It is worth considering in detail the peculiarities of the situation of children in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, considering the Russian state policy and its implementation through the activities of the occupation administrations regarding this category of the population.

According to Article 42 of the Hague Convention (II) with respect to the Laws and Customs of War on Land and its annex: Regulations concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land dated 29 July 1899, territory is considered occupied when it is "actually placed under the authority of the hostile army"[1], namely : a) the armed forces of a foreign state are physically present without the consent of the sovereign government at the site during the invasion; b) a sovereign state cannot exercise its power because of the presence of foreign forces; and c) the occupying forces establish their own authority over the territory. Since the beginning of the occupation of the territory, the relevant norms of international humanitarian law, in particular, the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 12 August 1949 and Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 8 June 1977.

One should agree with the experts of the Moscow Mechanism, who, in the Report dated 4 May 2023, note that in order to protect the best interests of the child and to counter the forced transfer and illegal deportation of minors in connection with the seizure of the territories of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, the concept of functional occupation, according to which certain rules of military occupation gradually begin to apply as soon as Russia gains control over the matters governed by them, should be applied. Thus, the ban on forcible transfer and illegal deportation of Ukrainian children, provided for in Article 49 of the Geneva Convention (IV), comes into effect as soon as minors are under the actual control of Russian agents, even if it lasts only a few hours[2].

With the start of the full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022, in addition to the territories of Ukraine occupied since 2014 (the territories of the Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts), certain territories of Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kyiv, Luhansk, Mykolaiv, Sumy, Chernihiv, Kharkiv, Kherson oblasts, which are located on the border with the Russian Federation or the Republic of Belarus and which until February 24 were under the control of the Government of Ukraine were placed under Russian control. The Russian offensive in February 2022 happened quickly. For example, on February 26, local authorities in Melitopol (Zaporizhzhia oblast) lost control over administrative buildings[3], on 2 March 2022, Mariupol (Donetsk oblast) was under siege already[4], and in early March, the Russian Federation captured Kherson (the regional center of the Kherson oblast).

In connection with the rapid pace of the occupation, the blocking of settlements and the failure of the Russian side to provide humanitarian corridors, it was almost impossible to evacuate the civilian population and organize the evacuation of all boarding facilities and institutions. At the same time, it is difficult to deny the fact that with information about a possible armed attack by the Russian Federation, no relocation plan was drafted and no preliminary evacuation of institutions where children were located in the border territories of Ukraine was carried out.

After the occupation, the possibility of leaving these territories was limited because of the urgent need to evacuate the civilian population from territories that were under constant shelling with limited access to the basic needs of the civilian population. For instance, the city of Mariupol in the Donetsk oblast was blocked by the Russian military from 3 March 2022, and the civilian infrastructure of the city was purposefully destroyed; at the beginning of March, there was no electricity, gas and water in the city

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districts because of Russian shelling. Up to 90% of residential buildings in Mariupol were destroyed or damaged[5], which indicates the deliberate use of indiscriminate shelling.

In the conditions of the impossibility of safely evacuating to the territory under the control of the Government of Ukraine, the only other options are to remain in the occupied territory or try to leave through the territory of the Russian Federation. Departure through the Russian Federation, however, required passing the so-called "filtering procedure". 21 "filtration points" were organized in Donetsk region alone[6].

The "filtering" procedure, which is currently carried out by representatives of the Russian Federation, is accompanied by numerous violations:

- excessive collection of personal information by photographing, taking fingerprints, copying the contents of phones, in particular, contacts;
- psychological pressure during interrogations, asking provocative questions about support for the Russian Federation and the Russian military, etc.;
- separation of persons undergoing the procedure together, in particular, separation of parents and children;
- improper conditions of stay in the so-called "filtration camps" (unequipped premises and accommodation of an excessive number of people in them, inadequate provision of food)[7];
- detention of persons who have not passed the so-called "filtering" and placing them in places of detention in the occupied territory.

According to an eyewitness, it is known about the case when, during the so-called "filtering" at the checkpoint, representatives of the Russian Federation put children on their knees and said that if the parents did not give money, the children would be shot[8].

There are also known cases when representatives of the Russian Federation separate children from their parents during the so-called "filtering". In particular, a 4-year-old girl Alisa from Mariupol was separated from her mother, Victoriia Obidina, who was providing medical aid to the Ukrainian military in Azovstal. The girl arrived in Zaporozhzhia in a convoy with evacuated residents of Mariupol. The child was traveling alone, because her mother was left by the Russian military in the "filtration camp" in Mangush, and was placed under the care of her grandmother, with whom she left for Poland. Victoriia spent 165 days in Russian captivity and returned as a result of the exchange of prisoners of war on 17 October 2022[9].

In some cases, after separation from their parents, children are deported to the Russian Federation with their subsequent placement in a family under guardianship and the possibility of adoption. Thus, in particular, Yevhenii Mezhevoi was separated from his three minor children at a checkpoint near Mariupol. Yevhenii was sent to Olenivka colony[10], where he spent 45 days, and his children were taken first to occupied Donetsk, and later to Russia together with 31 other children from Mariupol. On June 16, representatives of the Russian social services came to Polyany Children's Sanatorium near Moscow, where the children were staying, and informed them that they would either be sent to a boarding school or adopted, and the father had only five days to pick them up. The father managed to take the children, at the moment the family is in Latvia, all the other children taken from Mariupol together with Yevhenii's children have already been placed in Russian families[11].

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In addition to the above-mentioned violations, the Russian side implements a complex and systematic state policy regarding (1) the forced transfer of children to the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and the deportation of children to the territory of the Russian Federation, (2) the implementation of Russian education standards in the occupied territories, (3) the "re-education" and militarization of Ukrainian children relocated to the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and the territory of the Russian Federation, (4) forced change of citizenship of children in the occupied territories of Ukraine and passporting, (5) placement of Ukrainian children in families of citizens of the Russian Federation.

It is appropriate to consider all these elements of the policy of the aggressor country in more detail.

2.1. Forcible transfer and deportation of children to the territory of the Russian Federation

The scale of the policy of forced transer and deportation of Ukrainian children is astonishing. However, the mass deportation of children began a few days before the deployment of large-scale armed aggression against Ukraine - on 18 February 2022, the so-called "evacuation" from the DPR and LPR was announced[12]. As part of the campaign to prepare for a large-scale invasion, the Russian authorities justified the need to transfer children by a possible threat from the Armed Forces of Ukraine. As of 27 February 2022, 457 children from three boarding houses in Donetsk were placed in the Romashka sports and recreation complex in the territory of the Nekliniv district of the Rostov region[13].

Given the limited access to the occupied territories and the systematic failure of the Russian Federation to provide information about the children displaced by it, Ukraine managed to identify 19,393 children who were deported to the territory of the Russian Federation[14]. In addition, the state is making efforts to establish the location of the children who were in the temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine at risk of forced transfer or deportation, and whose fate is unknown. According to the Center for Strategic Communications, deportations took place to 57 regions, including the geographically remote Sakhalin oblast (about 8,000 kilometers from the place of usual residence), Novosibirsk oblast (about 4,000 kilometers), Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug (about 4,000 kilometers), Murmansk oblast (about 3 thousand kilometers), Omsk oblast (about 3 thousand kilometers). The children were transferred to Russian regions, which differ significantly from their usual place of residence in terms of culture and religion: the Republic of Dagestan, the Republic of Tatarstan, the Chechen Republic[15].

In order to analyze the phenomenon of deportation of Ukrainian citizens, in particular, children, the following categories of minors who were forcibly transferred within the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine or deported to the territory of the Russian Federation can be tentatively identified. These are, in particular:

(a) accompanied children, i.e. minors, transferred together with their legal representatives or one of them.

(b) orphans, children deprived of parental care who were at institutions in the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied before 24 February 2022 in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.

(c) orphans, children deprived of parental care, who were at institutions in the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied after 24 February 2022 (as far as we know about the Kherson oblast).

(d) children orphaned or left without parental care as a result of the war (as a result of the death of parents

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or guardians, separation from parents in the process of so-called “filtration”, captivity of parents/guardians, etc.).

(e) children who, probably with the consent of their parents, were taken to the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine or the territory of the Russian Federation and are kept in camps or sanatoriums for the purpose of “re-education”[16];

(f) children who were taken out for the purpose of clinical examination and medical examinations or providing medical assistance (medical intervention).

The child’s belonging to one or another isolated group affects the vulnerability of his situation, in particular, in the context of returning to Ukraine. Therefore, some categories of displaced / deported children should be discussed in more detail.

Thus, today the Russian Federation does not provide for the possibility of repatriation of minor orphans and those deprived of parental care[17]. Moreover, children from this category are at the greatest risk of becoming victims of forced transfer to Russian families and imposed citizenship of the aggressor state, which accompanies the process of transfer to guardianship and/or adoption. A separate problematic issue is the identification and return of children deported and adopted by Russians during 2014-2021, in particular those who, because of the temporary occupation, did not have Ukrainian identity documents.

According to the Russian side, the number of Ukrainian minors deported for so-called “re-education” to the occupied territories of Ukraine was about 30,000 in 2022[18]. Moreover, 10,000 children were forcibly relocated to the territory of the occupied Crimean Peninsula, where a network of seven institutions (in particular, camps, sanatoriums, schools) operates, about 2 - 2.5 thousand - to Belarus, where at least four institutions operate[19]. According to a study by Yale University, other minors were deported to 34 camps in the territory of the Russian Federation, 12 of which are located on the Black Sea coast, 10 around the cities of Moscow, Kazan, and Yekaterinburg. 11 camps are located at a distance of more than 800 kilometers from the child’s usual place of residence (2 of them - in Siberia, 1 - in the Far East). The absolute record holder for this parameter is Magadan, located 6,300 kilometers away. To get to the camp, the children first traveled by bus, then by train, and finally by plane (2 flights)[20]. The largest number of minors was concentrated at 4 institutions - Artek (Crimea), Orlenok (Krasnodar Krai), Okean (Vladivostok), Smena (Krasnodar Krai)[21]. During “re-education”, the duration of which was arbitrarily increased by Russian agents without the consent of legal representatives of minors, children could be placed in several institutions at once. Placement of children in such remote regions is a deliberate measure aimed at complicating their return. Their distribution by different regions is also aimed at greater integration of children into the Russian cultural and educational space and loss of connection with Ukrainian identity as a result of limiting communication with other representatives of the Ukrainian national group.

Regarding the undergoing of the so-called “preventive medical examination”, according to the data of the Russian side, which were made public at the 20th All-Russian Congress of Commissioners for Children’s Rights in the Subjects of the Russian Federation, which took place on April 26-27 in Kazan, as part of the execution of the order of the President of the Russian Federation dated 5 October 2022 No. Пр-1872, “in-depth preventive medical examinations of children in the territories of the DPR, LPR, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson oblasts” was organized, in particular, in the so-called DPR - more than 106.6 thousand children,

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in the so-called LPR - more than 79.9 thousand children, in the Zaporizhzhia oblast - more than 32 thousand children, in the Kherson oblast - 11.7 thousand children, as well as in Krasnodar Krai (from among those who left the so-called “new territories”) - 4.2 thousand children.

As of March 2023, at least 550 children were deported to the Russian Federation as a result of the “preventive medical examination”. Institutions at which minors may be placed include Polyany Sanatorium (a division of the Children’s Medical Center, Moscow oblast), Dr. Roshal’s Clinic, and the Russian Children’s Clinical Hospital (Moscow). Maria Lvova-Belova also announced the possibility of placing deported children at specialized institutions in the Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous District[22]. Potentially, the number of minors deported as a result of the “preventive medical examination” will increase, as evidenced by the statistics for individual occupied territories. Thus, according to Russian doctors, 70% of children examined in the so-called LPR need inpatient treatment[23]. Despite the statement of the “minister of health of the LPR” about placing minors in the Luhansk “Republican” Clinical Hospital, the latter does not have the appropriate capacity (410 beds). The institution can accommodate 7,000 children per year[24]. This may indicate the potential deportation of some Ukrainian minors to the Russian Federation. In addition, dispensation will continue also during 2023. For this, 435 million rubles have been allocated from the federal budget of the Russian Federation[25].

Under the pretext of providing for children, Russia also uses the movement of children for rehabilitation and recreation within the occupied territories of Ukraine. In particular, in October 2022, the so-called head of the occupation administration of Kherson Volodymyr Saldo stated that about 5,000 children from the Kherson oblast would come to Crimea for rehabilitation. At that time, there were already about 1,500 Ukrainian children in the territory of the temporarily occupied Crimea[26]. On May 8, the occupation authorities of the Zaporizhzhia oblast announced the transfer of 796 children to “safer settlements”[27].

In addition, the period of stay in the camps is not limited to a shift - motivating the delay by the danger of the situation in the children’s usual place of residence, they are left for extended shifts and are not returned to their families[28].

Therefore, the Russian Federation uses a number of methods of forced transfer of children within the occupied territories, as well as their deportation to the Russian Federation in order to separate them from their usual environment, isolate them from their own national group and place them in a “Russian” environment. Moreover, these methods are applied to different categories, in particular, both to children who have parents and to children deprived of parental care.

2.2. Implementation of Russian standards of education in the occupied territories

The Russian Federation systematically uses education in the occupied territories for the purpose of planting propaganda and breaking ties between Ukrainian children and their national group. The occupying state is obliged to ensure the proper functioning of institutions responsible for the care of children and their education[29]. In fulfilling this obligation, states must also take into account consider the

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child's right to preserve individuality; any care for a child must consider his ethnic origin, religious and cultural affiliation and native language[30]. It is necessary to entrust the education of children under the age of 15, who were orphaned or separated from their families as a result of the war, to persons with the same cultural traditions[31] and, if possible, persons of their nationality, language and religion[32].

In addition, states have an obligation to ensure the child's education with a focus on fostering respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as the principles proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations; respect for the cultural identity, language and national values of the country in which the child lives, the country of his origin; preparing a child for a conscious life in a free society in the spirit of understanding, peace, and tolerance[33].

However, the Russian Federation, contrary to its obligations as an occupying state, implements its own education standards and curricula in institutions in the occupied territories of Ukraine, continuing the practice it used in the occupied Crimea.

Starting with the occupation of the Crimean Peninsula in February 2014, the Russian Federation has been consistently eradicating the Ukrainian national identity of minors through Russification, militarization, indoctrination[34], deportation, and forced placement in Russian families. In a short period of time, the effective functioning of the system of patriotic education of the Russian Federation was restored and ensured on the peninsula, and the isolation and segregation from the educational, informational and cultural space of Ukraine was accelerated. Education in the Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar languages was abolished in the occupied Crimea. In addition, teaching was switched to the state educational standards of the Russian Federation. During the occupation, the number of schoolchildren studying in the Ukrainian language decreased by 60 times[35]. Russian teachers are brought from the territory of the Russian Federation to the occupied Crimea[36]. In turn, at least 218,974 Crimean school-age children became victims of the militarization of education[37]. In addition, until 2017, applicants from the occupied territories of Crimea were provided with benefits for admission to Russian HEIs[38]. From the beginning of the full-scale invasion, Crimea became a center for the organization, preparation and further implementation of the proven scenario of Russification of minors in the newly occupied territories of Ukraine.

In particular, the destruction of education in the occupied territories under the "Crimean scenario" includes:

- full transition to Russian education standards;

- replacement of educational materials with Russian ones;

- retraining and replacement of teaching staff with those "loyal" to the new government or displaced from the territory of the Russian Federation;

- exclusion of teaching subjects of the Ukrainian studies cycle, in particular, history of Ukraine, Ukrainian literature;

- restrictions on studying the Ukrainian language;

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- militarization of the educational process (cadet schools, Young Army Movement, Bolshaya Peremena Movement, etc.)[39].

All these practices are implemented by the Russian side both in the territories occupied until 24 February 2022, and in the territories that were occupied as a result of large-scale armed aggression against Ukraine.

One of the key steps in destroying the Ukrainian identity of children in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine is the actual suppression of the Ukrainian language from the educational process. This practice was applied by the occupying authorities in the territories of Ukraine occupied as early as 2014.

Thus, since July 2018, Vladimir Putin signed Federal Law No. 317-FZ On Amendments to Articles 11 and 14 of the Federal Law On Education in the Russian Federation[40]. Despite the positioning of the regulatory act as one that was intended to promote the study of "native languages of peoples" in schools, according to the amendments, Russian as the state language is mandatory at all schools of the Russian Federation, other languages may be chosen by parents as optional subjects. In addition, according to the data of the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of the Republic of Crimea, by 2018, there was only 1 school with Ukrainian as the language of instruction in the territory of the occupied Crimean Peninsula (9 classes, 146 students), and the number of people who studied Ukrainian as their native language decreased by 73%. According to the educational programs developed by the occupation administration, 3 hours per week shall be allocated for the study of the Ukrainian language and Ukrainian literature, provided that they are "voluntarily" chosen[41].

The practice of removing the Ukrainian language from the educational process is applied by the occupation authorities of the Russian Federation in those territories of Ukraine that were occupied after 24 February 2022. One of the main principles of state policy and legal regulation of relations in the field of education in the Russian Federation is the "unity of the educational space in the territory of the Russian Federation"[42]. On 17 February 2023, Vladimir Putin signed the law on the integration of the Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts into the educational space of the Russian Federation[43].

In addition, the occupation authorities are trying to preserve the appearance of the possibility of studying the Ukrainian language in the temporarily occupied territories. Thus, on 1 September 2022, the Minister of Education of the Russian Federation announced that textbooks on the "classical Ukrainian language", which would be used in the so-called DPR, LPR and "other territories affected by the SMO", were being drafted. According to Kravtsov, on September 1, 1,376 schools and 203 colleges, which are provided with textbooks, opened in these territories. In addition, the approach to studying the Ukrainian language may be formal[44].

On 4 April 2023, the Deputy Minister of Education of the Russian Federation announced the readiness of a Ukrainian language textbook for elementary school pupils in the newly occupied territories. In addition, the Ukrainian language remains exclusively as optional in the program, and the materials used to study it are of the Soviet model and do not meet the current standards of language learning. In addition, according to the technical task contained in the corresponding state contract, the future textbook should "instill in children the traditional Russian values that reflect the unique spiritual, historical and cultural development of the multinational people of Russia, the historical memory and continuity of generations, the unity of the peoples of Russia, higher moral feelings, the priority of the spiritual over the material, family

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traditions." Educational tasks in the textbook should instill a "civic position" in children and correspond to the constitution of Russia. All illustrative material in it should consist of 90% Russian content[45].

On 30 January 2023, Sergey Kravtsov, the Minister of Education of the Russian Federation, announced the creation of a school textbook on history, which will include information about the so-called "special military operation", that is, the war against Ukraine[46]. On 24 April 2023, as part of an educational marathon, he presented a textbook on history for 11th grade pupils, to usings of which schools will gradually switch to[47].

At the same time, educational materials of the Ukrainian model are being withdrawn from the occupied territories. Thus, in January 2023, the so-called "Ministry of Education and Science of the LPR" sent a document to the heads of city and district administrations, as well as sub-departmental educational organizations, with a recommendation to remove books from the list, which included 365 items, from the school library funds[48]. The following literature was banned: literature about the Holodomor in Ukraine, textbooks, methodological materials, reference books on the history of Ukraine, books from the Famous Ukrainians series, fiction about "events of the period of recent history" in Ukraine and Donbas (2014-2021)[49]. In June 2022, the occupiers seized about 22,000 textbooks on the history of Ukraine from schools in the Luhansk oblast and took them to an unknown destination[50].

These actions testify to the systematic approach of the Russian authorities to the eradication of the Ukrainian identity of children in the occupied territories of Ukraine. The Russian Federation seeks to create the illusion that there are opportunities to learn the Ukrainian language in the territories occupied in both 2014 and 2022, but the civilian population refuses to use the Ukrainian language, preferring Russian.

At the same time, the occupation authorities take measures that make it impossible for children living in the occupied territories of Ukraine to study at a distance according to the Ukrainian curriculum - there is information that parents are searched and equipment is checked to determine whether children are studying remotely at a Ukrainian school. If it is discovered that the children are studying according to the Ukrainian curriculum, the parents are threatened with a fine and that the children will be taken away if they are not sent to a Russian school[51].

2.3. "Re-education" and militarization of Ukrainian children transferred to the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and the territory of the Russian Federation.

In the camps in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and the Russian Federation, the Russian side implements practices aimed at "**re-education**" - cultural and educational activities based on Russian narratives about the history of Ukraine and the presentation of Russian aggression against Ukraine as a forced step aimed at ensuring peace. In particular, special lessons provided for by the Russian school program – "Conversations About Important Things"[52], which are aimed at "forming patriotism and love for the Motherland - the Russian Federation", are conducted with children from the occupied territories in the camps. As the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation explains, "the purpose and results of

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the lesson: the pupils' understanding of the objectives of the SMO that the residents of the DPR and LPR are Russian people, therefore their return to Russia is important. Russian soldiers are heroes"[53]. During "Conversations About Important Things", schoolchildren are told that Russia is "saving them from the Nazis", and Ukrainian territories have in fact "always been Russian". Events with the involvement of the Russian military, representatives of the occupation administrations, political representatives[54] and public figures of the Russian Federation[55] are also held for children.

In particular, 16-year-old Vitalii, who returned from a children's camp in Yevpatoria (the temporarily occupied territory of Crimea), said that children were constantly told that they "are in Russia, Russia is forever, and Ukraine will soon be Russia and they must obey Russia". In the second camp, where the boy was transferred after two weeks of "rest", personal correspondence was checked, and when they saw messages or other contents of the phone indicating support for Ukraine, they threatened to sit in the basement as a punishment[56].

It should be noted that in the camps, children were in a particularly vulnerable situation, as they were separated from their parents and had no idea when they would be reunited with their families. Psychological pressure and manipulation were used, among other things, in an attempt to obtain the consent of legal representatives for the transfer of minors for so-called re-education. Each of the cases of removal of minors followed by indefinite detention was preceded by the return of several groups of children (mostly children of local collaborators), which created an illusion of safety and a feeling of "bad mother (father)" in connection with a possible refusal. Realizing that the minor was not going to be returned, parents often tried to organize this process on their own, for example, by hiring transport and authorizing one proxy. However, heads of camps refused to repatriate minors in this way.

The educational process in the occupied territories is not limited to formal education. Considerable attention is paid to the patriotic upbringing of children. In addition to "Conversation About Important Things", at school children and teachers are forced to speak exclusively in Russian[57] and sing the national anthem of the Russian Federation during breaks between classes, and are also required to study the constitution of the Russian Federation outside of working hours.

Also, at the beginning of July 2022, the pro-Putin party United Russia opened a children's leisure center in Kupyansk, where elementary school children painted Russian flags and wrote the slogans "we and Russia are one people." On Children's Day, a holiday, at which Ukrainian children were photographed with the occupiers against the background of military equipment, was held here[58].

A separate aspect of the destruction of Ukrainian identity and violation of children's rights is the **militarization of education**. Propaganda for military service aimed at residents of occupied territories is prohibited by Article 51(1) of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Since 2014, the Russian Federation has been actively promoting service in the ranks of its own armed forces, focusing its efforts on propaganda among children - these measures are carried out under the guidance and financing of the occupation authorities, in particular, the "Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of the Republic of Crimea" and Russian ministries, in particular, the Ministry of Sports of the Russian Federation[59]. Ukrainian children in the occupied territories are forced to believe that service in the Russian army is prestigious, honorable and an unconditional obligation. Moreover, they form an understanding in the minds of Ukrainian children that sacrificing oneself in the war for the sake of Russia, the "Motherland", for the sake of its protection from external enemies, is the highest manifestation of heroism. The constant planting of such narratives

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in education and leisure will have consequences both in the medium and long term, in particular, it will contribute to the involvement of the Ukrainian population, especially children who studied and are studying according to Russian educational standards in the temporarily occupied territories, to serve in the Russian army, to participate in armed conflict on its side, the destruction of Ukrainian identity and the complication of the reintegration of the liberated territories into Ukraine[60]. Given the implications of such propaganda, these measures may also constitute a war crime in the form of forced service in the enemy's armed forces.

It is common to create units of the Young Army Movement units - an all-Russian children's and youth military-patriotic public movement, launched in 2016 at the initiative of the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation, Sergei Shoigu, in the occupied territories. The main task of the movement is to attract children to military training and promote the ideology of Russian world. Various groups and classes, where children learn to use weapons, undergo military and tactical training, participate in military sports games and relay races, are organized for this purpose. A child can join the Young Army Movement from 8 to 18 years of age[61]. Detachments of the Young Army Movement were created in Zaporizhzhia[62] and Kherson[63] oblasts.

In the temporarily occupied territory of the Kherson oblast, mandatory so-called "cadet classes" have been introduced at schools, starting from the first grade. Wearing a uniform and additional classes on patriotic education are mandatory for these pupils[64].

On the day of the 225th anniversary of the establishment of the village of Novoderkul, in the Bilovodsk district of the Luhansk oblast, a "solemn swearing-in ceremony and initiation into the participants of the military-patriotic movement" of the Young Guard of 30 school-age children took place[65].

In the temporarily occupied territories of the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia oblasts, representatives of another Russian organization, Voluntary Society for Assisting Army, Aviation and Navy, are conducting activities aimed at improving the image of the military service. Representatives of the organization come to educational institutions and agitate students of 10-11 grades to join the ranks of the Russian army.

In addition, the occupation administration in the Skadovsk, Kalanchak, Novotroyitsk and Henichesk districts of the Kherson oblast announced the creation of cadet classes at schools with the aim of motivating young men aged 15 and over to study military affairs in depth. According to preliminary information, young men who have the appropriate training will have the opportunity to hold primary management (sergeant) positions in the event of being called up for military service[66].

Schoolchildren are also involved in supporting the Russian military. In general, #МЫВМЕСТЕ campaign has been launched in Russia. Children are asked to write works on the topic of pride in Russia, letters of support and thanks to Russian soldiers according to the template. Some such letters with the same content and with different signatures have already been found in the de-occupied territories of Ukraine[67].

For "problem teenagers" from the occupied territories of the Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts, a military-patriotic education in the territory of Chechnya with the assistance of Ramzan Kadyrov, the head of the Chechen Republic as part of the Russian Federation, which also included a visit to the Russian University of Special Forces, was also organized[68].

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Education and leisure according to the Russian program, the promotion of symbols and Russian ideology in education, its widespread militarization are obviously aimed at forming the consciousness of children in the occupied territories about their belonging to the Russian national group and the perception of Ukrainian identity as hostile.

2.4. Forced change of citizenship of children in the occupied territories of Ukraine and passporting

Another systematic violation that reflects the state policy of the Russian Federation towards Ukrainian children is the imposition of Russian citizenship in the occupied territories and in the territory of the Russian Federation.

This practice began immediately after Russia occupied the territories of Ukraine in 2014 - by federal law, all citizens of Ukraine living in the territory of Crimea were recognized as citizens of Russia[69]. In 2019, the President of the Russian Federation signed a decree that provided for a simplified procedure for obtaining Russian citizenship for residents of the occupied regions of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts[70].

In May 2022, by decree of the President of the Russian Federation, a simplified procedure for acquiring citizenship was provided for orphans, children deprived of parental care, disabled persons who are citizens of Ukraine and are in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine[71]. On 30 September 2022, Putin signed laws that recognized the territories of the Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson oblasts as part of the Russian Federation[72]. Persons living in these territories, according to the logic of these documents, acquire the citizenship of the Russian Federation from the moment of such recognition, the only requirement is to submit an application and take the oath of citizenship of the Russian Federation. The position of the top leadership of the Russian Federation, however, comes down to the fact that the recognition of the territories as part of the Russian Federation automatically made their residents - both adults and minors - citizens of the Russian Federation[73]. In addition, in December 2022, the President of the Russian Federation signed another decree on simplifying the procedure for acquiring Russian citizenship by Ukrainian citizens who have reached the age of 14[74].

On March 15, 2023, the Federal Law of the Russian Federation No. 62-FZ[75] was adopted, which determines that citizens of the Russian Federation[76] shall be considered not to have Ukrainian citizenship from the moment they submit a statement to the relevant authorities on their unwillingness to have Ukrainian citizenship. In the case of children who have not reached the age of 14, the application shall be submitted on their behalf by one of their parents or adoptive parents. With regard to orphans and children deprived of parental care, such an application may be submitted by a guardian or an authorized representative of the educational, medical or social institution in which the child is permanently staying.

In such cases, the authorities of the Russian Federation consider Ukrainian citizenship “a fact that has no legal significance”. The law also prohibits the use of Ukrainian passports and other documents indicating Ukrainian citizenship, with the exception of procedures for termination of Ukrainian citizenship. A sample statement on unwillingness to hold Ukrainian citizenship has already appeared on the website of

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the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation[77].

Morover, in addition to the new law, a draft decree of the President of the Russian Federation[78], which provides for that the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation and its territorial bodies check persons who, after relinquishing their Ukrainian passport, continue to enjoy the rights of a citizen of Ukraine, has been proposed. In case of revealing a violation of the requirement - namely, not to take actions regarding the realization of the rights or compliance with the obligations of a citizen of Ukraine - the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation or its territorial body shall issue a reasoned opinion that the citizen of the Russian Federation does not fulfill his obligations. This opinion shall be sent to the citizen himself and to the FSB (the Federal Security Service)[79].

Federal Law No. 138-FZ On Citizenship of the Russian Federation[80], signed by Vladimir Putin on 28 April 2023, became the quintessence of at least twenty amendments made to Russian specialized legislation since the occupation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014. In accordance with part 5 of Article 16 of the mentioned regulatory act, a minor foreigner may be admitted to Russian citizenship if his parents, adoptive parents, guardians are already citizens, or if the child is placed in a Russian organization for orphans and children left without parental care. Together with the above-mentioned Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 330[81] on the accelerated procedure for the acceptance of these vulnerable categories of minors into Russian citizenship, it can be affirmed about the purposeful and deliberate imposition of the citizenship of the aggressor state on them and the intention to keep them in Russia forever.

The April 2023 bulletin of the Russian Commissioner for Children's Rights contains information that "All children [at least 380 people] who were placed under guardianship have acquired citizenship of the Russian Federation, but they also retain citizenship of the LPR, DPR or Ukraine. [...] When the children reach adulthood (18 years old), they will be able to decide for themselves whether they want to remain Russian citizens. [...] they must renounce their Russian citizenship"[82].

According to Article 10 of Federal Law No. 138-FZ On Citizenship of the Russian Federation, "a citizen of the Russian Federation who has dual citizenship or multiple citizenship shall be considered by the Russian Federation only as a citizen of the Russian Federation regardless of his place of residence, with the exception of cases provided for by federal law or international treaty of the Russian Federation"[83]. As of the beginning of May 2023, the Russian Federation has a corresponding agreement on dual, not second, citizenship only with Tajikistan (signed on 7 September 1995). Therefore, despite the stated possibility of retaining the citizenship of Ukraine, in fact, such a possibility is worthless, because it is not provided for in the proper manner according to Russian legislation. Moreover, upon reaching the age of majority, persons with imposed Russian citizenship will be obliged to perform military service in the armed forces of the Russian Federation[84]. Such a person will not be able to withdraw from Russian citizenship and retain only Ukrainian citizenship, as Maria Lvova-Belova emphasizes, because according to Article 23 of Federal Law No. 138-FZ On Citizenship of the Russian Federation, withdrawal is not allowed if the citizen has unfulfilled obligations to the Russian Federation[85]. Compulsion to serve in the armed forces of an opposing state is a serious violation of international humanitarian law and a war crime under Article 8(2)(a)(v) of the Rome Statute[86].

The Report of the group of experts of the Moscow Mechanism of the OSCE dated 4 May 2023 states that

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changing the nationality of Ukrainian children by granting them Russian citizenship is a violation of Article 50(2) of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Experts called on Russia to immediately stop the existing practice of accelerated admission of Ukrainians, especially children, to Russian citizenship and their withdrawal from Ukrainian citizenship. Russia should also create a legal mechanism to facilitate the restoration of the identity of all children who were forcibly transferred to the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine or deported to the Russian Federation, in full compliance with Article 8(2) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child[87].

Maria Lvova-Belova insists that all the children agreed to receive Russian passports and were happy with these documents[88]. The consent of minors referred to by the Commissioner does not legitimize the imposition of Russian citizenship. According to Clause 6 of Article 5 of the Law of Ukraine On Ensuring the Rights and Freedoms of Citizens and the Legal Regime in the Temporarily Occupied Territory of Ukraine, forced automatic acquisition of citizenship of the Russian Federation shall not be recognized by Ukraine and be a reason to lose Ukrainian citizenship[89]. Moreover, the Law of Ukraine On the Citizenship of Ukraine does not provide for the right of a minor to independently withdraw from the citizenship of Ukraine. Imposed Russian citizenship contributes to the impossibility of preserving Ukrainian national identity, which does not comply with Article 8 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the principle of the best interests of the child in accordance with Article 3 of the Convention[90] and Committee on the Rights of the Children General comment No. 14 [91].

The coercion of children to obtain Russian citizenship is also manifested through the blackmail of parents - they are threatened with dismissal at work and the refusal of social benefits[92], and the children themselves are threatened with the refusal to issue a school certificate[93].

In addition, there is a separate problem of minor Ukrainians who were deported or were taken by their parents or guardians to the Russian Federation, but have no desire to change Ukrainian citizenship and want to return home to Ukraine. Given that such applicants have parents who are personally responsible for their life and health, this issue and ways to resolve it require a coordinated, consolidated position of state authorities, in particular, the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine, the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, the National Social Service of Ukraine, the National Police of Ukraine, the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine.

Therefore, the Russian side implements a purposeful and systematic policy of changing the identity and imposing Russian citizenship on children who are in the occupied territories or in the territory of the Russian Federation. This is done both as a result of a direct change of citizenship of the children themselves, and by influencing their identity by imposing citizenship on their parents.

2.5. Placing Ukrainian children in families of citizens of the Russian Federation

The policy of the Russian Federation aimed at the illegal deportation and forcible transfer of Ukrainian children to Russian families has been implemented since the occupation of the Crimean Peninsula and the launch of armed aggression in eastern Ukraine in 2014. As of 1 January 2014, there were 4,995 orphans

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and children deprived of parental care living in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. The Russian Federation consistently denied Ukraine access to these children and did not respond to inquiries about their fate. It became known from open sources that minors of this category were given for adoption to Russian families. As mentioned, children from the temporarily occupied Crimea were transferred to Russian families from the beginning of the occupation of the peninsula[94]. Similar actions were also consistently implemented against children from the so-called DPR and LPR, despite the opposition of Ukraine and some successful attempts to repatriate minors[95].

Thus, at least 12 children were adopted and deported by citizens of the Russian Federation as part of the Train of Hope project in October-November 2014. Children aged 10 months to 8 years were sent to new families from the cities of Moscow, Belgorod, the Republic of Adygea, Krasnodar Krai and Voronezh oblast[96].

In 2016, Iryna Klyuyeva, the so-called Commissioner for Children's Rights of the Republic of Crimea, announced the adoption of 43 Crimean orphans by Russians following by the deportation of minors to the territory of the Krasnodar and Zabaykalsky Krais, as well as the Leningrad oblast[97]. According to information from the Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, for the period 2015-2017, more than 1,900 children were adopted, placed under custody of foster families. Currently, the fate of these children remains unknown. From 2014 until the start of the full-scale invasion, Ukrainian children from the so-called LPR/DPR were also deported and transferred to Russian families[98]. In particular, violations of the rights of 37 children from the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, who were forcibly deported to the territory of the Russian Federation, became the subject of an interstate application from Ukraine to the ECHR[99].

From 24 February 2022, the forcible transfer of Ukrainian children to the Russian national group finally acquired the characteristics of a formed policy.

In April 2022, two special headquarters were created in the Russian Federation for the synchronization of legislation and the development of forms of temporary guardianship and adoption, and for the "search" of relatives of children who are deported to the Russian Federation and transferred to Russian families[100]. A network of dozens of institutions has been deployed to house deported and forcibly transferred children, which are under the constant supervision of Russian law enforcement agencies[101]. Existing vehicles were repurposed or new vehicles were purchased to transport children[102]. The necessary amendments are being made to the legislation and law enforcement practice of the Russian Federation in order to speed up the process of forced transfer (in the field of imposing citizenship, establishing guardianship and adoption, creating additional incentives, executing the necessary documents, absorbing data about children into the Russian federal database, etc.)[103].

Moreover, in the case of forcible transfer to Russian families, direct pressure of the guardianship authorities of the Russian Federation and the social policy departments of regional authorities on the so-called resource families (families that already have adopted children or children under custody) with the aim of encouraging them to take Ukrainian children for upbringing[104]. In addition, in propaganda materials, in particular, in the series of films about Ukrainian minors transferred to Russian families, "Childhood. Return"[105], the purpose of the transfer - the return of "lost" Ukrainians to Russia – was mirrored in accordance with the dogma of "one nation" proclaimed by Putin[106].

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The Moscow oblast became a pilot region for placement of Ukrainian children in Russian families. Back in April 2022, a "humanitarian project to help orphans in Donbass" was proposed in the region. The initiator of the project was Andriy Vorobyov, the governor of the Moscow oblast, and the "head" of the so-called DPR Denis Pushylin, the vice-speaker of the Federation Council Andriy Turchak, the vice-speaker of the State Duma Anna Kuznetsova, the deputy head of the government of the Moscow oblast Vyacheslav Dukhin and Commissioner for Children's Rights in the Russian Federation Maria Lvova-Belova. The essence of the project was to find relatives of the children, but only in the territories temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation, or in the Russian Federation itself. If no relatives were found in these territories, the children were planned to be placed under interim custody[107].

The program piloted in the Moscow oblast, as of June 2022, has already been implemented in Moscow, the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District, the Kaluga, Tula, Rostov, and Voronezh oblasts of the Russian Federation[108].

In 16 regions of the Russian Federation, Ukrainian minors were forcibly transferred to Russian families. As of the end of 2022, the number of such children is at least 400[109]. Since October 2022, according to the testimony of Maria Lvova-Belova, the Commissioner for Children's Rights under the President of the Russian Federation, there is no special procedure for establishing guardianship or adoption of minors from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine[110]. Considering the secrecy of adoption, which is provided for in Article 139 of the Family Code of the Russian Federation, the number of victims of forced transfer to Russian families may be much higher[111]. The information from the official website of the Administration for Family and Childhood of the Krasnodar Krai, published in August 2022, about the adoption by Russians from Tyumen, Irkutsk, Kemerovo, and Altai Krai of more than a thousand Ukrainian children deported from Mariupol, indirectly testifies in favor of such an assumption. These publications were later removed from the website[112].

The Russian side purposefully deports Ukrainian children to its territory, without taking measures to find their relatives and without informing the Ukrainian side about such relocation, and places such children in Russian families under various conditions. These actions are aimed at making it impossible for the children to return to Ukraine and to completely sever their connection with the Ukrainian national group. Such actions of the Russian side may contain signs of the crime of genocide.

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