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ISW's Russian Occupation Update tracks the activities that occur in the Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine. The occupation updates will examine Russian efforts to consolidate administrative control of annexed areas and forcibly integrate Ukrainian citizens into Russian sociocultural, economic, military, and governance systems. This product line replaces the section of the Daily Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment covering activities in Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine.

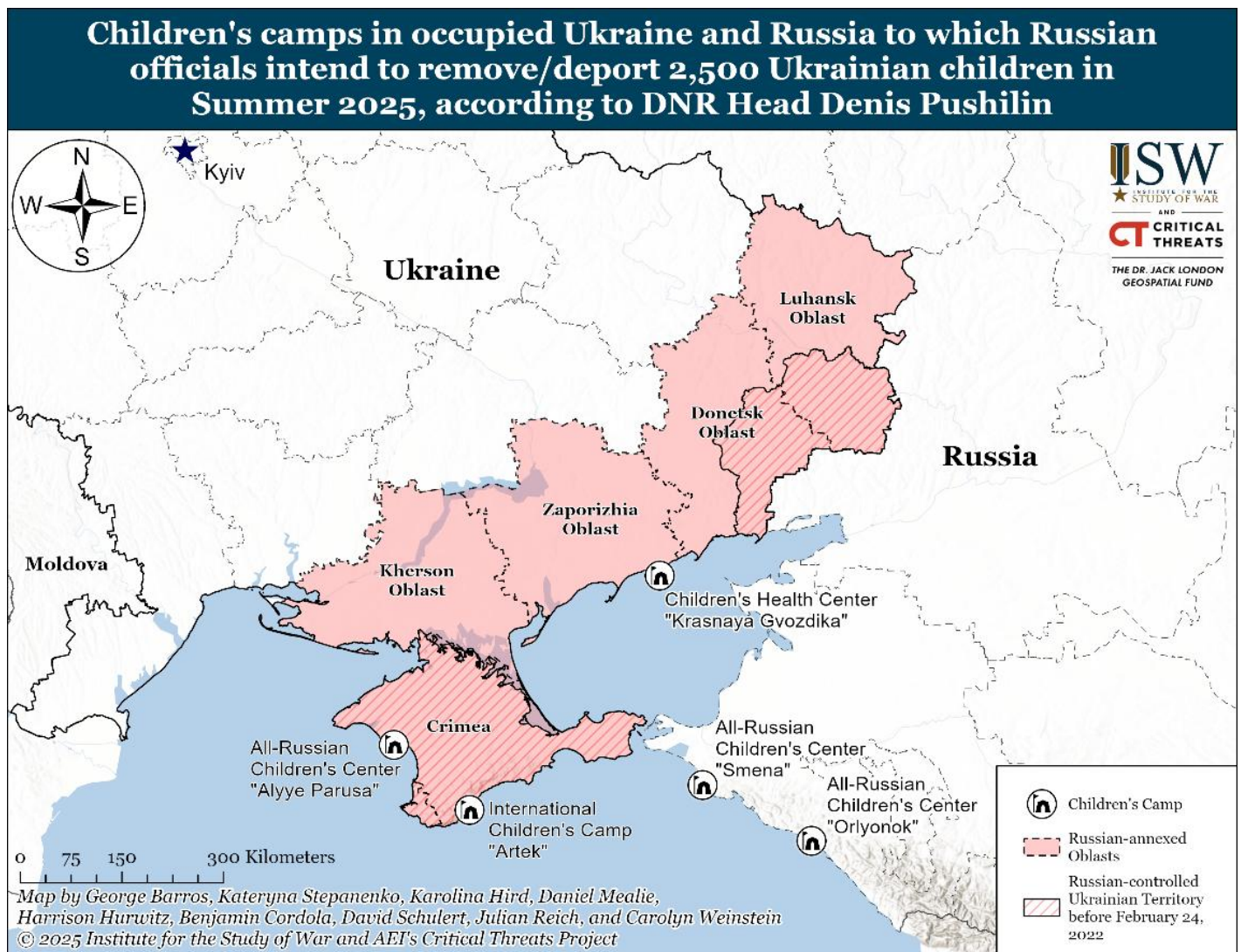
To read ISW's assessment of how Russian activities in occupied areas of Ukraine are part of a coerced Russification and ethnic cleansing campaign, click [here](#).

Key Takeaways:

- **Russia is once again preparing to escalate the forced removal and deportation of Ukrainian children during the upcoming summer months. A Russian official stated that about 53,000 children from occupied Ukraine will “spend their summer holidays” in children’s camps throughout occupied Ukraine and the Russian Federation.**
- **Russian preparations for Victory Day throughout occupied Ukraine emphasize Russia's continued weaponization of historical narratives to consolidate social control over occupied areas.**
- **Russia is further integrating occupied Ukraine into Russia’s wider governance system by re-distributing single-mandate constituencies.**

Russia is once again preparing to escalate the forced removal and deportation of Ukrainian children during the upcoming summer months. Russian First Deputy Education Minister Alexander Bugayev stated on April 27 that about 53,000 children from occupied Ukraine will “spend their summer holidays” in children’s camps throughout occupied Ukraine and the Russian Federation.[1] Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin noted on April 22 that his administration will send 2,500 children to the “Artek” camp (occupied Crimea), the “Orlyonok” camp (Krasnodar Krai), the “Krasnaya Gvozdika” camp (occupied Zaporizhia Oblast), the “Smena” camp (Krasnodar Krai) and the “Alyye Parusa” camp (occupied Crimea), and will also continue to send teenagers aged 14 to 17 to Russia via the “University Shifts” program.[2] Pushilin also claimed that 13,000 children will “rest” (likely meaning attend various summer camps) in various Russian federal subjects (regions). ISW previously reported that Russia intends to deport 2,000 Ukrainian teenagers

to Russia through the “University Shifts” program in 2025 alone.[3] International law notably differentiates between “forcible transfer/removal” and “deportation,” with “forcible transfer/removal” referring to occasions when the occupying power (in this case Russia) forcibly moves people within internationally-recognized national boundaries (in this case internationally-recognized Ukrainian territory), whereas “deportation” refers to the forced removal of individuals from outside of national boundaries.[4] Russian occupation authorities are both removing and deporting Ukrainian children to these summer camps, as ISW has previously assessed.[5] Both of these actions can rise to the level of a violation of international law.[6]



Such summer camps, whether in occupied Ukraine or in Russia, are re-education camps that aim to indoctrinate Ukrainian children through academic instruction, military training, and military-patriotic education. ISW has historically noticed an increase in the number of reported removals and deportations to such camps in the summer months, as Russian occupation officials are able to increasingly use the guise of summer vacation programs to facilitate the removals and deportations.[7] The Yale Humanitarian Research Lab (HRL) previously identified 43 such facilities,

including 41 pre-existing summer camps in occupied Ukraine and Russia, which are involved in the removal/ deportation and re-education of Ukrainian children.[8] Occupation authorities are not only increasing the scale of these deportations but also institutionalizing them as part of a long-term strategy to separate Ukrainian children from their identity and more broadly Russify occupied Ukraine. These efforts are aligned with the Kremlin's broader campaign to erase Ukrainian identity by assimilating the next generation of Ukrainians into a manufactured Russian national narrative that distorts Ukrainian historical memory, erases Ukrainian language, and conditions children to be loyal to the Russian state.

Russian preparations for Victory Day throughout occupied Ukraine emphasize Russia's continued weaponization of historical narratives to consolidate social control over occupied areas. Victory Day, celebrated on May 9, is Russia's primary patriotic holiday and commemorates the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany in the Second World War, known in Russia as the Great Patriotic War. In preparation for Victory Day, Russian occupation governments are compelling Ukrainian residents of occupied areas to participate in events including the "Dictation of Victory," a historical test on the Great Patriotic War comprised of 25 questions.[9] Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin claimed on April 25 that occupation authorities administered the test to 9,400 participants at 208 locations in occupied Donetsk Oblast and additionally had Ukrainian children write letters to Russian frontline servicemembers.[10] Zaporizhia Oblast occupation head Yevgeny Balitsky stated on April 25 that 150 sites in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast took part in the test including schools, universities, libraries, and various enterprises.[11] Kherson Oblast occupation head Vladimir Saldo claimed on April 25 that upwards of 4,000 residents of occupied Kherson participated in "Dictation of Victory" at 126 locations across occupied Kherson Oblast (twice as many as in 2024) including in schools, museums, near monuments, at the former military airfield in Shotivka, and at the Askania-Nova nature reserve.[12] The Kherson Oblast occupation administration additionally announced on April 24 that occupied Kherson Oblast has joined the Russian "St. George Ribbon" campaign, held in the lead-up to Victory Day from April 24 to May 9, claiming that it unites "millions" of Russians.[13] The Kremlin has historically used Victory Day to present Russia as a protector against Nazism, a narrative the Kremlin has frequently invoked to justify its invasion of Ukraine and further militarize Russian society in the long term.[14] Russian occupation authorities use Victory Day and the narrative of the Great Patriotic War as a means of disseminating a Kremlin-approved and propagandized version of history to Ukrainians, part of a wider initiative to Russify and militarize occupied Ukraine.[15] Russian occupation authorities will use Victory Day programming in occupied Ukraine to disseminate pro-Russian histories and hyper militaristic ideals, while vilifying Ukrainian historical identity.

Russia is further integrating occupied Ukraine into Russia's wider governance system by redistributing single-mandate constituencies. The Russian Central Election Commission (CEC) approved a new scheme on April 25 that will re-distribute single-mandate constituencies throughout Russia and include them in occupied Ukraine.[16] The new scheme allocates seven of the existing 225 single-mandate constituencies to occupied Ukraine—three in Donetsk Oblast, two in Luhansk Oblast, and one each in Kherson and Zaporizhia oblasts.[17] The re-distributed single-mandate constituency scheme will first be employed in the September 2026 State Duma elections, where 7 total representatives will be "elected" to the Duma from occupied Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts. Russia created four single-mandate constituencies in Crimea during the 2016 and

2021 Duma “elections” following the 2014 occupation and annexation.[18] A prominent Russian insider source previously remarked on the redistricting plans for occupied Ukraine, claiming that they are “a logical continuation of [Ukraine’s] integration into the Russian system of governance.”[19] Russia will use this new constituency scheme in an attempt to legitimize its illegal occupation of Ukraine, much as it did with the introduction of single-mandate districts in Crimea in 2016 and 2021.[20] Residents of occupied areas will likely be forced or coerced into voting in 2026, and the Kremlin will then have the grounds to claim high voter turnout and popular local buy-in for Russian governance. Duma representatives are likely to be pro-Russian or Kremlin-sanctioned candidates, which will allow Russia even greater legislative control of occupied areas. ISW has reported at length on Russia’s pseudo-legal manipulations in occupied Ukraine, and assesses they are part of the Kremlin’s wider campaign to forcibly integrate Ukraine into Russia using Russian legislative levers.[21]

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[1] <https://tass dot ru/obschestvo/23795241>

[2] <https://t.me/PushilinDenis/6320>

[3] <https://isw.pub/OccupationUpdate041725>

[4] <https://www.casematrixnetwork.org/cmn-knowledge-hub/elements-digest/art-7/7-1-d/3/#:~:text=There%20is%20an%20important%20distinction,take%20place%20within%20national%20boundaries.%22>; <https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/173e23/>

[5] <https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/24-210-01%20ISW%20Occupation%20playbook.pdf>

[6] <https://files-profile.medicine.yale.edu/documents/8c54abb4-3c6d-4b5c-be05-727f612afccc>

[7] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar052824>

[8] <https://files-profile.medicine.yale.edu/documents/8c54abb4-3c6d-4b5c-be05-727f612afccc>

[9] <https://en dot iz.ru/en/1871602/elizaveta-gricenکو/remembering-story-april-25-dictation-victory-will-take-place>

[10] <https://t.me/PushilinDenis/6342>

[11] <https://t.me/BalitskyEV/5160>

[12] https://t.me/SALDO_VGA/7017

[13] https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/30107

[14] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-may-9-2024> ; https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/2010195/ ; <https://t.me/zarubinreporter/3858> ; https://t.me/MID_Russia/55907

[15] https://almenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Children_web_ENG.pdf

[16] <https://www.pnp.ru/social/k-vyboram-v-gosdumu-2026-goda-izmenyat-skhemu-odnomandatnykh-okrugov.html>

[17] https://t.me/tass_agency/311498; https://t.me/kremlin_sekret/16973; <https://www.pnp.ru/social/k-vyboram-v-gosdumu-2026-goda-izmenyat-skhemu-odnomandatnykh-okrugov.html>

[18] <https://t.me/CenterCounteringDisinformation/14059>

[19] https://t.me/kremlin_sekret/16973

[20] <https://t.me/CenterCounteringDisinformation/14059>

[21] <https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/24-210-01%20ISW%20Occupation%20playbook.pdf>