

Author: Karolina Hird

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Key takeaways:

- **Russian officials continue to advertise programs that deport and Russify Ukrainian children and teenagers.**
- **The Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union (UHHRU) formally lodged a complaint against the Russian Federation at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) over the issue of Russia’s forced passportization and adoption of Ukrainian children.**
- **Zaporizhia Oblast occupation authorities appear to be cracking down against Ukrainian employees of the Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP), using fabricated criminal cases to punish them for pro-Ukrainian sentiment.**
- **Russia is using an administrative “road safety” law to force residents of occupied Ukraine to obtain Russian citizenship.**

Russian officials continue to advertise programs that deport and Russify Ukrainian children and teenagers. Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin held a meeting with Russian deputy prime ministers on April 14 and discussed the “University Shifts” program—a program that takes children aged 14–17 from occupied Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson to Russian university campuses and summer camps for “educational” experiences.[1] Mishustin noted that over 2,000 Ukrainian children will participate in “University Shifts” in Summer 2025 and reported that the Russian government has allocated 150 million rubles (\$1.8 million) to funding this program. Mishustin also emphasized that Russian President Vladimir Putin gave the “University Shifts” program his blessing with the acknowledgement that it exposes Ukrainian children to Russian values, traditions, and culture—suggesting that this is one of many programs that the Russian government is using to Russify Ukrainian youth. The Russian Ministry of Education and Science and the “Movement of the First” military-patriotic youth organization jointly founded the “University Shifts” program in 2022 and has since facilitated the deportation and Russification of tens of thousands of Ukrainian children—10.6 thousand in 2022, 10.7 thousand in 2023, and over 12 thousand in 2023.[2] “University Shifts” also likely prepares Ukrainian teenagers for eventual admission into Russian universities, which further separates them from their Ukrainian identities, families, and homes and further integrates them into the Russian Federation.

Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Deputy Chairperson Larisa Tolstykina also advertised the “Cultural Map 4+85” program on April 11, noting that this program will take over 3,000 Ukrainian children from occupied Donetsk Oblast to Moscow, St. Petersburg, Rostov-on-Don, and Kazan between April and October 2025 to participate in “cultural exchanges.”[3] “Cultural Map 4+85” brands itself as a “cultural and educational” program for Ukrainian children, but emphasizes that its goal is to “become an effective mechanism for the socio-cultural rehabilitation and integration of children into a single Russian society.”[4] ISW previously assessed that Russia is deporting Ukrainian children and exposing them to pro-Russian indoctrination using multiple schemes, including educational programs such as “Cultural Map 4+85” and “University Shifts.”[5]

The Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union (UHHRU) formally lodged a complaint against the Russian Federation at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) over the issue of Russia's forced passportization and adoption of Ukrainian children.[6] The UHHRU complaint, initially lodged in 2023 and then published on April 14, 2025, is written on behalf of 10 Ukrainian children aged 12 to 16 years old, all of whom are orphans from Crimea. The complaint notes that the children were wards of the Ukrainian state at the time of Russia's illegal occupation and annexation of Crimea in 2014, and that the Russian government refused Ukraine's requests to return the children to territory controlled by Ukraine and instead began the process of issuing them Russian citizenship. Crimean occupation authorities notably put the children up for adoption, and their whereabouts are currently unknown since the children disappeared from publicly-available adoption sites—which the UHHRU noted could mean that they have been adopted by Russian families. The ECHR previously agreed with allegations that Russia was violating international law by imposing Russian citizenship on residents of occupied Crimea, and UHHRU is seeking to apply this principle to the case of these 10 Ukrainian children.[7] The UHHRU complaint highlights a trend that ISW has observed for several years—Russia is placing vulnerable Ukrainian children up for adoption into Russian families and forcibly granting them Russian citizenship, which makes it much harder for Ukrainian authorities to identify these children and advocate for their return.[8]

Zaporizhia Oblast occupation authorities appear to be cracking down against Ukrainian employees of the Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP), using fabricated criminal cases to punish them for pro-Ukrainian sentiment. Ukrainian Enerhodar Mayor Dmytro Orlov reported on April 15 that the Russian-controlled Zaporizhia Oblast Court sentenced Liliya Kachkareva, a civilian ZNPP employee, to 14 years in prison for “high treason” for allegedly sending money to the Ukrainian armed forces in 2024.[9] Orlov noted that Russian occupation officials have increasingly been prosecuting female employees of the ZNPP and other Russian-occupied energy facilities under similar charges. Russian law enforcement authorities were holding at least 13 ZNPP employees in arbitrary detention on dubious charges as of April 1, 2025.[10] The locations and conditions of many of these employees remains unknown. Russian occupation courts frequently fabricate “terrorism,” “espionage,” or “treason” charges against Ukrainian residents of occupied areas in order to punish them for the expression of perceived pro-Ukrainian or anti-Russian views.[11] Russian occupation officials may be pushing for increased sentences against ZNPP employees in order to replace Ukrainian employees with Russian employees—thereby consolidating Russia's control over the occupied ZNPP.

Russia is using an administrative road safety law to force residents of occupied Ukraine to obtain Russian citizenship. The Russian federal law “On Road Safety,” which the Russian government initially amended in July 2023, began requiring Russian drivers’ licenses to drive in occupied Ukraine and the Russian Federation as of April 1, 2025.[12] Residents of occupied Crimea and Zaporizhia, Kherson, Donetsk, and Luhansk oblasts who do not have Russian drivers’ licenses and maintain either Ukrainian licenses or licenses issued by the Donetsk and Luhansk peoples’ republics (DNR and LNR) must now apply for a Russian license by January 1, 2026 using a simplified procedure that the Russian government codified in December 2022. This simplified procedure requires residents of occupied Ukraine to obtain Russian drivers’ licenses by submitting a Russian passport or residence documents, but without taking a driving exam.[13] The Ukrainian Resistance Center responded to this development by calling it “passportization on wheels” and noted that it is another Russian occupation scheme intended to pressure residents of occupied areas into receiving Russian documentation.[14] Russian occupation officials are likely to use this road safety law to further coerce passportization, as residents will need to obtain Russian citizenship in order to maintain their ability to drive by getting Russian passports. The road safety law will also allow Russian occupation officials to collect personal data on residents of occupied areas, which they can later use against residents in the case of dissent or non-compliance with the occupation regime.

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[9] <https://t.me/orlovdmytroEn/5715>

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