**UKRAINE**

**NGOs rescue children from Russian-occupied territories and Russia**

***Human Rights Without Frontiers calls upon the UN, the EU and states supporting Ukraine to fund Ukrainian NGOs rescuing at high risks Ukrainian children deported by and to Russia***

[***In Ukrainian***](https://hrwf.eu/україна-hyo-рятують-українських-дітей-д/)***:*** [***https://hrwf.eu/україна-hyo-рятують-українських-дітей-д/***](https://hrwf.eu/україна-hyo-рятують-українських-дітей-д/)

[***In Russian***](https://hrwf.eu/78391-2/)***:*** [***https://hrwf.eu/78391-2/***](https://hrwf.eu/78391-2/)

***By Willy Fautre***

HRWF (22.05.2024) - Since the beginning of the year, it was publicly reported by Kyiv that several Ukrainian non-governmental organizations had rescued more than a hundred Ukrainian children deported by and to Russia.

Only NGOs can put words into action with concrete rescue operations, not international institutions or states. In exchange, they would expect that the United Nations, the European Union and governmental institutions of various countries supporting Ukraine against Russia’s unprovoked aggression against Ukraine would spontaneously and generously fund their activities but this is not the case.

***Some rescue operations in May in Zaporizhzhia and Kherson oblasts***

On 17 May, Ukraine returned **four children** from Russian-occupied territory in Kherson Oblast, local governor Oleksandr Prokudin said.

The evacuated children were three brothers and a sister, aged from two to 12 years.

The rescue operation was conducted by the children's parents in collaboration with **Save Ukraine**, a Ukrainian humanitarian NGO.

The children arrived on Ukraine-controlled territory and received psychological and medical support, the [**governor**](https://t.me/olexandrprokudin/3452)said.

On 15 May, the Reintegration Ministry reported that the non-governmental Ukrainian organization **Child Rights Network** brought back a 17-year-old orphan, Denys, from Russian-held territories in Zaporizhzhia Oblast. He was 16 years old when he was abducted. He was then living in Kherson with his two deaf parents, who could not speak and could not fight back when Russian troops abducted him.

He spent 10 months in a Russian camp in Occupied Crimea until he was rescued by volunteers of an NGO. He had been living in the Russian-occupied territories under the supervision of his neighbor and searching for options to move to Ukraine-controlled territory since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion, according to the ministry's [**statement**](https://t.me/minre_ua/5724).

Denys's aunt previously appealed to the ministry to help in bringing the boy back. Currently, Denys lives under his aunt's guardianship.

The boy was sent to the rehabilitation center in the city of Truskavets in Lviv Oblast for further recovery.

On 14 May, **Child Rights Network** returned[**six children**](https://kyivindependent.com/governor-6-children-brought-back-from-russian-occupied-territory/) from Russian-occupied territories in Kherson Oblast.

***Some rescue operations in March***

On 22 March, nine Ukrainian children previously deported by Russia or held in Ukraine's Russian-occupied territories were brought back to Ukraine, said Ukraine's Ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets.

The children were returned with the help of [**Qatar**](https://kyivindependent.com/ombudsman-qatar-ready-to-help-ukraine-return-civilian-pows-from-russia/), which has played a major mediation role in [**returning**](https://kyivindependent.com/qatari-diplomats-to-facilitate-the-repatriation-of-4-deported-ukrainian-children-2/) Ukrainian children who had been deported or forcibly transferred to Russia, and within the framework of the approved action plan of Ukraine's president **Bring Kids Back UA**.

According to Lubinets, two three-year-old sisters, a six-year-old boy, and a 10-year-old girl were rescued from orphanages after their guardians and relatives appealed for their return. A 12-year-old girl was returned and reunited with her mother.

"Children were forced to attend Russian schools, where they were told that there was no independent state of Ukraine," Andriy Yermak, Ukraine's Presidential Office head, [**wrote**](https://t.me/ermaka2022/4530) on Telegram.

According to Lubinets, one of the girls who was returned had a disability and was not given proper medical care while being held in Russian-occupied territory. She will now reportedly receive proper care.

***Some rescue operations in February***

An international team of investigators have tracked down eight Ukrainian children, believed to have been abducted during Russia's invasion, reported Anna Holligan in The Hague & Diana Kuryshko, BBC Ukraine correspondent in an [**article**](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-68249102) titled “Ukraine’s missing children tracked down in Russia by digital sleuths”

More than 60 detectives used digital open source techniques to trace the missing children whose presence in Russia had been mentioned in their propaganda.

Experts from 23 countries at Europol's headquarters in The Hague used advanced facial recognition to find recent images of the children online. Geolocation experts analysed photos and videos and used satellite data to determine where they were being kept.

According to the BBC, [**18 Ukrainian children**](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-68249102) who were transferred to Russia and then returned home took part in a recreational camp in Irshava in the Zakarpattia region of western Ukraine, organised by a foundation set up by a Ukrainian billionaire.

***About statistics: only 2.5% of children stolen by Russia were rescued***

According to the official Ukrainian Database of [Children in War](https://childrenofwar.gov.ua/en/), about 20,000 [**children**](https://kyivindependent.com/tag/children)have been separated from their families in Ukraine, forcibly transferred by Russia to its own territories and the occupied Ukrainian regions where they have forcibly been registered as Russian citizens since the start of its full-scale invasion of Ukraine,

Many journalists, media outlets and even officials keep on writing that less than 400 children have been brought back home as mentioned on the website of the Ukrainian Database. These are however outdated statistics of 2022. They have unfortunately not been updated for lack of staff, failing to include more cases of enforced disappearances. Over a hundred children are thought to have been rescued since 1 January 2024. Most of them, if not all of them, were not on the lists of the Database.

The exact figures are unclear, and where they are is mostly unknown. The BBC has compiled evidence from many children who said they were separated from parents, were not allowed to go home or call their relatives.

In 2023, the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for the Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Children's Rights Commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova for the unlawful deportation of children.

Russia denies the accusation and says it has protected vulnerable children by moving them from a war zone for their own safety.

Maria Lvova-Belova says some 730,000 children have been brought to Russia, most of them with their parents or other relatives and that 2,000 children were ‘evacuated’ from Ukrainian orphanages for their ‘safety’, although she makes no mention of forcible displacement.

Unlike the issue of exchange of war prisoners, Russia remains far away from any international attempt to reunify the deported Ukrainian children with their original families and to repatriate the orphans to their country of origin but prefers to promote their illegal adoption by Russian families and hereby to forcibly russify them in flagrant violation of the internation conventions.

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