**A blue rectangular sign with yellow letters

Description automatically generated**

**UKRAINIAN CHILDREN IN SEARCH OF A WAY HOME FROM RUSSIA**



**Photo:** [**https://fakty.com.ua**](https://fakty.com.ua/ua/ukraine/20231127-hochut-znyshhyty-czile-pokolinnya-rf-gotuye-novi-spysky-ukrayinskyh-ditej-dlya-deportacziyi/)

Thousands of Ukrainian families are desperately searching for a way to get home their children who were kidnapped and deported by/to Russia

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**15 December 2023**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Since the beginning of the full-scale military invasion of Ukraine, the Russian Federation has been carrying out forced mass displacement and deportation of Ukrainian children who, under various circumstances, were separated from both parents, other relatives or legal representatives, without providing them the opportunity to return to the territory of permanent residence or reunite with family members.

The need for special protection of the child is envisaged in the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1924 and the Declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1959, and recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as in the statutes and relevant documents of specialized agencies and international organizations dealing with the welfare of children.

The 182 States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family ties, as provided by law, by preventing unlawful interference and, in the event of a violation of this rule, to provide the child with the necessary assistance and protection for the speedy restoration of his or her identity.

**STATISTICS ABOUT THE NUMBER OF DEPORTED CHILDREN:**

**700,000? 300,000? 20,000?**

At this stage, it is impossible to establish the exact number of deported children given the ongoing full-scale aggression, difficult access to the temporarily occupied territories and the failure of the Russian side to provide reliable information on this matter.

*Russian statistics*

Moscow says Russia has taken in 5.3 million people from Ukraine since its full-scale invasion, including [738,000 children](https://www.vedomosti.ru/society/news/2023/02/20/963624-svishe-53-mln-bezhentsev-s-ukraini-i-iz-donbassa-pribili-rossiyu). Russian authorities do not provide more detailed statistics and it is impossible to verify this information. No lists or any personal data at all is available. Russia does not submit reports to any international organizations and does not report to Ukraine either.

Russia’s Commissioner for Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova [said](https://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=0010V-I-x8kC5ad9QKnxB39xsqEUBTxp9Wd5G9AeN0AYSDo559BfiCxnGVG9G9iOKP4rjNjpqedrDqGLCAUabFtfuYdZyK3EPSi7De8LxC0G6_TLMcc54Wsm7VGNFkVSHwL0_zVa1r7BfaBvGU-0rm8KtHtcBvJ6xApH4pgSfeTiz5MkPWBYcKKL5XCBXmGPfDea6Xckgih1oqcWSbJO1issgVC6QfXTC-lK3siKr6gfIRn9CCVFV9gBu8Vir06lKGq&c=RBWavtNJgSwkn8i_TrRvHV3TyQQ3NQAazCeQ49XLcrDGCOgkXqTHrg==&ch=upigzBpz25IYbwpmC6NOsI6yiqlTDVfb-P7HmtUoBHf7IrT2EXUaIA==)that the number of such Ukrainian children is more than 700,000.

As of June 2023, the Interdepartmental Coordination Headquarters of the Russian Federation for Humanitarian Response indicated in a [statement](https://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=0010V-I-x8kC5ad9QKnxB39xsqEUBTxp9Wd5G9AeN0AYSDo559BfiCxnGVG9G9iOKP42o8SdlUoFIa3dwjyb1ELcwenzJ2ZAIphgAvSh87d_IL2D1H1kpHaSaOl436JDrSx99suvm0RHxFxM4uimK2vnlRZW3HhjdHgXin5SqvhGgh-xNERpSu-WrAiXdTnwQzFnemzyXBmaHi5gsHdxSmi35l4-fpEP93A2xanwH1zugbgroUfy-wMQy2-yDo5Ji-t7TWunQcai0EIEAWOkd0aF_yn6tf2S1X_F9YoQY21NFdltDOdjqs9Qg==&c=RBWavtNJgSwkn8i_TrRvHV3TyQQ3NQAazCeQ49XLcrDGCOgkXqTHrg==&ch=upigzBpz25IYbwpmC6NOsI6yiqlTDVfb-P7HmtUoBHf7IrT2EXUaIA==) that since 24 February 2022, 307,423 children have been taken from Ukraine to the territory of Russia.

Russia cynically calls the illegal transfer of Ukrainian children an "evacuation," but the UN panel of inquiry concluded that none of the cases it examined was justified on safety or health grounds, nor did they meet the requirements of international humanitarian law.”

At the end of September 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin [signed a decree](https://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=0010V-I-x8kC5ad9QKnxB39xsqEUBTxp9Wd5G9AeN0AYSDo559BfiCxnGVG9G9iOKP4r-IRzWm2HKgHgY9HEbH74ZwzGnQBT5K8S4GR62uyYXfWScNi-80jK32pRGsQh3g6S8s-APOtOJGJubx2cAVWyDHdAn3am4dJVUNmt7nqrajb9hh9ZVlgXw0XSHCjdtJKfRcbUOtzNV0=&c=RBWavtNJgSwkn8i_TrRvHV3TyQQ3NQAazCeQ49XLcrDGCOgkXqTHrg==&ch=upigzBpz25IYbwpmC6NOsI6yiqlTDVfb-P7HmtUoBHf7IrT2EXUaIA==) on the "accession" to the Russian Federation of the partially occupied regions of Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, Donetsk and the occupied region of Luhansk in Ukraine. After that, children from these newly occupied regions also began to be enrolled as citizens of the Russian Federation and forcefully adopted.

In its report on the issue, the OSCE [notes](https://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=0010V-I-x8kC5ad9QKnxB39xsqEUBTxp9Wd5G9AeN0AYSDo559BfiCxnGVG9G9iOKP4KQ83c5t4gQwW6hn0zb_ZM_Y1HB6vrdr3t_11dzDEPwGdSqLIKqx4uSQIz07ncClZuNwiTSZkmdumlpHGKiwEYVOLuZvmBaDp9Nf5rY8ZLIl4ZwhV5cndtT2hooEjk9ARCSxKZUqYxjN9qfXRSjcwibG_5Eyou2WujAfO8jW8zabm7f6m_6s4HqmF0mIV1Tk-&c=RBWavtNJgSwkn8i_TrRvHV3TyQQ3NQAazCeQ49XLcrDGCOgkXqTHrg==&ch=upigzBpz25IYbwpmC6NOsI6yiqlTDVfb-P7HmtUoBHf7IrT2EXUaIA==)that  the Russian authorities began working on the “transfer” of Ukrainian children for adoption or care by Russian families since 2014, after the occupation of Crimea.

According to the Russian program "[Train of Hope](https://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=0010V-I-x8kC5ad9QKnxB39xsqEUBTxp9Wd5G9AeN0AYSDo559BfiCxnGVG9G9iOKP4hakBu11lKh_-8i_He1V9-0Or_pQ8sbOObM6Zt_prFsCoFf7wJno7H4_xB8kExSKfbbOVAkUXeYytU3OlySF3Mj3WWQFgwC_BSAbe2_kO4Yo=&c=RBWavtNJgSwkn8i_TrRvHV3TyQQ3NQAazCeQ49XLcrDGCOgkXqTHrg==&ch=upigzBpz25IYbwpmC6NOsI6yiqlTDVfb-P7HmtUoBHf7IrT2EXUaIA==)", anyone from any part of the country could adopt Ukrainian children from Crimea, who were then granted Russian citizenship.

*Ukrainian statistics*

**Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada Commissioner for Human Rights Dmytro Lubinets** claims that the figure of 700,000 ‘moved away’ children is exaggerated. The Ombudsman [suggests](https://www.slovoidilo.ua/2023/02/17/novyna/suspilstvo/ombudsmen-nazvav-kilkist-ditej-nezakonno-vyvezenyx-ukrayiny-rf) that Russia has illegally removed about 150,000 children from Ukraine.

Adviser-Commissioner of the President of Ukraine for Children's Rights and Children's Rehabilitation [Daria Gerasymchuk](https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%93%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%BC%D1%87%D1%83%D0%BA_%D0%94%D0%B0%D1%80%27%D1%8F_%D0%9C%D0%B8%D1%85%D0%B0%D0%B9%D0%BB%D1%96%D0%B2%D0%BD%D0%B0) calls the figure "several hundred thousand children, that is, somewhere around 200-300,000." She [notes](https://fakty.com.ua/ua/ukraine/suspilstvo/20230619-rf-mogla-vykrasty-z-ukrayiny-do-300-tys-ditej-povernuty-vdalosya-mensh-nizh-400-gerasymchuk/) that the aggressor country, Russia, might have illegally ‘imported’ from Ukraine up to 300,000 children during the war.

Data on the deportation of young Ukrainians is collected by the National Information Bureau of Ukraine. This body receives applications from parents, relatives, witnesses, as well as representatives of local authorities about forced removal of children. After a detailed verification of deportation data in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the National Police, the Security Service, the Prosecutor General's Office, the information enters the register of the National Information Bureau.

As of 15 December 2023, the official Ukrainian platform monitoring this issue, [Children of War](file:////Users/willyfautre/Library/CloudStorage/Box-Box/HRWF%20Files/HRWF%20All%20Files%20and%20Folders/Lettres%202023/According%20to%20official%20information%20about%20the%20deportation%20of%20young%20Ukrainians,%20a%20person%20has%20been%20collected%20today%2019%20546%20deported%20children.%20We%20are%20talking%20only%20about%20children%20whose%20data%20–%20names,%20circumstances%20of%20deportation%20–%20have%20been%20established,%20so%20this%20figure%20does%20not%20fully%20reflect%20the%20real%20scale%20of%20deportation.%20And%20even%20for%20these%20children,%20their%20actual%20whereabouts%20are%20not%20always%20known.%20The%20number%20of%20deported%20children%20continues%20to%20grow.%20%20%20%20%20To%20date,%20only%20one%20has%20been%20able%20to%20return%20to%20Ukraine%20387%20children.), posted 19,546 cases of deported children wanted by their families with their pictures, their names and the places where they were abducted by the Russians.

The platform was created on behalf of the Office of the President of Ukraine by the Ministry for Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine together with the National Information Bureau, the Office of the Prosecutor General, the National Police, the Office of the Verkhovna Rada Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office of the President for the accumulation, processing and partial publication of information about children under martial law, namely: the number of wounded and dead children, deported children, those who have been found and those who are wanted.”

**REACTIONS OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY**

On 5 April 2023, 49 countries issued a joint statement on the illegal forced [deportation of Ukrainian children](https://uworld.news/news/deportovanyi-iz-mariupolia-pidlitok-namahavsia-1002090.html) to Russia in response to an [Arria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arria_formula_meeting) meeting Security Council meeting chaired by Russia.

On 25 April 2023, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a resolution stating that Russia's deportation of Ukrainian children has the characteristics of [a crime of genocide](https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-pare-deportacija-ditej-genocyd/32382455.html).

On 28 April 2023, Maria Mezentseva, [the head of the Verkhovna Rada delegation to the](https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-mezentseva-chervonyi-khrest-vykradeni-dity/32383511.html) [Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe](https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-mezentseva-chervonyi-khrest-vykradeni-dity/32383511.html)**,** [Ukraine](https://suspilne.media/tag/ukraina/)handed over a list with the names of 19,000 Ukrainian children abducted  [by Russia](https://suspilne.media/tag/rosia/) to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). They have the authority to visit them and learn about the conditions of children's detention.

On 17 July 2023, German Foreign Minister [Annalena](https://www.dw.com/uk/annalena-baerbock/t-57375629) [Baerbock](https://www.dw.com/uk/annalena-baerbock/t-57375629) called for increased international efforts to return to their parents [children kidnapped from Ukraine by Russia](https://www.dw.com/uk/ditaca-ombudsmenka-ukraini-rf-mae-pat-scenariiv-vikradenna-ditej/a-65070285) at the UN headquarters in New York at a meeting of the Security Council at the level of heads of foreign policy departments on peacekeeping in Ukraine.

On 24 August 2023, US President Joe Biden announced in an address on the occasion [of Ukraine's](https://www.dw.com/uk/%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%8C-%D0%BD%D0%B5%D0%B7%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%B6%D0%BD%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D1%96-%D1%83%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%97%D0%BD%D0%B8/t-19496174) [Independence Day](https://www.dw.com/uk/%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%8C-%D0%BD%D0%B5%D0%B7%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%B6%D0%BD%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D1%96-%D1%83%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%97%D0%BD%D0%B8/t-19496174) that the United States of America imposed [sanctions](https://www.dw.com/uk/sankcii-proti-rf/t-19192036)on a number of legal entities and individuals from Russia involved in the forced removal of children from Ukraine.

"We are working with all states to hold Russian forces accountable for war crimes and other atrocities they committed in Ukraine, including the forced removal of thousands of Ukrainian children to Russia. And today we announce new sanctions to bring to justice those responsible for these violent movements and deportations, and demand the return of Ukrainian children to their families," Biden said.

The U.S. Treasury Department has released a list of people and institutions that have been sanctioned. It included the Russian "federal state budget educational institution "International Children's Center "Artek", as well as 11 individuals.

A number of them hold positions of commissioners for children's rights in Russian regions. Also on the list is collaborator Olena Shapurova, who is now the "Minister of Education and Science" in the occupation administrations of Zaporizhzhia region, and the director of the Russian "Artek" Kostiantyn Fedorenko.

On 24 September 2023, the [House of Commons of the Canadian Parliament](https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-polytics/3765304-canadas-house-of-commons-condemns-russias-deportation-of-ukrainian-children.html#:~:text=The%20lower%20house%20of%20the,Bergeron%2C%20a%20Bloc%20Québécois%20member.) unanimously passed a resolution condemning the deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia and recognized it as genocide and a war crime.

According to the Verkhovna Rada Commissioner for Human Rights Dmytro Lubinets, Canada proposed to create an International Coalition of countries for the return of Ukrainian children deported by Russia.

On 8 December 2023, [the first meeting of the International Coalition](https://www.euronews.com/2023/12/09/talks-to-repatriate-ukrainian-children-illegally-deported-by-russia) was held in Kiyv. [Representatives of 72 countries](https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-polytics/3797667-zelensky-calls-for-urgent-action-at-meeting-of-international-coalition-for-return-of-ukrainian-children.html) took part in the event. President Zelensky participated in the conference and made a [speech](https://www.president.gov.ua/news/rosiya-namagayetsya-znishiti-bud-yakij-zvyazok-ditej-z-ukray-87589) as well as [Dunja Mijatovic](https://rm.coe.int/speech-video-message-at-the-conference-joint-steps-to-bring-kids-back-/1680adaac2), the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has also expressed its serious concern about the lack of a well-established system for the return of Ukrainian children, [stressed](https://www.holosameryky.com/a/v-oon-sturbovani-vidsutnistiu-systemy-povernennia-ukraiinskyh-ditei/7302960.html) UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights Nada Al-Nashif at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on 9 October 2023.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) stated that the Russian [Federation clearly violated the rights of Ukrainian children illegally taken to Russian territory](https://uworld.news/news/49-krain-svitu-zasudyly-rosiiu-1002111.html), and the deportation itself may contain elements of a crime against humanity.

On 17 March 2023, the Pre-Trial Chamber of the International Criminal Court in The Hague [issued arrest warrants for](https://uworld.news/news/suddi-mks-v-haazi-vydaly-1001732.html) Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian Commissioner for Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova for the war crime of unlawful deportation of population and unlawful transfer of population from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation, in prejudice of [Ukrainian children](https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-ukraine-icc-judges-issue-arrest-warrants-against-vladimir-vladimirovich-putin-and#:~:text=Today%2C%2017%20March%202023%2C%20Pre,Ms%20Maria%20Alekseyevna%20Lvova-Belova.).

**NO EFFICIENT INTERNATIONAL MECHANISM TO REPATRIATE UKRAINIAN CHILDREN**

In April 2023, [the head of the Prosecutor General's Office, Yulia Usenko,](https://suspilne.media/437478-ukraina-sukae-mozlivosti-dla-poverenna-ditej-z-rf-ofis-genprokurora/) reported that there is currently no single transparent algorithm or mechanism that makes it possible to return Ukrainian children deported to Russia.

Adviser-Commissioner of the President of Ukraine for Children's Rights and Children's Rehabilitation Daria Gerasymchuk believes that today there is no international structure in the world that could offer an effective mechanism for the return of deported children in Ukraine. She **said to** [Interfax-Ukraine](https://interfax.com.ua/news/general/917545.html)**:** “We do not have negotiations with Russia for such returns. They do not recognize these children as detained, deported, forcibly displaced. They call it ‘evacuation’. Moreover, negotiations mean that we could make exchanges but we do not have Russian children to exchange. We did not detain any of them, we did not kidnap anyone. The Russians should simply return all Ukrainian children immediately.”

"Regarding the deported children, we handed over to certain international organizations all available lists and personal information. Unfortunately, there was no retroactive action. So, today there is no international structure that could offer an effective mechanism for the return of our deported children," Gerasymchuk said.

"There are well-written documents in the world within the framework of international law, such as the Geneva Convention and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and others that could be activated. And theoretically, they should work if all signatories complied with these rules," she said.

"But the point is that there is one signatory country, in this case, the Russian Federation, which wanted to spit on all these rules it itself signed. It reads them in its own way, argues all its actions as she wants, namely with its fictional and absolutely painful imagination," Gerasymchuk complained.

According to her, "the whole world had put its hopes in an organization that has the broadest mandate in this regard, about deportees and forcibly displaced people - this is the International Committee of the Red Cross… Unfortunately, in practice this did not work in Ukraine."

**CONTROVERSY ABOUT THE FORCED DISPLACEMENT OF UKRAINIAN CHILDREN IN BELARUS**

Facts are being established regarding the [participation](https://www.slovoidilo.ua/2023/07/21/infografika/suspilstvo/deportacziya-ukrayinskyx-ditej-vidomo-pro-rol-bilorusi) **of President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko in the illegal transfer of underage Ukrainians**. According to a study by Yale University, [more than 2,400 Ukrainian children](https://fakty.com.ua/ua/ukraine/20231116-rf-vyvezla-do-bilorusi-ponad-2400-ukrayinskyh-ditej-doslidzhennya/) were taken to Belarus since the beginning of the full-scale war.

The international community is appalled by Russia's large-scale illegal forced deportation and relocation of Ukrainian children and [supported](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-on-deportation-of-ukrainian-children-by-russia.uk) Ukraine in protecting its future generations, noting that it will hold the Russian Federation accountable for its illegal and barbaric actions in Ukraine.

At the state level, Ukraine properly responded to the declaration of **the head of the Red Cross Society of Belarus Dmitry Shevtsov** saying that the organization headed by him "participated, takes and will take an active part" in the evacuation of Ukrainian children – allegedly, "these children come to Belarus for rehabilitation." Shevtsov [said this on the air of one of the](https://twitter.com/Belsat_Eng/status/1682033951626657792?s=20)  Belarusian TV channels. Earlier, during a trip to the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, Shevtsov was seen **in camouflage and with a chevron of the occupiers with the letter Z.**

**The International Federation of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)** clearly distanced themselves from the initiatives of Dmitry Shevtsov and condemned his behavior in [a statement](https://www.ifrc.org/article/statement-response-belarus-red-cross-secretary-generals-visit-luhansk-and-donetsk-and-his?fbclid=IwAR29MNEqx1_SI3G1ZZ0T6jqJBQ1XYideZLVt4oDnphtyZtrM052t-2dgxCQ) on this matter. They claimed that "they were not informed about Shevtsov's visit to the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine" and that they have already referred the case of the Belarusian representatives to the Committee on Compliance and Mediation, which, according to Article 32  [of the IFRC Statute](https://www.ifrc.org/statutory-texts), "resolves any violations of integrity or disagreements related to national member societies or any body in the Federation."

The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent was also [approached](https://telegra.ph/Reakc%D1%96ya-na-d%D1%96i-B%D1%96loruskogo-CHervonogo-Hresta-07-20-2) by the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights Dmytro Lubinets with a demand to ensure that the Belarusian Red Cross requests full information about children from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine who were on "rehabilitation" and "rest" in the Republic of Belarus during 2021, 2022 and 2023. "I also appeal to the Central Tracing Agency of the International Committee of the Red Cross to verify information and establish contact between children and their parents or other legal representatives," he said.

Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations Sergiy Kyslytsya, at a meeting of the Security Council on 21 July asked relevant United Nations officials, in particular the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict,  [to respond to](https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-polytics/3738897-kislica-poprosiv-oon-vidreaguvati-na-ziznanna-glavi-ch-bilorusi-u-deportacii-ukrainskih-ditej.html) the involvement of the head of the Belarusian Red Cross in organizing the forcible removal of Ukrainian children from the temporarily occupied territories.

**Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba** [**called on the**](https://twitter.com/dmytrokuleba/status/1681643294290313217?s=46&t=JHHzChDbvSf3JHpnTV6Hcg)  **International Criminal Court to issue an arrest warrant for Shevtsov,** who "publicly confessed to the crime of illegal deportation of children from the occupied territories of Ukraine."

As for the position of Belarus, it was voiced by Lyudmila Makarina-Kibak, a deputy of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus. "The kidnapping charges have no legal basis. Children come to us in accordance with international requirements and with the assistance of international organizations and funds of the UN system, the Red Cross and UNESCO,"  [she said](https://twitter.com/i/status/1681936578350919680).

**ADOPTION BY RUSSIAN FAMILIES**

According to [Gerasymchuk](https://interfax.com.ua/news/interview/917543.html), **t**here are confirmed cases of adoption by Russians but in many cases, they are not made public or are registered as "temporary custody." **However, there were several return cases** of children already ‘adopted’ in Russia.

As far as we know, the Russian Ombudsman of Lviv-Belova "temporarily takes care" of a child from Ukraine in this way, although she even told the President of the Russian Federation that she "adopted" the boy.

There are also cases of children who were sent to camps. Parents signed documents by which they agreed to send their children to a camp for three weeks. The Russians pledged to return them but it was not the case. The children were told by the Russians: "You will not return", "Your parents abandoned you", "They do not need you" or "A Russian family is waiting for you," despite the fact that a number of them continued to talk to their parents on the phone. Children were transported to camps for six months – from camp to camp. Six months later, they were considered as left without parental care and were sent to Russian families. Afterwards, they were granted Russian citizenship, and their names were changed. All possible schemes are used to deprive children of their biological families.

Russians have a clear genocidal policy,  [Gerasymchuk](https://interfax.com.ua/news/interview/917543.html) **notes.** They aim to either destroy the identity of Ukrainian children or replenish their nation at the expense of the children they kidnap.

**ONLY 387 CHILDREN RETURNED TO UKRAINE**

**As of 15 December 2023, 387 children had been returned to Ukraine. The last release operation took place** on 5 December with the [mediation of Qatar](https://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=0010V-I-x8kC5ad9QKnxB39xsqEUBTxp9Wd5G9AeN0AYSDo559BfiCxnGVG9G9iOKP4QmrjQgquVlU_FOTJswC-maJtXeMYs-qGOdFWuLaH35IZrN7AlSp3nkV9E9jJane7-SJNpn0Khw2LlA0xtirclbzy6GncYmByKy0_9aWlNmpJsCPMDcl4lpwoLuUqJ4mwJefIqU6Y4BdpIjqEKcmzRw==&c=RBWavtNJgSwkn8i_TrRvHV3TyQQ3NQAazCeQ49XLcrDGCOgkXqTHrg==&ch=upigzBpz25IYbwpmC6NOsI6yiqlTDVfb-P7HmtUoBHf7IrT2EXUaIA==) and concerned six children deported to Russia from Ukraine’s Occupied Territories.

All children are not returned through negotiations. There have never been any approvals or organized groups on the Russian side. All this is now happening case by case. That is why it is happening so slowly. Each rescue operation is different and quite often the result of an individual initiative.

In an interview with [Interfax-Ukraine](https://interfax.com.ua/news/general/917545.html), Gerasymchuk said: “It is always a lottery because there are cases when the Russians say: ‘No, we will not give the child back to their parents! It is dangerous there – in Ukraine. We decided that he or she will stay here. And if you want to stay with your child, please get Russian citizenship and stay in Russia.’”

“We do everything in our power when there are parents. It is much more complicated if there are no parents or parents cannot leave, or it can be military parents, or it can be a pregnant mother, or it can be parents who have some diseases and cannot leave. We are looking for other relatives who can arrange custody of the child, we help with the preparation of the necessary documents, the route or everything else so that they can leave. But every time it is a lottery. We are never sure who will be able to return.”

**WHO HELPS IN THE RETURN OF UKRAINIAN CHILDREN ‘ILLEGALLY DISPLACED’ BY RUSSIANS?**

International organizations do not offer any mechanisms for the return of children,  [Gerasymchuk](https://interfax.com.ua/news/interview/917543.html) **notes.** “There is a total lack of an effective system for the protection of such children in this situation".

“Yes, we try to use every opportunity. We are working with the OSCE Moscow mechanism and the special UN mechanism of the CAAC – this is the mechanism of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General ‘Children and Armed Conflicts.’ We also work with the International Criminal Court. We document everything and we do everything we can. However, I repeat it, no one can offer a single mechanism or any effective algorithm.”

At the beginning of autumn 2023, Ukraine launched the implementation of the Project [«Bring Kids Back UA»](https://www.bringkidsback.com.ua/), which is a comprehensive action plan that unites the efforts of all Ukrainian authorities, other states, international and non-governmental organizations for the return to their homeland of all Ukrainian children who were illegally deported by Russia. Many of the international institutions have already expressed their intention to participate in the work of this humanitarian initiative.

It was proposed to international partners to create a database of children illegally displaced by and to Russia and to determine their location as due to the war, Ukraine currently has limited financial and human resources to do it itself.

Some NGOs such as "[SOS Children's Towns](https://www.peaceinsight.org/en/organisations/sos-childrens-village-ukraine/?location=ukraine&theme)" and its Ukrainian partners are also directly involved in repatriation actions. At a public event in Munich on 10 August 2023, the head of the Ukrainian branch of SOS Children's Towns, Sergiy Lukashov, said “Often, not only parents, but also teenagers themselves, for example, through social networks, turn for support. We plan a route with them, help financially, suggest what formulations and arguments to use during communication with the authorities and at border points."

**CAAC MECHANISM**

Ukraine responsibly cooperates with the [Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC)](https://mfa.gov.ua/news/komentar-mzs-ukrayini-shchodo-richnoyi-dopovidi-genseka-oon-z-pitan-ditej-ta-zbrojnih-konfliktiv), Ms Virginia Gamba, in order to stop and prevent violations against children during the conflict.

Ukraine calls on the UN to fundamentally and persistently demand from the Russian Federation cooperation with the CAAC mechanism, access to all temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, as well as to its territory, since the CAAC mandate includes child abduction crimes.

The CAAC mechanism includes aggressor countries, aggressed countries and countries where there are domestic wars or conflicts. The mechanism deals with the study of six gross crimes against children – the crime of recruitment, attacks on schools and hospitals, the crime of sexual violence, obstruction to humanitarian needs, kidnapping of children, murder and injury.

In Ukraine, a local office consisting of representatives of UN structures, the so-called "UN Working Group on Children and Armed Conflicts", has been established. It is chaired by Denise Brown, UN Resident Coordinator in Ukraine, and Murat Sahin, UNICEF Representative in Ukraine. Each country also assigns a national focal-point for interaction with the CAAC mechanism. In Ukraine, this is Advisor – Commissioner of the President of Ukraine for Children's Rights and Children's Rehabilitation Daria Gerasymchuk*.* Ukraine has also already established an interdepartmental working group of representatives of relevant ministries.

In May 2023, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba went to Ukraine and afterwards to Moscow. During her two-day stay, [she discussed with representatives of the Russian government](https://news.un.org/ru/story/2023/05/1441287) ways to strengthen the protection of children in Ukraine and prevent serious violations of their rights. On that occasion, she met with Maria Lvova-Belova (Children's Ombudsperson of the Russian Federation) against whom there is an arrest warrant of the International Criminal Court on the grounds of deportation of Ukrainian children. More than six months later, no concrete results have been achieved and the number of repatriated children is stagnating.

On 5 July 2023, at the Seventy-seventh session of the General Assembly of the UN Security Council, the Secretary-General [noted](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N23/144/98/PDF/N2314498.pdf?OpenElement) in his report "Children and Armed Conflict" that he was concerned by reports, some of which have been confirmed by the United Nations, of children transferred to the Russian Federation from regions of Ukraine partially under or under temporary military control of the Russian Federation.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Human Rights Without Frontiers supports the recommendations of the UN Secretary-General, who urges

* Russia to ensure that no changes are made to the personal status of Ukrainian children, including their citizenship;
* all parties to continue to ensure that the best interests of all children are respected, including by facilitating family tracing and reunification of unaccompanied and/or separated children who find themselves outside borders or control lines without their families or guardians;
* parties to the conflict to grant child protection authorities access to these children to facilitate family reunification;
* his Special Representative on “Children and Armed Conflicts’, together with United Nations agencies and partners, to consider ways to facilitate such processes.

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