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***“I am still looking for my daughter”*: crimes against humanity
committed by Russian authorities against children from
Ukraine**

Summary

The present Conference Room Paper focuses on the latest findings of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine in its investigations concerning the unlawful deportation and transfer of children from Ukraine by Russian authorities, to the Russian Federation or to areas they occupied in Ukraine, in the context of the Russian Federation’s full-scale invasion.

The evidence collected leads the Commission to conclude that Russian authorities have committed the crimes against humanity of deportation and forcible transfer, as well as of enforced disappearance of children. The Commission also confirms its previous finding that Russian authorities have unlawfully deported and transferred children, as a war crime, and that they have unjustifiably delayed their repatriation, which is also a war crime. Further, measures taken with regard to deported or transferred children have violated international humanitarian law and international human rights law provisions and were not guided by the best interests of the child.

Russian authorities have deported or transferred thousands of children from areas they occupied in Ukraine. The Commission has so far confirmed the deportation or transfer of 1205 children. Russian authorities referred to these large-scale relocations as “evacuations” justified by the risks of the armed conflict. However, international humanitarian law mandates that evacuations must be temporary and take place for reasons of compelling health, medical treatment, or safety.

Four years on, 80 per cent of the children deported or transferred in the cases investigated by the Commission have not returned. Russian authorities have failed to establish a system facilitating the returns. Instead, they focused on long-term placements of the children with families or in institutions in the Russian Federation.

Starting from the days preceding the Russian Federation’s full-scale invasion, Russian authorities have coordinated legislative, administrative, and practical measures to facilitate deportations, transfers, and placements of the children in the Russian Federation. The evidence collected demonstrates that the authorities have acted pursuant to a policy conceived and executed at the highest level of the Russian Federation state apparatus. The involvement of Vladimir Putin, the President of the Russian Federation, including through his direct authority over entities that have steered and executed this policy, has been visible from the outset.

As a consequence of the measures put in place, children deported from Ukraine have been given Russian citizenship, appeared on adoption databases, and have been placed in 21

regions of the Russian Federation. Adoptions and long-term forms of placement have been prioritized, according to consistent Russian public statements.

Russian authorities failed to inform the parents, legal guardians, or relatives of the fate and whereabouts of the children. Families and children have carried out their own efforts to locate one another. The returns that could be organized occurred after obstacles, delays, and security risks. After four years, many families are still looking for their children and attempting to secure their return. This leads to lengthy separation and suffering.

The coercive environment surrounding the deportations or transfers, the indefinite duration of the placements in the Russian Federation, combined with the considerable difficulties the children face to find their family and travel back to Ukraine, has been a source of deep distress for the children. Arrangements established by Russian authorities led the children to be raised in a foreign environment, far from their families, sometimes thousands of kilometres away from Ukraine. Children reported trauma and fear of abandonment. A girl, recounting the way the children were treated in an institution after transfer, said that staff were telling her, *“Your mom will not come, she has no money, she will not make it to the border.”*

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 49/1, adopted on 4 March 2022, the Human Rights Council decided to urgently establish an Independent International Commission of Inquiry to investigate alleged violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law, and related crimes in the context of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine. The Commission's mandate was last extended on 4 April 2025. It is composed of Erik Møse (Chair), Pablo de Greiff, and Vrinda Grover.

2. The Commission is guided in all aspects of its work by the principles of independence, impartiality, objectivity, and integrity. It adopts a victim-centred approach and a strict respect of the "do no harm" principle, in particular regarding guarantees of confidentiality of the information received and the safety and the protection of victims and witnesses, and other interlocutors.

3. Considering the gravity and the continuous character of the crimes and violations committed in relation to children in the context of the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine since 2022, the Commission is presenting a conference room paper on this matter. In its investigations, the Commission has relied on 232 interviews with parents, legal guardians, boys and girls, and their relatives, staff of the affected institutions, experts, specialised organisations, investigative journalists, and government authorities. It has examined over 2,000 documents, including lists of affected institutions and deported children, identity documents of the children; 41 official documents of the Russian authorities or of the authorities cooperating with them in occupied areas of Ukraine; open-source material such as statements and declarations, publications on government websites, public adoption databases, expert documents, videos, and posts on social media; as well as 42 submissions to the Commission by non-governmental organisations.

4. The Commission expresses its gratitude to all those who shared their experiences, testimonies and other valuable information. It appreciates the cooperation of the Government of Ukraine. The Russian Federation has continued not to recognise the Commission and did not respond to any of the Commission's questions.

II. Overview

5. Already during its earlier mandates, the Commission investigated situations in which Russian authorities unlawfully deported children from areas they occupied in Ukraine to the Russian Federation or transferred them to other Russian occupied areas in Ukraine. It established that these acts amount to war crimes¹ and that Russian authorities violated their obligation under international law to facilitate in every possible way the reunification of families separated during the armed conflict.²

6. During the present mandate, the Commission has: First, investigated additional cases concerning the deportation and transfer of children by Russian authorities, from areas they occupied in Ukraine. Second, reviewed all the cases it has investigated so far, to assess the rate of return of the children, and to identify obstacles to returns. Third, tracked over time, the movements and whereabouts of the children who have been deported or transferred. Fourth, investigated initiatives by Russian authorities to facilitate the long-term placement,³ including through adoption, of the children deported to the Russian Federation. Fifth, identified individuals and entities responsible for the commission of the crimes and violations outlined in the present report.

¹ A/HRC/52/62, paras. 95-102; A/HRC/52/CRP.4, paras. 715-772; A/78/540, paras. 90-102; A/HRC/55/66, paras. 95-97.

² Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), art. 74.

³ In this report, the term placement with families refers to foster care or adoption.

7. The Commission has thus far documented cases concerning the deportation or transfer of a total of 1205 children by Russian authorities from areas that came under their control in five oblasts of Ukraine, to the Russian Federation, or to other occupied areas in Ukraine. These cases include the deportation or transfer of 210 children described in its previous reports, in the context of the ongoing armed conflict, as Russian armed forces gained and lost control of territories in Ukraine.

8. Resulting from its recent investigations, the Commission has verified the deportation of 995 children from 11 institutions in the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics that began shortly before the launch of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Russian authorities referred to this large-scale relocation of children as an "evacuation" justified by an imminent security risk generated by the Government of Ukraine, at a time when Russian armed forces themselves had massed personnel and military equipment at Ukraine's borders.

9. Most deportations and transfers of children investigated have not been temporary as required by law in the case of evacuation. On the contrary, Russian authorities at the highest levels of government have coordinated actions to facilitate their long-term placement in the Russian Federation. The authorities first relocated the children to temporary transit centers in the Russian Federation or in areas they occupied in Ukraine. They further gradually deported or transferred most of them to various locations in 21 regions of the Russian Federation, where they placed them indefinitely with families or in institutions. Children were given Russian citizenship and their profiles appeared on adoption or foster placement databases. These acts amount to various violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including war crimes and crimes against humanity.

10. In public statements and meetings, Russian authorities referred to adoptions as the preferred option for placement of the deported children and provided updates on legislative and administrative measures they undertook to make the adoptions possible. Some of the placements the Commission has documented appear, indeed, to be adoptions. However, around the time of the issuance of warrants of arrest by the International Criminal Court in March 2023, Russian authorities backtracked on these statements, denied that adoptions of children from Ukraine have been taking place and emphasized instead foster placement in their public declarations.

11. Russian authorities had not sought the consent of parents, legal guardians⁴ or of the Ukrainian authorities when they deported or transferred the children. Instead, they relied on the consent of local authorities in occupied areas who cooperated with them or were appointed by them. Many parents and legal guardians remained unaware of the fate and whereabouts of the children for months or years after the initial deportations or transfers, despite sustained efforts to find them. This led to prolonged family separations.

12. Four years on, the Commission found that from the cases of deportations and transfers it has documented, 80% of the children have not yet been returned. Russian authorities have not established a system facilitating the return the children, as required by international humanitarian law. Children, parents, legal guardians, and relatives have carried out their own efforts to locate one another. The returns that could be organized occurred after encountering obstacles, delays, and security risks. Some family reunifications received wide coverage in official government communications and the media. However, the majority of children deported or transferred have not returned, and many are still missing. Children from institutions, and in particular younger children,⁵ or those with disabilities, have almost no chance to return.

13. Deportations or transfers of children, their disappearance, and the ensuing prolonged separation from families have been highly traumatic for all those involved. The children who managed to return reported psychological distress and fear of abandonment. Those who have not returned are far from their family and the environment they came from. Some of the older children have reached the age of majority in the meantime. A mother who did not manage to

⁴ Under Ukrainian law, the concept of a legal guardian may differ from its meaning in international law; the term 'legal representative' is more commonly used.

⁵ Younger children are infants and those who are unable to form clear memories, allowing them for instance to remember their original address and details about their families or caregivers.

find her daughter, placed in an institution in the Russian Federation, stated, “[...] I am still looking for my daughter, and I am terribly afraid of what she might think of me and how she survives there, where many people hate Ukrainians [...]”.

III. Widespread and systematic deportations and transfers of children

14. The Commission has documented cases involving the deportation or transfer, by Russian authorities, of children then aged from 11 months to 17 years, from areas that had come under their control in five oblasts of Ukraine, namely Donetsk, Kharkiv, Kherson, Luhansk, and Mykolaiv oblasts, to the Russian Federation or to other occupied areas in Ukraine (see para. 7). In fact, these relocations of children began already during the week before the start of the 24 February 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine and continued as the armed conflict progressed. The deportations and transfers affected children who lost their parents or were separated from them in the context of the ongoing hostilities or were in institutions.⁶ Russian authorities first deported or transferred them to temporary transit centres in the Russian Federation or in the Russian occupied areas of Ukraine. Starting April 2022 and throughout the coming months and years, Russian authorities organized the further deportation or transfer of groups of these children, using buses, trains, or planes, to place them for indefinite periods in different regions across the Russian Federation or in occupied areas of Ukraine (see map).

15. Russian authorities referred to the deportations and transfers of children as “evacuations” that became necessary because of the dangers of the armed conflict. However, international humanitarian law states that a Party to the conflict cannot evacuate children, other than its own nationals, to a foreign country, except for a temporary evacuation for compelling health, or medical treatment, or safety reasons.⁷ Consistent with its previous findings, the Commission has found that the relocation of children has generally not been temporary. In the majority of cases, Russian authorities have not facilitated the return of the children to their families or country. On the contrary, they have taken measures aimed at their long-term placement in the Russian Federation through foster placement or adoption (see paras. 25-35). In addition, the evidence does not suggest that health, medical treatment, or safety reasons have been the principal motivating factor behind these relocations.

16. International humanitarian law also requires the consent of the parents or the legal guardians, and if they cannot be found, the consent of the persons who by law or custom are primarily responsible for the care of the children.⁸ In June 2023, during a meeting with heads of delegations of African states, Vladimir Putin, the President of the Russian Federation, declared, “*We evacuated entire orphanages, and it was done legally because the directors of those orphanages were legal guardians of the children*”.⁹ However, in the cases documented, the Russian authorities did not seek the consent of directors of institutions appointed by the Ukrainian Government.¹⁰ Instead, they relied on the consent of local authorities or directors cooperating with them. For instance, in the cases of two institutions from Kherson Oblast, Russian authorities dismissed directors who refused to cooperate and replaced them with new directors who authorized the deportation or the transfer. In the case of an institution in Kharkiv Oblast, Russian armed forces proceeded to transferring the children in the absence of the acting director of the institution.

17. The repeated instances of deportation and transfer of children from locations in five oblasts of Ukraine, following a consistent pattern of conduct, and the further deportations, transfers and placements of these children, demonstrate the widespread and systematic character of these acts. Russian authorities working at different levels have been involved in

⁶ A/HRC/52/CRP.4, paras. 726-733.

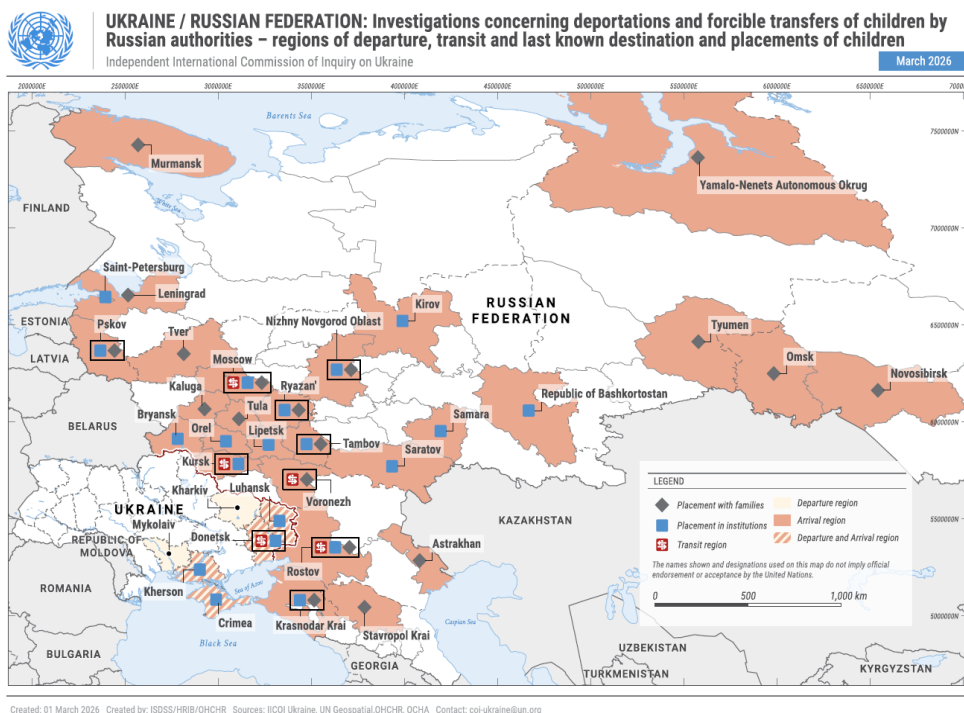
⁷ Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), art. 78 (1).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Official website of the President of the Russian Federation, “[Meeting with heads of delegations of African states](#)”, 17 June 2023.

¹⁰ Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), art. 78 (1).

these processes, including bodies directly answerable to Mr. Putin; other Government bodies and regional authorities in the Russian Federation; and local authorities in Russian occupied areas of Ukraine. These authorities organized and accompanied the transfers and deportations of the children; travelled to occupied oblasts in Ukraine; visited children’s institutions, temporary transit centers, and foster families; worked in close cooperation with the authorities in occupied areas of Ukraine, and carried out coordination meetings of different Russian government institutions to arrange logistical and administrative modalities concerning the placement in the Russian Federation of the children deported or transferred (see paras. 45-51).



Map of regions in Ukraine from where children were deported or transferred, transit locations in the Russian Federation or Russian occupied areas in Ukraine, and regions of further placement with families or in institutions.

Case description: deportations of children shortly before the full-scale invasion

18. During the week preceding Russian Federation’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Russian authorities engaged in a large-scale deportation of children from institutions in the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics, to the Russian Federation. Different Russian authorities, operating at various levels, coordinated efforts to carry out this early deportation wave. Between 16 and 18 February 2022, Denis Pushilin and Leonid Pasechnik, the respective “heads” of the two so-called republics, called for a mass evacuation of the population, invoking a threat of an imminent attack by the Ukrainian armed forces. On 18 February 2022, Mr. Pushilin and the “Ministers of Education” of the two so-called republics further ordered the “evacuation” of all institutions holding children without parental care. Local authorities implemented these orders immediately, together with the directors of these institutions, and transported hundreds of children from both oblasts across the border into the Russian Federation.¹¹

¹¹ Presidential Commissioner for Children’s Rights of the Russian Federation, [The Bulletin](#), Issue No. 1, 4 April 2023; Information Centre of Luhansk, “[The Ministry of Education announced the evacuation of boarding schools and orphanages in the Russian Federation](#)”, 18 February 2022.

19. Official declarations by Russian authorities, evacuation orders issued by the local administration and directors of institutions, other official documents, interviews with directors of institutions to the press, media coverage, as well as verified lists of pupils, confirm this large-scale relocation. The Commission has verified the deportation of children from seven institutions in the Donetsk Oblast: Donetsk Comprehensive Boarding School No. 1, Amvroziivka Boarding School No. 4, Dokuchaevskaya Special Comprehensive Boarding School No. 27, Vuhlehirsk Special Boarding School No. 6, Donetsk Pre-school Children's Home N. 1 "Teremok", Children's Social Center of Horlivka City, and Children's Social Center of Yenakiieve City. These institutions held a total of 701 children at the time of the deportation, according to official figures. The Commission has similarly verified the deportation of children from four institutions in Luhansk Oblast: Luhansk Children's Home, Luhansk Republican Mother and Child Home, Lutuhyne Special Boarding School, and Perevalsk Special Boarding School. These institutions held a total of 202 children at the time of the deportation, according to official figures.

20. The threat of an attack by Ukrainian armed forces invoked by the local authorities of both so-called republics did not materialise. Instead, the Russian Federation launched the full-scale invasion against Ukraine later that week.

21. In the Russian Federation, the children were placed in temporary transit centres in Kursk, Rostov, and Voronezh Oblasts. Already by mid-March 2022, over 1672 children without parental care were among those relocated, according to an official update by Ms. Maria Lvova-Belova, the Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights of the Russian Federation.

22. During the following months, Russian authorities at central and local levels, and in coordination with the authorities of the two so-called republics, took further steps – including legislative amendments – to seek arrangements for the long-term stay of the children in the Russian Federation (see para. 29).¹² In June 2022, a decision by the "head" of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic instructed the local authorities to consent to the placement with Russian families of children without parental care who had been evacuated to the Russian Federation and were given Russian citizenship. In September 2022, the media-office of the "government" of the so-called Luhansk People's Republic informed about a similar, temporary decision. In September 2022, the "Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs" of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic communicated a plan of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation to relocate the evacuated children without parental care to institutions in other regions of the Russian Federation.

23. Many of the children were further transferred, often in groups, from the temporary transit centres to different regions of the Russian Federation and placed with families or in institutions. Transfers within the Russian Federation occurred in the presence of senior officials, including Ms. Lvova-Belova, local Russian governors, on some occasions with Ms. Eleonora Fedorenko, the then "Adviser on Children's Rights" to the "head" of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic, and directors of the institutions from which they were deported.¹³

24. In April 2023, Ms. Lvova-Belova stated that the children who had been "evacuated" from the Donetsk Oblast were still in the Russian Federation.¹⁴ According to official declarations by Russian authorities and a record of placements in different regions, 288 among these children were placed with Russian families, while others were placed in institutions in the Russian Federation. Many of these children remained in the Russian

¹² See for example, [CRC/C/RUS/RQ/6-7](#) "Replies of the Russian Federation to the list of issues in relation to its combined sixth and seventh periodic reports to the Committee of the Rights of the Child", 1 November 2023, para. 85.

¹³ See for example, Official website of the President of the Russian Federation, "[Maria Lvova-Belova brought orphans from the DPR to the Nizhny Novgorod Region for placement with foster families](#)", 22 September 2022; Youtube channel of Governor Andrey Vorobiev, "[Children from Donbas meet foster parents](#)", 23 April 2023. (in Russian)

¹⁴ Parliamentary Newspaper, "[Orphanages and boarding schools were evacuated from new regions](#)", 4 April 2023. (in Russian)

Federation at the time of writing the report. Further, according to Russian authorities, in May 2022, the children deported from the Luhansk Oblast had been returned to the institutions from which they were transferred, but 92 were placed in Russian families.¹⁵

IV. Long-term placement of children: foster placements or adoptions

25. From the outset, Russian authorities have declared that the preferred option for family placement of the children “evacuated” from Ukraine was adoption and that hundreds of Russian citizens had expressed their willingness to adopt them.¹⁶ Already two days before the full-scale invasion, Russian authorities started considering practical modalities to do so and coordinated actions to address legal and administrative challenges. On 22 February 2022, an update on the website of the Presidential Commissioner for Children’s Rights of the Russian Federation regarding a conference call between the children’s ombudspersons from various Russian regions, noted that particular attention was paid to children without parental care who had been transported from institutions in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts to the Russian Federation. Ms. Lvova-Belova stressed that a “huge” number of citizens expressed a desire to take children into their family, both temporarily and permanently, and stated “we, in turn, together with colleagues from other departments, will work out the issue of how this can be done legally”.¹⁷ [“а мы в свою очередь, вместе с коллегами из других ведомств проработаем вопрос, как это можно сделать на законных основаниях.”]

26. Different Russian authorities raised the issue of legal challenges concerning the permanent placement of children with Russian families. The Family Code of the Russian Federation notes that in the case of adoption of a child who is a foreign citizen, the consent of the competent authority of the state of citizenship of the child is required. In March 2022, a clarification on the website of the Presidential Commissioner for Children’s Rights of the Russian Federation regarding the placement of children relocated from Ukraine into Russian families stated, “Since at the moment diplomatic relations with Ukraine are difficult, and the mechanism for transferring children, citizens of the Lugansk and Donetsk Republics, to family forms of upbringing has not yet been regulated within the framework of international treaties, this category of children cannot be transferred to family forms of upbringing without the consent of the guardianship authorities and authorities of the Republics.”¹⁸

27. Also in March 2022, Mr. Putin and Ms. Lvova-Belova discussed the issue of permanent placement of orphans who had arrived from eastern Ukraine during a meeting. Ms. Lvova-Belova stated, “There are simply legislative delays, which will then need to be eliminated.” Mr. Putin responded, “You tell us which ones, we will eliminate them.”¹⁹ [“Вы скажите какие – будем их устранять.”] In May 2022, Mr. Putin approved a decree expediting the acquisition of Russian citizenship for children without parental care from Ukraine.²⁰

¹⁵ Presidential Commissioner for Children’s Rights of the Russian Federation, [The Bulletin](#), Issue no. 1, 4 April 2023; Presidential Commissioner for Children’s Rights of the Russian Federation, [The Bulletin](#), Issue no. 2, 13 October 2023.

¹⁶ Official website of the Presidential Commissioner for Children’s Rights of the Russian Federation, “[Maria Lvova-Belova discussed the family placement of orphans with the head of the DPR Denis Pushilin](#)”, 6 April 2022.

¹⁷ Official website of the Presidential Commissioner for Children’s Rights of the Russian Federation, “[We have never abandoned our own people - a conference call of children's ombudsmen on assistance to children and families from the LPR and DPR was held](#)”, 22 February 2022. (in Russian)

¹⁸ Official website of the Presidential Commissioner for Children’s Rights of the Russian Federation, “[Answers on the family placement of orphans from the DPR and LPR in Russian families](#)”, 16 May 2022. (in Russian)

¹⁹ Official website of the President of the Russian Federation, “[Meeting with Commissioner for Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova](#)”, 9 March 2022.

²⁰ Russian Federation, [Decree of the President of the Russian Federation, No. 330, amending decrees No. 183 and No. 187 of the President of the Russian Federation](#), 30 May 2022, art. 1. (in Russian).

28. Russian authorities systematically granted Russian citizenship to the children whom they deported or transferred²¹ and have confirmed this in numerous official and public declarations.²² This is evident from testimonies of parents and returned children. The Commission also obtained copies of identity documents.

29. Further, during coordination visits and meetings, Russian authorities and the authorities of the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics amended existing legislation, prepared and signed agreements, and updated procedures to make adoptions possible.²³ These legal and administrative measures have facilitated the placement of the children deported from Ukraine into Russian families.

30. Russian authorities have actively encouraged, promoted, and rewarded foster placements and adoptions. Transfers and placements of children occurred in the presence of Russian officials and officials of the two so-called republics, in a festive environment, and were widely covered in the Russian media. Various Russian officials have personally visited families who have fostered children from Ukraine or met them during official ceremonies, have handed them letters of gratitude and presents, including financial contributions, according to documents, official communications, and the Russian media. Witnesses told the Commission that deported children who reached the age of majority have been offered apartments in the Russian Federation.

31. In May 2022, in a meeting of the United Nations Security Council, Vasily Nebenzia, the Russian Federation Ambassador to the United Nations, stated, "*Approximately 1,200 children came from orphanages in the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics. We work closely with the authorities of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics on the adoption of orphans*".²⁴ During a meeting with Russian families on International Children's Day, on 1 June 2022, Mr. Putin, referring to orphans from eastern Ukraine, stated, "*we will help children who have lost loved ones to find the same loving, friendly, generous families as yours*".²⁵

32. The practice of relocating children from occupied areas of Ukraine and placing them in Russian families, including through adoption, had been documented since 2014. In this regard, the European Court for Human Rights noted in 2025 that it "*is satisfied that a continuous sequence of acts in a pattern between 2014 and 2022 aimed at removing Ukrainian children from occupied territory in Ukraine and integrating them potentially indefinitely in families or institutions in Russia has been demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt*".²⁶

33. However, around the time of the issuance in March 2023 of the warrants of arrest by the International Criminal Court against Mr. Putin and Ms. Lvova-Belova for the war crime of unlawful deportation and transfer of children from Ukraine, the Russian authorities have started denying that adoptions of children deported from Ukraine took place and largely stopped referring to "adoption". Subsequent official communications concerning children

²¹ In "Replies of the Russian Federation to the list of issues in relation to its combined sixth and seventh periodic reports to the Committee of the Rights of the Child", it is stated that "according to the departmental statistical reports of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which contain information broken down by citizenship on foreign nationals and stateless persons, in the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 June 2023, the number of Ukrainian children who acquired citizenship of the Russian Federation was 46,886", [CRC/C/RUS/RQ/6-7](#), 1 November 2023, para. 94.

²² See for example, Official website of the Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights of the Russian Federation, "[Maria Lvova-Belova brought 125 orphans from the DPR to be placed in Russian families](#)", 16 September 2022. (in Russian)

²³ [A/HRC/52/CRP.4](#), para. 746-747, see also for example, Official website of the Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights of the Russian Federation, "[Let's give them a chance - Maria Lvova-Belova about orphans in the LPR](#)", 5 August 2022. (in Russian)

²⁴ [S/PV.9032](#), p. 25.

²⁵ TASS, "[Putin said that Russia will do everything to support orphans from Donbass](#)", 1 June 2022. (in Russian)

²⁶ European Court of Human Rights, [Ukraine and the Netherlands v. Russia](#), Applications nos. [8019/16](#), [43800/14](#), [28525/20](#) and [11055/22](#), Judgment, 9 July 2025, paras. 1588 and 1599.

from Ukraine contradicted those made throughout 2022, and emphasised foster placement.²⁷ In March 2023, in an interview with the Russian media, Ms. Lvova-Belova said, “*Children from new regions of Russia are given to families under guardianship, and not for adoption [...]*”. During an Arria-Formula meeting of the United Nations Security Council in April 2023, Mr. Nebenzia noted, “*that there was no such thing as forced “mass adoption”; that only orphans and children who were left without parental care were placed under the “temporary preliminary care” or “temporary guardianship” of Russian citizens*”.²⁸

34. Nevertheless, the Commission found evidence that Russian authorities have continued to place children deported from occupied areas of Ukraine in Russian families, in long-term types of arrangements, including adoption. Further, most of the placements that had already occurred in 2022 are continuing until today. Since 2022 until the time of writing of this report, a Russian online adoption database has been uploading profiles of deported children, indicating that they can be adopted or placed in foster families. The Commission has documented the dissemination of such profiles in 14 regions of the Russian Federation.

35. The circumstances described above demonstrate the intention and the joint efforts carried out by Russian authorities, from the outset, to place the children they deported from Ukraine with Russian families and to prioritize adoptions. Even if these arrangements are no longer officially referred to as adoptions, the Commission’s investigations show that the children have been given Russian citizenship and have been placed with Russian families for long-term periods, with no measures to facilitate their return.

Case descriptions: foster placements and adoptions

36. The Commission has tracked, where possible, the itinerary and the most recent whereabouts of the children who have been deported or transferred from occupied areas in Ukraine. It has documented placements of these children with families in the Russian Federation. Some of the placements appear to be adoptions; in two cases, new Russian documents have changed the name and birthplace of the child. Children have also been placed with Russian officials, including in Ms. Lvova-Belova’s family. Although Russian authorities have emphasised that efforts are made to keep families together, the Commission has documented cases where children have been separated from siblings and relatives.

37. In April 2022, a boy then aged 13 years, had been deported to the Russian Federation from the Amvrosiivka Boarding School No. 4 in the Donetsk Oblast (see para. 19) and placed with a foster family in Moscow Oblast. The Commission obtained a placement order signed by an authority of the so-called Donetsk People’s Republic, dated April 2022, as well as a hand-over document. The foster mother declared to the media that the boy was given Russian citizenship in an accelerated procedure. The boy has an older sister in Donetsk Oblast. At the time of writing of this report, he is reportedly still with the foster family in the Russian Federation, separated from his sister.

38. Also in April 2022, twin sister and brother aged 9 years and an older sister aged 12 years were deported to the Russian Federation from two different boarding schools in the Donetsk Oblast and placed in a foster family in Moscow Oblast. The two girls were in the Amvrosiivka Boarding School No. 4, and the boy was in the Vuhlehirsk Special Boarding School No. 6, according to a list of pupils (see para. 19). The Commission obtained a placement order for the girls dated April 2022 and signed by an authority of the so-called Donetsk People’s Republic, as well as a hand-over document. A documentary on Russian television in October 2022 shows the arrival of the siblings by train to Moscow and the foster parents receiving them in the presence of Russian authorities. In October 2023, the

²⁷ In the replies of the Russian Federation to the list of issues in relation to its combined sixth and seventh periodic reports to the Committee of the Rights of the Child, it is stated that “no adoptions of children who are citizens of Ukraine have been recorded in the Russian Federation in the period since 24 February 2022”, [CRC/C/RUS/RQ/6-7](#), 1 November 2023, para. 95.

²⁸ [S/2023/289](#), Letter dated 24 April 2023 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General.

social media page of a boarding school in Moscow Oblast posted a video showing the foster mother and the boy. In September 2024, the social media page of the same school uploaded two videos of the boy playing Russian songs, mentioning that he is enrolled in the school.

39. In June 2022, three boys who were then 16 years old were deported to the Russian Federation as part of a group of 31 children from the Donetsk Children’s Social Centre, in Donetsk city, to a temporary transit center in Moscow Oblast.²⁹ Each boy was subsequently placed with a different foster family in the Russian Federation, even though each of them had family members or a legal guardian in Ukraine. One of them was placed in Ms. Lvova-Belova’s family and another boy in the family of Ms. Irina Rudnitskaya, head and founder of an organization advocating for family values. During a meeting with Mr. Putin, Ms. Lvova-Belova publicly declared that she had “adopted” a child from Mariupol.³⁰ All three boys were given Russian passports. Two of the boys have managed to return to Ukraine through their own efforts and support from Ukraine. The foster families and Russian authorities have actively attempted to impede their return. Testimonies collected by the Commission demonstrate that foster placement had been psychologically draining for them. In 2025, Ms. Rudnitskaya was charged by Russian authorities with child trafficking in connection with an unrelated incident.

40. Starting in June 2022, five siblings then aged between 4 and 14 years, deported in three different phases from Donetsk Oblast to the Russian Federation, were placed with a foster family in Moscow Oblast. According to an official list of deported children and media reports, three among them were part of the group of 31 children deported from the Donetsk Children’s Social Centre in Donetsk city to a temporary transit center in Moscow Oblast.³¹ Another sibling had been among the children first deported from institutions in Donetsk Oblast to Rostov Oblast, Russian Federation, and subsequently transferred again by plane to Moscow Oblast on 16 September 2022 (see para. 21). The fifth child was picked up in April 2023 by the Russian foster father from Donetsk Oblast. On her social media account, the foster mother posted photographs of the same children together with other children of the family. In 2022, official Russian social media channels reported that the Governor of the Moscow Oblast expressed his gratitude to the family. In 2023, the media announced that the Ministry of Social Development of the Moscow Oblast handed a letter of appreciation to the family through a local representative of the United Russia Party. An update on foster families in Moscow Oblast, posted on the website of the Ombudsperson for Children’s Rights for Moscow Region at the end of 2024, refers to the five children as still being with the same family.

41. In September 2022, a then 11-month-old girl and a 2-year-old boy from Kherson Children’s Home, in Kherson city, were deported to the Russian Federation and placed in a family in Moscow Oblast.³² The Russian appointed director of Kherson Children’s Home had authorised Ms. Inna Varlamova to accompany the infant children during travel. The Commission has obtained a copy of the electronic registration of an act of adoption for the infant girl, with her original name and place of birth in Kherson Oblast, and a changed name and place of birth in Moscow Oblast. The document included the names of the adoptive parents, 72-year-old Mr. Sergei Mironov, parliamentary leader in the State Duma and a close ally of Mr. Putin, and his wife, the above-mentioned 57-year-old Ms. Varlamova. A copy of the girl’s new birth certificate and an electronic registration thereof cite only her changed name and place of birth and this couple as her parents. According to witness testimonies, the girl has two older siblings, a legal guardian and a biological mother in Ukraine. However, at the time of writing of this report, she has not been returned to Ukraine, despite multiple efforts. The Commission has no information concerning the current whereabouts of the boy.

²⁹ A/78/540, paras. 98 - 99.

³⁰ Ibid, para. 99.

³¹ Ibid, paras. 98 - 99.

³² See also A/HRC/55/66, paras. 95 – 97.

42. In November 2022, seven children between 11 and 17 years were deported from a family-type orphanage in Kherson Oblast to Krasnodar Krai, in the Russian Federation, by the director, who was cooperating with the Russian authorities. She abandoned them after arrival in the Russian Federation. The children were placed in different institutions and families. Two siblings among them, aged 13 and 17 years at that time, were separated. The older boy was placed with a family; the younger sister in an institution. The boy had reached the age of majority and continued to reside with the foster family. He managed to establish contact with his biological mother in Ukraine, called her regularly, and told her that he will be looking for ways to return to Ukraine. He committed suicide in January 2024. The Commission obtained a copy of the death certificate and an extract from the official register of death. Afterwards, the family attempted to locate the younger sister, including through the efforts of an older brother who became her legal guardian, but Russian authorities refused to provide any information.

43. In July 2023, a boy then aged 5 years, was deported to the Russian Federation from a children's institution in Donetsk Oblast (see para. 19), further transferred to Moscow Oblast, and adopted by a Russian woman through a judicial order. The boy can be identified in photos of a group of children deported from Ukraine and transferred by plane to Moscow Oblast on 7 October 2022 (see para. 46). The Commission obtained the copy of an electronic registration of an act of adoption for the boy, similar to the document cited above (see para. 41), with his name and original place of birth in Donetsk Oblast, and a changed name and place of birth in Moscow Oblast, as well as the name of the adoptive mother. On her social media account, the mother posted pictures of the boy. He had reportedly several siblings. The adoptive mother told the media that she refused the request of an older sister, also deported from Donetsk Oblast, to be placed with the same family.

44. In January 2024, a boy then aged 7 years, was deported to the Russian Federation from the Donetsk Pre-school Children's Home N. 1 "Teremok" (see para. 19) to an institution in Pskov Oblast, and later placed with a military family in the same oblast, according to the media. The same sources reported that the foster father is a Russian military officer participating in the armed conflict in Ukraine and the mother is the head of the regional committee of military families. The Governor of the Pskov Oblast invited the family for the handing over of an award to the boy. The boy is recognisable in photos posted by the foster mother on her social media account in 2024 and 2025.

V. Coordinated actions by Russian authorities to deport, transfer, and place children in the Russian Federation

45. The evidence collected by the Commission demonstrates that Russian authorities and institutions, at the highest level, at regional level, as well as in the occupied oblasts in Ukraine, have organised the deportation or transfer of children from Ukraine to the Russian Federation or to occupied areas in Ukraine. These officials have coordinated a range of actions to facilitate the further deportation or transfer and the placement of these children, on a long-term or permanent basis, in the Russian Federation.

46. The direct involvement of Mr. Putin has been visible from the outset. He exercises direct authority over entities that have steered and executed the policies relating to children as detailed in the present report. During official meetings, Mr. Putin received regular updates from Ms. Lvova-Belova, the Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights of the Russian Federation, who reports directly to him, on the situation of the children deported or transferred from Ukraine. Mr. Putin has praised and encouraged efforts to enable the permanent placement of these children in the Russian Federation and has taken the necessary measures to advance this objective. He adopted a decree to simplify the manner of acquisition of the Russian citizenship for children without parental care from Ukraine (see para. 27).

Also, on 7 October 2022, an airplane traced to the Russian presidential fleet was used to transfer 53 children who had been deported from Ukraine, to Moscow Oblast.³³

47. In the cases investigated, Ms. Lvova-Belova has played a leading and pivotal role in coordinating the deportation and transfer of children, and organizing their transport, placement in temporary transit centers, and further transfer and permanent placement in institutions or families. To this end, she has been working in close coordination with other Russian bodies and authorities, including ministries, members of the State Duma, regional governors, regional commissioners for children's rights, and authorities in occupied oblasts of Ukraine. She has personally accompanied the children during transfers within the Russian Federation and has visited foster families who received children deported from Ukraine. In March 2024, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child urged the Russian Federation "*To investigate allegations of war crimes perpetrated by the Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights*".³⁴

48. Some ministries of the Russian Government have also played a role in coordinating or implementing the policies described above. The Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation has provided transport for the transfer within the Russian Federation of groups of children who had been deported from Ukraine. For instance, in September 2022, Russian authorities transferred 77 children initially deported from Ukraine to Moscow Oblast, with a plane belonging to the Russian Aerospace Forces.³⁵ On that day, Ms. Lvova-Belova posted on her Telegram channel an expression of gratitude to the Ministry of Defence, for providing the transport, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, for the processing of Russian citizenship for the children. In some cases, Russian armed forces have conducted the actual transfer of the children in Russian occupied areas of Ukraine. In April 2022, the Ministry of Education had been developing an agreement to facilitate the placement in Russian families of children deprived of parental care who had been deported from the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics in Ukraine.³⁶

49. The Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation, reporting directly to Mr. Putin, has also been involved in these deportations. Members of the Investigative Committee have visited children who had been deported and placed in temporary transit centres in the Kursk, Rostov, and Voronezh Oblasts, in the Russian Federation (see para. 21). A video posted by the Investigation Committee in March 2022, shows one such visit and states that its purpose was to support the children, and to inform them "*about the possibility of enrolling and studying at educational institutions of the Investigative Committee*". On 30 May 2022, during a visit to an institution in Moscow Oblast, where 31 children had been deported from the Donetsk Oblast, Ms. Lvova-Belova noted, "*Our colleagues from the Russian Investigative Committee helped us bring 31 children from the Donbas there.*"³⁷

50. Anna Kuznetsova, Deputy Chair of the State Duma of the Russian Federation, has been supporting plans for the placing of children deported from institutions in Ukraine with families in the Russian Federation, including adoptions, through preparing agreements with the two so-called republics and discussing amendments of their legislation. To this end, she held meetings and discussions with the authorities of both so-called republics, visited children who had been deported and placed in temporary transit centres in the Russian

³³ Official website of the President of the Russian Federation, "[Maria Lvova-Belova brought children from Donetsk People's Republic to Russia](#)", 7 October 2022; Official website of the Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights of the Russian Federation, "[Maria Lvova-Belova: 234 orphans from Donbass were brought to Russia over the past week to be placed in Russian families](#)", 7 October 2022. (in Russian).

³⁴ [CRC/C/RUS/CO/6-7](#), Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of the Russian Federation.

³⁵ Official website of the President of the Russian Federation, "[Orphans to be adopted by Russian families arrived in Russia with assistance from Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova](#)", 16 September 2022.

³⁶ Parliamentary Newspaper, "[The Ministry of Education is preparing agreements on the transfer of orphans from the DPR, LPR and Ukraine to Russian families](#)", 13 April 2022. (in Russian)

³⁷ [A/78/540](#), paras. 98 – 99.

Federation, and children in institutions in occupied areas of Ukraine.³⁸ In March 2022, Ms. Kuznetsova posted a message on her Telegram channel stating, “*From the first days of the evacuation, residents of Russian regions who want to take the children into their families began to come forward. But for this, it is necessary to make a change in the legislation of the [Luhansk People’s] Republic. It was agreed to start this work.*” In May 2022, in an interview with the parliamentary journal of the Russian Federation, Ms. Kuznetsova noted, “*More than a thousand children from orphanages were evacuated to Russia. Hundreds of Russian families responded and offered their help in their adoption. Such a lively response is very valuable. If minors have no relatives in Donbass who are ready to raise them, and there are no other obstacles, adoption into a Russian family is possible. But only after all the nuances are settled at the legislative level.*”³⁹ In October 2022, Ms. Kuznetsova further posted on her Telegram channel, “*About 50 children from the Kherson region orphanage were evacuated to Crimea against all odds [...]! Together with regional leaders and representatives of relevant agencies, we succeeded!*”. On the same day, Mr. Igor Kastyukevich, also a deputy of the Russian State Duma, who had been directing this transfer, thanked Ms. Kuznetsova and other authorities for “*their participation in this important matter*”.⁴⁰

51. The authorities in Russian occupied areas of Ukraine have cooperated with the Russian authorities and have played an instrumental role in authorising and implementing the initial deportations or transfers of children. Subsequently, they have facilitated administrative, practical, and logistical ways the long-term placements of the children in the Russian Federation or in Russian occupied areas of Ukraine. Mr. Pushilin and Mr. Pasechnik, the respective “heads” of the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics, had ordered the initial deportations of hundreds of children (see para. 18). The “Ministries of Education” of both so-called republics took measures to execute these orders. Ms. Fedorenko and Yulia Nazarenko, the respective former “Children’s Rights Commissioners” of the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics have played a key implementation role. They coordinated measures concerning the children deported to the Russian Federation with the Russian authorities. Ms. Fedorenko has personally ordered and facilitated deportations of children and accompanied children from the Donetsk Oblast during their further transfer and placement in the Russian Federation.

VI. Enforced disappearances

52. Russian authorities failed to inform parents, legal guardians, or relatives about the deportation or transfer of the children and their fate and whereabouts. Many remained unaware of the fate and whereabouts of the children for prolonged periods of time, lasting weeks, months, or years. In the case of children deported or transferred from institutions, parents or relatives recounted how they went to visit or retrieve them, only to discover that they were missing. Rarely, sympathetic staff informally passed some information to the parents or legal guardians, or enabled telephone contacts with the children. In the case of children deported or transferred from institutions who were deprived of parental care and fell under the guardianship of the heads of institutions and the Ukrainian State, the Ukrainian authorities reported that they did not receive information from the Russian authorities on their fate and whereabouts.

53. Those who managed to establish the whereabouts of the children usually did so through their own, considerable efforts, using personal contacts, open-source information, or with the assistance of the Ukrainian authorities, non-governmental organizations, and third parties. A grandmother whose grandson had been transferred from an institution, stated that she had never been notified about his transfer and his whereabouts. She said, “*I called everywhere, I went to all institutions, I asked my relatives in Crimea and Russia to enquire about the whereabouts of my grandson. I found out by myself where he was*”. In some cases,

³⁸ Russian Legal Information Agency, “[The headquarters will be engaged in the placement of orphans from the LPR in foster families in Russia](#)”, 16 April 2022. (in Russian)

³⁹ Parliamentary Newspaper, “[Anna Kuznetsova: Synchronization of the laws of Russia and LPR/DPR will help Donbass orphans to find parents](#)”, 4 May 2022. (in Russian)

⁴⁰ A/HRC/55/66, paras. 95 – 97.

the children themselves have attempted to locate their parents or relatives. However, many parents or legal guardians did not manage to establish the children's fate and whereabouts at the time of the writing of the report. Concerned families often resided in areas heavily affected by the armed conflict and faced difficulties in conducting searches across different sides of the frontlines.

54. These situations led to prolonged family separations, distress, and anxiety for the children and their families. A mother whose son was transferred from an institution, while she was not informed, said, *"I was calling the hotline every two days to find out where my son was, but nobody could give me any information"*. A grandmother who has been unable to locate her grandson since his transfer in 2022, recalled that in November 2024, the police of Kherson city asked her to come and see if her grandson was among a group of recently returned children. She stated, *"I went to Kherson in the hope that my grandson was one of the returned children, unfortunately [he] was not amongst them. It was devastating"*.

VII. Obstacles to return

55. Even when families managed to establish the fate and whereabouts of the children who had been deported or transferred, their return and reunification with their families have been marred with challenges. In the cases investigated, over 80% of the children have not yet returned. In a bulletin issued in April 2023 by the Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights of the Russian Federation, it is noted that if a child *"has a parent with full parental rights, the family has every opportunity to be reunited"*, and that the Commissioner's office *"assists all legal representatives of children"*. Russian authorities allowed the return of children when parents or legal guardians themselves, or persons or organizations acting on their behalf, undertook strenuous efforts to locate a child, went through the bureaucratic steps imposed, and organized travel to retrieve them. Some examples of return and reunification have received wide public coverage. However, these constitute a minority, while the majority of cases remain unresolved. The Russian authorities failed to set up a system to facilitate the expeditious return of the children, as prescribed by international humanitarian law.⁴¹

56. For individual parents, legal guardians, or family members, the return of children has been very challenging and generally took months or even years to organize. Russian authorities requested official documents, including official extracts or judicial confirmations, that took a long time to obtain. In some cases where a child had no parents or legal guardians, relatives first acquired legal guardianship to facilitate their return, which is also time consuming, and led to longer family separations.

57. Due to the ongoing armed conflict, travel to the Russian Federation or to Russian-occupied areas in Ukraine is difficult and requires the crossing of multiple international borders, coupled with security risks and high costs. Some families were denied access to the territory where the children were held. In one case, the Russian authorities told a mother who was traveling to retrieve her child that she did not pass the filtration and prohibited her entry to the territory. In another situation, the Russian authorities accused a grandmother of cooperating with Ukrainian authorities, threatened to call the police, and did not allow her to retrieve her grandchild. Some of the returns were made possible with the assistance of the Ukrainian government, non-governmental organisations, or intervention by third parties. For families from poor economic backgrounds, this has been impossible without external support.

58. Many parents, legal guardians, or relatives could not secure the return of their children. A grandmother who had not managed to find her grandson regretted that as time passes, the boy is being raised away from his family. The return of children without parental care, who have been deported from institutions and have no parent or legal guardian to claim their return, has mostly not taken place.

59. Several older children deported to the Russian Federation attempted to return on their own and faced considerable difficulties. A teenager boy who had been deported and placed with a foster family in the Russian Federation, made several attempts to return to Ukraine,

⁴¹ Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), art. 78 (3).

but his foster family tried to dissuade him and alerted the authorities. On the first attempt, Russian authorities arrested and coerced him to make a false declaration on camera, stating that he had been forced to return to Ukraine. The boy later wrote a letter to Ukraine's President saying that he wanted to return. Ultimately, a relative in Ukraine became his legal guardian and he managed to return. Two other teenage boys made their way back through Belarus with external assistance (see para. 39).

VIII. Condition of the children upon return

60. Family separations lasted weeks, months, or years. The children who have returned suffered from trauma, anxiety, and fear of abandonment. Parents, legal representatives, and relatives reported instances of emotional pressure and inadequate care in the institutions where the children were placed after deportation or transfer. A grandmother reunited with her grandson stated, "*when he was there, I could not see a smile on his face. Now that he is back, he is smiling again*". A boy who was transferred and placed in an institution said that he suffered from stress and panic attacks and when that occurred, the staff placed him in isolation. He stressed that he continues to have panic attacks as a consequence. A child who had been deported to the Russian Federation and placed in a family, told the Commission that documentaries showing how children from Ukraine were happily placed in foster families in the Russian Federation were staged, adding that a major obstacle encountered by children who wish to return to Ukraine is that they are afraid to voice their opinion.

61. The needs of some of the deported or transferred children, who lived with a disability or a medical conditions, were not met in the institution where they were placed after transfer. Parents or relatives reported that they had not received the medical care they had been prescribed and consequently suffered from health complications. They also stated that they had not received sufficient food and nutrition. The same interlocutors said that the children lost significant weight, were hungry, or reported having suffered from hunger during their time in the institution.

62. Families of children who were deported or transferred also reported instances of indoctrination. Some of the returned children stated that they were forced to listen to the Russian national anthem every day and that failure to do so resulted in threats and psychological pressure. A mother noted that by the time of his return, her child forgot to speak in Ukrainian and told her that his favorite song was the Soviet Army song "*The Soldier Walks the City*". Children transferred and placed in an institution reported that the staff there told them that Ukraine would become part of Russia or that Ukraine no longer existed. According to one mother, the staff said to her son, "*your country does not exist anymore, everything has burnt down, and your parents probably died*". Three years on, he still suffers from trauma related to his transfer and has trouble sleeping.

IX. Conclusions and recommendations

Unlawful deportation and transfer as a war crime

63. **Russian authorities deported or transferred thousands of children from areas they occupied in Ukraine to the Russian Federation or to other Russian occupied areas in Ukraine, stating that these were necessary evacuations because of the armed conflict. The relocations have not been temporary, as provided under international humanitarian law in the case of evacuations. On the contrary, Russian authorities have arranged the long-term placement of many of the children in the Russian Federation or in occupied areas of Ukraine. Compelling health, medical treatment, or safety reasons – the only legally justifiable reasons for temporary evacuation of children – were not the motivating factors for the deportations and transfers. In addition, Russian authorities did not seek the consent of parents, legal guardians or of the Ukrainian authorities. The removal of children from Ukraine thus cannot be qualified as an "evacuation" within the meaning of international humanitarian law, as claimed by the Russian authorities. Under international humanitarian law, deporting or transferring**

of a protected person without lawful basis is a war crime.⁴² The Commission reaffirms its previous finding that Russian authorities have unlawfully deported and transferred children from Ukraine, which amounts to war crimes.⁴³

Unjustifiable delay in the repatriation of civilians as a war crime

64. The Commission's investigations have so far confirmed that Russian authorities have deported or transferred 1205 children. Of these, the Russian authorities have failed to return over 80%. Instead, they have taken legislative, administrative, and practical measures to facilitate the indefinite placement of the children with families or in institutions in 21 regions of the Russian Federation and in areas they occupied in Ukraine. Russian authorities did not establish a system for the repatriation of the children.⁴⁴ The arduous task of finding the children and seeking their return was left to the families. Russian authorities have therefore continued to violate their obligation under international humanitarian law to facilitate in every way the reunion of families separated during the armed conflict,⁴⁵ which amounts to the war crime of unjustifiable delay in the repatriation of civilians.⁴⁶

Deportation and forcible transfer as a crime against humanity

65. The deportations and transfers of children from Russian occupied areas in Ukraine have been widespread and systematic, as they affected a significant number of children, have been carried out in various locations spread across several oblasts of Ukraine, and followed a well-established and consistent pattern of conduct. The Russian authorities at the highest levels – including Mr. Putin and entities directly answerable to him, as well as authorities at the regional level, and in the Russian occupied areas of Ukraine, have coordinated practical modalities to carry out these deportations and transfers, and to further relocate the children in the Russian Federation. These acts have been committed following a consistent and carefully organised plan and modus operandi, initiated already before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This demonstrates the existence of a pre-established policy conceived and executed under the leadership of the highest level of the Russian Federation state apparatus. The scale and the scope of these crimes, as well as their commission pursuant to a policy, lead the Commission to conclude that Russian authorities have deported and forcibly transferred children as a crime against humanity.⁴⁷

Enforced disappearance as a crime against humanity and a human rights violation

66. In most cases investigated, Russian authorities have not informed the parents, legal guardians, relatives, or the Ukrainian authorities of the fact of the deportation or transfer of the children, have not sought their consent, and have not informed them of the fate and whereabouts of the children. The Ukrainian authorities, who have the legal guardianship of children without parental care, stated that they have not received information on the fate and whereabouts of the children from the Russian authorities. In cases investigated, information was deliberately withheld from families, the identities of children were concealed, and returns or reunifications were prevented.

67. Consequently, parents, legal guardians, and relatives have remained unaware of the fate and whereabouts of the children for a prolonged period of time. This has led to lengthy separations, distress and suffering. In the case of younger children, this can cause irreversible harm and estrangement from their country and families. Despite the

⁴² Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention), art. 49; and Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), arts. 85 (4) and 85 (5).

⁴³ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, art. 8 (2) (a) (vii); [A/HRC/52/CRP.4](#), paras. 724 and 728.

⁴⁴ Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), art. 78 (3).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, art. 74.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, arts. 85 (4) (b) and 85 (5).

⁴⁷ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, art. 7 (1) (d).

wide coverage given to the placement or the return of some of the children, such cases are a minority. Four years on, in numerous other cases the fate and whereabouts of the children remain unknown. Families have persisted with extraordinary efforts in the hope of finding and securing the return of their children.

68. The removal of the children from their families and country, without the consent of parents, legal guardians, or of the Ukrainian authorities, also constitutes an abduction.⁴⁸ The coercive environment surrounding the deportations or transfers, the indefinite nature of the placements in the Russian Federation, as well as the considerable difficulties to find their family and travel back to Ukraine, make the situation of the children in the Russian Federation to amount to a deprivation of liberty.⁴⁹ The deprivation of liberty is also demonstrated by the Russian authorities' failure to establish a repatriation system, and by deliberately organising long-term or permanent placements of the children in the Russian Federation. These arrangements force the children to be raised in a foreign environment, far from parents, legal guardians, or relatives, sometimes thousands of kilometres away from Ukraine. Moreover, adoption has far-reaching implications for a child and drastically diminishes the prospect for a child to return and reunite with their family.

69. These considerations have led the Commission to conclude that Russian authorities have also committed enforced disappearances of the children they deported or transferred from Ukraine. These enforced disappearances have been widespread and systematic, committed pursuant to a policy, and amount to a crime against humanity.⁵⁰ They also constitute human rights violations.⁵¹

Other violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law

70. The Commission found that the actions of the Russian authorities, as described in the present report, have been contrary to several other provisions of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, in particular the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols. The range of measures taken towards the deported or transferred children have not been guided by the principle of best interests of the child.⁵² Changes to the personal status of the children, such as name, place of birth, and nationality, violate international humanitarian law⁵³ and international human rights law.⁵⁴ The conduct of the Russian authorities further violated the right of a child to family relations without unlawful interference,⁵⁵ the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents,⁵⁶ and the right not to be separated from his or her parents against their will.⁵⁷ It is considered that the separation of children from their families or caregivers has serious effects on their personal integrity, with a lasting impact, and causes great physical and mental harm. This leads to the violation of other rights of the child, such as the right to health and recovery.⁵⁸

71. The recommendations made in previous reports remain relevant. The Commission sets out below specific recommendations to address issues in the present conference room paper.

⁴⁸ Elements of crime of the International Criminal Court, art. 7 (2) (i).

⁴⁹ European Court of Human Rights, *Ukraine and the Netherlands v. Russia*, Applications nos. 8019/16, 43800/14, 28525/20 and 11055/22, Judgment, 9 July 2025, para. 1596.

⁵⁰ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, art. 7 (1) (i) and art. 7 (2) (i) in connection with art. 21 (3). See also Extraordinary African Chamber of Assizes, *Public Minister Vs. Habré*, Judgment, 30 May 2016, paras. 1467-1471 (in French); see also CED/C/9, Joint statement on illegal intercountry adoption.

⁵¹ United Nations Declaration on the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance, art. 2.

⁵² Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 3.

⁵³ Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention), art. 50.

⁵⁴ Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 8 (1).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, art. 8 (2).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, art. 7 (1).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, art. 9 (1); see also arts. 3(1), 10 and 18.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, art. 24 and 39.

72. **The Commission recommends that the Russian Federation:**

- (a) **Cease any deportation of children from Ukraine or transfers within occupied areas of Ukraine;**
- (b) **Provide reliable and comprehensive information about all children who have been deported to the Russian Federation or transferred within occupied areas of Ukraine, including on their fate and whereabouts, legal status, well-being and health conditions. This should include information about placement of children in institutions or with Russian families, including through adoption, as well as any change of citizenship;**
- (c) **Restore and facilitate effective communication between all children who have been deported to the Russian Federation or transferred within occupied areas of Ukraine with their parents, legal guardians, families or caregivers;**
- (d) **Promptly and proactively initiate the immediate, safe and unconditional return to Ukraine of children deported to the Russian Federation or transferred within occupied territories in Ukraine, in accordance with their best interests and in conformity with international law;**
- (e) **Cooperate with Ukrainian authorities in their efforts in relation to a DNA registry that would aid in the identification and recovery of children;**
- (f) **Immediately cease any measure to change the legal status of any child deported or transferred;**
- (g) **Provide unimpeded access to United Nations entities and other relevant international monitoring and humanitarian organizations to verify the situation of Ukrainian children, safeguard their rights and well-being, and take all measures necessary to secure their immediate, safe and unconditional return to reunite with their parents, legal guardians, families or caregivers.**

73. **The Commission recommends that Ukraine:**

- (a) **Continue its work towards the verification of the identity and a complete list of children who were deported to the Russian Federation or transferred within occupied areas of Ukraine;**
- (b) **Strengthen its efforts in a relation to the DNA registry that would aid in the identification and recovery of children;**
- (c) **Ensure access to multidisciplinary, coordinated and comprehensive support and services to children and their families to address their specific immediate, short-term and long-term needs, and ensuring the fulfilment of their rights.**

74. **The Commission recommends that international community:**

- (a) **Coordinate and reinforce its efforts to impress upon the Russian Federation the urgency to facilitate the return of children who have been deported to the Russian Federation or transferred within occupied areas of Ukraine;**
 - (b) **Support Ukraine in responding to the needs of children, parents, legal guardians, relatives and caregivers;**
 - (c) **Contribute both financially and with technical assistance towards a range of multidisciplinary and coordinated efforts – including legal, social, psychological, medical, educational, and rehabilitation and reintegration services – for children who have returned.**
-