

Yale SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH  
*Humanitarian Research Lab*

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*to the United Nations Security Council*  
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Thank you, Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield, President of the Security Council, and representatives of member states for allowing me to brief you this morning.

Yesterday, our team released [Russia's Systematic Program of Coerced Adoption and Fostering of Ukraine's Children](#), the latest report from the US State Department-supported Conflict Observatory program. It is the findings of this over twenty month long investigation which utilizes the collection and analysis of open source data and commercially available satellite imagery that I am here to discuss with you specifically today.

The Humanitarian Research Lab's inquiry identified 314 children from Ukraine that, following Russia's February 2022 invasion of the country, have been placed in this systematic, Kremlin-directed program of coerced adoption and fostering. These identifications resulted from cross-corroboration of multiple points of data to a high confidence standard, including— but not limited to— photographs, travel itineraries, physical characteristics, official Russian documents, and other specific details related to each child. At the heart of our investigation, is the discovery of three interconnected Russia-affiliated child placement databases in which children from Ukraine were placed for adoption or fostering as if they were an orphan from Russia. In one case the database involved was financially supported by President Putin's office itself.

The dossiers for each child the Yale School of Public Health humanitarian Research Lab have identified have now been transferred to Ukraine's government, including their law enforcement, and the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. The children HRL could find were exclusively, we believe, from Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, but information reviewed by HRL analysts indicates children from Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, and Kharkiv oblasts as well - areas captured by Russia after February 2022 - are likely also included in the program. Just under half of the children HRL identified are part of sibling groups present in the program, meaning they're brothers and sisters. In at least one case, a sibling was separated by Russia from their brothers and sisters as part of placement with citizens of Russia.

The total number of children from Ukraine Russia has placed in its adoption and fostering pipeline is not known and cannot be determined from the data analyzed for this report. Without Russia providing the Government of Ukraine and the International Committee of the Red Cross the actual lists of the children they've taken, we cannot estimate how many children

**Yale** SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH  
*Humanitarian Research Lab*

are in their custody. However, we know this: 148 of the 314 children HRL identified were listed in these trios of child placement databases and were adopted.

The placement of children in the aforementioned databases by Russia occurred after the illegal annexation in September 2022 by Russia of internationally recognized territory belonging to Ukraine. And this is important— before that point, the children were held at temporary accommodations, including one funded by the Office of the President of Russia himself, at what HRL refers to as “midpoint locations,” prior to the illegal annexation for up to six months. After that point, they were listed for adoption.

President Putin’s personal Presidential Air Wing and Russia’s Aerospace Forces - according to analysis of online photos and commercially available satellite imagery - transported the children from Ukraine into and within Russia in 2022. 208 of the 314 children Yale HRL identified have been placed with citizens of Russia through adoption or some form of temporary or permanent guardianship. And this is critical— 67 of the 314 children have been formally naturalized as citizens of Russia.

The naturalization of children originally from Ukraine as citizens of Russia is a core aspect of the entire operation. The program relied on detailed legal maneuvering by President Putin himself, Maria Lvova-Belova, Russia’s Children’s Rights Commissioner, Anna Kuznetsova, a member of the Duma and a party official in United Russia, and others to ensure that these activities— while violating international human rights and humanitarian law— complied with Russia’s federal law governing adoption of Russian children. Russia’s adoption laws require that children are citizens of Russia before they can be adopted. As a result, Presidential declarations, legal amendments as a matter of public record passed by the Duma, and other procedural moves were used by the Kremlin to fast track both the renunciation of the children’s citizenship in Ukraine by proxies and facilitate the issuance of Russian Federation citizenship to the children themselves. Involved in this pipeline were officials of the Ministry of Education, including headmasters at boarding schools.

Thus, as President Putin and Lvova-Belova were allegedly violating international humanitarian and human rights law by deporting protected persons - i.e. kids - from Ukraine to Russia, which is an alleged war crime, they have been involved in a higher order of alleged crime— which is the alleged crime, which is a crime against humanity— of transfer of people from one national or ethnic group to another, which is prohibited under the 1998 Rome Statute. The historical antecedent for this alleged crime is the 8th Nuremberg Trial, known as the RuSHA trial, in which Nazis and their collaborators were found guilty on multiple charges, including the specific act of forced transfer of Polish children to Germany for so-called Germanification, which included the destruction of their birth certificates. The same alleged crime is occurring now in the 21st Century and it is Russia this time that is committing it.

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*Humanitarian Research Lab*

In closing, it is now time for Russia to do what it was legally required to do under the Geneva Conventions at the start of the war it began: Russia must provide Ukraine, the International Committee of the Red Cross, UNICEF, and other relevant authorities a full list of the children it has taken, including those in the database systems that we reviewed. Until Russia gives up this information, which it is legally and morally required to do, it will be impossible to fully assess how many children exactly from Ukraine are waiting to go home.

Thank you.