

# Children of War | Russia's Abduction of Ukrainian Children

## 1 | Scale of Abductions

The initiative of the President of Ukraine, the Bring Kids Back UA, received **19,546** reports of unlawful deportations and forced transfers of children, including of **4,396** orphans. As of November 2025, only **1,835** children have been returned from Russia, Belarus and the occupied territories of Ukraine.

Russian Commissioner for Children Rights Maria Lvova-Belova claimed to have deported 700,000 children. Ukrainian officials estimate the abduction of **200,000 children**. The exact number is currently unknown due to the lack of access to the occupied territories and no cooperation by Russia on the issue.

## 2 | Illegal Adoption

In May 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree providing for a simplified procedure to impose Russian citizenship on Ukrainian "children left without parental care and incapacitated persons," legalizing the abduction process. The Yale Human Research Laboratory (YHRL) identified **314** Ukrainian children placed in Russia's program of coerced adoption and fostering since February 2022 – **208** of which have already been placed in a Russian family.

A single website of the so-called Ministry of Education of the Luhansk People's Republic listed **294** Ukrainian children for adoption in an "online catalogue", where users can filter children by gender, eye color, hair color, and children are described like products: "obedient," "calm," "tidy". High-ranking Russian officials, such as Maria Lvova-Belova and former Chairman of the Federation Council Sergei Mironov, adopted abducted Ukrainian children from occupied Mariupol and Kherson, respectively.

Adoption is often accompanied by **sibling separation, the change of personal information and erasure of the paper trail**, effectively destroying any chance for parents or Ukrainian authorities to search for a child.

## 3 | International Law & Response

Russia's forcible transfer and deportation of children is in **direct violation of the UN Genocide Convention** that includes "forcibly transferring children of the [national, ethnical, racial or religious] group to another group," as a marker of **genocide**.

Russia's mistreatment and separation of children from their families **violates multiple articles of the Fourth Geneva Convention**.

In a UN Human Rights Council report dated March 15, 2023, the Commission concluded that "the transfer and deportation of children,

within Ukraine and to the Russian Federation respectively, violate international humanitarian law, and amount to a **war crime**."

On March 17th, 2023, **the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Vladimir Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova** for their roles in the forcible transfer of Ukrainian children to Russia.

The International Federation of the Red Cross **expelled the Belarus Red Cross Society** as a result of their refusal to dismiss Mr. Dmitry Shevtsov - the Secretary General of the Belarus chapter, who publicly admitted his involvement in the abduction of Ukrainian children to Belarus.

On July 14th 2025 the **European Court of Human Rights found Russia guilty of a systematic practice of abduction**, forcible transfer, and indoctrination of Ukrainian children, formally recognizing the mass deportation of Ukrainian children as a state-administered, unlawful practice.

## 4 | In captivity

Russia presents abduction of Ukrainian children as a rescue mission, but children are taken to Russia under coercion and deception.

Ukrainian children are subject to heavy **indoctrination**: singing the Russian national anthem, studying history according to the Russian worldview, and paramilitary education.. They are stripped of their national identity and punished for speaking Ukrainian.

Children do not receive appropriate medical treatment and are subjected to physical, sexual and psychological abuse as well as the **risk of being trafficked** and exploited.

YHRL has confirmed the existence of at least **210** facilities across Russia and Russian-occupied territories for abducted Ukrainian children. Of these, **130** are involved in re-education and 39 provide military training for Ukrainian children. At least **11** are located over 500 miles from Ukraine: in Siberia and in Russia's Far East.

In December 2023, the YHRL also confirmed the involvement of **Belarus** in the Russian policy of forced deportations: at least **2,442** Ukrainian children have been transported to **13** facilities in Belarus.

Even children not technically abducted by Russia, but those in occupied territories of Ukraine, are subject to indoctrination and a risk of abduction. Many of them still secretly study in Ukrainian schools online.

**Despite multiple attempts of Ukraine to negotiate, Russia is not returning Ukrainian children willingly. President Trump should make their return a non-negotiable condition of the peace deal with Putin.**