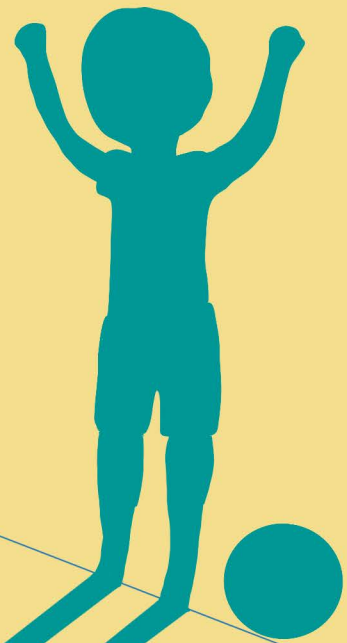




UNITED NATIONS  
**HUMAN RIGHTS**  
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

*Ukraine*



# THE IMPACT OF THE ARMED CONFLICT AND OCCUPATION ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN UKRAINE

24 February 2022 — 31 December 2024

"Some children fall to their knees - their legs do not move because they are afraid. There are no tears, no crying or screaming, the child just freezes. One child stood there holding a toy and did not let go of it all day."

– a kindergarten director describing children's reactions to shelling.

## Illustrations

The artwork in this report was created with the help of nine-year-old Yegor who knows firsthand what war is like. Yegor spent the first two months of the full-scale invasion in his native Mariupol, while the city was engulfed in some of the worst fighting of the war. Today Yegor lives in Kyiv, but he still dreams of returning home one day.

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# I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



1. This report by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) describes widespread violations of the rights of the child in the context of prolonged hostilities and occupation following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation. It covers the period from 24 February 2022 to 31 December 2024 and is based on the work of the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU).
2. The extensive use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas has killed and injured children, and damaged or destroyed homes, schools, medical facilities, and electricity infrastructure. The continuous hostilities have disrupted essential services for children and driven displacement, undermining children's enjoyment of their rights to health, housing, education, family life, and an adequate standard of living, among others. Furthermore, Ukraine now has one of the highest prevalence of explosive remnants of war and landmines globally, which will likely cause continuing casualties among children in particular far into the future.
3. In the four regions of Ukraine that were illegally annexed by the Russian Federation in 2022, children have been particularly affected by violations of international human rights law (IHRL) and international humanitarian law (IHL), including summary executions, arbitrary detention, conflict-related sexual violence, torture and ill-treatment.<sup>1</sup> Some children were deported from or forcibly transferred within occupied territory, particularly in the months following the full-scale invasion. Without access to the Russian Federation or occupied territory of Ukraine, OHCHR has not been able to fully assess the scale of these transfers and deportations, however has been able to verify that at least 200 children have been affected by these measures.
4. Discriminatory policies implemented by the Russian Federation in occupied territory have compelled children to obtain Russian citizenship, express allegiance to the Russian Federation, and attend schools teaching the Russian state curriculum. The curriculum includes lessons that justify the full-scale invasion and fail to respect Ukrainian cultural identity. The Russian Federation instated patriotic and military education aimed to prepare children in occupied territory for military or civil service in Russian state institutions. Occupying authorities have threatened or punished children and their parents for speaking Ukrainian or attending online school following the Ukrainian curriculum. These measures violate the obligations of the Russian Federation as an occupying Power under IHL, as well as provisions of IHRL.

## II. METHODOLOGY



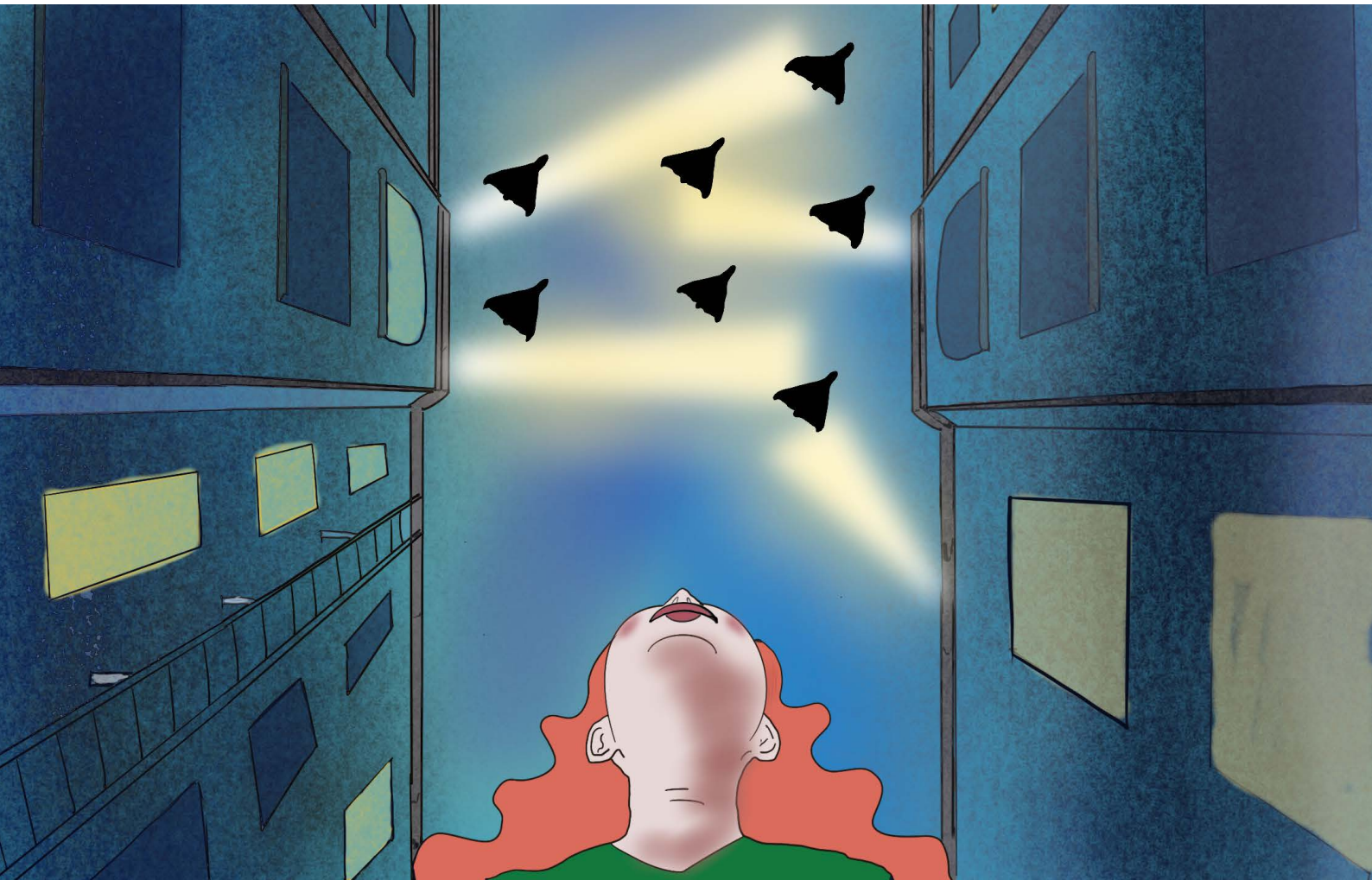
5. This report is based on interviews as well as documentary and digital information collected, verified and analysed by OHCHR. Since the start of the full-scale invasion, OHCHR has conducted 1,578 interviews<sup>2</sup> with victims and witnesses of violations of children’s rights, as well as human rights defenders, representatives of civil society organizations, lawyers, medical professionals, journalists, students, teachers, Government officials, and other relevant sources, including persons who had resided in occupied territory. OHCHR also conducted 101 field visits, 16 visits to care institutions and shelters, 7 visits to places of detention, and monitoring of 1 court hearing in territory controlled by Ukraine.
6. OHCHR abided strictly by the obligations to ‘do no harm’ and to respect the informed consent of all sources, including by taking measures to safeguard the confidentiality of information and protect the identity of sources. Contact with interlocutors was established only after assessing the risks for their life, safety, freedom or well-being, and interviews were conducted in a trauma-informed manner. Children were interviewed following an assessment of the best interests of the child and with the consent of the parent(s) or legal guardian.
7. Information was verified according to OHCHR methodology. Findings are included in the report where they meet the “reasonable grounds to believe” standard: namely where, based on a body of verified information, an ordinarily prudent observer would have reasonable grounds to believe that the facts took place as described, and where legal conclusions are drawn, that these facts meet all the elements of a violation.
8. The Russian Federation has not granted OHCHR access to territory of Ukraine which it occupies, despite repeated requests. In addition to lack of physical access, OHCHR faced other constraints while documenting violations that occurred in occupied territory. Individuals in occupied territory experienced difficulty moving to territory controlled by Ukraine due to the absence of crossing points, the need to travel vast distances through the Russian Federation, and numerous internal checkpoints within occupied territory often leading to invasive searches of personal belongings (including electronic devices). Furthermore, many people were hesitant to share accounts via telephone or electronic messaging services out of concern that communications could be overheard or intercepted and lead to retaliation.
9. OHCHR shared the draft report with the concerned States for factual comments, as per usual practice.

### OHCHR ACTIVITIES IN THE REPORTING PERIOD



### III. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

10. The Russian Federation and Ukraine are bound by both IHRL<sup>3</sup> and IHL<sup>4</sup>, which apply concurrently in an international armed conflict, and are complementary and mutually reinforcing. The human rights obligations of States apply extraterritorially in all circumstances where they exercise jurisdiction or effective control, including in occupied territory.<sup>5</sup>



#### A. INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

11. Children must be registered at birth and have the rights – from birth – to a name, to acquire a nationality and, as far as possible, to know and be cared for by their parents.<sup>6</sup> States must respect the right of children to preserve their identity.<sup>7</sup> All children must also be protected against discrimination, including on grounds of language, political or other opinion, and national or ethnic origin.<sup>8</sup>
12. Children have the right to enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health, and to a standard of living adequate for their physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.<sup>9</sup> States have the obligation to take steps, to the maximum of available resources, to achieve progressively the full realisation of these and other economic, social and cultural rights.<sup>10</sup> Children also have the rights to privacy and to freedom of expression, including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, and to take part in cultural life.<sup>11</sup>
13. IHRL protects the right of every child to an education which is available, accessible, inclusive, and free from discrimination – including in times of armed conflict.<sup>12</sup> Education must be delivered in a manner that allows children to freely express their views, while being culturally appropriate and respectful of their individual cultural identity, language and values. It must also respect the national values of the country where they reside and their country of origin.<sup>13</sup> With the best interests of the child as a primary consideration,<sup>14</sup> Government decisions or policies impacting education should foster a child’s cognitive, emotional, and physical development, thereby laying the foundation for their well-being and future. Any propaganda for war is prohibited.<sup>15</sup>
14. States are obliged to take all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children affected by an armed conflict, in line with their obligations under IHL, and to promote their physical and psychological recovery and social integration.<sup>16</sup>

## B. INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

15. Children, as part of the civilian population, must be protected during hostilities. Parties to an armed conflict must distinguish between civilians and combatants and may not direct attacks at civilians. They must observe the principle of proportionality in attack to prevent excessive incidental harm to civilians and take all feasible precautions to avoid incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians and damage to civilian objects.<sup>17</sup> Parties to the conflict must also take all feasible precautions to protect civilians under their control from the effects of attacks.<sup>18</sup>
16. Parties to a conflict must assess and mitigate not only the direct impact of an attack, but also the reasonably foreseeable reverberating or indirect effects on civilians and civilian objects.<sup>19</sup> These effects include foreseeable disruptions to essential services like healthcare, water, and food security due to the destruction of critical infrastructure.
17. Schools are – in principle – civilian objects protected under IHL. Medical facilities enjoy special protection and shall not be the object of attack.<sup>20</sup>
18. Parties to a conflict are obliged to respect protected persons, their honour, family rights, religious convictions and practices, manners and customs. They shall be treated humanely at all times and protected against violence and threats.<sup>21</sup>
19. Parties to a conflict are obliged to treat children with particular respect, and to provide them with the care and aid they require, whether due to their age or for any other reason.<sup>22</sup> Armed forces must not recruit or use children in any capacity, whether in direct hostilities or other tasks.<sup>23</sup>

### » Law of Occupation

20. The nature and scope of the powers and duties of an occupying Power under international humanitarian law are premised on the assumption that occupation is a temporary situation to respond to military necessity and does not transfer title of sovereignty to the occupying Power.<sup>24</sup> An occupying Power is required to respect the existing laws and institutions of the occupied territory as far as possible, and to avoid making far-reaching changes to the existing order or intrinsic characteristics of the occupied territory.<sup>25</sup>
21. IHL prohibits an occupying Power from compelling residents of occupied territory to swear allegiance to it.<sup>26</sup> An occupying Power must not compel protected persons to serve in its armed forces or use pressure or propaganda to secure voluntary enlistment.<sup>27</sup> These provisions uphold the dignity of individuals under occupation, ensuring that they are not forced to act against their own country
22. Children in occupied territory are afforded additional special protections. The occupying Power is obliged to facilitate the proper working of all educational and care institutions for children, which includes a duty to avoid interfering with their activities.<sup>28</sup> An occupying Power must not enlist children in formations or organizations subordinate to it.<sup>29</sup> In addition, an occupying Power must not alter the family or personal status or the nationality of a child.<sup>30</sup>
23. Protected persons may in no circumstances renounce their rights under IHL; further, the annexation of territory does not deprive them of their rights.<sup>31</sup>

### » Protection of unaccompanied and separated children, orphans, and children deprived of parental care on occupied territory

24. Parties to a conflict have a heightened duty of care toward children under the age of 15 who are orphaned or separated from their families due to war. States must ensure their basic needs are met and facilitate their access to education. Whenever possible, their education should be entrusted to persons of a similar cultural background, so as to protect them from religious or political propaganda intended to alienate them from their natural environment.<sup>32</sup> States must facilitate in every way possible the reunification of families who are dispersed as a result of armed conflict.<sup>33</sup>
25. IHL prohibits transfers of children from occupied territory except for a temporary evacuation where compelling reasons of the health or medical treatment of the children so require.<sup>34</sup> The unlawful deportation or transfer of protected persons, including children, is a war crime.<sup>35</sup>
26. The limited circumstance under which children may be evacuated is intended to prevent their removal for other reasons, such as to be educated according to certain political or religious views or to be prepared for military service. IHL also aims to protect children from being separated from family and loved ones, from losing their identity, or from being raised in a manner that is foreign to their family or their country.<sup>36</sup> Parties to the conflict must facilitate the return of evacuated children as soon as conditions allow, including by providing detailed information to the Central Tracing Agency about each evacuated child.<sup>37</sup>

# IV. THE CONDUCT OF HOSTILITIES AND THEIR IMPACT ON CHILDREN IN UKRAINE



## A. CASUALTIES AMONG CHILDREN

27. OHCHR verified that at least 669 children were killed and 1,833 injured in Ukraine from 24 February 2022 through 31 December 2024. Of these, 521 were killed and 1,529 injured in territory controlled by Ukraine, and 148 were killed and 304 injured on occupied territory. However, the actual number of deaths and injuries among children is likely considerably higher.<sup>38</sup> Boys comprised 57 per cent of child casualties and girls 43 per cent.<sup>39</sup> Older children faced greater risks, with casualties peaking among 16- to 17-year-olds. Among those killed or injured were 52 infants below the age of one.
28. Russian authorities have reported that 27 children have been killed and 137 injured inside the Russian Federation in the same period.<sup>40</sup> OHCHR has not been able to verify these cases or the circumstances in which they occurred; therefore, they are not included in the overall number of verified casualties.
29. Explosive weapons with wide area effects caused 89 per cent of child casualties, killing 563 children and injuring 1,663.<sup>41</sup> The use of these weapons in populated areas can foreseeably result in significant incidental civilian harm.<sup>42</sup> Although each attack must be individually assessed for its IHL compliance, the widespread use of such weapons in populated areas is fundamentally at odds with the prohibition of indiscriminate attacks and the principles of proportionality and precaution.
30. Explosive remnants of war and mines caused 6 per cent of child casualties, and the remaining five per cent were caused by other conflict-related situations (see para. 71 below).

“

The kids were celebrating a birthday when it happened – everyone got hurt! My 14-year-old son was severely wounded – shrapnel pierced his shoulder blade, fractured his ribs, tore his lung, and damaged his spine.

”

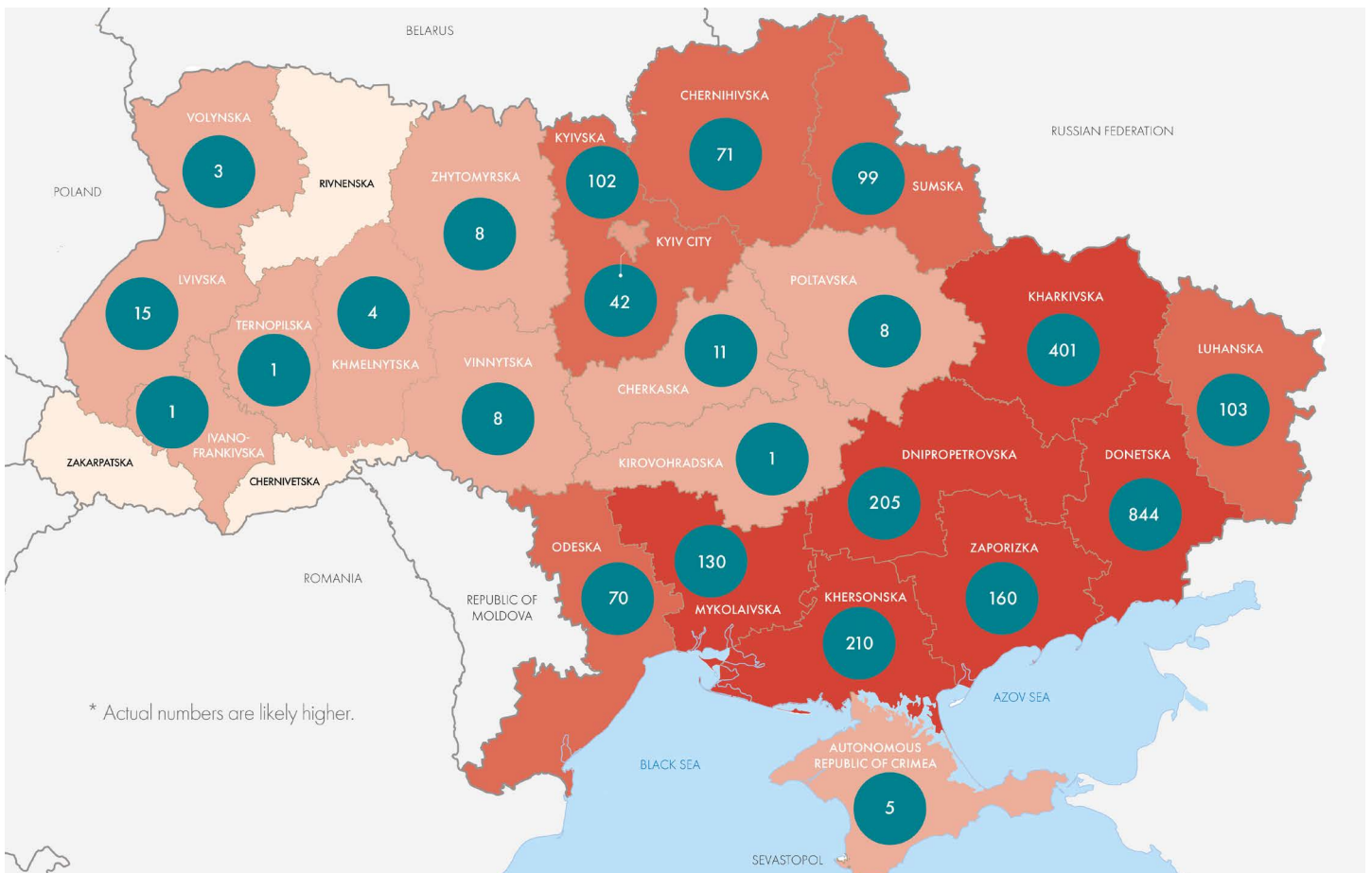
— a woman whose son was in a café in Malokaterynivka, Zaporizhzhia region, struck by shelling on 20 August 2024.



## » Casualties from explosive weapons in territory controlled by Ukraine

31. Most child casualties from explosive weapons (86 per cent) occurred in territory controlled by Ukraine, the vast majority of which are likely a result of attacks launched by Russian armed forces.<sup>43</sup> Casualties among children were highest in the initial months of the invasion but increased again in 2024. As Russian forces rapidly advanced in 2022, many families with children were suddenly caught at the frontline with residential areas under attack, resulting in casualties among children.
32. Attempts by families with children to flee dangerous areas were also perilous. For example, on 8 April 2022, a cluster munition attack on Kramatorsk railway station (Donetsk region) killed 60 civilians including 7 children, and injured another 111, including 17 children, as thousands had gathered to evacuate the city.<sup>44</sup>
33. In some places, fighting in populated areas using explosive weapons lasted for days or weeks, severely affecting children and families. For instance, OHCHR recorded that at least 120 children were killed and 127 injured in Mariupol (Donetsk region) from February to April 2022 as Russian and Ukrainian forces battled to control the city.<sup>45</sup>
34. By late 2022, Ukrainian forces regained significant territory and frontlines stabilized. Many families with children left frontline areas voluntarily or following evacuation orders. Ukrainian authorities implemented protective measures such as systems providing early warning of imminent attacks, air defence systems, and underground shelters. These measures helped to reduce child casualties.
35. In frontline areas, artillery projectiles and rockets continued to kill and injure children, as some families either remained in these areas or returned after displacement due to financial hardship or other constraints. Long-range explosive weapons such as missiles and loitering munitions also claimed children's lives country-wide throughout the period, as they struck areas to which families had fled or where they continued to reside.
36. Child casualties in territory controlled by Ukraine decreased from 1,001 (341 killed and 660 injured) in 2022, to 318 (61 killed and 257 injured) in 2023, then increased to 596 (80 killed and 516 injured) in 2024.
37. In 2024, the number of child casualties increased substantially, particularly towards the second half of the year, due to three main developments: 1) intensified attacks by Russian armed forces along the frontline in Donetsk region; 2) increased use of long-range missiles and loitering munitions across the country; and 3) attacks with modified powerful air-dropped bombs on larger cities where many families still resided, such as Kharkiv, Sumy, and Zaporizhzhia. The number of children killed or injured by aerial bombs increased from 9 in 2023 to 159 in 2024.<sup>46</sup> Overall, 100 per cent more children were killed and 146 per cent more were injured by explosive weapons with wide area effects in territory controlled by Ukraine from July to December 2024 compared to the same period in 2023.<sup>47</sup>

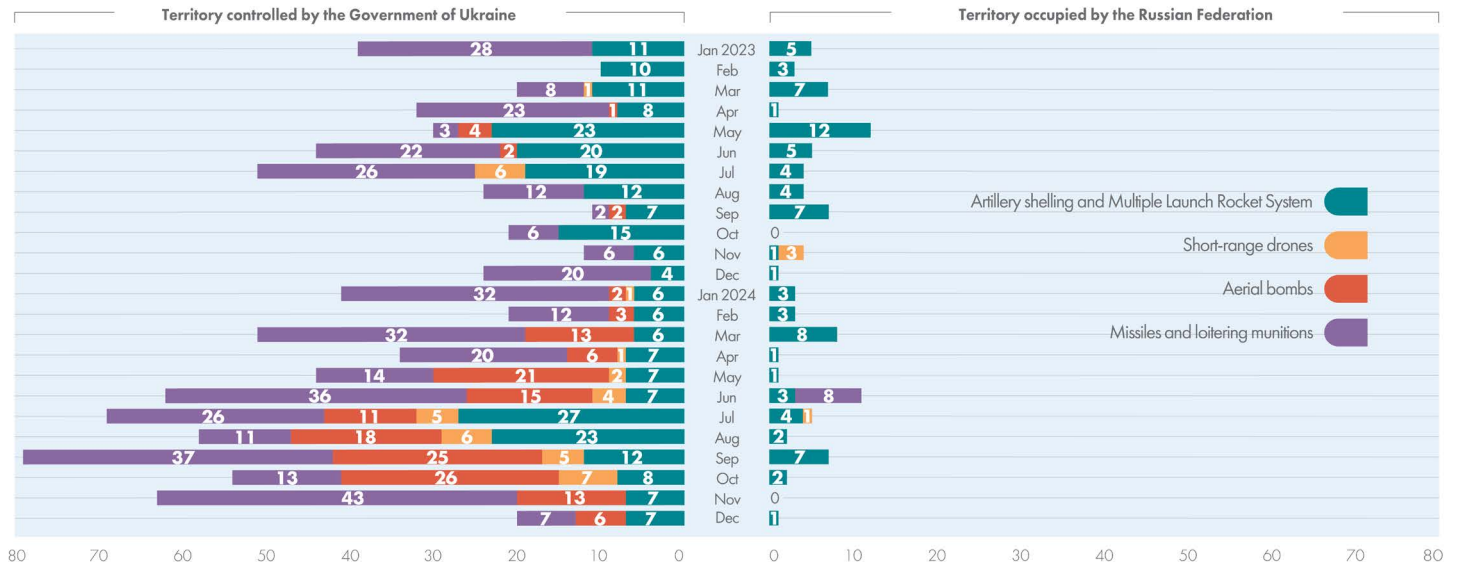
Child casualties, by region, from 24 February 2022 to 31 December 2024\*



## » Casualties from explosive weapons in territory occupied by the Russian Federation

38. Fourteen per cent of child casualties from explosive weapons occurred in territory occupied by the Russian Federation, with the majority likely resulting from attacks by Ukrainian armed forces.<sup>48</sup> Most child casualties in these areas occurred during the first six months of the full-scale invasion when frontlines rapidly shifted. Weapons with relatively limited ranges, such as artillery rockets and projectiles, caused nearly all such casualties.
39. Child casualties in these areas decreased year by year, from 214 (60 killed and 154 injured) in 2022, to 53 (12 killed and 41 injured) in 2023, to 44 (9 killed and 35 injured) in 2024.
40. In 2024, Russian authorities reported that child casualties increased inside the Russian Federation itself following the Ukrainian armed forces operations and presence in Kursk, coupled with higher casualties in other regions of the country, primarily Belgorod.<sup>49</sup>

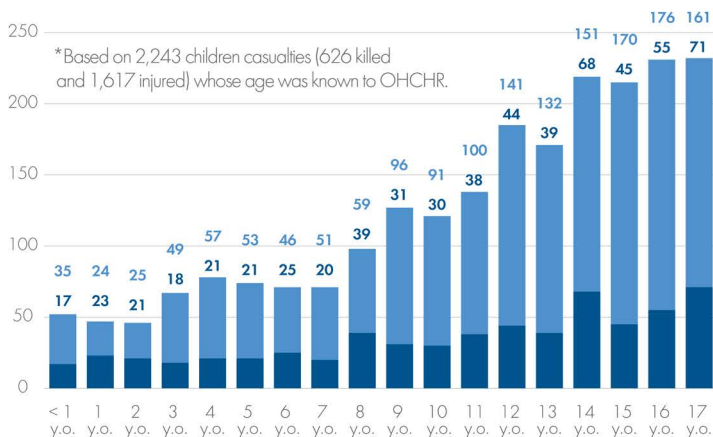
Child casualties, by territory of control, month and type of weapon, from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2024



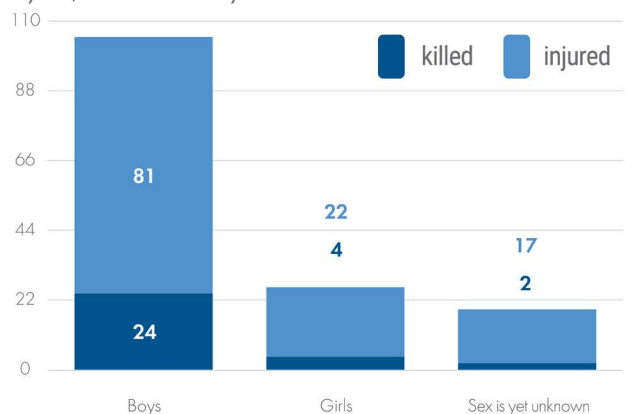
## » Casualties from mines and explosive remnants of war

41. OHCHR has verified that mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) killed 30 children and injured 120 since 24 February 2022.<sup>50</sup> According to the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense, an estimated 139,000 square kilometres of Ukraine are currently contaminated with landmines and ERW, creating long-term risks to children's lives and safety, undermining livelihoods, and preventing families from returning safely.
42. Boys accounted for over 80 per cent of these casualties.<sup>51</sup> For example, on 5 October 2023, a 17-year-old boy was killed and three other boys were injured when unexploded ordnance detonated in a residential yard in occupied Horlivka (Donetsk region). On 28 December 2022, a 7-year-old boy stepped on a landmine during a fishing trip in Buhaiivka (Kharkiv region), a formerly occupied village over which Ukraine regained control, and his leg had to be amputated.
43. Landmine and ERW incidents increased in rural areas during agriculture seasons when farmers and families worked the land. Unpaved roads also posed major risks for civilian vehicles. On 7 July 2024, for example, a family of four, including a 5-year-old boy and a newborn girl, was killed when their car set off an anti-tank landmine on an unpaved forest road near the village of Tsyrykuny (Kharkiv region), over which Ukraine regained control in 2022.
44. Shifting frontlines make attributing specific responsibility for landmines placed at earlier points in time challenging; however, OHCHR has documented child casualties from both anti-vehicle and anti-personnel landmines. Because of the high civilian risks in particular, anti-personnel mines have so far been banned by 164 countries,<sup>52</sup> constituting over three-quarters of the United Nations' membership, including Ukraine.

Child casualties, by age, from 24 February 2022 to 31 December 2024\*



Child casualties from mines and explosive remnants of war, by sex, from 24 February 2022 to 31 December 2024

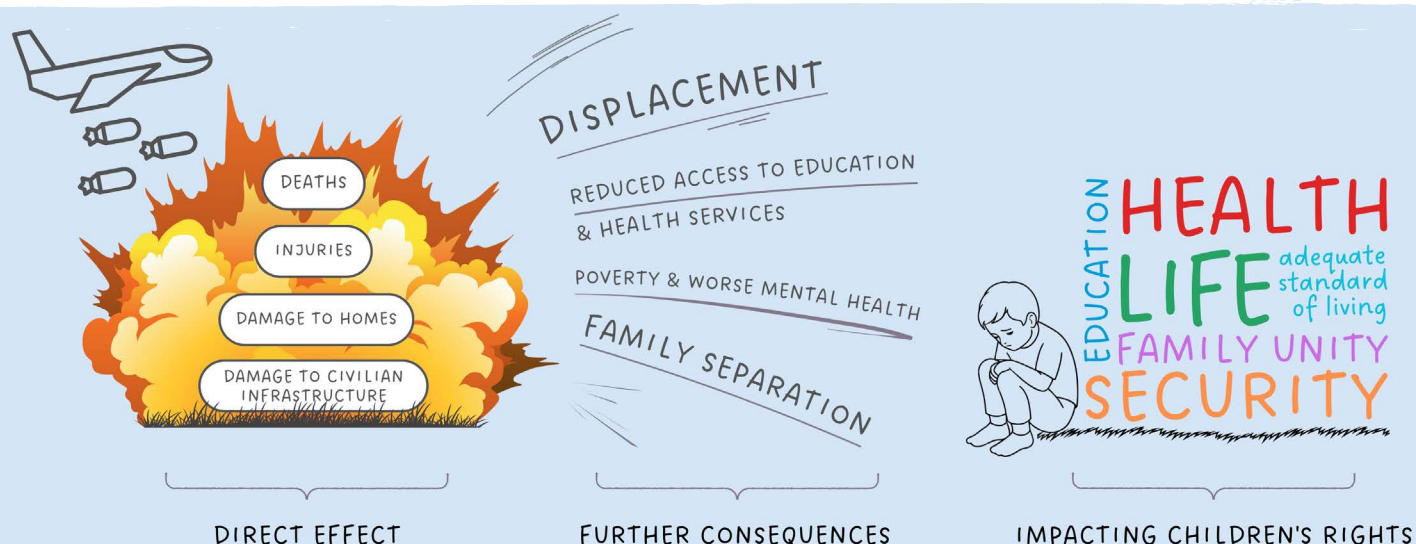


## B. EFFECTS OF THE USE OF EXPLOSIVE WEAPONS IN POPULATED AREAS ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

### » Displacement of children

45. The large-scale displacement of children due to intense hostilities affected children's rights to an adequate standard of living (including food and housing), to health, and to respect for their home, privacy and family life.<sup>53</sup> During the initial months of hostilities, civilians fearing for their lives fled to places of greater safety, especially to protect their children. The displacement of families became prolonged and entrenched, as heavy weapons continued to strike population centres throughout 2023 and 2024. As of December 2024, over 3.6 million people had been displaced inside Ukraine, including an estimated 737,000 children (50 per cent girls and 50 per cent boys).<sup>54</sup>
46. Larger numbers of children were displaced abroad. As of November 2024, over 1.7 million Ukrainian children were refugees (53 per cent boys and 47 per cent girls<sup>55</sup>), with over 80 per cent having been displaced since 2022, mainly in Europe.<sup>56</sup> In 22 per cent of refugee households with children, the spouse or partner of the head of household remained in Ukraine,<sup>57</sup> meaning hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian children have been separated from a parent, usually their father, for up to three years, depriving them of the right to be cared for by their parents.<sup>58</sup> In addition, 3 per cent of refugee households have a child who is separated from both parents.<sup>59</sup>

### HOW THE USE OF EXPLOSIVE WEAPONS AFFECTS CHILDREN'S RIGHTS



### » Housing and an adequate standard of living

47. Attacks with explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas have resulted in large-scale destruction of residential housing in Ukraine. By the end of 2024, hostilities had damaged or destroyed an estimated nearly 13 per cent of Ukrainian housing stock, affecting some 2.5 million households.<sup>60</sup> OHCHR travelled to dozens of villages and towns in areas close to the frontline, and observed large-scale damage to homes and apartment buildings. When documenting civilian casualties, OHCHR frequently visited sites where houses and apartment buildings had been severely damaged by explosive weapons.
48. Large-scale destruction of residential housing, combined with protracted displacement, has jeopardized children's rights to housing and to an adequate standard of living. OHCHR recognizes steps taken by the Government of Ukraine to protect and fulfil these rights, the significant challenges it faces, and the role of the international community in assisting the Government. Since February 2022, collective centres were set up and emergency payments were granted to internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the form of State benefits or cash grants from humanitarian actors.<sup>61</sup> In these measures, children were identified as a priority category for support according to available resources.
49. Despite these efforts, IDP households reported lower levels of access to adequate housing, food, medicine and employment (compared with non-displaced households).<sup>62</sup> The rise in demand for rental housing for IDPs, coupled with the shortage of housing stock, has resulted in higher rent prices, lower quality housing, and the need to frequently move to seek adequate accommodation. Families with low incomes were disproportionately affected.<sup>63</sup> IDPs and humanitarian workers told OHCHR that some IDP families with children spent all their income on rent and had to seek assistance with food, and that IDP families with children remained in collective centres because they could not afford housing.

50. A displaced woman told OHCHR that she and her teenage daughter had to move three times since the spring of 2022 due to a lack of affordable accommodation and employment opportunities. She feared she would face issues with accommodation for the rest of her life. Another woman IDP in western Ukraine told OHCHR that her friend had returned to occupied territory with her child because she could not afford housing or obtain compensation for her damaged property.
51. The poverty rate sharply increased as a result of hostilities, particularly in rural areas and among households with children. One woman reported to OHCHR that her total monthly income was an IDP allowance of 5,000 UAH (119 USD) for herself and her son. Several displaced families told OHCHR that they did not receive the allowance long enough to find employment and adequate housing, depriving their children of conditions necessary to enjoy their right to a standard of living adequate for their development.<sup>64</sup>

## » Education

“ I wanted to study, but I couldn't. There was no internet, no electricity, and there was shelling. ”

— a 12-year-old girl who attended online classes.

52. The ongoing hostilities have hindered children's enjoyment of their right to education, due to strikes directly impacting educational facilities and challenges in accessing effective online education posed by family resource constraints and attacks on energy infrastructure limiting household electricity and internet access.
53. OHCHR has documented at least 1,614 attacks which have destroyed or damaged educational facilities since the full-scale invasion. Seventy-one per cent of attacks affecting educational facilities occurred in territory controlled by Ukraine, 24 per cent in territory occupied by the Russian Federation, and 5 per cent in territory over which control was contested at the time of the attack.
54. In Government-controlled territory, attacks with explosive weapons disrupted learning for the nearly 2.2 million schoolchildren (65 per cent of students) who attended school in person.<sup>65</sup> During frequent air raid sirens, children had to evacuate to bomb shelters both during the school day, bringing lessons to an abrupt end, and at night, depriving children of sleep. According to an online tracking system, sixteen regions of Ukraine have been under air alerts for more than 1,000 hours (equivalent to over 41 full days) between the start of the full-scale invasion and 31 December 2024, with air alerts exceeding 5,000 hours (208 full days) in frontline regions of Donetsk, Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia regions.<sup>66</sup>
55. Furthermore, attacks by Russian armed forces on Ukrainian energy infrastructure undermined the accessibility of online classes, as the resulting power outages cut children off from their teachers and classmates.<sup>67</sup> For instance, a woman told OHCHR that her daughter could only attend online classes for one or two hours per day when there were power cuts.
56. Enjoyment of the right to education by children with disabilities was disproportionately affected by the hostilities. Parents and guardians reported difficulties accessing education and rehabilitation services that fulfilled the specific learning needs of children with disabilities, especially if they were displaced. For example, a woman whose daughter has autism reported that children in her daughter's special classes relied on computer-based educational aids that could not be used during power cuts. Several parents told OHCHR that the frequent air raid alerts, blackouts, and noisy generators agitated and further disrupted the learning of children with autism who had sensory hypersensitivities. The director of a rehabilitation centre in Mykolaiv region told OHCHR that many children with low mobility missed therapy sessions during power cuts because their parents could not bring them from the upper floors of multi-story buildings without a working elevator.
57. In response to widespread disruption and deterioration of access to education, Ukrainian authorities implemented a broad range of measures. They closed schools near the frontline or the border with the Russian Federation to reduce child casualties from explosive weapons. Authorities required school buildings which remained open to have sufficient capacity in bomb shelters for all children physically present, or to deliver online classes instead.
58. Some communities in frontline areas, including Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia, built schools underground and in metro stations to increase access to in-person education. The director of an underground school in Kharkiv told OHCHR that “there is simply no substitute for in-person classes. Children are happier, more productive, and more satisfied with their results.” Each year since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, more schools have re-opened and larger numbers of children attended classes in person.

59. As of December 2024, over 420,000 children in Ukraine nevertheless attended all their classes online (12 per cent of students). For example, regional education administrators in Odesa reported that 15,000 students in 40 secondary schools in Odesa region were operating online-only, due to the lack of adequate bomb shelters in schools. A further 771,000 children (23 per cent of students) attended school in a hybrid modality (partially online in shifts),<sup>68</sup> a measure driven by existing shelters' limited capacity.
60. Despite school programs and humanitarian initiatives to distribute electronic devices, some families still faced limited access to online education, leaving children from disadvantaged communities further behind. One woman told OHCHR that her five children shared a single mobile phone to attend online classes.
61. These cumulative disruptions eroded access to education and, coming on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic, resulted in lower levels of educational attainment. In the 2022 Program for International Student Attainment (PISA) examination, 15-year-old pupils received lower scores in mathematics, reading, and science, as compared to the 2018 scores.<sup>69</sup> Girls, as well as pupils from poor families and rural areas, fell further behind; worse mental health, especially among girls, as well as displacement of both pupils and teachers, are likely to have contributed to the lower scores.<sup>70</sup> In the state school-leaving exams, the average score for mathematics declined.<sup>71</sup> One woman told OHCHR that her nine-year-old son and his online classmates "would have to be sent back to first grade" if they resumed in-person schooling. Reduced levels of educational attainment will diminish children's future education and employment opportunities.

## » Health



Every child in Ukraine has trauma – no matter where they are, whether there are drones or not. Kids nowadays have become adults very early on.



— a child psychologist speaking of war's impact on the mental health of children.

62. Hostilities have affected children's right to health, by damaging health facilities, complicating practical access to available health services, and impairing children's health. OHCHR has documented at least 744 attacks which have destroyed or damaged health facilities since the start of the full-scale invasion, with some facilities in frontline areas being affected repeatedly. For example, the Kherson Children's Regional Clinical Hospital was damaged during at least eight attacks in 2023 and 2024. The functioning of medical facilities, which rely on electricity for life-saving medical equipment and procedures and cold storage of medication, was also disrupted by power cuts resulting from attacks by Russian armed forces on Ukrainian energy infrastructure.<sup>72</sup>
63. The hostilities' impact on children started with maternal health. During air raid alerts, women in maternity hospitals took shelter underground, where some hospitals constructed delivery rooms and introduced mobile incubators for newborns. Nevertheless, the hostilities, combined with the conditions in health facilities, caused stress and anxiety among pregnant women, which can negatively affect the foetus' development.
64. Taken together, several effects of the hostilities—displacement, family separation, degraded health services, and fears for the future—contributed to a downward trend in the birthrate in Ukraine, which decreased by over 30 per cent from over 271,000 in 2021, to 199,000 in 2022, 187,000 in 2023, and 176,679 in 2024.<sup>73</sup>
65. The hostilities reduced the capacity of Okhmatdyt National Specialized Children's Hospital to deliver services to the country's most critically-ill children. On 8 July 2024, a high-precision Russian missile struck the hospital, whose patients had to be temporarily discharged or transferred to other hospitals.<sup>74</sup> A hospital representative informed OHCHR that, after the attack, the hospital had to reduce its in-patient capacity by approximately 100 beds (out of 620) and decrease its number of surgeries by seven per cent.
66. People in Ukraine, including children, missed medical appointments and treatments due to travel risks in regions prone to attacks, with adverse health consequences. One hospital administrator told OHCHR how children with chronic diseases frequently missed rehabilitation sessions due to travel risks, and that ambulances could not always reach frontline towns due to the security situation.
67. Children's mental health declined due to the hostilities. In 2024, local authorities reported that at least 67 children had to be given medical treatment for acute stress reactions immediately after attacks with explosive weapons.<sup>75</sup> Parents, teachers and doctors told OHCHR about their growing concerns for children's psychological well-being. Children's social support networks were weakened due to interlinked consequences of the hostilities, displacement, family separation and online schooling, which increased their vulnerability to psycho-social distress. Psychologists told OHCHR that children suffered from attachment and self-esteem disorders, sleep disturbances, anxiety and depression. A woman psychologist working close to the area of active hostilities in Zaporizhzhia region worried that war had become completely normal for children; another woman psychologist, from Kherson, where all children must study online, described delayed language development among children who had been deprived of sufficient social contact.
68. A man explained that after his family fled a frontline community and was separated from relatives in occupied territory, his 11-year-old daughter became withdrawn and his 4-year-old son developed a fear of all loud noises and suffered from alopecia due to psychological stress. One woman told OHCHR that the war had caused her first-grade son to confuse numbers. Survey data also showed the worsening mental health among children.<sup>76</sup> Ukraine currently has an insufficient number of psychologists and psychiatrists to support children who suffered mental injury or illness related to the hostilities.

## C. USE OF CHILDREN IN HOSTILITIES AND THEIR DETENTION

69. In 2024, OHCHR recorded a surge in credible allegations that the Russian Federation used Ukrainian children in Government-controlled territory to conduct surveillance and transmit information on the Ukrainian military, or to commit sabotage and arson targeting military objects or public property with links to the military. Most cases followed a similar pattern: individuals contacted boys and girls over social media and instructed them to set fire to objects such as vehicles belonging to members of the military or railway equipment. They promised to pay the children after receiving video proof of the arson. Though this method of contact is designed to obfuscate attribution of responsibility, the content and context of the messages

suggested that those responsible were linked to the Russian Federation. Should these incidents be linked to the armed conflict, such use of children would be in violation of the prohibition in international law on the recruitment or use of children in hostilities.<sup>77</sup>

70. According to the Prosecutor-General's Office of Ukraine, as of 31 December 2024, 11 children (10 boys, 1 girl), aged 13 to 17, have been detained in relation to such acts. They are facing potential criminal trials for treason, sabotage, terrorism, obstruction of the armed forces, or property damage.<sup>78</sup>



We did something stupid. We do not want this stupid act to determine the rest of our lives.



— a 17-year-old boy detained for committing arson and charged with terrorism.

## V. CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN TERRITORY WHICH CAME UNDER CONTROL OF RUSSIAN ARMED FORCES FROM 2022



### A. VIOLENT AND REPRESSIVE MEASURES AFFECTING CHILDREN IN THE FIRST MONTHS FOLLOWING THE FULL-SCALE INVASION

71. As Russian armed forces rapidly seized Ukrainian territory in early 2022, they routinely used violence and other acts of repression against the civilian population under their control, including summary executions, attacks, and arbitrary detention accompanied by torture and other forms of ill-treatment.<sup>79</sup> OHCHR documented that at least 76 children were killed and 50 injured, mainly during close encounters with Russian armed forces.<sup>80</sup> The majority of these child casualties – 65 killed and 43 injured – occurred during the first weeks of the full-scale invasion, including when soldiers opened fire on civilian vehicles of families trying to flee to safer locations, in

potential violation of fundamental IHL principles of distinction and precaution. In addition, five boys and two girls were summarily executed in 2022 and 2023.<sup>81</sup> The wilful killing of civilians is a war crime and a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions.<sup>82</sup>

72. OHCHR also documented 12 cases of conflict-related sexual violence by Russian armed forces against 12 children (10 girls and 2 boys) aged between 3 and 17 years old.<sup>83</sup> In all but one case, this sexual violence occurred in residential areas, including in the victims' homes. In March 2022 in Kherson region, a Russian

soldier entered a house where a seven-month pregnant 16-year-old girl and her relatives were hiding from shelling. The soldier raped the girl after threatening to gang rape and execute her. In another case in March 2022, a 3-year-old boy was present while a Russian soldier attempted to rape his mother in Chernihiv region.<sup>84</sup> The children who endured or were exposed to sexual violence suffered trauma and described psychological consequences, such as impaired memory, fear of all men in uniform, learning difficulties, and nightmares.

73. OHCHR documented the arbitrary detention of 16 boys by Russian armed forces in 2022 and 2023, 10 of whom were tortured or otherwise ill-treated. For example, in May 2022 in occupied territory of Zaporizhzhia region, Russian soldiers searched the cell phone of a 14-year-old boy and, upon finding pro-Ukrainian content, detained him. The boy was held for five days, during which he was beaten with sticks and metal wire and subjected to electric shocks. His parents were denied access to their son during this time.

## B. FORCED TRANSFERS AND DEPORTATIONS OF CHILDREN

74. In the first year following the invasion, some children, especially those in institutional care or who had been separated from their parents or guardians during hostilities, were forcibly transferred within occupied territory or deported outside Ukraine, potentially in violation of strict IHL restrictions on the movement of children.<sup>85</sup> OHCHR verified that around 200 children – almost all from institutions – were transferred individually or in groups within occupied territory or to the Russian Federation, mainly in 2022.<sup>86</sup> For example, in late 2022, the occupying authorities moved children from at least two institutions in Kherson region, mostly within occupied territory, but with a few children deported to the Russian Federation. Many of the children had disabilities or were under the age of three.

75. Without access to the Russian Federation or occupied territory of Ukraine, OHCHR has not been able to fully assess the scale of these transfers; thus, the total number of children who may have been deported or forcibly transferred, and have been unable to return, is unknown.

76. The tracing and return of these children have been slow. The Ukrainian authorities have faced challenges in updating data about these children. The Russian Federation has not upheld its obligation to provide detailed information to the Central Tracing Agency about children whom it moved.<sup>87</sup> This has thwarted efforts to trace children forcibly transferred or deported and to reunify them with their families.

77. Parents and relatives who tried to bring their children home had to travel long distances at considerable expense and faced risks of interrogation or detention at checkpoints. One mother described to OHCHR how the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation detained her for approximately 32 hours in a basement, blindfolded and interrogated her, and subjected her to a polygraph test. Some older children travelled to territory controlled by Ukraine on their own or with help from volunteers. One 16-year-old boy who returned to Ukraine described the treatment he endured in the Russian Federation. He received military training, including shooting practice, at school. Russian students verbally abused Ukrainian students,<sup>88</sup> using derogatory terms such as “khokhly”, “nazis”, and “banderovtsy”.<sup>89</sup> The boy made three unsuccessful attempts to cross the border to Ukraine. On his fourth attempt, Russian armed forces beat him after searching the messages on his mobile phone, but allowed him to leave. He reunited with his family.

78. According to the Ombudsperson of Ukraine, 1,183 children have been returned from occupied territory and the Russian Federation.<sup>90</sup> OHCHR is unable independently to verify these numbers.

## C. IMPOSITION OF LAWS AND POLICIES RESTRICTING CHILDREN’S RIGHTS IN OCCUPIED TERRITORY

79. Following the illegal annexation of four regions of Ukraine in 2022,<sup>91</sup> the Russian Federation imposed its legal and administrative systems, disregarding its obligations under IHL to maintain, as far as possible,

the existing systems of the occupied territory.<sup>92</sup> This has affected children at every level, from birth registration through education and social and cultural development, to eligibility for military conscription.

“Occupation was like a cage for me.”

— a 17-year-old girl who lived in occupied territory of Kherson region until the summer of 2023.



# RUSSIAN FEDERATION LEGISLATION TARGETING RESIDENTS, INCLUDING CHILDREN IN OCCUPIED TERRITORY (NON-EXHAUSTIVE)

## 2022

- **25 May – [Decree No. 304](#) of the President of the Russian Federation**  
*Introduced changes that allow residents of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions to apply for Russian citizenship under a simplified procedure.*
- **30 May – [Decree No. 330](#) of the President of the Russian Federation**  
*Granted guardians, caretakers, and heads of children's institutions (such as orphanages and care facilities) the ability to apply for Russian citizenship on behalf of children under their care under a simplified procedure.*
- **11 July – [Decree No. 440](#) of the President of the Russian Federation**  
*Extended the possibility of obtaining Russian citizenship under a simplified procedure to all citizens of Ukraine.*
- **4 October – Russian Federation Federal Constitutional Laws [No 5-FKZ](#), [No 6-FKZ](#), [No 7-FKZ](#), [No 8-FKZ](#)**  
*Purportedly annexed occupied regions of Ukraine, thereby displacing the existing legal system with Russian legislation. Recognized all Ukrainians permanently residing in these regions, including children, as Russian citizens provided that those aged 14 and above took an oath of allegiance.*
- **26 December – [Decree No. 951](#) of the President of the Russian Federation**  
*Introduced a procedure for registering minors 'unwilling' to retain Ukrainian citizenship, and allowed parents and legal guardians to apply on behalf of children under age 14.*

## 2023

- **17 February - Russian Federation [Law No. 19-FKZ](#)**  
*Granted temporary accreditation to educational institutions in occupied territory, setting deadlines to change their names and charters and to fully comply with the Law on Education of the Russian Federation. "Foreign" educational institutions – which included Ukrainian institutions – had to close by 1 June 2023.*
- **27 April (with subsequent amendments) - [Decree No. 307](#) of the President of the Russian Federation**  
*Stipulated that - retroactively from 30 September 2022 - citizens of Ukraine, 'Donetsk people's republic' and 'Luhansk people's republic' were recognized as foreigners permanently residing in the Russian Federation. Provided a deadline for residents of occupied territory to obtain Russian citizenship or be considered "foreigners" of 1 July 2024, later extended to 31 December 2024 by [Decree No. 281](#) of the President of the Russian Federation of 22 April 2024.*
- **28 April – Russian Federation [Law No. 138-FZ](#)**  
*Granted the President of the Russian Federation the right to determine that certain categories of "foreign" citizens and stateless persons may acquire Russian citizenship without satisfying all requirements and conditions for citizenship for "humanitarian or other goals".*
- **24 June – Russian Federation [Law No. 271-FZ](#)**  
*Facilitated the integration of physical education and sports entities in occupied territory into the Russian legal system.*

## 2024

- **4 January - [Decree No. 11](#) of the President of the Russian Federation**  
*Specified that orphans and children without parental care acquired Russian citizenship in accordance with Law No. 138-FZ which permitted the President to waive eligibility requirements based on "humanitarian or other goals".*
- **1 February – [Decree No. 62](#) of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation**  
*Introduced as of 1 September 2024 the compulsory school subject "Fundamentals of Security and Defence of the Homeland" for all 8th grade students (13-14 years old) which includes military training on grenades, small arms, hand-held anti-tank grenade launchers, and sniper rifles.*
- **11 September - [Order No. 2501-p](#) of the Government of the Russian Federation**  
*Established "State cultural policy up to 2030" whose "most important task" is the integration of "new subjects of the Russian Federation ... into the Russian cultural-humanitarian space"; aimed at "maintaining and popularizing traditional all-Russian spiritual-moral values", "maintaining an all-Russian civic identity", and increasing the number of children participating in recreational activities "with a military-historical theme".*
- **28 December - Russian Federation [Law No. 550-FZ](#)**  
*Amended the law on youth policy to define and prioritize patriotic education for State youth programs, including the "formation and strengthening of all-Russian civic identity among young citizens" and authorized State support for military-patriotic clubs.*
- **28 December - Russian Federation [Law No. 543-FZ](#)**  
*Instructed that educational activities during children's rest and recuperation, including summer camps, be directed toward the "formation in children of a sense of [Russian] patriotism", and "traditional all-Russian spiritual-moral values".*
- **28 December - [Decree No. 1124](#) of the President of the Russian Federation**  
*Identified "Ukrainian nationalism" as a form of extremism and "extremism in Ukraine" as a threat to national security. Outlined 30 priorities for education and youth policy, including Russian patriotic education and the cultural "integration" of occupied territory.*
- **30 December - [Decree No. 1126](#) of the President of the Russian Federation**  
*Required Ukrainian citizens living in occupied territory to regularize their stay under Russian law by 30 April 2025 or risk deportation.*

## » Birth registration and compulsory changes to citizenship

80. The Russian Federation has required medical staff in occupied territory of Ukraine to issue Russian official birth notifications and prohibited them from transmitting data on newborns to the National Health Service of Ukraine. While at first, some parents were able to obtain Ukrainian birth certificates, eventually the civil registries began issuing exclusively birth certificates of the Russian Federation, which used Russian spelling of names and places and identified the Russian Federation as the country of birth instead of Ukraine. Mandatory issuance of Russian birth certificates contradicts the temporary nature of occupation, the responsibilities of an occupying Power regarding the identification of children, and the inviolability of rights and status of protected persons.<sup>93</sup> It further violates IHRL provisions aimed at preserving a child's identity.<sup>94</sup>
81. Access to basic rights, including health care, education, and social security benefits, was made contingent on Russian citizenship,<sup>95</sup> amounting to discrimination on the grounds of nationality.<sup>96</sup> Parents faced significant pressure to also change their status, since without Russian citizenship they could not adequately care for their children. In one case, a woman with three children told OHCHR that her entire family had to apply for Russian citizenship and passports so that she could continue working, enrol her children in school, and receive social benefits. This effective imposition of nationality also violated children's right to privacy.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, the imposition of Russian nationality is tantamount to forcing inhabitants of the occupied territory to swear allegiance to the occupying Power, which is prohibited under international humanitarian law.<sup>98</sup>
82. According to laws adopted by the Russian Federation on 4 October 2022, Ukrainian citizens and stateless persons in occupied territory, including children, were "recognized" as citizens of the Russian Federation provided that they swear an oath.<sup>99</sup> In disregard of IHL<sup>100</sup>, taking the oath effectively required children aged 14 and above to swear allegiance to the occupying Power.<sup>101</sup> Public ceremonies were sometimes organized to showcase the presentation of Russian passports to children. For example, ceremonies were held to present Russian passports to 14-year-old boys who lacked parental care in the occupied parts of Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia regions, as well as in Sevastopol.
83. IHL requires that the status of children in occupied territory be preserved.<sup>102</sup> However, the President of the Russian Federation issued decrees that facilitated and expedited the issuance of Russian citizenship to children lacking parental care, enabling guardians, caretakers, and heads of institutions (such as orphanages and care facilities) to apply for Russian citizenship on behalf of children in their care, regardless of whether the child had a parent.<sup>103</sup> For children separated from their families, changes to their names and nationality has hindered tracing and reunification, which contributed to prolonged separation.
84. Under Russian legislation, only children who are Russian nationals can be placed in Russian families for custody and guardianship, foster care, or adoption. In December 2022, Russian authorities reported that 380 children from Donetsk and Luhansk regions lived with foster families in the Russian Federation.<sup>104</sup> The current number is likely higher since children from occupied territory have continued to be placed in foster care in the Russian Federation.
85. Russian officials have stated that no children from occupied territory have been adopted.<sup>105</sup> Conversely, the Ombudsperson for Children's Rights in Luhansk has stated that families from the Russian Federation had adopted 29 children from Luhansk region in 2023.<sup>106</sup> OHCHR has confirmed that Ukrainian children were listed on Russian adoption websites, and OHCHR documented one case in which a family from the Russian Federation adopted a Ukrainian child from Kherson region.<sup>107</sup>

“When a birth certificate is issued, Russian citizenship is indicated. In the occupied territories, you are either a Russian or a traitor.”

— a woman from occupied territory of Kherson region.

## » Imposition of Russian state curriculum

86. From the 2022-2023 academic year, the Russian Federation imposed its state curriculum across schools in occupied territory in place of the Ukrainian curriculum, contrary to the occupying Power's obligation to facilitate the work of all educational institutions for children, without interfering with their usual activities.<sup>108</sup> The stated goal was to completely integrate occupied territory into the Russian educational and cultural spheres.<sup>109</sup> In February 2023, the Russian Federation adopted a law governing the education system's transition: temporary accreditation was granted to educational institutions in occupied territory, and deadlines established for them to change their names and charters and to comply fully with Russian national legislation. It further stipulated that "foreign" educational institutions – including Ukrainian institutions – had to close by 1 June 2023.<sup>110</sup>
87. The Russian Federation educational curriculum introduced history textbooks in which Ukraine was not represented as an independent country.<sup>111</sup> New mandatory lessons entitled "Conversations about Important Things" began in the third quarter of 2022, which covered topics selected by the Ministry of Education to "[form] spiritual and moral values in accordance with the [Russian] National Security Strategy."<sup>112</sup> One lesson plan for 8th and 9th grade students (ages 13-15) focused on "the objectives of the 'special military operation' and instructed that residents of occupied territory were Russian people, making their return to Russia important; and that Russian soldiers were heroes."<sup>113</sup>
88. These changes to the school system effectively exposed Ukrainian children to propaganda for war, and deprived them of an education respectful of their individual cultural identity, language and values, and the national values of their country, in violation of IHRL.<sup>114</sup>



The curriculum was completely different even though the subjects were the same. We were constantly told that 100 years ago Ukraine did not exist, it was all Russian land, and that after the collapse of the Soviet Union Ukraine stole the land from Russia.



— a 16-year-old girl who attended school in occupied territory of Kherson region.

89. While imposing the Russian state curriculum, the occupying authorities restricted access to education in the Ukrainian language, similar to measures implemented by Russian authorities in Crimea in 2014. There, in the first year of occupation, the number of students receiving education in Ukrainian language fell by 80 per cent, and ultimately decreased from 12,700 (prior to occupation) to only 197 in 2023.<sup>115</sup> By 2024, only one school in Crimea had the status of a Ukrainian-language school, and the last Ukrainian class offered in a Russian-language school in Simferopol ended.<sup>116</sup> The International Court of Justice held that the manner in which the Russian Federation implemented its educational system in Crimea with regard to instruction in Ukrainian language constituted a pattern of racial discrimination, noting the disparate adverse effect on the rights of Ukrainian children.<sup>117</sup>
90. Similarly, the Russian authorities did not close all Ukrainian classes immediately in the regions illegally annexed in 2022. Ukrainian language classes remained as an extracurricular option in some areas; however, parents and teachers told OHCHR that many families feared enrolling children in these classes, because the occupying authorities considered the use of the Ukrainian language as evidence of potential disloyalty. The Russian Federation has not published data about the number of children in occupied territory who receive instruction in Ukrainian language, which complicates full assessment of the trends.
91. Occupying authorities also barred children from speaking Ukrainian in school. An IDP told OHCHR that when her daughter's classmate refused to speak Russian, the teacher called a Russian guard in military uniform to take the girl for a "talk". She returned in tears. Ukrainian language books were removed from school and public libraries, and Ukrainian internet providers, television, radio, media, and websites were blocked, further reducing children's ability to study and use the Ukrainian language.<sup>118</sup>
92. Some families resisted sending their children to Russian schools and instead kept them home to follow the Ukrainian curriculum in online classes. This became more difficult over time: internet service providers blocked access to Ukrainian websites, including those for education; Russian armed forces searched mobile phones for Ukrainian apps; and occupying authorities used threats and intimidation to coerce parents into sending their children to Russian schools.<sup>119</sup> Parents told OHCHR that occupying authorities threatened to terminate their parental rights and take away their children if they did not attend Russian schools.
93. These policies and practices resulted in discrimination against children who wished to speak Ukrainian or follow the Ukrainian curriculum, and infringed their rights to education, access to information, freedom of expression and participation in cultural life.<sup>120</sup>

## » Education programs to instil Russian patriotism

94. The President of the Russian Federation instructed Government officials to strengthen Russian identity among youth in occupied territory and explain to them the reasons for the "special military operation."<sup>121</sup> These instructions were subsequently incorporated into the "Strategy of State Cultural Policy until 2030",<sup>122</sup> for all federal ministries to follow in developing and funding state programmes. Integrating "new subjects of the Russian Federation ... into the Russian cultural-humanitarian space" was defined as the "most important task" of the strategy. The law on youth policy was subsequently amended to define and prioritize patriotic education for state youth programs.<sup>123</sup> A law on child rights was also amended to require that educational activities during school holidays, including summer camps, "develop a sense of Russian patriotism in children."<sup>124</sup>

95. Schools in occupied territory began holding weekly Russian flag-raising ceremonies, and, in 2024, pre-schools and kindergartens were obliged by law to display the Russian flag, to cultivate a “patriotic mood”.<sup>125</sup> Graduation ceremonies in occupied territory included speeches of allegiance to the Russian Federation and the singing of the Russian anthem.
96. The Russian Federation incorporated patriotic education into summer camps for children from occupied territory, which took place in occupied territory, the Russian Federation and Belarus. Campers visited Russian patriotic memorials and attended lectures by soldiers and law enforcement. The explicit purpose of some programs was to increase campers’ loyalty to the Russian state. For example, a Russian political leader announced that 22,000 children from occupied territory underwent “social adaptation” to become “full-fledged citizens of our beautiful motherland”, while staying in a resort owned by the presidential administration.<sup>126</sup> The number of children who have participated in such camps is unknown; however, the occupying authorities in Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia regions reported that 58,000 children attended camps in 2024.<sup>127</sup>
97. The inculcation of patriotism and other forms of allegiance toward the Russian Federation effectively compelled Ukrainian children to swear allegiance to the occupying Power, and ran counter to their entitlement to respect for their honour, manners, customs and cultural identity, protected by IHL and IHRL.<sup>128</sup>

## » Military training and education for children in occupied territory

98. Russian authorities amended educational and cultural policies to promote military training and future military service for children, including Ukrainian children in occupied territory.<sup>129</sup> Children in occupied territory underwent military education and training at school and in organized patriotic youth groups and were exposed to military propaganda urging enlistment in the armed forces of the occupying Power. These programs and practices violated fundamental provisions of IHL, including prohibitions on compelling protected persons to swear allegiance to an occupying Power, using pressure or propaganda to secure voluntary enlistment in the occupying Power’s armed forces, and enlisting children in formations or organizations subordinate to the occupying Power, including those with political aims.<sup>130</sup>
99. The militarization of education further exposed children to propaganda for war and violated the right to an education that prepares children for “responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, [and] tolerance...”.<sup>131</sup> This militarized education prepared children for service in armed forces engaged in hostilities against their country of origin, which risks perpetuating conflict.

### • Military activities in schools

100. In September 2024 the Ministry of Education introduced a new compulsory subject for both boys and girls in 8th grade (ages 13-14) entitled the “Fundamentals of Security and Defence of the Homeland”. The course involved military training, including on types of grenades, small arms, hand-held anti-tank grenade launchers, and sniper rifles.<sup>132</sup>
101. Russian servicepersons frequently visited schools in occupied territory to promote Russian-oriented patriotism and military service. Some brought their weapons into schools, demonstrated how to use them and trained children to assemble them. Children also participated in organized school activities aimed at supporting the war effort against their own country. In regular “Letter to a Soldier” activities, children were required to write to Russian soldiers who fought against Ukraine, thanking them for their service and heroism. They also manufactured equipment such as camouflage nets and trench candles for frontline Russian armed forces.

### • Military activities through organized youth groups

102. The Russian Federation also introduced “cadet classes” – specialized pre-professional education for entry into law enforcement and the military – into public schools for girls and boys as young as 6 years old. Under this instruction, all cadets must swear an oath of allegiance to the Russian Federation. Cadet classes were introduced in Crimea in 2015,<sup>133</sup> and by the 2023-2024 academic year, 78 schools in Crimea had a total of 244 cadet classes. The Russian Federation followed suit in the four regions of Ukraine that it illegally annexed in 2022. By December 2024, occupying authorities in Zaporizhzhia region reported opening 11 cadet classes, while at least three schools in Kherson region, three in Luhansk and two in Donetsk also established cadet classes. The curriculum included military-patriotic training and classes tailored to the specific sponsoring institution. A specialized Naval Military School opened in Mariupol in September 2024, with a capacity of 560 students starting from 5th grade (ages 11-12).
103. The “Strategy of State Cultural Policy until 2030” prioritized increasing the number of children participating in “military-historical” recreational activities.<sup>134</sup> Amendments to the law on youth policy authorized state support for military-patriotic clubs.<sup>135</sup> The Russian Federation enrolled Ukrainian children and youth in occupied territory into various state-affiliated groups that sought to cultivate Russian patriotic values and teach military skills.
104. The “Yunarmiya” (or “youth army”) group, founded by a former Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation, expanded to occupied territory and organized activities for boys and girls aged 8 to 18. The group aimed to strengthen Russian-oriented patriotism, to motivate and prepare youth for Russian military service, and ultimately to enlist at least 10 per cent of members in the armed forces.<sup>136</sup> Children in the group received military training including how to handle automatic rifles, and wore military-style uniforms to school. Reports in 2024 indicated that Yunarmiya had 4,100 members in Donetsk region, 6,000 in Luhansk region, along with 23 groups in Zaporizhzhia region.
105. The civic-state group “Movement of the First” claimed to have formed 2,108 groups for children aged 6 and older at educational institutions in occupied territory. The Movement’s program, developed jointly by the Russian Minister of Education and Federal Agency for Youth Affairs, aimed to cultivate Russian patriotism including through “Zarnitsa 2.0”, its annual flagship patriotic-military games. The games, often held on school premises, included assembling weapons, operating drones, acting as “storm troopers”, and completing “military-tactical” obstacle courses and challenges. The competition was held in occupied territory in 2024.

## » Military conscription regulations and propaganda for voluntary enlistment in the Russian armed forces

106. Ukrainian boys who turned 18 in occupied territory were subjected to conscription into the Russian armed forces for a period of 12 months, on the basis of their imposed Russian citizenship. In November 2024, the first groups of conscripts from occupied territory reportedly travelled to the Russian Federation to serve in the Russian armed forces.<sup>137</sup> Compelling persons from occupied territory to serve in the Russian armed forces constitutes a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions.<sup>138</sup>

107. Before children turned 18, teachers encouraged students to sign military contracts or to enrol in cadet academies. Vulnerable children, such as those from single-parent households, were often targeted. For example, a woman whose son lived with his grandparents in occupied Mariupol told OHCHR that teachers and school administrators began pressuring the grandparents to enrol their grandson in the new Naval Military School after they discovered the boy was in their care. Teachers in Starobilsk schools encouraged children to sign contracts with the Russian army, saying it was a good financial opportunity for those reaching conscription age.

## » Restrictions on children's freedom of expression, including expressions of cultural identity

108. The Russian Criminal Code and Code of Administrative Offenses were amended in March 2022 to introduce new offenses on the "dissemination of knowingly false information" about the armed forces, and on "public actions directed at discrediting" and "obstructing" the Russian armed forces.<sup>139</sup> These broadly worded provisions allowed for prosecutions for actions that would otherwise be lawful, such as wearing Ukrainian traditional clothes or the colours of the flag,<sup>140</sup> creating an environment in which people in occupied territory, including children, became afraid to make any cultural references to Ukraine, and effectively suppressed expressions of Ukrainian identity and pro-Ukrainian opinions.

109. IDPs told OHCHR that teachers disciplined students for expressing pro-Ukrainian sentiments or summoned their parents. Parents were threatened with arrest or having their children taken away. Interlocutors

also told OHCHR it was not safe for children to speak Ukrainian in the street. Parents instructed their children not to express pro-Ukrainian views in school or on social media and teenagers engaged in self-censorship.

110. OHCHR reviewed a state-funded online course for educators that instructed teachers to identify Ukrainian symbols and the expression of pro-Ukrainian sympathies among children as indicators that they may engage in illegal activity.<sup>141</sup> In December 2024, the Russian Federation adopted a State strategy on countering extremism, which identified "Ukrainian nationalism" as a form of extremism and described "extremism in Ukraine" as a threat to national security. The strategy also outlined 30 priorities for education and youth policy, which included – again – patriotic education and cultural "integration" of occupied territory.<sup>142</sup>



There was a class called 'Ukrainian language' but even during the lessons, we had to speak Russian! It was forbidden to speak Ukrainian in school.



— a 16-year-old girl who attended school in occupied territory of Kherson region.

## VI. OBLIGATIONS OF UKRAINE TO PROTECT CHILDREN IN TERRITORY OCCUPIED BY THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND CHILDREN DISPLACED FROM OCCUPIED TERRITORY



111. While the Russian Federation has the primary responsibility to ensure compliance with IHRL and IHL in territory it occupies, Ukraine also retains a positive obligation to take steps to protect the rights of children residing there, to the extent possible.<sup>143</sup>
112. To promote access to education, Ukrainian authorities offered online classes to children in occupied territory. However, many children could not attend due to risks, blockage of websites, and the heavy load of attending Russian school by day and Ukrainian classes by night. Civil society actors recommended measures to make online education and information more accessible, for instance by diversifying the formats and course offerings. The Government has not yet adopted a plan to improve the accessibility and appropriateness of education for children on occupied territory.
113. Children who fled occupied territory needed support following their arrival in Government-controlled territory in order to fully enjoy their human rights. The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine established a procedure for individualized comprehensive support packages (including provision of essential goods, housing, financial assistance, education, psychological support and rehabilitation) aimed at ensuring accompaniment and reintegration of children; however, this applies only to children who were forcibly transferred or deported.<sup>144</sup>
114. Children born under occupation arrived in Ukraine with birth certificates issued by the Russian Federation. To obtain a Ukrainian birth certificate, parents or guardians had to apply to court, which involved complex steps and frequent delays. The Ukrainian authorities have not yet implemented a simplified administrative procedure for issuing birth certificates, as provided by Ukrainian law,<sup>145</sup> which hinders enjoyment of the right to nationality and identity and has knock-on effects on the rights to health, education, and social security.
115. Many children, having experienced both hostilities and occupation, required psychological support. Psychologists who worked with children from occupied territory told OHCHR that some of them showed symptoms of trauma, including fear, aggressiveness, anger and depression. Others expressed distrust, lack of faith in the future, or disappointment, and had difficulty socially connecting with new people. Some younger children suffered speech difficulties, while teenagers experienced eating disorders, suicidal thoughts and self-harm practices. Teenagers experienced worse mental health if they were exposed to militarized activities, spent longer periods under occupation, or if trusted authority figures, such as teachers or coaches, had switched loyalties to support the Russian authorities in occupation. As noted above, Ukraine has too few mental health professionals specializing in children for the wide needs in this area across the country.

116. Parents told OHCHR that, after relocating to Government-controlled territory, they had encountered little difficulty enrolling their children in local schools. Parents and educators explained that some newly arrived children had adapted quickly to their new environment and education in Ukrainian language, but that others had struggled in transitioning to the Ukrainian language at school. Civil society organizations provided language and psychological support to some children. However, the aunt of a child recently relocated from occupied Donetsk region noted that free, state-provided access to Ukrainian language tutors could help accelerate the adaptation process.

117. Russian language instruction is not offered in Ukrainian schools because the legal framework for education and national minorities applies differential treatment between official European Union languages and other languages, including Russian. OHCHR has raised concern that,

under the current legal framework, national minorities whose language is not a European Union language are not able to enjoy the same rights and that this differential treatment may be discriminatory.<sup>146</sup> While interviewed parents did not raise concern about the lack of Russian language instruction in Ukrainian schools, OHCHR will continue to monitor this issue.

118. Though the Ukrainian authorities instituted measures to facilitate the enrolment of children and young adults from occupied territory in higher education, many faced financial constraints due to low stipends, banking restrictions (which prevented the transfer of funds from family members in occupied territory), and the high cost of rent. Moreover, as of December 2024, no procedure existed to validate learning outcomes obtained in occupied territory, although this is envisioned in Ukrainian law.<sup>147</sup> The lack of recognized credentials hindered access to higher education and the job market.

“ I have no one here, no family. I take care of all my needs myself. I can only rely on myself. ”

— a 17-year-old girl who moved from occupied territory to Kyiv.

## VII. CONCLUSION



119. Over the past three years, the full-scale invasion by the Russian Federation has resulted in widespread violations of human rights and IHL, causing significant harm to millions of children in Ukraine and their enjoyment of the full range of human rights.

120. The extensive use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas has led to deaths, life-altering injuries, displacement, family separation, and loss of homes. The destruction of civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, has further disrupted children's lives, limiting access to essential services, including education and medical care, and worsening living conditions. The cumulative impact of these violations has undermined children's rights across all sectors of life. Despite certain protective measures taken by Ukrainian authorities, it has been impossible to fully shield children from the adverse effects of hostilities. As a result, many face reduced educational attainment, lower lifetime earnings, and poorer mental and physical health. The economic toll of diminished educational opportunities alone is estimated in the billions of dollars, further compounding the country's post-war recovery challenges.

121. In the months following the full-scale invasion, the Russian armed forces, in areas they occupied or controlled, killed some children as they attempted to flee, and subjected some children to conflict-related violence and arbitrary detention. Forced transfer within occupied territory and deportation of children from occupied territory to the Russian Federation constitute war crimes.<sup>148</sup> Some such cases have been accompanied by illegal alteration of children's identity.

122. Children residing in occupied territory are particularly vulnerable. The Russian Federation has implemented policies that violate IHL provisions requiring an occupying Power to protect children, uphold their existing identity, and maintain the continuity of their education and cultural

traditions. However, occupying authorities have imposed Russian citizenship, restructured education systems to prioritize military-patriotic training, and infused Russian-oriented propaganda for war into educational and recreational activities. These policies have broadly suppressed Ukrainian language instruction, erased Ukrainian cultural identity from State institutions, and discriminated against children based on their Ukrainian national and/or ethnic identity, infringing upon their rights to private life, education, cultural participation, and freedom of expression and access to information.

123. While the human toll of explosive weapons and other methods of warfare can be measured, albeit imperfectly, the full extent of harm resulting from occupation policies – such as the coercion of children into adopting Russian national identity, restrictions on their freedoms, and militarized indoctrination in the service of hostilities against their own national origin – remains incalculable. The systematic exposure of children in occupied territory to military-patriotic education presents a serious risk of perpetuating conflict and undermining post-war reconciliation efforts.

124. These measures have profound consequences for social cohesion in Ukraine. Ukrainian children have endured vastly different wartime experiences – some as refugees in Europe, others as direct victims or under continued threat of bombardment, and many subject to the coercive laws and policies applied by Russian authorities in occupied areas. Meaningful recovery will require not only measures to restore children's rights but also accountability for their violation, and targeted efforts by way of remedy and reparation in order to repair the harm they have suffered. Acknowledging and addressing these violations is essential for ensuring a future where all Ukrainian children can reclaim their rights, identity, and security in a society free from the enduring consequences of war and occupation.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 125. To all parties to the conflict

- a. Respect and ensure full compliance with IHRL and IHL, in particular, in the conduct of hostilities, and the treatment of protected persons;
- b. Immediately cease attacks utilizing explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas;
- c. Take all feasible precautions, in light of experience, to avoid or at the very least minimize civilian harm, including through the careful selection of lawful means and methods of warfare;
- d. Immediately and completely refrain from using anti-personnel mines. Rigorously map the location of mines so that affected areas can be promptly identified and, as soon as possible, cleared, and support child-friendly programs to educate children in particular as well as other civilians of the specific risks posed by mines and ERW and how to best protect oneself in contaminated areas;
- e. Ensure prompt, impartial, and effective investigations into all alleged violations of IHL and IHRL, particularly those causing harm to children, and ensure that perpetrators of such violations, including members of the military and security forces and persons in positions of command, are duly prosecuted.

## 126. To the Russian Federation

- f. Immediately, completely and unconditionally cease the use of force against Ukraine and withdraw all its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, in line with United Nations General Assembly Resolutions ES-11/1 (2022) and ES-11/4 (2022), ending its occupation of Ukrainian territory;
- g. Immediately cease all attacks directed against civilians or civilian infrastructure;
- h. Accede to the 1997 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction (Ottawa Convention or Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty);
- i. Provide full information about Ukrainian children forcibly transferred within occupied territory or deported to the Russian Federation, including those in institutional care and those placed within Russian families, to the Central Tracing Agency; refrain from making any changes to their personal status, including nationality, and facilitate their reunification with family. Abolish the simplified procedure allowing guardians to apply for Russian citizenship on behalf of Ukrainian children;
- j. Cease all measures that compel Ukrainian children to swear allegiance to the Russian Federation, halt military training and education aimed at securing children's voluntary enlistment in the Russian armed forces, and end the enlistment of children in formations or organizations subordinate to the Russian Federation, such as those providing patriotic-military education;
- k. End discrimination against Ukrainian children who have not taken Russian citizenship and ensure that they have equal access to education and health services;
- l. Restore access to education following the Ukrainian state curriculum in Ukrainian language both in-person and online, including by ensuring Russian internet service providers allow access to websites hosting the Ukrainian education curriculum, and publish regular statistics about the number of children studying Ukrainian in occupied territory;
- m. Respect children's right to participate fully in the cultural life of their choosing, which includes the right to freely express and develop their cultural identity, without discrimination on the basis of nationality, ethnicity, political opinion or language;
- n. Make full reparation for IHL and human rights violations committed during the occupation by providing due restitution, compensation and/or satisfaction;
- o. Provide OHCHR with safe and meaningful access to occupied territory for the purpose of monitoring the human rights situation, including in schools and care institutions for children.

## 127. To the Government of Ukraine

- p. Apply a maximum of available resources to achieving progressively the full realisation of economic, social and cultural rights of all children within its jurisdiction;
- q. Take all feasible measures to protect and care for children, including children with disabilities, affected by armed conflict, promoting their physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration;
- r. Ensure that detention of children is used as a measure of last resort and for the shortest possible period of time and that it is reviewed on a regular basis with a view to its withdrawal;

- s. Strengthen children's access to psychological and psychiatric support, including by training mental health professionals in child-sensitive care;
- t. Implement a simplified administrative procedure for issuing Ukrainian birth certificates for children born in occupied territory;
- u. Develop a comprehensive strategy to ensure support for all children arriving from occupied territory or the Russian Federation, which incorporates existing support mechanisms for children who were forcibly transferred or deported, in particular by providing social assistance, language classes, educational support including for youth seeking access to higher education, and mental health services;
- v. Adopt measures to make online Ukrainian classes more accessible for children living on occupied territory, and appropriate in light of their specific needs; adopt a procedure to recognize the learning outcomes obtained in occupied territory;
- w. Amend the law 'On national minorities (communities) of Ukraine' to fully comply with international human rights norms and standards in accordance with previous recommendations of OHCHR and the opinion of the Venice Commission.

## 128. To the international community

- x. Provide further financial support and technical assistance to Ukraine, in particular to enhance its capacity for safe, efficient, and effective demining operations, and support child-friendly programs to educate on the risks posed by mines and ERW;
- y. Facilitate the tracing and return of forcibly transferred and deported children through diplomatic channels;
- z. Support national institutions, local civil society and other actors promoting child rights by providing resources and strengthening their capacities to work with children, including children with disabilities, displaced children, and children suffering trauma;
- aa. Support all accountability mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court, investigating human rights violations and abuses against children amounting to breaches of international criminal law;
- ab. Support Ukraine through funding and technical cooperation aimed at establishing support programmes for children arriving in Government-controlled territory from occupied territory and the Russian Federation.

# ENDNOTES

1. The report focuses on territory newly occupied by the Russian Federation in 2022 and after. Information on the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine (Crimea) can be found in previous OHCHR reports, for example [Ten Years of Occupation by the Russian Federation: Human Rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine](#).
2. With 887 women, 671 men, 14 boys and 6 girls.
3. Both Ukraine and the Russian Federation have ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (Optional Protocol I), as well as other core human rights treaties.
4. Both parties are bound by treaty and customary IHL applicable to international armed conflicts, primarily the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their 1977 Additional Protocol I, the 1907 Hague Convention IV with its annexed Regulations concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land (Hague Regulations). Ukraine has ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (Rome Statute).
5. Human Rights Committee, General Comments no. 31 (para. 10) and no. 36 (para. 63).
6. CRC, art. 7.
7. ICCPR, art. 24; CRC, arts. 2, 7, 8.
8. CRC, art. 2.
9. CRC, arts. 24, 27.
10. The ICESCR contains no derogation clause; see for instance Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 14 (2000) on the right to the highest attainable standard of health (art. 12), para. 47. Furthermore, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) has confirmed that the Covenant applies even in times of conflict or general emergency. See E/C.12/AFG/Q/2-4, para. 38; E/C.12/COL/Q/5, para. 5.
11. CRC, arts. 12, 13, 16, 31; ICCPR, arts. 17, 19; ICESCR, art. 15.
12. CRC arts. 28-30, 38; ICESCR, art. 13.
13. CRC, art. 29(1); Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment no. 1 on "The aims of education", para. 8; Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), General Comments no. 13 on "Right to education" (para. 6) and no. 21 on "Right of everyone to take part in cultural life" (paras. 15, 26); Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 12 August 1949 (Fourth Geneva Convention), art. 50.
14. CRC, art. 3.
15. ICCPR, art. 20.
16. CRC, arts. 38, 39; Optional Protocol I, art. 7.
17. Additional Protocol I, arts. 48, 51(2), 51(5)(b), 52(2), 57.
18. Additional Protocol I, art. 58.
19. These obligations are established in Additional Protocol I (Articles 51, 57), ICRC Customary IHL, Rule 14; ICRC, War in cities: The reverberating effects of explosive weapons, at <https://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2017/03/02/war-in-cities-the-reverberating-effects-of-explosive-weapons/> (all footnotes in the report were last accessed on 17 March 2025).
20. Additional Protocol I, arts. 12-13. See also, Rome Statute, art. 8(2)(b)(ix).
21. Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 27. The obligation to respect manners and customs is particularly important in occupied territory; see Commentary of 1958, p. 203.
22. Additional Protocol I, art. 77; CRC, art. 38.
23. Optional Protocol I, arts. 3, 4.
24. ICJ, Advisory Opinion on the legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, 19 July 2024, para. 106.
25. Hague Regulations, art. 43; Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 64; Additional Protocol I, art. 4.
26. Hague Regulations, art. 45.
27. Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 51.
28. Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 50.
29. Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 50; Commentary of 1958, p. 288.
30. Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 50.
31. Fourth Geneva Convention, arts. 8, 47; Commentary of 1958, pp. 275-276.
32. Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 24; Commentary of 1958, p. 187.
33. Additional Protocol I, art. 74.
34. Additional Protocol I, art. 78. This provision does not apply with regard to children of the same nationality as the Party to the conflict conducting the evacuation.
35. Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 147, Additional Protocol I, art. 85; Rome Statute, art. 8(a)(vii), 8(b)(viii).
36. Commentary of 1987 to Additional Protocol I, paras. 3211, 3226.
37. Additional Protocol I, art. 78(3); Commentary of 1987, para. 3218.
38. OHCHR has been unable to verify some civilian casualties during the first months of the full-scale invasion due to the large number of reports and the lack of access to certain areas. The number of civilian casualties is likely significantly undercounted in cities like Mariupol (Donetsk region), Lysychansk, Popasna and Sievierodonetsk (Luhansk region), where protracted intensive fighting occurred in 2022.
39. This figure is based on verified deaths and injuries among children whose sex could be identified. 669 killed (352 boys, 289 girls, 28 children of unknown sex) and 1,833 injured (891 boys, 657 girls, 285 children of unknown sex).
40. These figures are based on reports provided by the Russian authorities or official statements published by local authorities and media. They have not been verified by OHCHR.
41. Killed: 285 boys, 256 girls, 22 children of unknown sex. Injured: 789 boys, 612 girls, 262 children of unknown sex.
42. UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, Securing our common future: An agenda for Disarmament, 2018, p. 34.
43. 482 killed, 1,433 injured.
44. Killed: Five girls, two boys. Injured: Five girls, three boys, nine children of unknown sex.
45. Actual figures are considerably higher, as many reports are still pending corroboration.
46. 2023: 7 boys and 2 girls killed or injured. 2024: 89 boys and 70 girls killed or injured.
47. 1 July to 31 December 2023: 20 children killed, 123 injured. 1 July to 31 December 2024: 40 children killed, 303 injured.
48. 81 killed, 230 injured.
49. Russian Federation authorities reported 18 children killed and 102 injured in 2024. OHCHR has not been able to verify these casualties or the circumstances surrounding the attacks.
50. 2022: 18 killed, 47 injured; 2023: seven killed, 47 injured; 2024: 5 killed, 26 injured.
51. Figure based on verified deaths and injuries among children whose sex could be identified: 105 boys, 26 girls, 19 children of unknown sex.
52. Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction, 18 September 1997.
53. Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2 (11 February 1998).
54. IOM, Ukraine Internal Displacement Report, round 19, January 2025.
55. UNHCR calculations as of November 2024, based on available official data complemented with survey estimates, do not include Ukrainian children in the Russian Federation.
56. UNHCR, Intentions Survey #6 (November 2024); does not include Ukrainian children in the Russian Federation.
57. Ibid.
58. CRC, art. 20. Women represented a greater portion of those displaced abroad as the introduction of martial law placed restrictions on the possibility for men aged 18-60 to travel abroad.
59. UNHCR Protection Monitoring and Profiling 2024.
60. World Bank, Government of Ukraine, European Union and United Nations, [Fourth Rapid Disaster Needs Assessment \(February 2022 – December 2024\)](#), 2025, p. 93.
61. See for instance [Law of Ukraine No. 1706-VII](#) "On ensuring the rights and freedoms of internally displaced persons", adopted on 20 October 2014, and subsequent amendments; Decree of Cabinet of Ministers No. 332 of 20 March 2022 "Some issues of housing assistance payments

- to internally displaced persons”; Decree of Cabinet of Ministers No. 930 of 1 September 2023 “Some issues of functioning of temporary accommodation for internally displaced persons”; Decree of Cabinet of Ministers No. 333 of 19 March 2022 “On adoption of Procedure for compensation of costs for temporary accommodation (stay) of internally displaced persons”.
62. International Organization for Migration (IOM), [Ukraine Internal Displacement Report, round 18](#), October 2024, p. 7-8.
  63. As of October 2024, nearly a quarter of IDP households had inadequate housing, and over half of IDP households headed by single parents had insufficient access to food. Ibid.
  64. CRC, art. 27.
  65. OHCHR has not been able to draw reliable conclusions on the impact of attacks with explosive weapons on access to education for children in occupied territory. While numerous surveys are available regarding the situation of children in Government-controlled territory, comparable surveys regarding children in occupied territory are not available, in part because UN entities have not been granted access.
  66. Air Raid Alert Map of Ukraine, Air Raid Alerts Duration By Region, at <https://alerts.in.ua/en>.
  67. In 2024, Russian armed forces launched 13 large-scale coordinated attacks. HRMMU, [Attacks on Ukraine's Energy Infrastructure: Harm to the Civilian Population](#), September 2024.
  68. Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine.
  69. See PISA Key Findings and Conclusions in Ukraine for 2018 and 2022, <https://testportal.gov.ua/en/pisa-in-ukraine/>
  70. World Bank, Government of Ukraine, European Union and United Nations, [Third Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment \(February 2022 - December 2023\)](#), 2024, p. 81.
  71. UNICEF, Olena Zelenska Foundation, Kyiv School of Economics, [The Future Index: Children's Well-being Index 2023](#), p. 59; Official results of the NMT for 2024, p. 53.
  72. For more details, see OHCHR, [Attacks on Ukraine's Energy Infrastructure](#).
  73. UNICEF, [Executive summary: Situation Analysis of Children in Ukraine](#), 2024, p. 9; Ministry of Justice, Statistical information on state registration of civil status acts, available at [https://minjust.gov.ua/actual-info/stat\\_info](https://minjust.gov.ua/actual-info/stat_info).
  74. OHCHR, [Treatment of prisoners of war and update on the human rights situation, 1 June to 31 August 2024](#), October 2024, para. 86.
  75. 31 girls, 28 boys, 8 children of unknown sex.
  76. UNICEF, [Life for children during the war](#), February 2024, p. 10.
  77. CRC, art. 38; Additional Protocol I, art. 77.
  78. Criminal Code of Ukraine, arts. 111, 113, 258, 114, 194.
  79. OHCHR, [Killings of Civilians](#), 7 December 2022; OHCHR, [Detention of civilians](#), 27 June 2023.
  80. Some of these cases occurred in Government-controlled territory.
  81. See OHCHR, [Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine, 1 August to 30 November 2023](#), December 2023, para. 46.
  82. Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 147.
  83. CRC, arts. 19, 34; ICCPR, art. 7, 9; Convention Against Torture, arts. 1-2. These acts were perpetrated in areas which were under the control of Russian armed forces. OHCHR did not document any cases of conflict-related sexual violence against children by Ukrainian armed forces.
  84. Forced witnessing of sexual violence is in itself a form of sexual violence.
  85. Additional Protocol I, art. 78.
  86. The legal qualification of these transfers as forced transfers and deportations requires careful factual determinations based on the individual circumstances of each adult or child. However, they constitute violations of the rights to respect of family life and to know the fate and whereabouts of missing relatives, as well as the rights of children to preserve their identity and to family reunification under IHRL. The Government of Ukraine estimates that over 19,000 children were forcibly transferred or deported.
  87. Additional Protocol I, art. 78(3); Commentary of 1987, para. 3218. In addition, see CRC, arts. 9-10 regarding State obligations concerning family separation and reunification.
  88. There were 20 Ukrainian students (12 boys, 8 girls).
  89. Derogatory terms used to describe Ukrainians.
  90. Report “Phenomenon of Power”, January 2025, p. 6.
  91. Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia regions.
  92. See OHCHR, [Human rights situation during the Russian occupation of territory of Ukraine and its aftermath](#), March 2024; Art. 4 in Russian Federation Federal Constitutional Laws N°5-FKZ (Donetsk), N°6-FKZ (Luhansk), N°7-FKZ (Zaporizhzhia), N°8-FKZ (Kherson), all adopted on 4 October 2022.
  93. Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 47 and 50. Further, “An Occupying Power must take all necessary steps to facilitate the identification of children and registration of their parentage ... [and] must not do anything to hamper the normal working of the administrative services responsible for the identification of children, in particular newly born infants.” Commentary of 1958, p. 287.
  94. CRC, art. 8.
  95. OHCHR, [Russian occupation and its aftermath](#), paras. 115-122.
  96. ICESCR, arts. 2, 12, 13; Fourth Geneva Convention, arts. 50, 55, 56; Additional Protocol I, arts. 14(1), 69.
  97. The Human Rights Committee has found that “nationality constitutes an important component of one’s identity and that protection against arbitrary or unlawful interference with one’s privacy includes protection against the forceful imposition of a foreign nationality.” Bratsylo, Golovko and Konyukhov v. Russia, CCPR/C/140/D/3022/2017, para. 8.10.
  98. Hague Regulations, art. 45.
  99. Art. 5 in each of the following Russian Federation Federal Constitutional Laws: N°5-FKZ (Donetsk), N°6-FKZ (Luhansk), N°7-FKZ (Zaporizhzhia), N°8-FKZ (Kherson).
  100. Hague Regulations, art. 45.
  101. In the Russian Federation, at age 14, children are obliged to obtain a passport.
  102. Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 50.
  103. Decrees No. 304 of 25 May 2022, No. 330 of 30 May 2022, No. 440 of 11 July 2022, No. 951 of 26 December 2022, No. 11 of 4 January 2024, para. 2.
  104. Report on the activities of the Commissioner for Children’s Rights under the President of the Russian Federation for 2022, p. 118, <https://deti.gov.ru/Deyatelnost/documents/245>; TASS, Children’s Rights Commissioners accompany all families that have taken in Donbass children, 30 October 2024, <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/22266401>
  105. See e.g. Russian Federation Commissioner on Child Rights, Telegram post, 9 August 2023, <https://t.me/malvovabelova/1906>
  106. Luhansk Information Center, Families from other Russian regions have adopted 29 Luhansk children since the beginning of 2023 – Ombudsman, 9 November 2023, media article, available at <https://lug-info.ru/news/rossijskie-sem-i-s-nachala-2023-goda-usynovili-29-luganskih-detej-ombudsmen/>
  107. International adoption should only be pursued in conformity with the standards and principles of the 1993 Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoptions. In an emergency situation, however, it can be near impossible to ensure that the standards and safeguards of the convention are respected. This escalates the risk of child abduction, sale, or trafficking, and illegal adoptions during emergency situations is not in line with international standards. UNICEF, [Guidance for protecting displaced and refugee children in and outside of Ukraine](#).
  108. Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 50; OHCHR, [Russian occupation and its aftermath](#), paras. 21, 130-136.
  109. Statement of the Minister of Education of the Russian Federation, 15 January 2024, (<https://edu.gov.ru/press/8036/integraciyu-novyh-regionov-v-rossijskuyu-sistemu-obrazovaniya-planiruetsya-osuschestvit-v-techenie-dvuh-let/>); “State cultural policy for the period up to 2030”, 11 September 2024. (<http://government.ru/docs/all/155288/>).
  110. Russian Federation law N°19-FKZ “On the particularities of the legal regulation of relations in the spheres of education and science...”, (15 February 2023), art. 4.
  111. See OHCHR, [Russian occupation and its aftermath](#), paras. 131-132.
  112. Minister of Education, President’s meeting with members of the government, 31 August 2022, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69238>.
  113. Methodological recommendations for conversations about what is important, “Our country is Russia”, 12 September 2022, [https://razgovor-cdn.edsoo.ru/media/file/ourcountry-89-method\\_recom.pdf](https://razgovor-cdn.edsoo.ru/media/file/ourcountry-89-method_recom.pdf)
  114. ICCPR, art. 20; CRC, art. 29(1). See concerns raised by the Committee on the Rights of the Child of “widespread and systematic State propaganda in schools about the armed conflict in Ukraine.” Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of the Russian Federation, CRC/C/RUS/CO/6-7, 1 March 2024, para. 39b.
  115. OHCHR, [Ten Years of Occupation by the Russian Federation](#), para. 35.
  116. A/78/340, paras. 31-33.
  117. [Judgment](#), Ukraine v. Russian Federation, International Court of Justice, 31 January 2024, paras. 359, 369-370.

118. OHCHR, [Russian occupation and its aftermath](#), paras. 50-51, 140; CRC, art. 13, 29.
119. OHCHR, [Russian occupation and its aftermath](#), paras. 64-54, 133-134.
120. CRC, arts. 2, 13, 17, 29, 31.
121. President of the Russian Federation, List of instructions following the meeting of the Council on Interethnic Relations, 16 July 2023.
122. Government of the Russian Federation, Order No. 2501-p of 11 September 2024 "State cultural policy for the period up to 2030", p. 16.
123. Russian Federation law No. 550-FZ (28 December 2024) "On introduction of changes to the federal law 'On youth policy of the Russian Federation'".
124. Russian Federation law No. 543-FZ (28 December 2024) "On introduction of changes to the federal law 'On fundamental guarantees of the rights of the child in the Russian Federation'".
125. Minister of Education, 22 August 2024, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/74920>, referring to Federal Constitutional Law, No. 1-FKZ "On the state flag of the Russian Federation", 23 March 2024.
126. Transcript of the State Council meeting of 20 December 2024, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/75918>.
127. Reports of occupying authorities in Donetsk (22,000 children) [https://vk.com/wall-76988535\\_23779](https://vk.com/wall-76988535_23779); Kherson (3000) [https://t.me/VGA\\_Kherson/27301](https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/27301); Luhansk (25,000) <https://t.me/minoblrnr/15227>; and Zaporizhzhia (8000) <https://za-inform.ru/zaporozhskaya-oblast/bolee-8000-rebyat-iz-zaporozhskoj-oblasti-otdohnuli-v-detskih-lageryah/>.
128. Hague Regulations, art. 45; Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 27; CRC art. 29(1).
129. In March 2024, the Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern about Government interference in the educational process and called on the Russian Federation to prevent attempts to rewrite school curricula and textbooks to reflect the political and military agenda of the Government. CRC/C/RUS/CO/6-7, paras. 39-40.
130. Hague Regulations, art. 52; Fourth Geneva Convention, arts. 50, 51; Commentary of 1958, p. 288.
131. CRC, art. 29(1)(d); ICCPR, art. 20.
132. Order No. 62 of the Ministry of Education, 2 February 2024.
133. Law of the Republic of Crimea No. 131-ZRK/2015 'On Education in the Republic of Crimea', 6 July 2015.
134. Government of the Russian Federation, Decree No. 2501-r of 11 September 2024, available at <http://static.government.ru/media/acts/files/1202409160031.pdf>
135. Russian Federation law No. 550-FZ "On introduction of changes to the federal law 'On youth policy of the Russian Federation'", 28 December 2024.
136. Statute of the All-Russian child-youth military-patriotic civic movement "Yunarmiya", adopted 28 May 2016; Development Strategy of the All-Russian child-youth military-patriotic civic movement "Yunarmiya" until 2030.
137. Ren.tv, Conscripts from new regions of the Russian Federation went on compulsory military service for the first time, medial article, at <https://ren.tv/news/v-rossii/1281081-prizyvniki-iz-novykh-regionov-rf-vpervye-otpravilis-na-srochnuiu-sluzhbu>
138. Fourth Geneva Convention, arts. 51, 147.
139. Code of Administrative Offenses, art. 20.3.3; Criminal Code art. 207.3 and art. 280.3.
140. See for instance OHCHR, [Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine, 1 September to 30 November 2024, December 2024](#), p. 74.
141. Russian Society Znanie, Preventing the spread of neo-Nazi ideology among children and young people, course material, at <https://akademiya.znanierussia.ru/course/profilaktika-ideologii-neonacizma-sredi-detej-i-molodezhi/>
142. Presidential Decree No. 1124 (28 December 2024) "On approval of the strategy for countering extremism in the Russian Federation", p. 6, 14, 20-24.
143. See ECtHR, Case of Ilaşcu and Others v. Moldova and Russia [GC], judgment, 8 July 2004, para. 333; ICCPR, art. 2(1).
144. [Resolution 551](#), 14 May 2024.
145. Article 9 of the Law of Ukraine "On ensuring the rights and freedoms of citizens and the legal regime in the temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine".
146. See OHCHR, [Human rights situation in Ukraine, 1 December 2023 – 29 February 2024](#), paras. 96-97.
147. Law of Ukraine "On Education", art. 40-1, as amended 21 November 2023.
148. Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 49, 147; Additional Protocol 1, arts. 77, 85.



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