

New Report Exposes Systematic Indoctrination and Militarisation of Ukrainian Children in Their Own Words

www.saveukraineua.org www.warchild.org.uk



A new report, based on 200 documented cases of recently returned Ukrainian children and young people, released by War Child UK, Save Ukraine, and the Human Security Centre, uncovers the enormity of systematic abduction, indoctrination and militarisation of Ukrainian children under Russian occupation. The report concludes that the most likely goal of Russia is to encourage, manipulate, or coerce Ukrainian children into the Russian Armed Forces, including participation in combat against their own country.

The report highlights these actions by the Russian state as the largest, most organised campaign of grave child rights violations in Europe since the end of the Yugoslav wars. **Crucially, this is the first report that exposes these crimes from the voices of the children themselves.** It documents the stories of 200 children, while at the same time shedding light on what may be happening to the hundreds of thousands who remain trapped in Russia or under occupation.

Through these testimonies, the report concludes what the militarisation of Ukrainian children — weapons training, propaganda lessons, and forced participation in paramilitary structures — is not accidental but part of Russia's deliberate, state-driven strategy to erase Ukrainian identity and prepare children as future resources for its military ambitions.

Key findings from the report include:

- **55% of children were subjected to pro-Russian indoctrination**, including mandatory lessons promoting “correct” versions of history, propaganda events and bans on the Ukrainian language.
- **41% reported militarisation**, such as weapons training, forced drills or membership in paramilitary youth movements like Yunarmiya.
- **39% experienced unlawful, forced displacement** or deportations to Russia, Crimea or Belarus.
- **30% attended ‘camps’** where they were forced to undertake military training including firing live rounds and grenades.
- **18% were separated from their families.**
- **18% were denied access to medical care.**
- **17% of children reported being detained** - sometimes alongside their parents - in police stations, filtration camps, or informal facilities.
- **10% of children reported torture or cruel treatment**, while **6% reported sexual violence and assaults.**

The report identifies that Russia's strategy to erase Ukrainian identity, assimilate children into Russian society and transform them into a mobilisation resource for Russia's military ambitions is well funded, deliberate and state-driven. The report also includes excerpts of 35 children's testimonies taken from the 200 interviews conducted by Save Ukraine.

One of the rescued Ukrainian children, a girl aged 16 from Kherson region, when asked about her experience, told Save Ukraine that: *"Every day felt like we were being shaped into something we weren't. They didn't treat us like kids. They wanted us to behave like their soldiers."*

Mykola Kuleba, CEO of Save Ukraine said; *"Save Ukraine has already rescued more than 800 children from Russia and the occupied territories. In each child's eyes, we see fear; in their voices we hear stories of being forced into military camps, punished for speaking Ukrainian or showing any trace of their heritage, and subjected to relentless psychological and physical abuse. Their very identities are being systematically erased in order to turn them into 'Russian children'. Boys as young as 18 years old are being coerced into fighting for the Russian army and killed in combat. These are not isolated cases. 1.6 million Ukrainian children are being held as hostages in Russia and occupied territories. We must stand together and demand with one voice: Help us let our children go."*

Carey Mulligan, War Child Global Founding Ambassador said; *"This report highlights some truly horrifying new information on what children under occupation in Ukraine are currently experiencing. These children have, and continue to be, ripped away from their families, and given military training. No child should be exposed to this kind of treatment, and I hope by raising awareness of this important issue, both governments globally and the public will unite in demanding the return of every child."*

Helen Pattinson, CEO of War Child UK said; *"Protecting children in conflict is not optional; it is a fundamental obligation under international law. At War Child, we work to defend the rights of all children caught in conflict. It's a terrifying experience for a child to be separated from their families, let alone be stolen by another state. The world cannot look away. We're calling for immediate and impactful action from world leaders to return these children to their homes as the absolute bare minimum."*

The study also highlights how Russian state structures, from schools and adoption systems to camps and the Russian Orthodox Church, work together to assimilate Ukrainian children. Many families were tricked into allowing their children to attend what they believed to be holiday camps - only for them to be subjected to intense military training.

When asked about his experience, a now 18 year old boy from the city of Luhansk told Save Ukraine; *"They introduced a weekly propaganda session. Every Monday, we raised the Russian flag. Teachers repeated the same line: 'Ukraine started the war, Russia is protecting us.'"*

Save Ukraine and War Child UK are urging the international community to:

- Prioritise the safe return and reintegration of deported children.
- Ensure accountability through international justice mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court.
- Provide urgent psychosocial and legal support to survivors and their families.

Save Ukraine and War Child UK have recently signed a partnership agreement that will lead to greater availability of trauma and social care for children repatriated from Russian control. However, without urgent global action, thousands more children risk permanent assimilation into Russia's military and cultural apparatus.

Nathaniel Raymond, Executive Director at Humanitarian Research Lab continued; *"This report is critical to understanding Russia's widespread and illegal militarization, indoctrination, and abuse of Ukraine's children. The testimonials in this report not only raise the voices of these specific children, but the thousands of other children still held by Russia. This report emphasizes the urgent need for Ukraine's children to be returned as a precondition to any end-of-war negotiations."*

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Notes to editor:

The full report can be viewed [here](#)

Images and credits available [here](#)

A video news release with footage from Ukraine and interviews with Ukrainian young people can be found [here](#)

About War Child UK

War Child is driven by a single goal – ensuring a safe future for every child affected by war.

War Child works in some of the hardest-to-reach places to support those who are hardest hit. It aims to reach children as quickly as possible when conflict breaks out and stays long after the cameras have gone to support them through their recovery. War Child works with local communities and governments to help protect and educate children, and support them to heal and learn, for a safer, brighter future. Because one child caught up in conflict is one child too many.

War Child understands children’s needs, respects and stands up for their rights, and puts them at the centre of everything it does. War Child boldly campaigns on the root causes of conflict and helps to amplify children’s voices, so that it can advocate for change on the issues that matter to them.

Together with its partners, War Child delivers vital work in 14 countries across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America. Every day, its local teams are in communities and refugee camps creating safe spaces for children to play, learn, and access psychological support. War Child also specialises in responding rapidly to emergency crisis situations as they happen, offering immediate and critical aid to keep children safe and help them through their trauma. War Child will never give up on children affected by conflict.

www.warchild.org.uk

About Save Ukraine

Save Ukraine is a non-partisan international NGO headquartered in Ukraine and the United States, and a leading force in rescuing, rehabilitating, and reintegrating Ukrainian children stolen by Russia or trapped in occupied territories.

Since 2014, Save Ukraine has evacuated more than 100,000 children and families from frontline areas using armored vehicles and rapid-response missions. Following Russia’s full-scale invasion in 2022, the organization launched covert cross-border rescue operations — a modern-day “Underground Railroad” — which have successfully brought home over 820 Ukrainian children, including 162 orphans, in defiance of Russia’s illegal abductions and occupation.

Yet rescue is only the first step. Save Ukraine provides a full continuum of care — from emergency shelter and trauma counselling to long-term family reunification and reintegration. Its national network of more than 5 *Hope and Healing Centers* includes residential facilities (with over 1,000 beds) and community-based centers that serve up to 5,000 people every month. Each child’s recovery is guided by multidisciplinary teams of psychologists, legal advocates, social workers, and educators, ensuring safety, healing, and restored identity.

Led by Mykola Kuleba, Ukraine’s former Commissioner for Children’s Rights, Save Ukraine has earned international recognition for its courageous work, including the **International Four Freedoms Award (2024)**, **the Magnitsky Human Rights Award**, **the OXI Day Award (2024)**, and **the Manhae Peace Prize (2023)**.

Save Ukraine is a core member of the International *Bring Kids Back* Coalition and a trusted partner for rehabilitation, evidence collection, and reunification of rescued children. Its work is made possible through the support of global partners such as the **UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)**, **the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands**, **the German Federal Foreign Office**, **Global Affairs Canada**,

Howard G. Buffett Foundation, World Central Kitchen (Chef José Andrés), All Hands and Hearts, churches, and thousands of individual donors worldwide.

<https://www.saveukraineua.org>

About Human Security Centre

From Kyiv to Kabul, the safety of ordinary people is being undermined by war, repression, and lawlessness. The Human Security Centre (HSC) exists to confront these threats head-on and to ensure that protecting lives is treated as a core duty of foreign policy.

The HSC is an independent, non-profit foreign policy think tank based in London. It was founded to put people at the heart of security policy. The purpose of the HSC is to address, and to formulate solutions to current and emerging threats to human security. The HSC aims to promote and help create an international society in which individuals and communities everywhere are able to live free from fear, free from want and free from indignity.

To achieve this, the HSC promotes the concept of human security as a tool to facilitate better understanding of the complexity and interrelatedness of threats and as a central pillar of foreign policy in the twenty-first century.

The HSC aims to educate the public about the concept of human security and the various threats to human security around the world; to contribute to the collective knowledge and advance the understanding of the concept of human security; to encourage governments to adopt the human security approach as the basis for foreign, defence, security and international development policies; and to engage with key stakeholders and the general public in strengthening the political will to act upon human security issues.

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