

Children of War | Russia's Forced Deportation of Ukrainian Children

1 | Scale of Deportations

According to the Ministry of Reintegration of Ukraine, as of July 20, 2023, there have been **19,592** verified cases of Ukrainian children being deported or forcibly transferred by Russia, including **4,396** orphans; 385 children have been returned to Ukraine.

The Yale Humanitarian Research Lab has confirmed the existence of at least **43** facilities in Russian-controlled territories for deported Ukrainian children. Of these, **32** are re-education facilities. **11** of those are located over 500 miles from Ukraine, including two in Siberia and one in Russia's Far East.

The Yale HRL cited actual estimates from the Ukrainian government to be in the range of **200,000**, which is the most credible estimate currently available.

2 | Processes of Deportation

Exact procedures of Russia's forcible child deportations vary by situation. Generally speaking, there are four ways Russia deports children:

1. **Deportation of orphans.** Children from orphanages and boarding schools are systematically moved to Russia under the pretext of evacuation.
2. **Through filtration camps.** Children are forcibly separated from their parents in interrogation camps, (filtration camps), and taken to facilities in Russia. Parents are forced to cooperate with occupiers to return their kids.
3. **From hospitals.** Hospitalized children are separated from their parents and forcibly transferred into Russian-controlled territories. Parents are coerced into giving their "consent" for transfers under duress, with conditional access to life-saving medical procedures used as leverage.
4. **Directly from families.** Parents in occupied areas are often coerced to send their children to "recreational camps" in Russia where children are imposed Russian citizenship and forcibly reeducated. Many kids are never returned.

3 | Classification as Genocide

The forcible transfer of children is a marker of **genocide** (Genocide Convention) and violates the UN Resolution on Children's Rights and The Geneva Convention 1949.

The ICC issued an arrest warrant for Vladimir Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova for the crime of deportation. The UN Human Rights Council on Ukraine report recognizes Russian actions in Ukraine as a war crime.

UN agencies and ICRC have no access to places of separation or captivity of deported children. Rare visits to such places are staged and highly curated by Russia.

4 | Reasons for Deportation

Historically, the Soviet practice of deportations helped weaken resistance in occupied areas. Deportations and illegal adoptions of Ukrainian children are portrayed as rescue missions in Russian propaganda. Ukrainian children are presented as uncivilized and are held in re-education facilities.

Deported Ukrainians create leverage Putin could exploit in the future to demand concessions from the Ukrainian government.

Russian households are **financially incentivized** to adopt Ukrainian children. Processes for adoption and granting citizenship to Ukrainian children have been expedited by presidential decree.

5 | What the US Can Do

Pass legislation such as **H Res 149 & S Res 158**. Isolate and pressure Russia to return Ukrainian children: based on publicly available information we composed a list of at least 32 people involved in the child deportation who are not yet sanctioned by the US.

Encourage international organizations like ICRC and UNICEF to take action. Contribute to investigations and accountability measures by sharing intelligence, creating a Special Tribunal or working with the ICC.

Support existing repatriating efforts by organizations like *Save Ukraine* and *Helping to Leave*.

The Human Experience

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Yevhen and three of his children were hiding in a bomb shelter in Mariupol before Russian soldiers gave them an ultimatum: get on a bus, or the Chechen unit will “clear” this shelter. Yevhen and his kids were forcibly transferred to the Donetsk region. He was sent to the filtration camp for 45 days, during which he had no contact with his children. When he was released, Yevhen walked to the nearest town where he was told that his children were gone — they were taken to Russia. A few days later, he got a call from his oldest son, who said that Yevhen had five days to go and get them before they would be submitted for adoption. With Yevhen facing this impossible ultimatum and having no money upon his release from the filtration camp, Volunteers helped raise the costs for Yevhen to get to Russia, reunite with his kids, and evacuate them to Estonia where they now live.

Olena was a nurse in Kupiansk. Her mother was killed during Russian shelling and her son, Andriy, was heavily wounded and taken to a Russian-controlled hospital. Olena had no contact with Andrii for months, until a woman who was previously deported to Russia provided information that her son Andrii was in a hospital in Russia. There was no way for Olena to return her son without physically going to Russia to retrieve her now-disabled son. Volunteers helped her evacuate him from Russia with Andrii and go to Switzerland, where Andrii is going through rehabilitation.

Denys's wife and his son, Pavlo, decided to evacuate from heavily shelled Kupiansk. Their evacuation route was shelled, and Denys's wife was killed in front of Pavlo. Pavlo was taken by the Russians to a hospital in the so-called Luhansk People's Republic (LNR). Denys didn't know if his son was alive or dead. It was only when he happened to be watching a Russian propaganda TV program that he chanced to see his son, who was alive. Pavlo's grandmother had to go to LNR and retrieve her grandson. To get out of the LNR, they had to go to Russia and from there — to Europe where Pavlo is now.

These stories are known to us directly from the survivors themselves, and not through press reporting or indirect sources.