an individual level (Save Ukraine is the prominent NGO in this endeavour). But even this approach is hindered by Russia's stipulation that, upon the liberation of the territory from which they were taken for "holidays" in Crimea, they will only be returned to immediate family members. This necessitates that the mother or grandmother (with men prohibited from exiting Ukraine due to martial law) must travel to Russia via a third country and then to the temporarily occupied Crimea. Afterwards, they must retrieve their child and return to Ukraine via the same circuitous route. **Not everyone possesses the means or financial resources for such a journey, and travelling to Russia inherently carries risks for Ukrainian citizens.**



## What can we do?

The policy of deportations is a breach of international law at multiple levels. It is evidence of the **Russian desire not to defend themselves against the West but to expand and control all their neighbours** – it is a symbol of what the Russian regime is, and such activities cannot be compromised with.

Forcible transfer or deportation of the population by the occupation authorities of RF can be qualified as a crime against humanity and/or a war crime in accordance with the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

In the UN Human Rights Council report dated March 15, 2023, the Commission concluded that *“the situations it has examined concerning the transfer and deportation of children, within Ukraine and to the Russian Federation respectively, violate international humanitarian law, and amount to a war crime.”*

The warrants by the ICC is a confirmation of evil but **it will not get deported Ukrainian children home**. We need actions:

**01. Help to stop the Russian war machine.** Any legal repatriation mechanisms can't be properly implemented while Russia refuses to cooperate. Weakening Russia and destroying its war capabilities through proper implementation of sanctions, export control, obliging companies to control its products and pressuring Russian allies are the only ways to influence Russia on political, geopolitical and humanitarian issues.

**02. Advocate aid for Ukraine.** The only way to stop deportations and subsequently repatriate the deported is for Ukraine to liberate all its territories (including Crimea) and for Russia to recognise its defeat so an international mechanism of repatriating the deportees en masse can be enforced.

**03. Include the issue of forcible deportation into every debate around Ukraine.** Repatriation of all deported Ukrainians needs to be a must-have condition of ending the war.



**04. Strengthen individual sanctions and enable the war crimes investigations.** All people involved in forcible deportations, must be sanctioned and banned from the world, as well as prosecuted for war crimes.

**05. Put diplomatic pressure on Russia to disclose the names, locations, exact number and conditions of the deportees.** Hiding this information is already a crime.



## Resources

- [Crimean Platform](#)
- [Children and War by Almenda NGO](#)
- [Forcible transfer and deportation of children from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine to the Russian Federation](#)
- [Deportation of custodial settings from occupied territories of Ukraine](#)
- [Provisions the RF violates against children and adults](#)
- [A Century of Deportations: How Russia Has Been Destroying Nations](#)
- [Deportation of Crimean Tatars in 1944](#)