

Russian Abductions and Deportations of Ukrainian Children (2026 report)

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Abductions and Deportations of Ukrainian Children



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1. Introduction

This is the second report in my role as Special Envoy of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA) on Russian Abductions and Deportations of Ukrainian. Since my previous report published in June 2025 in my former capacity as OSCE PA Special Rapporteur with the focus on Ukrainian children, I have been appointed the Special Envoy on this crucial issue in October 2025 by the President of the OSCE PA, Pere Joan Pons Sampietro.

This report therefore builds upon my 2025 report and focuses on developments since then, including increased international engagement, new documentation, and continued challenges in ensuring the return of Ukrainian children.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, which began in 2014 and escalated dramatically in 2022, continues to be a war not only against territory, but against identity, language and the future of Ukraine. Among its gravest consequences is the systematic targeting of Ukrainian children through deportation, indoctrination and forced assimilation.

While the nature and scale of these crimes have already been clearly established, developments since 2025 show that, despite growing international awareness and action, the situation of many Ukrainian children has not improved. Substantial efforts are underway, but tangible results in returning the children remain limited.

2. Human Rights and the Best Interests of the Child

Human rights are founded on the principle that all people are equal in dignity and entitled to life, freedom and security. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child establishes that all children possess their own specific rights and that the best interests of the child must always be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children. Children have the right to protection, education, healthcare, family life, language, culture and identity. In situations of armed conflict, international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, provides children with special protection against violence, forced displacement, exploitation and recruitment into armed groups. Every state is obliged to protect its citizens – and especially children – protect and safeguard their security, rights and development. This applies both to times of war and occupation.

3. Children in War – the Deported Ukrainian Children and Ukrainian Children in Russian-Occupied Territories

Since Russia's illegal occupation of Crimea and parts of eastern Ukraine in 2014, Ukrainian children have suffered profoundly because of the war. Following Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, the situation deteriorated dramatically, and today virtually every child in Ukraine is affected by the war. Millions of children have been forced to flee their homes and seek safety either within Ukraine or abroad. Many live under the constant threat of bombardment, the loss of family members, and a daily existence marked by fear, uncertainty and trauma.

At the same time, thousands of Ukrainian children have been deported to Russia or transferred to Russian-occupied territories or Belarus. These children have been separated from their families and subjected to forced adoptions and so-called "re-education" programs. Children living in the Russian-occupied territories are also exposed to systematic Russification, propaganda and indoctrination through the education system and other state-organized structures. Their access to the Ukrainian language, culture and history is restricted or entirely prohibited.

In addition to the situation of the children who have been deported, it is also of great importance to highlight the circumstances of the more than one and a half million Ukrainian children who continue to live in Russian-occupied territories. These children are subjected daily to propaganda, militarization, restrictions on the Ukrainian language and culture, and severe violations of their fundamental rights and freedoms. Many live in constant fear and uncertainty, while their opportunities for free education, security and hope for the future are severely restricted.

The deported children are therefore subjected to a double violation. They are not only separated from their families and their sense of security, but are also deprived of their right to identity, language, culture and heritage. This is not only about stealing children's childhoods, but also about attempting to erase their national and personal identity. These children include both children with and without known parents or legal guardians, as well as children from Ukrainian institutions and orphanages. Their ages range from infants to 17-year-olds. Russian authorities frequently justify these transfers by referring to evacuations from the war, medical treatment, cultural exchange programs, recreational camps or military-patriotic youth camps. Under these pretexts, children are transferred to Russia, Russian-occupied territories or Belarus.

Russia has also established a system of forced adoptions of Ukrainian children. Children are registered in Russian adoption databases where they are falsely presented as being of Russian origin. Through legislative changes, Russian authorities have facilitated both the naturalization and adoption of Ukrainian children. At the same time, practices of the alterations of children's names, date- and place of birth have been observed to be a common practice among Russian authorities to further obstruct efforts to trace a child's origins and reunion with its family/legal guardian(s).

This policy has been directed and supported at the highest levels of the Russian state leadership. President Vladimir Putin has signed legislation enabling and

facilitating the adoption and naturalization of Ukrainian children and has provided direct support for these activities. On 17 March 2023, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants against the Russian President, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, and the Commissioner for Children's Rights in the Office of the Russian President, Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova, for the war crime of unlawful deportation of Ukrainian children from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation.

Since my previous report, this dimension has become more prominent and requires increased international attention.

4. Challenges of Return and Reintegration

By far the greatest challenge in returning the children who have been unlawfully deported to Russia is identifying them. As previously noted, Russia has not shared any records or information concerning the forcibly deported children, and even if lists of children were to be provided, their current whereabouts would still need to be established, together with the identification of any foster or adoptive families. The situation is further complicated by the fact that many children's names, places of birth and identity documents have been altered to make them appear Russian. Many children were also deported at a very young age, which makes the situation even more serious. For young children, every day, month and year is of crucial importance for their development, attachment, language and identity. The longer these children are kept away from their families and their homeland, the greater the risk that their connection to Ukraine will weaken or be lost altogether. It is precisely this approach of systematic deprivation from Ukrainian culture and identity that makes Russia's actions so cynical and abhorrent.

At the same time, the most important factor is that the Russian Federation must agree to return the children. Without such consent, it will in practice be extremely difficult to bring the children home, even if they are identified and located. Continued and increased international pressure on Russia is therefore essential, both to gain access to information regarding the children's identities and whereabouts and to hold those responsible accountable.

Many of the children who have been subjected to Russia's deportation system carry severe trauma, and their reintegration into Ukrainian society must therefore be handled carefully, professionally and with a long-term perspective, with the best interests of the child serving as the guiding principle. The Coordination Center for Family Upbringing and Childcare Development, within the framework of the "Bring Kids Back UA" initiative, has highlighted the enormous challenges involved in reintegrating children who have been exposed to Russian indoctrination and militarization during formative years of their lives.

It is also clear that reintegration is not solely about bringing the children home. Many families have lost their homes, their sense of security and their social networks as a result of the war and occupation. Investments are therefore also needed in housing, education, rehabilitation and meaningful activities for children and young people who return. Experiences from countries such as Lithuania and Estonia, where rehabilitation and treatment centers for Ukrainian

children have been established, demonstrate that concrete international initiatives can make a substantial difference and contribute to the children's recovery and hope for the future.

5. International Initiatives for the Deported Ukrainian Children since Autumn 2025

The following are some important examples of international initiatives, reports and measures concerning the deported Ukrainian children since autumn 2025. The overview does not claim to be exhaustive, but highlights several significant developments, findings and actions taken by international organizations, institutions and independent actors.

5.1 International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children

The Coalition first convened in Stockholm and Istanbul late last year. The latest meeting took place on 11 May in Brussels and was attended by the OSCE PA President and me in my capacity as Special Envoy. The Coalition will meet next in 28–29. September 2026 in Toronto, Canada.

5.2 UN General Assembly Resolution on the Return of Ukrainian Children

On 3 December 2025, the UN General Assembly adopted the 'Return of Ukrainian Children' Resolution (ES-11/9)¹. The resolution calls on Russia to immediately, safely and unconditionally return all Ukrainian children who have been forcibly transferred or deported and to cease deportations, forced adoptions, changes to children's identities and indoctrination. The UN also underlined the importance of family reunification, rehabilitation and international co-ordination to locate the children and ensure their return.

5.3 Yale Humanitarian Research Lab (Yale HRL)

In September 2025, Yale HRL published the report *Ukraine's Stolen Children: Inside Russia's Network of Re-Education and Militarization*. The report identified at least 210 facilities in Russia and Russian-occupied territories to which Ukrainian children had been transferred since 2022. The report describes an extensive system of Russification, militarization and ideological indoctrination of Ukrainian children, including military training and long-term placement systems. Yale HRL concluded that these activities are being conducted on a large scale and with direct involvement from Russian state authorities.

In March 2026, Yale HRL also published the report *Willing Accomplices*, which demonstrates how the Russian state-owned energy companies Gazprom and Rosneft have participated in the transportation, financing and indoctrination of Ukrainian children. The report describes how these companies have contributed to transferring children to camps and programs characterized by propaganda and militarization. Yale HRL points to close cooperation between the Russian state,

¹ <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/ES-11/9>

state-owned companies and the systems used for the deportation and re-education of Ukrainian children.

5.4 UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine

In March 2026, the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry concluded that the deportation and forcible transfer of Ukrainian children constitute both war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Commission verified more than 1,200 cases of deported or forcibly transferred children and found that Russian authorities had systematically obstructed their return by concealing their whereabouts and placing them with Russian families or institutions. The Commission also stressed that many children remain missing and continue to suffer severe trauma.

5.5 OSCE Moscow Mechanism on the Militarization of Ukrainian Children

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the OSCE Moscow Mechanism has been invoked several times to investigate serious violations of human rights and international law. As one of the OSCE's most important fact-finding tools for addressing threats to democracy, human rights and the rule of law, it has concluded that Ukrainian children have been unlawfully deported and forcibly transferred. The reports further state that these children have the right to immediate and unconditional return.

In January 2026, 23 OSCE participating States decided to invoke the Moscow Mechanism² to investigate Russia's militarization and ideological indoctrination of Ukrainian children in occupied territories and in Russia. The initiative focuses particularly on military training, patriotic propaganda, forced assimilation and efforts to erase Ukrainian identity among children and young people. The mechanism aims to document abuses, strengthen accountability and provide recommendations to the international community regarding further measures against Russia.

5.6 European Union Sanctions

In May 2026, the European Union adopted additional sanctions targeting individuals and organizations involved in the deportation, indoctrination and militarization of Ukrainian children. The sanctions include individuals responsible for camps, military-patriotic organizations and institutions contributing to the forced assimilation and militarized education of Ukrainian minors. The EU stated that these actions constitute serious violations of international law and of the fundamental rights of children. Among those sanctioned are individuals and entities linked to camp operations, ideological re-education and military training of Ukrainian children both in Russia and in Russian-occupied territories.

5.7 Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group (KHPG)

KHPG's 2026 report describes how Russia's systematic abuses, including the deportation and forcible transfer of children, form part of a broader and

² <https://odhr.osce.org/news/odhr/661963>

deliberate strategy directed against Ukraine's population and identity. The report emphasizes the importance of continued international support, documentation, accountability and long-term assistance for victims and their families. KHPG also underlines the need for stronger international co-operation to locate missing children and support their return and rehabilitation.

5.8 Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine

Another important step towards international accountability is the ongoing work to establish a special tribunal for the crime of aggression against Ukraine. The tribunal's purpose is to investigate and prosecute the highest political and military leadership responsible for Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine — the crime that constitutes the foundation for the other war crimes and abuses committed during the war. The work is being carried out within the framework of the Council of Europe and is supported by a large number of states. During 2026, approximately 35–40 countries, together with the European Union, have joined the efforts related to the establishment and development of the tribunal. The tribunal has not yet fully commenced its judicial work, but several important legal and institutional steps have been taken to enable future prosecutions and accountability.

6. OSCE PA

As an organization committed to human rights and the protection of children, the OSCE PA has a responsibility to act to ensure that the Ukrainian children who have been deported or forcibly transferred are returned to their homeland. This work is not only about supporting Ukraine during the ongoing war, but also about contributing in the long term to reconstruction, justice and rehabilitation for the children affected. Even after Russia's war of aggression comes to an end, this work will remain essential.

Since my 2025 report was presented, several important initiatives have been taken. Some of the recommendations have been implemented, while others remain outstanding. In autumn 2025, the OSCE PA became the first parliamentary assembly to join the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children. In May 2026, around 40 participating States within the OSCE's executive structures invoked the Moscow Mechanism for a new follow-up report on the deported Ukrainian children and the situation of children living in Russian-occupied territories. During this period, new international sanctions packages have also been adopted to increase pressure on Russia and on the individuals and organizations involved in the deportation, indoctrination and militarization of Ukrainian children.

The OSCE PA must continue to act resolutely to ensure that the positions expressed in the Assembly's declarations are translated into concrete action. In addition to the initiatives already taken, the Assembly should therefore consider the following measures.

7. Recommendations

Children have special rights, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child must therefore always serve as a guiding principle.

- **Ensuring that Ukrainian children are prioritized in future peace negotiations and ceasefire agreements**

The OSCE PA should work to ensure that the issue of deported and forcibly transferred Ukrainian children is consistently included in all future ceasefire and peace negotiations. The unconditional return, identification and reintegration of the children must form a central part of any sustainable peace settlement on Ukraine's terms.

- **Strengthening international accountability**

The OSCE PA should urge participating States to strengthen support for international legal proceedings and the continued documentation of deportations, forced adoptions, Russification and militarization of Ukrainian children. The unlawful deportation and forced transfer of Ukrainian children must not be treated as a secondary issue, but as a central component of international accountability for Russia's aggression against Ukraine, including the work of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), ICC, and the Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression.

- **Developing long-term international support programs for reintegration and rehabilitation**

Together with Ukraine, the international community must develop long-term programs for the reintegration of returned children. This includes trauma support, specialized child psychiatry and child psychology, education, social support, family reunification and long-term rehabilitation, particularly for children exposed to indoctrination and militarization.

- **Strengthening the focus on children living in Russian-occupied territories**

International efforts must increasingly also address the situation of the more than one and a half million Ukrainian children still living under Russian occupation. The OSCE PA should draw attention to the systematic Russification, militarization, propaganda and violations of children's rights in the occupied territories, and support continued international monitoring and documentation.

- **Ensuring long-term funding and coordination of documentation and return efforts**

The OSCE PA should urge participating States to ensure long-term funding and coordination of international initiatives that document deportations, identify missing children and support return efforts. The knowledge, technology and

databases developed by, among others, the Yale HRL and Ukrainian initiatives are essential both for accountability and for the return of the children.

- **Using frozen Russian assets to support affected children**

Frozen Russian assets, and the revenues generated from them, should, in accordance with international law and international decisions, contribute to financing the return, rehabilitation and long-term support of the Ukrainian children affected by Russia's aggression.

- **Support for the international coalition for the return of Ukrainian children**

Supports the initiative and the conclusions reached following the high-level meeting of the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children, and reiterates the urgent need to ensure the safe, unconditional, and swift return of all unlawfully deported and transferred Ukrainian children. Calls for increased coordination and information-sharing among participating States and relevant international organizations to strengthen accountability and support efforts aimed at documenting violations and facilitating returns.

Invites the OSCE to share all relevant findings concerning violations of international law by the Russian Federation, including the conclusions of the upcoming Moscow Mechanism report, with competent international bodies, including institutions in The Hague such as the ICC, as well as the newly established tribunal on the crime of aggression against Ukraine. Further calls on participating States to consider the adoption of targeted sanctions, including asset freezes and travel bans, against individuals, entities, and networks responsible for, or complicit in, the unlawful deportation, transfer, or detention of Ukrainian children, as well as those who facilitate or enable such actions.

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Appendix – Meetings and Activities as Special Envoy since Autumn 2025

High-Level Meeting in the Swedish Parliament

Participation in a high-level meeting in the Swedish Parliament concerning the deported Ukrainian children, international accountability and continued international support for Ukraine. Her Majesty the Queen of Sweden participated in the meeting, which was organized in connection with the International Crimea Platform Parliamentary Summit hosted by the Speaker of the Swedish Parliament.



From left to right: Dr. Mark Klamberg, Professor of Public International Law, Stockholm University; Olena Khomenko, Member of Parliament of Ukraine (Verkhovna Rada); Markus Wiechel, Member of the Swedish Riksdag; Verkhovna Rada (Parliament of Ukraine); H.M. Queen Silvia of Sweden; Andreas Norlén, Speaker of the Swedish Riksdag; Ms Thórdís Kolbrún Reykfjörð Gylfadóttir, Special Envoy of the Council of Europe Secretary General on the situation of the children of Ukraine; Mr Ödebrink, Special Envoy; Johan Büser, Member of the Swedish Riksdag; H.E. Ambassador Svitlana Zalishchuk, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine to the Kingdom of Sweden.

Café Kyiv, Berlin

Participation in Café Kyiv in Berlin, including a seminar on 24 February marking three years since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Meetings were also held with representatives of the German-Ukrainian Friendship Group in the Bundestag and representatives from the German Federal Foreign Office. Discussions focused on international support for Ukraine, accountability and the situation of the deported Ukrainian children.



Carina Ödebrink addresses Café Kyiv in Berlin, 24 February 2026

Meetings in New York

Meetings in New York with organizations and representatives engaged in international advocacy and support for Ukrainian children affected by the war, including discussions with representatives connected to the United Nations. The meetings focused on strengthening international co-operation and maintaining global attention on the deported Ukrainian children. Meeting with Ms. Zhanna Galeyeva from Bird of light, who shared information about her project “Empty beds”.



Installation of Bird of lights project Empty Beds at the European Commission's headquarters before the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children summit.

OSCE Ministerial Council Side Event

Participation in a high-level panel discussion organized by the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the OSCE. The discussion focused on Russia’s war crimes, the deported Ukrainian children and the need for strengthened international action and accountability.

Meetings with Ukrainian and International Organizations

Since autumn 2025, several meetings have been held with Ukrainian and international organizations working on the return, protection and rehabilitation of deported Ukrainian children. These included meetings with representatives from Save Ukraine, PR Army, Bird of Light, the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group (KHPG), Belarusian democratic representatives, as well as representatives connected to international advocacy, human rights and accountability efforts. Discussions focused on documentation of war crimes, international co-operation, sanctions, strategic communication, psychosocial support, reintegration and the long-term needs of returned children and their families.



Installation of Bird of lights project Empty Beds at the European Commission's headquarters before the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children summit.

Meeting with Ukrainian Authorities, the Coordination Center and the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare

Meeting with representatives of Ukraine’s central state authorities within the social services sector, the Coordination Center for Family Upbringing and Childcare Development — an advisory body under the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine within the framework of the President’s initiative “Bring Kids Back UA” — as well as a representative of the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare. Discussions focused on the return and reintegration of deported Ukrainian children, psychosocial support, international co-operation, competence development and the long-term needs of children affected by war, deportation and Russian indoctrination.

Seminar and Exhibition with Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group

The Swedish Parliament hosted a seminar connected to the presentation of a new report by the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group (KHPG), focusing on Russian war crimes, deportations and the situation of Ukrainian children. In connection with the seminar, I also inaugurated the exhibition *Angels of Kharkiv*, highlighting the human consequences of the war for Ukrainian civilians and children.



Exhibition in the Swedish Parliament about Ukrainian children who have been killed in Russia’s illegal war against Ukraine. Organized by the Swedish delegation to the OSCE PA, Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group (KHPG) and Östgruppen.

Presentations at Swedish Universities

I was invited to three of Sweden's largest universities to present and discuss my 2025 report on the deported Ukrainian children and the broader consequences of Russia's war against Ukraine.



(Special envoy Ödebrink delivers keynote address at Gothenburg University.)

Strengthening Co-operation with International Special Envoys

Two online meetings were held with Ms Thórdís Kolbrún Reykfjörð Gylfadóttir, Special Envoy of the Council of Europe Secretary General on the situation of the children of Ukraine. The discussions focused on strengthening international co-operation, sharing information on ongoing initiatives, and co-ordinating efforts to support the return, protection and rehabilitation of Ukrainian children affected by Russia's war.

Upcoming participation in Council of Europe event in Strasbourg

In July 2026, I will participate in an event in Strasbourg together with Ms Thórdís Kolbrún Reykfjörð Gylfadóttir, focusing on the situation of Ukrainian children. The event will also include the participation of Ms Vanessa Frazier, United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.