



3 DECEMBER 2024

INTENTIONAL, SYSTEMATIC, & WIDESPREAD:
RUSSIA'S PROGRAM *of* COERCED ADOPTION
and FOSTERING *of* UKRAINE'S CHILDREN

A CONFLICT OBSERVATORY REPORT
Yale SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH
Humanitarian Research Lab

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Cover image “Maria Lvova-Belova brought children from Donetsk People’s Republic to Russia,” Kremlin Executive Office, 7 October 2022. Source link CC0302 has been withheld due to protection concerns.
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This report was produced as part of the Conflict Observatory with the support of the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, United States Department of State. This report does not necessarily represent the views of the United States Government. Learn more at <https://conflictobservatory.org> or view <https://web.archive.org/web/20250101020705/https://hub.conflictobservatory.org/portal/apps/sites/#/home/>

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Citation | Raymond, Nathaniel A., Oona A. Hathaway, Caitlin N. Howarth, and Kaveh Khoshnood et al., “Intentional, Systematic, & Widespread: Russia’s Program of Coerced Adoption and Fostering of Ukraine’s Children.” 3 December 2024. Humanitarian Research Lab at Yale School of Public Health: New Haven. Available at <https://medicine.yale.edu/lab/khoshnood/publications/reports/>

This report has was originally published at <https://conflictobservatory.org> under the title “Russia’s Systematic Program of Coerced Adoption and Fostering of Ukraine’s Children.” The report’s contents and findings remain the same; the title has been updated. Original citation: Raymond, Nathaniel A., Oona A. Hathaway, Caitlin N. Howarth, and Kaveh Khoshnood et al., “Russia’s Systematic Program of Coerced Adoption and Fostering of Ukraine’s Children.” 3 December 2024. Humanitarian Research Lab at Yale School of Public Health: New Haven. Available at <https://conflictobservatory.org>.

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**Children from Ukraine are placed with citizens of Russia
“in such a way that this guardianship turns into adoption.”**

– Officials in Moscow oblast

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study is the third in a series of reports authored by the Yale School of Public Health Humanitarian Research Lab (Yale HRL) as part of the Conflict Observatory program examining Russia's deportation, re-education, and coerced adoption and fostering of children from Ukraine since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The research presented in this report took place over a twenty-month period and is the most extensive public effort to date to identify and track children from Ukraine subjected to deportation, adoption, and fostering by Russia's government following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. This report includes the largest high confidence public count of children taken from Ukraine and placed in Russia's program of adoption and fostering to date.

Included below is a detailed anatomy of the individuals, governmental and non-governmental organizations, legal maneuverings, procedures, and systems used by Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin's regime to facilitate the adoption and fostering of Ukraine's children. This report details the process by which children from Ukraine came into Russia's custody, the logistical networks and transportation routes used to move them from Ukraine to and inside Russia, and the processes by which specific children have been naturalized as Russian citizens and placed with citizens of Russia or listed in Russia's child placement databases (hereafter referred to as "databases").

Yale HRL has determined with high confidence that the Russian Federation has engaged in the systematic, intentional, and widespread coerced adoption and fostering of children from Ukraine. The operation documented below was initiated by Putin and his subordinates with the intent to "Russify" children from Ukraine.

Yale HRL defines Russia's program of coerced adoption and fostering as the deportation of children from Ukraine and their subsequent placement with citizens of Russia and/or in institutions at which they are listed in Russia's child placement databases by the explicit command of Russia's senior federal and occupation authorities. These orders have been executed by multiple elements of the Government of the Russian Federation in close coordination with occupation officials in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.

The key findings of this report are as follows:

1. Yale HRL has identified 314 individual children from Ukraine who have been placed in Russia's systematic program of coerced adoption and fostering following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Among the 314 individuals identified by Yale HRL, 148 children were listed

in Russia's child placement databases, including 42 who have already been placed for adoption or guardianship, or who have had a citizen of Russia appointed as their guardian. An additional 166 children have been placed with citizens of Russia. This is the largest and most comprehensive high-confidence assessment to date of the placement of children from Ukraine with citizens of Russia or listed in Russia's databases.

- 2. Russia's officials listed children from Ukraine in Russia's child placement databases** following Russia's illegal annexation of portions of the internationally recognized territory of Ukraine in September 2022. Some children had been held at midpoints in Russia for six months prior to being taken to educational institutions in Russia and subsequently listed on Russia's child placement databases. Yale HRL defines midpoints as locations in Russia to which children were temporarily transferred prior to being moved and placed with citizens of Russia or placed in institutions and listed on Russia's databases. The end of the children's period of being held at midpoints and their listing in the databases coincided with the illegal annexation of Ukraine's territory by approximately one week, which demonstrates a strategic shift from guardianship to adoption from October 2022 onwards.
- 3. Russia's Aerospace Forces and aircraft under the direct control of President Putin's office transported multiple groups of children** from Ukraine on Russian Federation-flagged military transport planes for placement with citizens of Russia between May and October 2022.
- 4. At least 67 of the 314 children from Ukraine have been naturalized as Russian citizens since being taken to Russia**, although Yale HRL can reasonably assume that the number of formally naturalized children is significantly higher.
- 5. At least 208 of the 314 children identified have been placed for adoption or guardianship with citizens of Russia**, have been temporarily placed with citizens of Russia, or have had a citizen of Russia appointed as their guardian. Following legal changes introduced between May 2022 and April 2023, Russian citizens who are the legal guardians of minors from Ukraine have been empowered to apply for Russian citizenship and renounce Ukrainian citizenship on the minor's behalf.
- 6. Approximately half (46.6%) of the children identified have siblings** with known names listed in the databases at the same time. In at least one case,

three siblings from a family of four had been placed with a citizen of Russia without their fourth, eldest sibling who remained listed for adoption on Russia's databases. Yale HRL does not know whether other groups of siblings listed in Russia's child placement databases have also been separated from each other.

- 7. Children have been taken to at least 21 regions throughout Russia** where they were placed with citizens of Russia or placed in institutions and listed on Russia's child placement databases.
- 8. Russia's system of coerced adoption and fostering has been ordered and facilitated by President Vladimir Putin and Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights in the Russian Federation Maria Lvova-Belova.** Critical officials and organizations that play roles in designing and overseeing the program include: the Deputy Secretary of the General Council of the United Russia Party and Deputy Chairman of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation Anna Kuznetsova; Heads of the [so-called] Luhansk People's Republic and Donetsk People's Republic; the Russian Federation's Ministry of Education; and officials of United Russia, the majority political party in the State Duma (the lower legislative assembly of Russia's Federal Assembly).
- 9. Children assessed to be from Ukraine have been listed across three primary child placement databases in Russia as if they are children born in Russia.** These databases are operated by, affiliated with, and/or coordinate closely with Russia's federal government.
- 10. Russia utilizes psychologists (психологи) as part of an apparent effort to legitimize the program** by giving the deportation and placement of children with citizens of Russia the patina of medical necessity. Russia's mental health professionals were found to have matched children from Ukraine with citizens of Russia for prospective placement. The use of health professionals to legitimize human rights abuses in Russia and multiple other countries is well-documented.¹
- 11. All children identified in this report have been taken from Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts.** At least 122 of the 314 children (38.9%) were taken from institutions located in Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts, including 86 children taken from two educational institutions in pre-2022 occupied Donetsk oblast. With the exception of one child taken from Mariupol, all children appear to have originated from territory in the so-called Luhansk People's Republic and Donetsk People's Republic (hereafter referred to as the so-called "LPR" and "DPR", respectively).
- 12. At least 80.4% of children from Ukraine listed in Russia's databases have been taken from Donetsk oblast.** Lvova-Belova stated that the so-called DPR would be the first region in Ukraine connected to Russia's federal child placement database.
- 13. Children taken from Ukraine were transferred to various midpoint locations within Russia,** including four temporary accommodation centers and schools in Kursk and Rostov oblasts, before being listed on Russia's federal databases or directly placed with citizens of Russia.
- 14. Children from Ukraine have been subjected to pro-Russia re-education** at each of the eight known institutions to which children were transferred prior to being subsequently listed on Russia's databases.
- 15. Agencies operating Russia's databases would later limit what personally identifiable information was publicly available about children in the databases.** In some instances, the profiles of children from Ukraine have been retroactively amended to reflect that they were available for both guardianship and adoption, whereas they previously had only been listed for guardianship. Data with investigative significance, including profile data of children from Ukraine and Russian media reports about the transfer, has been removed at various points prior to 15 August 2024. These profile changes and content removal follows the issuance of arrest warrants by the International Criminal Court (ICC) against Vladimir Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova in March 2023.

1A. OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

This research focuses explicitly on the fostering and adoption of children from Ukraine originating solely in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts due to the information Yale HRL analysts could assess for this study. However, verified reports indicate that Russia's systematic adoption and fostering of Ukraine's children extends beyond the children and regions identified in this report.

Yale HRL has identified 314 individual children assessed to high confidence to have been taken from Ukraine and placed in Russia's program of coerced adoption and fostering since February 2022. Some of the children identified in this report were transported by Russia's Aerospace Forces aircraft, a uniformed service of Russia's Ministry of Defense, prior to being placed with citizens of Russia. At least 67 children identified in this report have been naturalized as Russian citizens since entering the custody of Russia.

Yale HRL has determined that the children identified in this report, with the exception of at least one child, have been taken from pre-2022 occupied areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. While internationally recognized as Ukrainian territory, sections of these oblasts have been under Russian occupation since 2014 and were illegally annexed by Russia as of September 2022. A child confirmed to be from an area not under pro-Russia forces' control prior to Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022 had been taken from Mariupol in Donetsk oblast during Russia's attack on the city in early 2022.

Russia's illegal annexation of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia oblasts in 2022 coincided with a major shift observed in how Russia's officials facilitate the widespread adoption and fostering of children from Ukraine. Prior to Russia's illegal annexation of these territories, children had been placed directly with citizens of Russia. In the weeks following Russia's illegal coordinated annexation of Ukrainian territories in September 2022, however, children from Ukraine were listed for adoption, guardianship, and/or trusteeship in at least one of Russia's three interconnected child placement databases.

Among the 314 children identified in this report, 148 children have been listed in Russia's databases. Yale HRL has not identified information suggesting that the remaining 166 children had been listed in Russia's databases prior to being placed with citizens of Russia. All databases are operated by, affiliated with, and/or formally coordinate closely with Russia's federal government. The databases that yield critical information leading to the identification of children in this report include Russia's Ministry of Education (MoE) database, the Center for Development of Social Projects (ANO TsRSP) database, and the Change One Life (COL) database. Examples of children's profiles Yale HRL has extracted from each of these databases can be found in Annex II.

Approximately half of the children taken from Ukraine and listed in Russia's databases (46.6%) are purported to have siblings; these siblings were also identified by Yale HRL as listed in Russia's databases. Analysts determined one case of sibling separation in which three siblings were placed in a Russian family without their fourth, oldest sibling. Yale HRL cannot yet assess the extent to which other sibling groups may have been separated as part of Russia's program of coerced adoption and fostering.

In addition to the 148 children listed in Russia's databases, Yale HRL identified 166 children who have been placed with citizens of Russia. To date, analysts cannot confirm that these children have been listed in Russia's MoE, ANO TsRSP, or COL databases prior to their placement with citizens of Russia. This group of children were presented in local media as having been taken from Ukraine and placed with citizens of Russia. Open source materials analyzed includes reports, images, and videos of children from Ukraine being taken to Russia, statements and media by Russia's government officials propagandizing the children's placement with citizens of Russia, and ceremonies for the provision of Russian citizenship to children from Ukraine who have been placed with citizens of Russia.

At least 208 of the 314 children (66.2%) identified as originating from Ukraine have been either adopted by a family in Russia, placed in a Russian family, or have had citizens of Russia appointed as their guardians—including 42 of the 148 children listed in Russia's databases. In some cases, it was possible to identify the families with which the children have been placed for fostering or adoption. Details about these individuals are not included in this report to prevent potential reprisals.

Russia engaged in acts of deception to conceal the full scope of this program and related activities. Most critically, children taken from Ukraine are fundamentally presented in Russia's databases as if they were from Russia. None of the databases analyzed by Yale HRL include information suggesting that the child is from Ukraine and do not acknowledge the children's Ukrainian nationality or their place of origin. Places of origin for children in these databases likely born in Russia are also not listed in these databases. Analysts have determined that specific and highly probative content from Russia's databases, as well as Russian media reports on Russia's program of coerced adoption and fostering of Ukraine's children, have been removed at various points preceding 15 August 2024.

International law enforcement agencies and investigative journalists have previously conducted research on Russia's fostering and adoption of Ukraine's children, including the Dutch National Police, the BBC, the *Kyiv Independent*, *Verstka*, *Important Stories*, the *New York Times*, and the *Financial Times*.² These organizations identified children from Ukraine present in Russia's databases through a variety of means, including the

use of facial recognition technology. All of these efforts relied on open source reporting, including some of the same sources Yale HRL used to identify the children and document Russia's system of coerced adoption and fostering. Yale HRL's findings are independent of previous investigations and rely on a unique methodology to identify the more than 300 children placed in Russia's databases or with citizens of Russia whose experiences are chronicled in this report.

1B. IDENTIFICATION OF CHILDREN FROM UKRAINE

Yale HRL identified that children from Ukraine have been listed in Russia's databases by cross-referencing unique physical features obtained from the children's database profiles with open source material publicizing the arrival of children from Ukraine to Russia in 2022. Analysts began the research process by systematically identifying, archiving, and analyzing all available reports of children from Ukraine being taken to Russia and subsequently placed with citizens of Russia.

All children examined in this report are assessed to high confidence—the highest confidence level available to Yale HRL analysts—to have been taken from Ukraine and placed for adoption and fostering in Russia. High confidence of a child's origin from Ukraine was determined using a combination of indicators, including: the child's presence among a wider group of children present in Russia reported as being from Ukraine; a child's travel itinerary from both Ukraine to Russia and within Russia; and naturalization as a Russian citizen. In some cases, a child's unique origin point within Ukraine could be verified to the standards of the Berkeley Protocol for Open Source Investigations. In every case this report details, the child's origin within internationally recognized territory belonging to Ukraine was established to high confidence using the Berkeley Protocol standards (see *Section 2 for a detailed discussion of this study's methodology and limitations*).

Analysts established the itinerary of each child deported from Ukraine and placed in Russia's program of coerced adoption and fostering. Yale HRL identified and assessed the children's patterns of movement over time and identified specific modes of transportation Russia employed to move the children. The method utilized in this report focused on the identification and mapping of origin points, midpoints, and terminus locations to which children were taken in Russia to confirm that all children originated from Ukraine.

Many of the children in this study are present in visual media generated at midpoint locations in Russia to which children from Ukraine had been deported in early 2022—facilities at which only children from Ukraine are known to have been present at that time. These midpoints—often referred to as “temporary accommo-

dation centers” in Russian media—include educational institutions and children's social and rehabilitation centers. Additional indicators this report assessed include the physical facial features of children present at Russian citizenship ceremonies.

Yale HRL has created dossiers of each child identified in this report documenting the following information, when available:

- Name;
- All relevant photos and video records;
- Month and year of birth;
- Sex;
- Purported siblings;
- Reported health status as listed in the databases;
- Purported reason for lack of maternal and paternal care as listed in the databases;
- Known origin locations in Ukraine from which children were taken;
- Known midpoint locations in Russia to which children were taken;
- Child's last known location within Russia.

These dossiers have been transferred to the International Criminal Court's (ICC) Office of the Prosecutor (OTP). The dossiers have also been made available for independent verification by relevant law enforcement agencies and other relevant accountability mechanisms, particularly the Government of Ukraine. Yale HRL does not share any personally identifiable information (PII) of children with the public. These practices ensure compliance with data protection laws governing child PII in the European Union and Ukraine and comport with accepted ethical standards for the responsible use of child PII.

1C. RUSSIA’S SYSTEM OF COERCED ADOPTION AND FOSTERING

Russia’s program of coerced adoption and fostering of children from Ukraine (hereafter, “the program”) has been intentionally and directly authorized by Putin and senior officials of the Russian Federation. Russia’s federal government amended existing legislation and introduced new legislation pertaining to citizenship that facilitates the placement of children from Ukraine with citizens of Russia. These laws expedite and expand the provision of Russian citizenship to children from Ukraine, which according to Russia’s federal officials, is required for children to be placed under the guardianship of—or adopted by—families in Russia.

Following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Russia’s officials further amended federal law to simplify the process of conferring Russian citizenship on children from Ukraine purported to be orphans or left without parental care. A series of changes to federal law between May 2022 and March 2023 also granted pro-Russia authorities in occupied Ukraine extraordinary powers of proxy on behalf of children from Ukraine. These authorities include occupation officials and heads of medical, educational, and social service institutions for orphans and children left without parental care. Their powers include both applying for Russian citizenship and renouncing Ukrainian citizenship on behalf of minors. Russia’s federal officials publicly stated that children from Ukraine should immediately be naturalized as Russian citizens upon their arrival in Russia.³ Russia’s federal officials further claimed that 380 children from Ukraine had been placed in households in Russia between April and October 2022, all of whom have since been naturalized as citizens of Russia.

Key individuals involved in this program include the Presidential Commissioner for Children’s Rights in the Russian Federation Maria Lvova-Belova, the Deputy Secretary of the General Council of the United Russia Party and Deputy Chairman of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation Anna Kuznetsova, and senior occupation officials of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. These individuals directed and facilitated the adoption and fostering of Ukraine’s children through legislative changes, direct placement of children with citizens of Russia, and the naturalization of Ukraine’s children as Russian citizens.

Lvova-Belova herself took legal custody of a child from Mariupol in June 2022 who was part of a group of children taken to Russia by Russia’s Investigative Committee.⁴ Multiple sources indicate that she subsequently adopted this child.⁵ She stated in an interview that “placing children in families was [her] professional job” and that requesting support in her effort to place children from Ukraine with citizens of Russia “would not be correct if [she] had not personally participated.”⁶

Occupation officials from the so-called DPR and LPR worked directly with the Kremlin and United Russia—the majority party in the State Duma—to deport children from Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts to Russia for adoption and fostering. Documents described below show the initial transfer of children from educational institutions in Ukraine to Rostov and Kursk oblasts, with subsequent transfer to Russian regions where children were later placed with citizens of Russia or listed on child placement databases. These documents also illustrate formal cooperation between occupation officials in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts with Russia’s federal government to facilitate the movement of the children into and within Russia between February 2022 and October 2023.

The Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation plays a central role in facilitating the coerced adoption and fostering of children from Ukraine. Russia’s Ministry of Education developed agreements that facilitate the placement of children from Ukraine in Russian Federation households, transferred purported orphans and children left without parental care to Russia, and operates one of Russia’s federal child placement databases in which children from Ukraine were identified.

A leaked document, whose provenance has been verified by Yale HRL, details how the highest levels of Putin’s government worked with occupation officials to institute this program. A confidential document dated 23 September 2022 that has been publicly leaked claims that Russia’s Ministry of Education sent a letter to the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy of the [so-called] Donetsk People’s Republic about the relocation of purported orphans from Ukraine to Russia. Following a meeting of the Interdepartmental Commission of the Russian Security Council on Improving State Migration Policy on 26 July 2022, Russia’s Ministry of Education—in accordance with the aforementioned letter—was directed to take “urgent measures” to “relocate orphans and children without parental care” who had been taken from Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts to temporary accommodation centers in Russia. This document includes an annex listing the institutions in Ukraine from which children were moved and the Russian regions to which these children were taken. This document, alongside other official documents, helps corroborate Yale HRL’s analysis of where the children had been located at each stage prior to being placed with citizens of Russia or listed on Russia’s databases.

1D. LEGAL ANALYSIS

The coerced deportation, re-education, and adoption and fostering of children from Ukraine documented in this report may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity under customary international law and as codified by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (Rome Statute). While these acts, in isolation, likely would not provide the sole basis for criminal charges of genocide, taken together with other evidence, this report's findings could support a broader case. Finally, the acts documented in the report may violate Russia's obligations as a State Party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. For full legal analysis, see Section 5.

2. METHODOLOGY

This investigation utilized publicly available data sources and commercially-available satellite imagery, including very high resolution (VHR) satellite imagery for this investigation. Analysts aggregated, synthesized, and verified open source media, Russian government documents and communications, and social media to identify children from Ukraine placed in Russia's program of coerced adoption, fostering, and subsequent re-education. Analysts evaluated Russian legislation and corporate records to identify the entities facilitating these efforts and the ways in which Russia expedited its operation through extensive changes to federal legislation. All materials in non-English languages were translated and verified by Russian linguists at Yale HRL.

This approach applied standards of multi-source corroboration established by the Berkeley Protocol on Digital Open Source Investigations (Berkeley Protocol).⁷ Analysts evaluated each data source for reliability, veracity, and credibility using assessment criteria derived from the Berkeley Protocol and the NATO admiralty scale. An assessment of bias did not mean that the information provided was not valid, but it did require additional analysis and scrutiny. Multiple source types attesting to the same fact or phenomenon lent credibility to assertions made. Commercial VHR satellite imagery and GIS tools were used to geolocate, corroborate and otherwise verify details as appropriate.

Yale HRL also adhered to data preservation standards outlined in the Berkeley Protocol. Analysts preserved local copies of all data—including images and videos—used to identify the children in Russia's databases and open source media. The web address, source code, full page capture, and embedded media files of each digital text item were preserved and hashed in both MD5 and SHAH256. Data preservation was prioritized to ensure its accessibility, authenticity, and potential use by accountability mechanisms, including in legal proceedings.

2A. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Following Yale HRL's February 2023 report on the forcible transfer, re-education and adoption of Ukraine's children, analysts continued to investigate Russia's adoption and fostering of Ukraine's children, during which the following research questions were developed:

- 1. Affected Children:** How many children from Ukraine are listed in Russia's child placement databases? Are children from Ukraine placed with citizens of Russian families or adopted in Russia? Who are these children?
- 2. Structure:** What laws, entities, and mechanisms facilitate the listing of Ukraine's children in Russia's

databases? Are there other processes by which children from Ukraine are being placed with citizens of Russia?

- 3. Locations, Transportation, and Logistics:** Where are these children located in Russia? From where in Ukraine were children taken? How were they relocated?
- 4. Chain of Command:** Who are the actors and entities involved in the process of deporting children from Ukraine to Russia and placing them for fostering and adoption in Russia?

2B. IDENTIFICATION OF CHILDREN FROM UKRAINE IN RUSSIA'S CHILD PLACEMENT DATABASES

Yale HRL identified children from Ukraine in Russia's child placement databases by identifying patterns of descriptive metadata on Russia's databases and corroborating each child's identity, location, and movement from Ukraine to and within Russia.

Each child in this subset met two criteria: 1) they were listed on Russia's child placement databases, and 2) they were assessed to be from Ukraine to a degree of high confidence.

To establish whether children met these criteria, researchers evaluated if any of the following data was present, verifiable, and could be corroborated against multiple sources:

- The child appears in at least one of the three major databases funded by or affiliated with Russia's federal government to facilitate adoption and guardianship placement;
- The child is reported to be from Ukraine, according to:
 - Official statements and documents from Russia's federal government officials, affiliates, or entities acting as the child's legal guardian, and/or
 - Media claiming these children had been taken from Ukraine;
- Any documentation that could place a child in facilities or transportation related to:
 - The child's departure from Ukraine;
 - The child's arrival at a facility for children in Russia, including temporary accommodation centers;
 - A group of children with whom the child travelled or was co-located who were also listed in the databases for adoption, guardianship, and/or trusteeship; and

4. If the child was naturalized as a citizen of Russia and/or issued a Russian domestic passport.

Media reporting that included photos and videos of children being deported from Ukraine to Russia were used to help identify children in Russia's databases. Reporting on children from Ukraine located in temporary accommodation centers and institutions in Russia was also used to identify children from Ukraine that were listed in Russia's databases. The data used to identify children was generated by a range of actors, including Russia's government and occupation officials, boarding school institutions and children's centers, government-aligned entities, and media agencies.

AREA(S) OF INTEREST

Yale HRL conducted a Boolean search to find media reports of children— including purported orphans— taken from occupied Ukraine to Russia. The search yielded results across dozens of Russian regions. Yale HRL identified leads and investigated specific children that may have been taken from Ukraine and listed in Russia's databases in those regions.

2C. IDENTIFICATION OF CHILDREN PLACED WITH CITIZENS OF RUSSIA

Yale HRL conducted keyword searches to identify children from Ukraine directly placed in Russian households across all 83 federal subjects of the Russian Federation.⁸ Analysts then collected information on each child identified as having been placed with citizens of Russia, including— but not limited to— PII about each child, mid-point locations to which children were taken in Russia where they had been placed with citizens of Russia, and whether they had been naturalized as Russian citizens. Each child identified in this group was assessed by Yale HRL to high confidence as originating from Ukraine and confirmed as having been placed with individual citizens in Russia.

2D. GEOLOCATION

Analysts geolocated facilities using descriptive, photographic, and video media that described the presence of children from Ukraine at these facilities. Facility features were compared against reference material from facilities' websites, social media pages, and user-uploaded photographs on mapping sites. Yale HRL identified unique features in the background of adoption profile images and videos to determine where children were located when those profile images and videos were created.

At least two analysts had to independently confirm the presence of children from Ukraine at a specific facility in or after February 2022 for the facility to be considered

geolocated to high confidence. Imagery analysts corroborated each location and its features through satellite imagery analysis. This process included mapping the structures or areas at the location that matched photographs and videos. Yale HRL analyzed satellite imagery of these locations during the period in which children from Ukraine were present.

Imagery analysts also conducted multi-temporal change detection analysis— the comparison from satellite images taken at separate times— for each location assessed and geolocated to high confidence. Analysts annotated this imagery for observable indicators of activity near or at a facility potentially relevant to the deportation, transfer, or holding of children from Ukraine placed in Russia's program of coerced adoption and fostering. Two imagery analysts had to reach concurrence to establish observable indicators of activity.

Analysts identified and assessed visual indicators and changes in activity patterns that could be consistent with operations related to the deportation, transfer, or presence of children transferred from Ukraine at specific sites. Yale HRL imagery analysts developed a list of potentially relevant observable indicators for this study based in part on the methods laid out in *Mass Atrocity Remote Sensing (MARS)-Relevant Observables and Corresponding Typing Methods*.⁹ The composition of a MARS-Relevant Observables and Corresponding Typing Methods table involved developing a list of objects, activity patterns, and other phenomena visible in satellite imagery bearing potential relevance to the commission of mass atrocities and other human rights or humanitarian law violations and methods for assessing their relevance to the conflict or violation in question.

2E. CONFIDENCE ASSESSMENT

Yale HRL assessed the possible origin for each child through a series of verification steps using cross-corroboration of multiple sources. Children assessed to be from Ukraine at high confidence have a combination of the following indicators:

1. The features of a child depicted in open source data match those visible in the photo of a child in the child placement database, and the verified source explicitly states that this child or the group they are part of is from Ukraine.
2. An independent assessment of the facility demonstrates that it matches the features of the facility in which the child was located.
3. The child's purported sibling is assessed to high confidence to have been taken from Ukraine.
4. The child was naturalized as a citizen of Russia.
5. The child is located at the same place, at the same time, as other children reported to be from Ukraine.

6. The child's travel itinerary through Russia aligns with that of other children from Ukraine taken to the same locations at the same times.
7. The child is identified at a midpoint location in Russia.
8. The child is identified at an origin location in Ukraine.

Analysts established lower levels of confidence for children who did not meet a combination of the above criteria, including instances of insufficient data to assess a child's origin.

2F. CHAIN OF COMMAND

Yale HRL identified high-level officials and entities involved in Russia's program of coerced adoption and fostering, as well as their role in directing, facilitating, and funding this program. Analysts identified a range of actors involved in the deportation, adoption, and fostering of Ukraine's children, including local non-governmental organizations, regional governors, occupation officials, and senior Russian Federation officials. Analysts identified critical nodes in this network based on an entity's level of formal and de facto authority and their level of influence on the deportation of children from Ukraine and their subsequent placement in Russia's databases and among citizens of Russia.

Sources used for network analysis included publicly accessible corporate and financial records, official government communications, Russian legislation, and Russian media reporting on the entity's involvement. Analysts evaluated photos and videos obtained from media depicting officials or members of security services with children stated to be from Ukraine to identify specific individuals and units.

2G. LIMITATIONS

Yale HRL was able to identify more than 300 children taken from Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts and listed in Russia's databases or placed with citizens of Russia. Yale HRL's identification of 314 children is not, however, representative of the total number of children from Ukraine subjected to Russia's program of coerced adoption and fostering. Yale HRL was neither able to comprehensively assess the profiles of all children in the child placement databases, nor did analysts systematically exhaust all possible leads relevant to this process. Ongoing investigation is required.

This report raised multiple interconnected and complex ethical issues at each stage of the investigation, in particular the underlying balance of consequence tradeoffs between the impact that the investigation itself may have on evidence versus the necessity of

identifying the children for recovery and humanitarian purposes. At each stage, the team evaluated two primary sets of indicia to navigate these ethical challenges. First, the indicators of change in Russia's operational posture towards the data itself under investigation, and second, the results of Yale HRL's investigation vis-à-vis the number of children identified. These two sources of information were cross-referenced against each other to produce decisions at specific junctures in the investigation, including changes in Yale HRL's operational procedures.

The removal of content and the limited reporting identifying children from Ukraine taken to Russia following ICC arrest warrants for Putin and Lvova-Belova restricted Yale HRL's ability to identify children from Ukraine who were presumably listed in Russia's child placement databases after March 2023. Yale HRL was unable to pursue all entities involved in the adoption and fostering of Ukraine's children due to capacity constraints.

3. RUSSIA'S PROGRAM OF COERCED ADOPTION AND FOSTERING

The following section provides an overview of (a) the evolution of this program, (b) the top-level officials directing Russia's program, (c) changes made to Russia's federal law to facilitate this program, (d) Russia's primary databases in which Ukraine's children are listed for guardianship and adoption, and (e) Russia's concealment of their adoption and fostering of Ukraine's children.

3A. EVOLUTION OF THE PROGRAM

THE FIRST TRANSFERS

Coercive movements of children from Ukraine to Russian territory predate the 2022 full-scale invasion. Russia-aligned officials have been bringing Ukraine's children to summer camps and other facilities in occupied Ukrainian territory as early as 2014 after Russia's invasion of Crimea.¹⁰ Since February 2022, these facilities became the site of re-education efforts intended to "integrate" children from Ukraine into Russian life, culture, and society, including enforcing Russia's version of history and narratives that serve the political interest of Russia's government.¹¹

The Kremlin launched the program of coerced adoption and fostering in tandem with its preparation to invade Ukraine in the first weeks of 2022. Russia started to systematically transport children, including some of those children identified in this study, from two schools in occupied Donetsk oblast into Russia as early as 18 February 2022, six days before Russia's troops first entered Ukraine via Belarus.¹²

The Heads of the [so-called] DPR and LPR ordered the evacuation within hours before children would be moved under the pretense of an imminent threat of attack by the Ukrainian Armed Forces.¹³ Yale HRL examined videos and images of the children gathered in front of their school and put on buses. The children arrived in Russia within 24 to 48 hours after having been taken from their school in Ukraine.¹⁴

Russia focused on four distinct cohorts of children as its combat operations expanded and the newly occupied areas of Ukraine fell to Russia's forces in the first months of the full-scale invasion. The four cohorts are as follows: 1) children from occupied areas sent to camps for re-education activities; 2) children separated from families in the network of filtration facilities established during the siege of Mariupol in early 2022; 3) children taken into the custody of Russia's military and

security forces on the battlefield in Mariupol, Kharkiv, Kherson, and elsewhere; and 4) children from Ukraine's state institutions and facilities, which are the focus of this report.

Officials from the Kremlin and United Russia worked closely with senior officials from the so-called LPR and DPR in the first weeks of April 2022 to coordinate legislative changes in the occupied areas and set up a headquarters for United Russia to facilitate the transfer and placement of Ukraine's children with citizens of Russia (see Section 3C). These initial transfers from Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, which include children identified in this report, laid the groundwork for what the program would later become.

MOSCOW REGION'S PILOT PROGRAM

By April 2022, Andrei Vorobyëv—Governor of the Moscow region—had initiated a pilot project to place children from Ukraine with citizens of Russia. Moscow's officials claimed that this project first looked for relatives of children taken to Russia from the so-called DPR and LPR in both Russian databases and Red Cross databases. If relatives were not found after officials queried the databases, children were placed under temporary guardianship prior to being placed for adoption.¹⁵ The Moscow pilot program became the model upon which Lvova-Belova drew for streamlining the future placement of children from Ukraine. In June 2022, Lvova-Belova stated that the system developed in Moscow was ready to be deployed in six more regions throughout Russia.¹⁶ The following month, Lvova-Belova stated that the system would be spread throughout the country.¹⁷

Moscow officials created a registry in early April 2022 of citizens of Russia who had previously taken orphans and children left without parental care into their households.¹⁸ Other citizens potentially willing to foster children from Ukraine and capable of caring for children with special needs were sought out as part of this process.¹⁹ The first children in this pilot project were placed with citizens of Russia several weeks later on 23 April 2022.²⁰ The Moscow oblast continued to develop and expand this pilot program. On 14 July 2022, children from Donetsk oblast were flown to the Chkalovskiy military airfield in Moscow oblast to be redistributed and placed with citizens of Russia in the six regions previously identified by Lvova-Belova²¹ (see Section 4 on transportation).

Moscow was the first region in Russia to have children from Ukraine placed with its citizens as part of the pilot program.²² Notably, it was also the first region in which children from Ukraine were naturalized as Russian citizens following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.²³ According to Moscow's local government, purported orphans lived in one of six centers for no longer than three months before being placed in homes with citizens of Russia or provided government housing.²⁴ A week before the first known group of children from

Ukraine was placed with citizens of Russia in Moscow in April 2022, Vorobyëv stated that “we invite them, adopt them, this is just the beginning.”²⁵

SHIFT FROM FOSTERING TO ADOPTION

The initial focus on temporarily placing children with citizens of Russia appears to have decidedly shifted to placing children in Russia’s child placement databases following Russia’s illegal referendum on the annexation of occupied territories in Ukraine on 30 September 2022.²⁶ The majority of children identified as placed with citizens of Russia entered these placements between April and December 2022. However, the first children this study identified as listed in Russia’s trio of child placement databases appeared in October 2022.

In October 2022, Lvova-Belova claimed that she had previously reached agreements with governors and selected households willing to foster Ukraine’s children.²⁷ She further stated that they were not planning to use this system following the 30 September 2022 referendum. Lvova-Belova publicly claimed that Russia was changing procedures in order to place children from the annexed regions in Russia’s federal database system.²⁸

Yale HRL’s analysis of when Ukraine’s children appeared in the databases confirms that Lvova-Belova’s October 2022 statements accurately described the program’s agenda at that time. The initial program transitioned at this point from a foster-centric focus with the prospect of adoption to an adoption-centered effort supplemented by foster placements of children with citizens of Russia. Children who had been taken from Ukraine to institutions in Russia were listed for adoption and guardianship on Russia’s child placement databases as early as October 2022.

The children’s profiles on the three interconnected child placement databases show them located at the institutions to which they were taken in Russia. Citizens of Russia who were interested in adopting these children could view the profiles of the children from Ukraine, who were presented without any online indication that they were taken from Ukraine, and contact regional officials for additional information (*see Section 3e on concealment*).

PLACEMENT TYPES WITH CITIZENS OF RUSSIA

“Forms of placement” (“формы устройства”) refers to the different ways in which children can be placed with citizens of Russia. The profiles of children listed on Russia’s databases specify the types of placement for which children are eligible: adoption, guardianship, and/or trusteeship. The ANO TsRSP database defines these placements as follows:

I. Adoption: “Adoption is a priority form of placing a child in a family, in which family ties are legally established between the child and a person or a married couple who are not his or her biological

father and mother.”²⁹

II. Guardianship: “Guardianship is a form of arrangement for minor citizens (minors under the age of fourteen), in which citizens (guardians) appointed by the guardianship and trusteeship authority are the legal representatives of the wards and perform all legally significant actions on their behalf and in their interests.”³⁰

III. Trusteeship: “Trusteeship is a form of arrangement for minor citizens aged fourteen to eighteen years, in which citizens (trustees) appointed by the guardianship and trusteeship authority are obliged to assist minor wards in exercising their rights and fulfilling their obligations, protect minor wards from abuse by third parties, and also give consent to adult wards to perform actions in accordance with Article 30 of the Civil Code of the Russian Federation.”³¹ Trusteeship is a specific form of guardianship.

Adoption, guardianship, and trusteeship

The program has primarily relied on two forms of placement for children from Ukraine with citizens of Russia: adoption and guardianship. Procedures, laws, and database systems for governing and facilitating both placement types for children born in Russia existed prior to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

First, a child from Ukraine is required to be recognized as a citizen of the Russian Federation in order to be adopted in Russia (*see Section 3C*).³² Adoption in Russia gives adoptive parents the legal right to change the child’s surname, first name, patronymic, and date and place of birth.³³ Under Russian Federation regulations, government employees are prohibited from revealing any information which may indicate that a specific child is adopted.³⁴ To ensure the secrecy of adoptions, adoptive parents are recorded on a child’s birth certificate as the birth parents as part of the adoption’s finalization in Russia.³⁵

Courts in Russia, as in the United States and Europe, are responsible for authorizing and certifying adoption. However, birth parents have no right in Russia to withdraw consent for adoption after consent is initially given. Parental rights cannot be reinstated and relatives of the child cannot claim guardianship after adoptions are finalized.³⁶ Children over the age of 10 years must consent to adoption. The exception to this rule is that consent is not required if the child is already under the legal guardianship of the prospective adoptive parents.³⁷

When children in Russia are placed in foster families, the mechanisms of either guardianship or trusteeship are utilized depending on the age of the child.³⁸

Unlike children who have been adopted, children under guardianship retain their status as “children left without parental care” in the eyes of the Russian Federation.³⁹ Information about the child’s current place of

residence can be given to the child's relatives and communication with birth family relatives is allowed.⁴⁰ However, Russia's officials state that children from Ukraine placed under guardianship require Russian Federation citizenship, similar to Russia's adoption requirements.⁴¹

“Temporary Guardianship”

As of April 2022, Russia's officials widely claimed that children from Ukraine were placed in foster families in Russia under “temporary guardianship,” a preliminary arrangement that cannot exceed six months. Russia's officials placed children under temporary guardianship while they amended legislation simplifying the provision of Russian citizenship to children from Ukraine and facilitating the permanent placement of children from Ukraine with citizens of Russia. Yale HRL identified at least one group of children who were placed under temporary guardianship prior to being naturalized as citizens of Russia. It is unknown whether children are required to have Russian citizenship for placement under temporary guardianship.

Temporary guardianship is distinct from the “forms of placement” of adoption, guardianship, and trusteeship described above. Russia's Family Code stipulates that children can be temporarily transferred to the family of citizens permanently residing in Russia for no more than three months.⁴² The law further states that guardianship and trusteeship authorities can extend this period by an additional three months under “exceptional circumstances.” Children granted this extension can be temporarily transferred to citizens of Russia for no more than six months.

Temporary guardianship is a critical precursor to adoption. In April 2022, Deputy Chairman of the Moscow Oblast Government, Vyacheslav Dukhin, stated that children from Ukraine are first placed with citizens of Russia under temporary guardianship “in such a way that this guardianship turns into adoption.”⁴³ This was stated at an interdepartmental meeting between United Russia, the Duma, Lvova-Belova, Russia's Ministry of Education, regional officials, and occupation officials in which they discussed the placement of children from Ukraine with citizens of Russia.⁴⁴ Lvova-Belova, along with Russia's state news agency “TASS” and the official website of the Voskresensk district of Moscow oblast, have corroborated this statement, claiming that the procedure developed in Moscow oblast “organize(s) temporary guardianship, and later adoption” for children from Ukraine.⁴⁵

Russia's officials have often described the placement of children from Ukraine with citizens of Russia as “temporary.” However, Russia's officials placed children from Ukraine under temporary guardianship with the explicit intent for this placement to precede adoption. Lvova-Belova's press service stated that “Temporary guardianship involves placing children in families for up to six months. Therefore, during this time, a mechanism for permanent family placement of these children must be

developed.”⁴⁶ After Russia's officials developed a procedure facilitating the adoption of children from Ukraine who had been placed under temporary guardianship in Russia, Russia's officials amended federal laws simplifying the provision of citizenship to purported orphans and children left without parental care from Ukraine. These amendments expedited the assignment of Russian citizenship to children from Ukraine, which allowed the temporary guardianship to become “permanent” (see *section 3C for changes to laws and policies*).⁴⁷

The pipeline between temporary guardianship and adoption is a critical component of Russia's concealment of their program of coerced adoption and fostering. Russia's officials developed a process in which temporary guardianship acts as the de-facto streamline for adoption— and thus the concealment— of children from Ukraine. Simultaneous to children being placed under temporary guardianship, Russia amended legislation expediting the conferral of Russian citizenship to purported orphans from Ukraine. Russia then naturalized children placed under guardianship as Russian citizens, enabling them to be adopted by citizens of Russia. Russia's federal law authorizes those who adopt to alter the child's personally identifiable information, including their first name, surname, patronymic, place of birth, and date of birth.⁴⁸ Such changes in personal information could conceal the child's original identity and present significant barriers to tracing children after adoption, including secrecy requirements for Russian government officials.

Vladimir Putin ordered and coordinated this program at the highest levels of Russia's federal government since the very first transfers. The Russian government's publicly stated intent, followed by these actions, resulted in the systematic and widespread effort to naturalize and adopt children from Ukraine.

3B. COMMAND & CONTROL

PRESIDENT PUTIN AND COMMISSIONER LVOVA-BELOVA’S OVERALL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PROGRAM

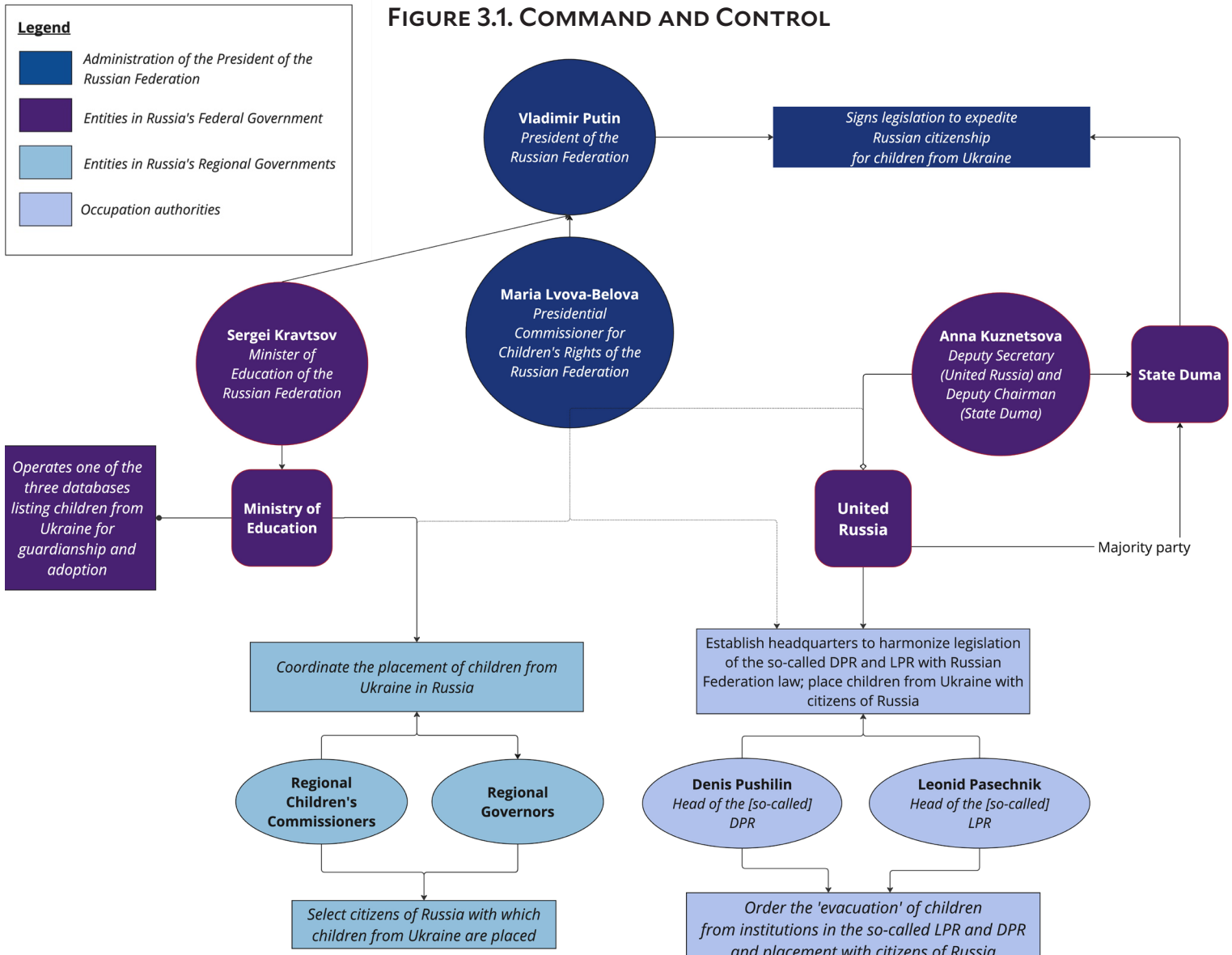
Putin has held primary command and control responsibility for major strategic decisions about Russia’s program of coerced adoption and fostering since its inception. Lvova-Belova serves, in effect, as Putin’s executive officer for the program. Lvova-Belova both logistically and politically implements the strategic intent received from Putin. Meetings between Putin and Lvova-Belova have been both publicly recorded and transcribed for release on the official website of the Kremlin website. Russian linguists at Yale HRL translated all original content when meetings were publicly recorded.

Putin himself has played at least three main roles in the program that are publicly known. First, he directed the removal of legal and procedural barriers that had previously prevented the adoption and fostering of children

from Ukraine in Russia with Russian Federation citizens. Second, he directed the use of federal funds to finance the organizations listing children from Ukraine for adoption on three distinct database systems. Third, Putin oversaw and continues to oversee the military, the security services, members of his own administration and other federal personnel—such as the Ministry of Education—directly responsible for deporting children from Ukraine who were subsequently placed in Russia’s program of adoption and fostering.

Through a combination of Presidential Decrees and legislative actions by the State Duma, Russia’s lower legislative assembly (hereafter referred to as “the Duma”), Putin closely engaged in facilitating the legal and policy changes necessary to allow the program to comply with Russia’s pre-2022 laws governing adoption and fostering (see Section 3C). In one example, Putin wrote a personal letter to members of the Duma to urge them to push through legislation related to simplifying the transfer of children from Ukraine to Russia for adoption and fostering.⁴⁹

FIGURE 3.1. COMMAND AND CONTROL



Direct financial support and other assets from the President's Office have underwritten and resourced two core logistical components of the program: child placement databases and transportation of children. Since 2019, the Presidential Grants Fund has approved and allocated grants to the Autonomous Non-Profit Organization Center for Development of Social Projects (ANO TsRSP), the operator of the child placement database *Usynovite.ru*.

Children from Ukraine who were taken to Russia have been listed on this database for adoption, guardianship, and trusteeship. From 2019 to 2024, ANO TsRSP received at least 47,522,281 rubles in grants from the government via the Presidential Grants Fund.⁵⁰ The Presidential Property Management unit, which reports to Putin, operated at least two flights that transported children from Ukraine in 2022 (see *Section 4 on transportation*).

Putin's overall direction and supervision of the federal agencies involved in the program has occurred, in part, through the Interdepartmental Commission of the Russian Security Council on Improving State Migration Policy. Dmitry Medvedev, the former President of Russia, is the Security Council's Deputy Chairman. A confidential document dated 23 September 2022 that has been publicly leaked claims that Russia's Ministry of Education sent a letter to the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy of the [so-called] Donetsk People's Republic about the relocation of purported orphans from Ukraine to Russia.⁵¹

The document further states that following a meeting of the Interdepartmental Commission of the Russian Security Council on Improving State Migration Policy on 26 July 2022, Russia's Ministry of Education— in accordance with the aforementioned letter— was directed to take “urgent measures” to “relocate orphans and children without parental care” who had been taken from Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts to temporary accommodation centers in Russia. The document further stipulates that guardianship and trusteeship authorities should prepare individual files about the children.

Next to Putin himself, Lvova-Belova, whose position resides within the Office of the President, is the most prominent figure responsible for the design and execution of the program. Her responsibility for the program has shaped some of its most consequential top-level policies, such as the focus on removing legal barriers to conferring citizenship on children from Ukraine, pushing for a shift from fostering to adoption from fostering children in the fall of 2022, and advocating for the utilization of pre-existing government databases for advertising the children for fostering and adoption. In January 2023, Putin directed Lvova-Belova to “take additional measures to identify minors” living in the occupied territories “left without parental care, and to promptly provide them with state social assistance, as well as to provide such persons with social support established by the legislation of the Russian Federation.”⁵²

Lvova-Belova has been the primary coordinating official with occupation authorities in the so-called LPR and DPR since the start of the war.⁵³ She helped establish headquarters of United Russia in occupied territories to synchronize local and federal laws and policies related to the deportation and nationalization of children and has worked closely with regional governors and other local officials on coordinating the placement of children with citizens of Russia.⁵⁴

Lvova-Belova has also been physically hands-on in almost every aspect of the program's logistical operations. This approach includes presiding over “citizenship ceremonies” and presenting the passports to children from Ukraine newly naturalized as citizens of Russia.⁵⁵ She has also identified individual citizens of Russia to foster specific children and accompanied the children on military transport flights within Russia prior to placement with citizens of Russia.⁵⁶

Lvova-Belova's efforts scaled up the placement of children from Ukraine from one region in Russia to at least fourteen regions between April and September 2022. In at least eight instances within this timeframe, she personally accompanied by train or plane groups of children from Ukraine to meet the families with which they would be placed.⁵⁷ These journeys include two instances where children were taken on military transport flights in September and October 2022, respectively (see *Section 4 on transportation*).⁵⁸ On two separate trips she made with groups of children in July 2022, Lvova-Belova expressed a desire for her work to become more “systematic.”⁵⁹ In July 2023, Lvova-Belova claimed that “If earlier the assistance was targeted, now it is becoming systematic.”⁶⁰

Lvova-Belova and her husband took custody of a child from Ukraine themselves, a 15-year-old boy taken from Mariupol after Russia's siege of the city began in early 2022.⁶¹ In an interview, Lvova-Belova stated that she “immediately understood he was [her] son.”⁶² She added that requesting support from her fellow Russians to help place children from Ukraine with citizens of Russia “would not be correct if [she] had not personally participated.”⁶³

Before the imposition of international sanctions and subsequent indictments, Lvova-Belova communicated her vision for the program to Russia's domestic audience. On 18 March 2022, Lvova-Belova held a press conference and spoke about “the implementation of the instructions of the President of the Russian Federation” pertaining to the placement of orphans and children without parental care taken to Russia from Ukraine.⁶⁴ In her speech, Lvova-Belova named a lack of Russian Federation citizenship as a barrier to placing children from Ukraine with citizens of Russia, obstacles which her office was working to remove.⁶⁵

As early as April 2022, Lvova-Belova stated that adoption of children from Ukraine was the “highest priority”

for Russia's policy towards the children.⁶⁶ Lvova-Belova's public messaging changed in late 2022 and early 2023 parallel with increased international condemnation of Russia's deportation of children from Ukraine. She stated in October 2022 that media publications accusing Russia of placing children from Ukraine for adoption were incorrect and that children were only placed for guardianship.⁶⁷ These comments were made one month after the United States sanctioned Lvova-Belova and approximately two weeks after children from Ukraine were identified as listed for adoption in Russia's databases. Lvova-Belova further stated that children "can return to their homeland if they want."⁶⁸

In April 2023, several weeks after the ICC indicted Putin and Lvova-Belova, she further denied that children from Ukraine had been adopted and claimed that children from Ukraine were given the "opportunity" to become Russian citizens, and that they would retain their Ukrainian citizenship.⁶⁹ In the same month, the Duma passed laws that render dual-citizenship obsolete (see *Section 3C*).

Though Putin and Lvova-Belova have had the most significant roles and responsibilities for the program, they did not act alone. Officials of the so-called DPR and LPR, United Russia, including parliamentarian Anna Kuznetsova, and the Ministry of Education (MoE) and its minister, Sergei Kravtsov, also bear direct command and control responsibility for the program, including playing key roles in its strategic design, coordination, and execution.

OCCUPATION OFFICIALS

The program, particularly in its initial phase in early 2022, relied significantly on the active involvement of senior officials of the so-called LPR and DPR for its execution. The heads of these pro-Russia regimes, Leonid Pasechnik, Head of the [so-called] LPR, and Denis Pushilin, Head of the [so-called] DPR, were integral accomplices in Russia's efforts to first deport and later nationalize children from Ukraine. Both Pasechnik and Pushilin approved and facilitated legal changes within their respective regime's legal code to synchronize them with Russia.⁷⁰ Additionally, Pasechnik and Pushilin issued decrees on 18 February 2022 ordering the purported "evacuation" of institutions from occupied Ukraine in the days leading up to Russia's full-scale invasion.⁷¹ The decree issued by Pushilin explicitly directed the purported evacuation of orphans and children left without parental care from educational institutions in the so-called DPR.⁷² Both Pasechnik and Pushilin repeatedly met with senior officials of the Russian Federation, including Lvova-Belova, in the months following Russia's full-scale invasion to discuss the ongoing placement of Ukraine's children with citizens of Russia.

Pasechnik, a member of the High Council of United Russia, coordinated with United Russia and Lvova-Belova

to place children from Luhansk oblast for adoption and guardianship with citizens of Russia.⁷³ Pasechnik himself authorized the transfer of at least 104 children from the so-called LPR to Russia's custody.⁷⁴

Similarly, Pushilin worked directly with Lvova-Belova to select 100 children from the so-called DPR for placement with citizens in Russia.⁷⁵ He also met with a delegation from the Government of Russia in July 2022 to establish a shared data bank about children who could be transferred to Russia, though it is unclear if the registry was ever built.⁷⁶ In October 2022, Pushilin directed the transfer of 53 children under the age of five from Donetsk oblast to Russia for placement with citizens of Russia.⁷⁷

In addition to the heads of the so-called LPR and DPR, Lvova-Belova had a critical ally in the so-called DPR government, Eleanora Fedorenko, assisting her as she established the program in 2022. Fedorenko serves in two roles simultaneously: Advisor to Head of the [so-called] DPR and Children's Commissioner of the [so-called] DPR. In March 2022, Fedorenko and the Children's Commissioner of the [so-called] LPR signed a Protocol of Intent with Lvova-Belova to establish coordination on "the protection of rights of orphans and children without parental care" (see *section 3C*).⁷⁸

Fedorenko traveled on at least three occasions with Lvova-Belova to visit the locations where children from the so-called DPR were being fostered within Russia.⁷⁹ In June 2022, Fedorenko wrote a letter to Pushilin requesting changes to so-called DPR policy that expedited the process by which children in the region could be classified as being "without parental care" if their parents were not found within ten days.⁸⁰

The program was a joint undertaking between so-called DPR and LPR officials with the Kremlin from its inception. However, occupation officials received assistance in coordinating with the Kremlin at each stage of the program's development: identification of children for transfer, synchronization of laws and policies, and the physical movement of the children from Ukraine to Russia. This assistance came, in large part, from the majority political party in the Duma, United Russia.

UNITED RUSSIA

United Russia controls the State Duma with 324 of the 450 seats occupied by United Russia members.⁸¹ While Putin is not officially the head of the United Russia party, it is his de facto personal political apparatus.⁸² There is significant overlap between those who played a role in the program and United Russia membership at all levels – including both senior officials and local activists.

United Russia has been involved in the movement of children from occupied areas of Ukraine since at least early 2022. United Russia collaborated with Russia's federal and occupation officials– including Lvova-Belova, the Heads of the [so-called] LPR and DPR, and

Anna Kuznetsova, the Deputy Secretary of the General Council of United Russia and Deputy Chairman of the State Duma— to establish headquarters that facilitated Russia’s program of coerced adoption and fostering.⁸³ In April 2022, United Russia established headquarters in the so-called LPR and DPR to synchronize its policies and laws with the Kremlin and facilitate the placement of children with citizens of Russia.⁸⁴

Kuznetsova is the most prominent Duma member and one of the most senior United Russia party officials linked to the program.⁸⁵ She drafted a ‘treaty’ with the occupied Ukrainian territories to facilitate the placement of children in Russia in her role as the head of the United Russia Commission for the Protection of Motherhood, Childhood and Family Support.⁸⁶ At the start of May 2022, Kuznetsova announced that Russia’s legislation had been synchronized with that of the so-called DPR and LPR to ensure “that orphans from these territories can be adopted in the Russian Federation.”⁸⁷ Kuznetsova has made several public appearances with children from Ukraine brought to Russia.⁸⁸ Prior to her election to the Duma, Kuznetsova was Lvova-Belova’s predecessor as Presidential Commissioner for Children’s Rights of the Russian Federation from September 2016 to September 2021.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Sergei Kravtsov is the head of Russia’s Ministry of Education (MoE) and, like Kuznetsova, a senior United Russia party official, serving as a member of United Russia’s General Council.⁸⁹ The Ministry of Education under Kravtsov has been a central actor for directing and facilitating the placement of children from Ukraine in foster families, overseeing their re-education and institutional housing, and operationally overseeing the child placement databases and their websites. Kravtsov proved to be one of the program’s most vocal and prominent public supporters after Putin and Lvova-Belova, and the MoE played integral roles in both facilitating the children’s movement and operating the databases and websites which presented the children from Ukraine for adoption.

Russia’s Ministry of Education, according to its own officials, prepared “international” agreements allowing the transfer of orphans from the occupied territories in Ukraine to households and institutions inside Russia prior to the illegal annexation of territories occupied by Russia.⁹⁰ State educational and medical institutions under MoE control served as midpoints for children from Ukraine deemed as being without parental care after they entered Russia.⁹¹ Children listed for adoption resided in MoE-operated boarding schools while they were being listed for adoption and fostering.⁹²

The MoE has been arguably the most involved of all of Russia’s federal agencies in the financing and operation of the websites and databases on which children from Ukraine were listed. The MoE itself operates one

of the three databases containing profiles of children from Ukraine – profiles that do not indicate the child’s non-Russian origins.⁹³ The MoE provided PII about children from Ukraine to ANO TsRSP for its website and database, which also lists children from Ukraine for guardianship and adoption.⁹⁴

Vladimir Putin, Maria Lvova-Belova and senior Russian and occupation officials’ actions were essential to implementing their program of coerced adoption and fostering of children from Ukraine. Their efforts to change and introduce new laws to naturalize children from Ukraine was the single most important factor in systematizing this policy.

3C. RUSSIA’S LEGAL AND POLICY CHANGES

The Kremlin’s campaign of adopting and fostering children from Ukraine with citizens of Russia following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has been well-established within the past two years as contravening international humanitarian law, most notably the Geneva Conventions. What is less well-known and understood is that the program would have also been in contravention of multiple elements of the laws of the Russian Federation itself. As mentioned in the previous sections, these laws were still on the books at the time the program commenced in early 2022. This fact is critical to fully comprehend the level of intentional design and coordinated execution required from all levels of Putin’s regime to facilitate the program.

Russia’s officials have stated that Ukraine’s children need Russian citizenship for permanent placement—including guardianship and adoption—with citizens of Russia. While Yale HRL did not identify a law specifically requiring Russian citizenship for adoption and guardianship, Article 165 of Russia’s Family Code stipulates conditions in which children with citizenship of another State can be placed for adoption in Russia.⁹⁵ Russian law states that it is necessary to obtain the consent of both the child’s legal representative and the “competent authority of the State” of which the child is a citizen in order for children be adopted in Russia. Officials repeated claims that Russian citizenship is necessary for “permanent placement” with citizens of Russia demonstrates an apparent attempt to circumvent the federal law requiring consent from authorities in Ukraine.

Following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Russia amended existing federal legislation and introduced new legislation that facilitated its program of coerced adoption and fostering. Russia simplified the process in which children from Ukraine were naturalized as Russian citizens and removed legislative barriers identified by Lvova-Belova and Putin that prevented children from Ukraine from being placed under the guardianship of or adopted by citizens of Russia.

A preceding Presidential Decree issued on 24 April 2019 allowed citizens of Ukraine and “stateless persons permanently residing in the territory of Ukraine” the conferral of Russian citizenship on a “humanitarian” basis.⁹⁶ This decree granted Russian citizenship in a simplified manner within three months of application.⁹⁷ The decree further specified that heads of organizations for orphans and children left without parental care in Ukraine could apply for Russian citizenship on behalf of the children permanently placed in these organizations.⁹⁸ While this decree enabled the simplified provision of Russian citizenship to individuals in Ukraine, there was not yet a specific and systematic process by which children from Ukraine were expeditiously granted Russian citizenship necessary for permanent placement with citizens of Russia as of February 2022.

As a result, Putin and his senior officials faced a significant obstacle in the first half of 2022 to any attempt to systematically “Russify” children from Ukraine taken under Russian custody both in the days leading up to Russia’s full-scale invasion and in the following months. Both occupied territory and domestic laws that existed prior to February 2022 would have to be systematically rewritten if the program were to be given the patina of apparent legality, which is exactly what the Kremlin proceeded to do. The Kremlin’s legal maneuvering, combined with the illegal annexation of occupied Ukrainian territories, resulted in fast-tracked citizenship for children from Ukraine that enabled Putin’s government to claim compliance with Article 165 of Russia’s Family Code by ensuring these children were no longer considered citizens of Ukraine under Russian law.

“Bureaucratic Delays”

Putin and his senior officials telegraphed their intent to deport, nationalize, and rehome children from Ukraine with citizens of Russia by adapting Russia’s policies and laws to facilitate the program. Decrees and legislation addressed three tranches of amendments and additions to current law, including the granting of new powers to the state:

1. A clear process for children from Ukraine to be naturalized in the Russian Federation to enable their adoption and guardianship with families in Russia;
2. A mechanism for the renunciation of citizenship among minors from Ukraine; and
3. Elimination of dual citizenship protections for children who originally held a passport issued by Ukraine.

Lvova-Belova’s own statements confirmed that these legal changes were perceived by Putin as integral to achieving the end goal of placing children from Ukraine with citizens of Russia inside the Russian Federation. At an event in which 24 children from Ukraine were placed with citizens of Russia in Novosibirsk in October 2022, Lvova-Belova stated:

“As far back as March of this year the President of the country defined the task: Children from the LPR, DPR, and other territories in the zone of the special operation must not suffer, must live in families... And it is necessary to help children without any bureaucratic delay in order that they can receive citizenship. For this it was necessary to change the legislation.”⁹⁹

Lvova-Belova’s mention of “bureaucratic delay” refers to the direction she was given by Putin approximately two weeks after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In a bilateral meeting between Putin and Lvova-Belova at the Kremlin on 9 March 2022, Putin explicitly directed Lvova-Belova to quickly resolve legislative delays associated with placing children from Ukraine with citizens of Russia.¹⁰⁰ Putin stated, “These are extraordinary circumstances and, it seems to me, we should think not about bureaucratic delays, but about the interests of children.”¹⁰¹

The 9 March 2022 meeting between Putin and Lvova-Belova established three critical facts. First, Putin exerted direct command-and-control over the design and execution of Russia’s program of coerced adoption and fostering of children from Ukraine since its inception. Second, Putin communicated his strategic intent for Lvova-Belova to oversee systematic changes to Russian law in collaboration with the State Duma.¹⁰² Putin claimed in that meeting she should “make proposals” for addressing legislative barriers, after which he would remove them.¹⁰³ Third, Lvova-Belova told Putin that she had already compiled a register of purported orphans from Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, but legislative changes would be necessary to place them with citizens in the Russian Federation.¹⁰⁴

The first step taken to clear the “bureaucratic delays” was the signing of a Protocol of Intent with occupation officials.¹⁰⁵ This document was signed by Lvova-Belova in her role as Children’s Commissioner of the Russian Federation, along with the Children’s Commissioners of the so-called DPR and LPR, Eleonora Fedorenko and Yulia Nazarenko.¹⁰⁶ Russia recognized the territories of Luhansk and Donetsk as independent states less than one month before this meeting.¹⁰⁷ The goal of the Protocol of Intent was to establish their coordination on “the protection of the rights of orphans and children without parental care.”¹⁰⁸ The Protocol of Intent was signed on 10 March 2022, one day after Putin and Lvova-Belova’s bilateral meeting at the Kremlin.

Putin issued a decree on 30 May 2022 that sought to simplify the provision of Russian citizenship explicitly for purported orphans and children left without parental care from the so-called DPR and LPR.¹⁰⁹ The decree amended Presidential Decree 187, issued on 29 April 2019, on simplifying the provision of Russian citizenship to foreign and stateless persons. The 30 May 2022 decree marked a significant change to previous Russian Federation law by stating that orphans and children

left without parental care only need to be temporarily staying in Russia in order to apply for citizenship—an exemption that did not exist prior to the full-scale invasion in February 2022.¹¹⁰ Echoing the substance of the decree, the Duma worked on a bill to “simplify the registration of orphans” in April 2022.¹¹¹ The document proposed to recognize the municipality in which they were registered before reaching adulthood as their place of residence.¹¹²

Putin issued Decree 951 on 26 December 2022 establishing a process for Ukrainian citizens to renounce their Ukrainian citizenship.¹¹³ This decree allowed citizens of Ukraine present in the Russia-occupied territories of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson who automatically received Russian citizenship after Russia’s illegal annexation in September 2022 to formally renounce their Ukrainian citizenship.¹¹⁴

In addition to the process for the renunciation of Ukrainian citizenship, this decree granted heads of institutions in Russia and guardians with custody of children from Ukraine from the territories listed above the power to apply for Russian citizenship and renounce Ukrainian citizenship on behalf of children under fourteen.¹¹⁵ This decree expanded the scope of the law to include the 148 children from Ukraine identified in this report who were listed in Russia’s child placement databases, all of whom were moved to institutions in Russia.

THE ROLE OF THE DUMA

Russia’s State Duma played an important role in expediting the naturalization of citizens of Ukraine in Russia. The Duma passed a law that made joint renunciation a unilateral act in the eyes of Russia, overcoming the obstacle of the previous requirement for joint renunciation.¹¹⁶ The Duma passed Federal Law 62-FZ on 18 March 2023, three months after Putin’s 26 December 2022 decree. Both the introduction of proxy renunciation for minors and making the renunciation of Ukrainian citizenship a unilateral act exclusively controlled by the Russian Federation further expedites the naturalization of children from Ukraine as citizens of Russia without Ukraine being able to prevent this act.

Under this law, all citizens of Russia who possess Ukrainian citizenship can apply – or have a proxy apply on their behalf in the case of minors– to renounce their Ukrainian citizenship. According to this law, guardians or “authorized representatives” of institutions– including, but not limited to, educational, medical, and social institutions – can apply for renunciation of Ukrainian citizenship on behalf of orphans and children left without parental care.¹¹⁷ Parents could apply for renunciation of citizenship among children under 14 years of age.¹¹⁸

Children between the ages of 14 and 17 are permitted to request to renounce their Ukrainian citizenship without the approval of their Russian Federation appointed

legal guardian.¹¹⁹ Federal Law 62-FZ went into effect on 17 June 2023.¹²⁰ The Duma, in an explanatory note attached to the act, explained that those with both Russian and Ukrainian citizenship are unable to pursue the traditional route of renouncing Ukrainian citizenship due to the ongoing conflict, wherein Ukraine jointly acknowledges the renunciation of dual citizenship.¹²¹

The law stipulates that Russia does not require authorization from Ukrainian officials to approve the renunciation of Ukrainian citizenship and that Ukrainian citizenship is considered legally renounced once citizens submit their renunciation application to Russian authorities.¹²² Moreover, the unilateral renunciation of Ukrainian citizenship may mean that Ukrainian authorities who were not party to, or did not authorize the renunciation of Ukrainian citizenship, may not have received notification of any change and still consider the individual to be a citizen of Ukraine. This law further explicitly prohibits those who apply to Russia unilaterally renouncing their Ukrainian citizenship from utilizing documents certifying or indicating their Ukrainian citizenship.¹²³

On 28 April 2023, the Duma passed Federal Citizenship Law 138-FZ.¹²⁴ The law stated that “a Russian citizen who has dual or multiple citizenship is considered by the Russian Federation only as a citizen of our country, regardless of where he or she lives.”¹²⁵ The stated priority of Federal Citizenship Law 138-FZ is to grant citizenship to those “who live in the country and are able to fully integrate into [Russian] society.”¹²⁶

Russia’s officials have claimed that children from Ukraine retained their previous citizenship, including Ukrainian citizenship, upon receipt of Russian citizenship.¹²⁷ However, even if retained, Federal Citizenship Law 138-FZ would effectively render Ukrainian citizenship invalid within Russia.¹²⁸ Citizens are prohibited from renouncing their own Russian citizenship until they reach the age of eighteen and all obligations to the Russian Federation are fulfilled, including mandatory military conscription for men aged 18-30 years.¹²⁹

Federal Citizenship Law 138-FZ also enshrined certain categories of children as being eligible for Russian citizenship through a simplified process. The law explicitly stated that it applied to children who have been adopted by Russian citizens, children under the guardianship of Russian citizens, or those who are in the custody of a Russian organization for orphans and children left without parental care.¹³⁰

These categories encompass all the children this study has conclusively identified as those deported from Ukraine and placed in the Kremlin’s adoption and fostering program.¹³¹ While the law took an additional six months from when it was signed to come into effect, Yale HRL analysts have documented multiple instances in which Ukraine’s children were placed with citizens of Russia prior to being naturalized as Russian citizens.

Putin issued another Presidential Decree on 4 January 2024. Decree 11, which was issued on 4 January 2024, reverted back to language used in the 2019 decrees by replacing all mentions of the so-called DPR and LPR with “Ukraine.”¹³² The decree allowed all children from Ukraine to be naturalized as citizens of Russia in the same simplified manner established for children from the so-called DPR and LPR.¹³³ The “bureaucratic delays” that deterred both Putin and Lvova-Belova in the first months of the program were now effectively resolved.

3D. THE DATABASES

The operational heart of Russia’s program of coerced adoption and fostering of children from Ukraine are three interconnected databases. For over twenty months, Yale HRL has monitored, archived, and investigated the databases, including collecting granular information about domain names, internet service providers, and the data sharing relationship between the databases. The three databases are:

1. Russia’s Ministry of Education’s “State data bank of orphans and children left without parental care” (hereafter, the “MoE database”);¹³⁴
2. The Center for Development of Social Projects (ANO TsRSP), a non-governmental organization that had previously been funded by the MoE and the Office of the President of the Russian Federation (hereafter, the “ANO TsRSP database”);¹³⁵ and
3. Change One Life (COL), a non-governmental organization led by Yana Leonova, a member of the expert council of the MoE on issues related to the guardianship of unaccompanied children (hereafter, the “COL database”).¹³⁶

The MoE database, per Russia’s Federal Law, has been the federal operator of the “State data bank of orphans and children left without parental care” since 2005.¹³⁷ In this role, the MoE’s database of children is the sole entity in Russia legally responsible for the collection and maintenance of data about these children.¹³⁸ The MoE receives and processes data from regional operators of databases after they first receive it from local guardianship authorities.¹³⁹

A hierarchal and interconnected relationship exists between the three databases, with the MoE’s being the database of record and ANO TsRSP being a secondary database that ingests information from the MoE. Russia’s officials often refer to the ANO TsRSP database as the primary federal adoption database.¹⁴⁰ The two databases have had a common information sharing agreement since at least 2019.¹⁴¹

The COL database serves as a complement to the MoE and ANO TsRSP databases. The COL database has videos and other interactive content. Additional research is required to better understand how this database

is managed. Each of the databases contains profiles that hyperlink to the children’s profiles in the other two databases.

Each database is hosted on open source websites within Russia. These websites contain resources for adoptive and foster parents, contact information of local guardianship authorities within each region, and information about guardianship and adoption within Russia.

The databases categorize children listed for forms of family placement within each region of Russia. The databases can be filtered by region to identify the children available for adoption, guardianship, and/or trusteeship located within the selected region.

At least as early as March 2023, Ukrainian territories illegally annexed by Russia in September 2022 – including the so-called DPR, so-called LPR, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia oblasts – were incorporated into Russia’s federal child placement databases. It is unknown when the four territories were added. It is also unknown if children identified in this report were taken and subsequently listed within regions in Russia prior to the territories within Ukraine being incorporated into the databases.

3E. CONCEALMENT OF THE PROGRAM

Russia has never hidden the overall fact that it has deported children from Ukraine to Russia, nor has it categorically denied that some children have been placed in the custody with citizens of Russia. However, the program has consistently engaged in three categories of activities that have fundamentally served to conceal the number of children in the adoption and fostering program, the individual names and origins of the children, and the transportation routes and current whereabouts of the children who have been processed through the program in the past two and a half years.

First, while Russia’s databases were amended to include the four occupied territories of Ukraine in which children were available for adoption and guardianship, children from Ukraine were listed in Russian oblasts of the database. All 148 children identified in Russia’s databases were listed in Russian oblasts. Yale HRL identified the children’s journeys from their origin point in Ukraine to the midpoints and end facilities to which they were taken in Russia, after which children were listed on Russia’s databases in Russian regions.

Children from Ukraine had already been listed for adoption and guardianship in Russian oblasts approximately five months before Lvova-Belova released a statement on her official website saying children from Ukraine would be placed in Russia’s federal database.¹⁴² Lvova-Belova also claimed that the so-called DPR would be the first region incorporated into Russia’s federal child placement database.¹⁴³ After categories for the

so-called DPR– along with Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, and the so-called LPR– were added to Russia’s databases, Yale HRL only identified children from Ukraine listed for adoption and guardianship within the Russian oblasts rather than the Ukrainian territories.

Additionally, it is unknown if children were ever listed for adoption and/or guardianship within the Ukrainian territories. Yale HRL routinely monitored the Ukrainian territories in these databases over twenty months; at no point were children found by Yale HRL to have been listed for adoption and/or guardianship within the Ukrainian territories on the databases.

Furthermore, Russia failed to acknowledge which children had been taken from Ukraine in the databases and presented them as if they had been born in Russia. This willful failure to identify the children as nationals of Ukraine occurred simultaneously with Russia’s refusal to register the children with the Government of Ukraine or the International Committee of the Red Cross, as mandated by the Geneva Conventions.¹⁴⁴

The second and third broad types of concealment activities included, but were not limited to: 1) Removal of profile data about children—including those from Ukraine– in Russia’s child placement databases; and 2) Removal and obfuscation of open source information relevant to tracking the children’s travel patterns and their whereabouts. The removal of content itself does not prove an effort to conceal the identities of these children per se. However, this activity is highly probative to understanding the degree to which and how Russia intended to conceal the identities of these children, and specifically, their origins in Ukraine.

Open source content has been removed or obfuscated that has probative value to tracking how the children were initially transported from Ukraine and how they were moved within Russia. These materials include articles showing the arrival of the children at boarding schools, specific Telegram content from Lvova-Belova’s social media account talking about a visit to a facility holding children with delegates of the Red Cross, and news reports about children arriving at the midpoint locations.¹⁴⁵ The tail number of planes used to transport the children have also been obscured (see *Section 4*). In at least one case, the personally identifiable information of a child in the database did not match the PII attributed to this child when they were interviewed in Russian media. It is unknown whether this child’s PII had been changed in the databases.

The statements of senior officials about the program, particularly about whether it included the practice of widespread adoption of children from Ukraine, have changed over time. The timing of these changes appears to correlate with international sanctions and law enforcement actions connected to the program. For example, officials claimed that children from Ukraine would be placed in adoption as the priority for placement in the summer of 2022.¹⁴⁶ A few weeks after

Lvova-Belova was sanctioned by the United States in September 2022, she claimed that adoption has never been the priority despite children beginning to be listed on the databases, including specifically for adoption, at that time. By March 2023 Lvova-Belova categorically denied that any ongoing adoption activities of Ukraine’s children were occurring. Following these denials, Russia engaged in increased deceptive practices to conceal their adoption of children from Ukraine. Between June 2023 and August 2024, the profiles of at least four children from Ukraine were changed from being available for guardianship and/or trusteeship to being available for adoption in addition to guardianship and/or trusteeship. Concurrently, Russia’s officials continued to publicly deny any wrongdoing. When asked about the ICC’s arrest warrants in July 2023, Lvova-Belova claimed “Of course, I’m not hiding from anyone. And I have no doubt that we are doing everything right. With every day this confidence grows more and more.... It would seem difficult to create an image of a ‘woman of genocide’ over such simple and understandable things, but the Ukrainian side and Westerners did it.”¹⁴⁷

The ICC indictments in March 2023 led to direct diplomatic consequences for Russia’s Federal Government. In May 2023, South Africa considered changing its laws to allow Putin to attend the BRICS Summit in August despite the ICC warrant.¹⁴⁸ In July 2023, South Africa’s largest political opposition party brought the issue of whether Putin should be allowed to attend BRICS before the High Court in Pretoria.¹⁴⁹ Ultimately, Putin did not attend. At no other point since the full-scale invasion did Putin himself sustain a direct consequence that negatively affected his diplomatic standing amongst his allies. After August 2023, Lvova-Belova and officials in Russia’s Federal Government continued to deny that children from Ukraine are placed for adoption in Russia.

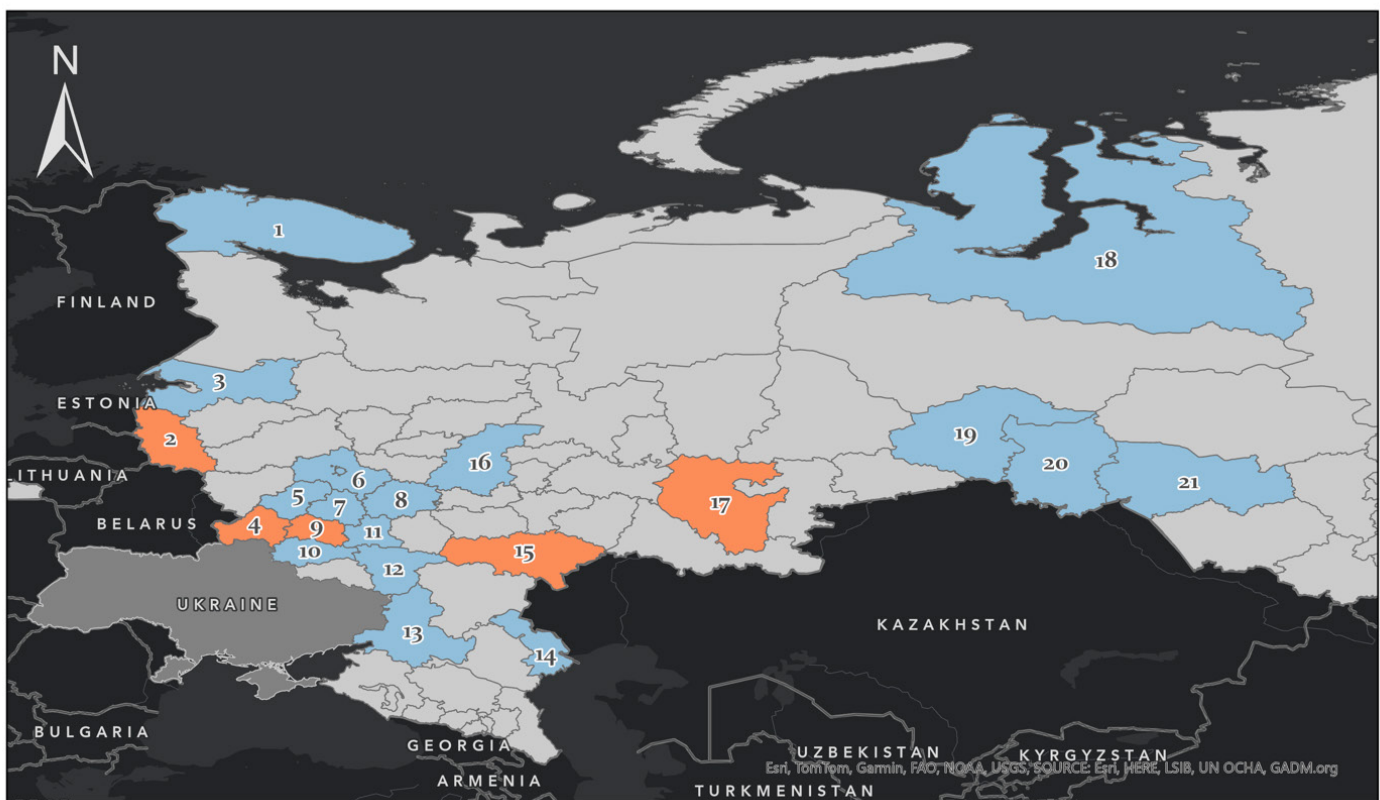
Following international condemnation, Russia’s officials—who originally publicized the guardianship and adoption of children from Ukraine– later claimed that children from Ukraine were solely placed under guardianship. While children may have originally been placed under guardianship with citizens of Russia, this did not preclude children from later being adopted. Russia’s officials developed a system in which guardianship precedes adoption. Russia’s officials claimed that after children were placed for temporary guardianship, children would be adopted.¹⁵⁰ As children were placed under temporary guardianship, legislation was amended that expedited the conferral of Russian citizenship on purported orphans from Ukraine. Children placed under guardianship were then naturalized as Russian citizens, enabling their adoption by citizens of Russia. As described earlier, adoption enables children to be further concealed in Russia’s program of coerced adoption and fostering, as Russia’s federal law authorizes changes in PII among adopted children.¹⁵¹ These changes present significant barriers to identifying the individual children taken from Ukraine and adopted within Russia (see *section 6*).

4. CHILDREN IDENTIFIED IN RUSSIA’S PROGRAM OF COERCED ADOPTION AND FOSTERING

Yale HRL has identified 314 children at high confidence who have been taken from Ukraine and placed with citizens of Russia or listed on Russia’s child placement databases across 21 regions of Russia following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Figure 4.1 depicts where the 314 children identified in this report were taken and placed in Russia’s program: 148 children were taken to at least five regions of Russia and listed on Russia’s child placement databases; 166 children were directly placed with citizens across 16 regions of Russia.

Yale HRL has assessed that the true number of children from Ukraine who have undergone Russia’s program of coerced adoption and fostering is significantly higher than the 314 children identified in this report (see subsection “Russia’s coerced adoption and fostering throughout occupied Ukraine” below). This assessment is based on the existence of multiple other credible reports of children from Ukraine not in this study’s cohort being fostered and adopted in Russia. These reports include investigations on children from Kherson’s baby home as well as children who underwent filtration.¹⁵² Yale HRL believes that some children may have had living relatives in Ukraine when they were taken to Russia and placed with citizens of Russia or placed in Russian institutions and subsequently listed in Russia’s databases. In various interviews with Russian media outlets, citizens of Russia with whom children from Ukraine were placed have claimed that the children’s parents in Ukraine were missing, had been deprived of parental care, had died, or were unable to care for their children.¹⁵³

FIGURE 4.1. GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF PLACEMENTS OF CHILDREN FROM UKRAINE



Forms of Placement of Children from Ukraine	
■	Listed in databases for adoption and/or guardianship
■	Directly placed with citizens of Russia

Figure 4.1 illustrates the Russian regions in which children identified by Yale HR were taken and listed in Russia’s child placement databases or placed with citizens of Russia. There is no apparent overlap between placements of the two groups. Children were transported to and listed in Russia’s databases in the following regions: Pskov (2), Bryansk (4), Orël (9), Saratov (15), and the Republic of Bashkortostan (17). Children were placed with citizens of Russia in the following regions: Murmansk (1), Leningrad (3), Kaluga (5), Moscow (6), Tula (7), Ryazan (8), Kursk (10), Lipetsk (11), Voronezh (12), Rostov (13), Astrakhan (14), Nizhny Novgorod (16), Yamalo-Nenets (18), Tyumen (19), Omsk (20), and Novosibirsk (21).

The following section provides an overview of the children who have undergone Russia's program of coerced adoption and fostering. It includes three primary components:

1. The socio-demographic backgrounds of the children who were taken from Ukraine and placed with citizens of Russia, or placed in institutions and listed on Russia's databases;
2. The children's experiences identified in this report and the associated trends identified in Yale HRL's research on Russia's program of coerced adoption and fostering; and
3. How children were moved through Russia's system of coerced adoption and fostering prior to being placed with citizens of Russia or placed in institutions and listed on Russia's databases.

4A. BACKGROUND OF CHILDREN

MOVEMENT OF CHILDREN FROM UKRAINE TO RUSSIA

Russia targeted purported orphans and children left without parental care for subsequent adoption, guardianship, and/or fostering in Russia. Almost 1,000 children, including those purported to be orphans or left without parental care, were taken to Russia under the guise of "evacuations" in the days leading up to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.¹⁵⁴

Russia's occupation officials directed the mass deportation of children from Ukraine to Russia. On 18 February 2022, the Heads of the [so-called] DPR and [so-called] LPR issued decrees ordering the "evacuation" of educational and social institutions in Ukraine.¹⁵⁵ Children from Ukraine were deported to Russia within hours of the decrees being issued.¹⁵⁶ The Ministry of Education and Science of the [so-called] Donetsk People's Republic facilitated the purported evacuation of 626 children from seven institutions in occupied Donetsk oblast to Rostov and Kursk oblasts in Russia between 18 and 19 February 2022.¹⁵⁷

In May 2022, Lvova-Belova claimed that 1,700 orphans—including 1,200 orphans from boarding schools in the [so-called] DPR and LPR—had been taken to Russia.¹⁵⁸ Yale HRL believes that some of the children identified in this report were likely taken to Russia in the days prior to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine (see *Section 3*).

The heads of institutions in occupied Ukraine prepared the children's documentation and transported the children to facilities in Russia.¹⁵⁹ Russian media claims that the children's teachers in Ukraine also transported the children to Russia, where at least some of them remained at the facilities with the children for up to several months.¹⁶⁰

At least one of the children identified by Yale HRL was part of a group of 31 children taken from basements in Mariupol.¹⁶¹ According to Russian media, the group was purportedly aged between 7 and 17 years old and taken from Mariupol to Donetsk by Russia's Investigative Committee—a federal criminal investigative agency—and then to a boarding house in Russia operated by the Presidential Property Management Department of the Russian Federation.¹⁶² According to independent investigations, the group of 31 children was flown from Rostov oblast to Moscow oblast on a government plane from Putin's Presidential fleet.¹⁶³ In an interview in June 2022, Lvova-Belova stated that these children were "the first in line for adoption."¹⁶⁴ The same month, Lvova-Belova herself took custody of one of these children, a 15-year-old boy from Mariupol.¹⁶⁵ Multiple sources indicate that she subsequently adopted him several months later.¹⁶⁶

Institutions in Ukraine from which children were taken

At least 122 of the 314 children identified by Yale HRL were taken from institutions in Ukraine. Yale HRL has identified two secondary schools in Ukraine from which children identified in this report were taken and placed in Russia's coerced adoption and fostering system. Both institutions are in Donetsk oblast and operate as boarding schools for orphans and children left without parental care.¹⁶⁷

Both of the institutions identified were founded by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Donetsk People's Republic and registered in 2014 following the invasion of the Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts.¹⁶⁸ These institutions were re-registered as Russian institutions—rather than [so-called] DPR institutions—in November 2022, less than two months after Russia's illegal and coercive annexation referendum.¹⁶⁹

Both institutions continued to operate after children were deported in February 2022; students who attended these schools after the initial groups of children were deported in February 2022 were exposed to pro-Russia re-education.¹⁷⁰ The institution directors who had previously taken children to Russia have since returned and have enrolled, or are in the process of enrolling, new students in their institutions.¹⁷¹ One institution was converted to an Investigative Committee cadet corps academy in September 2024. Cadet schools provide traditional academic instruction while also preparing children to serve in the Investigative Committee and aim to "instill ... [in children] a sense of patriotism and readiness to defend the Fatherland" (see *Yale HRL's report on the deportation of children from Ukraine to Belarus on cadet schools*).¹⁷² Yale HRL has assessed that both institutions are active as of 2 October 2024.

The leaked document from the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy of the [so-called] DPR discussed in *Section 3* includes an appendix that identified nine educational institutions and children's centers in Ukraine from which children were taken and moved to Russia,

including the two aforementioned educational institutions identified by Yale HRL (see *Section 3*). Additional research is needed to identify whether children from the seven additional institutions have been placed in Russia's program of coerced adoption and fostering.

Russia's coerced adoption and fostering throughout occupied Ukraine

All children identified in this report were taken from Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. However, Russia's program of coerced adoption and fostering likely extends to additional occupied regions of Ukraine. In May 2022, Russia's officials introduced legislation that enabled heads of institutions in Russia-occupied territories in the so-called LPR/DPR, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson to apply for Russian citizenship on behalf of minors, thus enabling children to be placed with citizens of Russia (see *Section 3C*).¹⁷³

Three months after this legislation passed, Lvova-Belova asserted that she wanted placement of children from Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts with citizens of Russia to become "systematic."¹⁷⁴ In October 2022, Lvova-Belova stated that orphans from Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia oblasts would be placed with citizens of Russia.¹⁷⁵ Media identifying children from occupied¹⁷⁶ Kherson oblast and Kharkiv oblast placed with citizens of Russia corroborates Lvova-Belova's claims and indicates that Russia's program of coerced adoption and fostering extends beyond Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts.¹⁷⁷

LIVING RELATIVES IN UKRAINE

Yale HRL has assessed that some of the children identified in this report may have living relatives in Ukraine.

As previously reported in Yale HRL's February 2023 report on the re-education and adoption of Ukraine's children, some children deemed to be orphans by Russia's authorities may have one or more living parent(s).¹⁷⁸ Prior to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Ukraine's government relayed to the United Nations that the majority of children in Ukrainian institutions and orphanages "are not orphans, have no serious illness or disease, and are in an institution because their families are in difficult circumstances."¹⁷⁹

Some children have parents who were deprived of parental rights. The director of one institution in Ukraine, who transported children from Ukraine to Russia—where they were placed in institutions and later listed on Russia's databases—claimed that some children were deemed "social orphans," including those whose parents had allegedly been deprived of parental rights.¹⁸⁰ Yale HRL could not corroborate individuals deprived of parental rights or the specific circumstances in which parental rights may have been revoked, though another organization has corroborated these details.¹⁸¹

The Republic of Bashkortostan's Minister of Family, Labor and Social Protection, Lenara Ivanova, claimed that an unspecified portion of the 32 children taken from Donetsk oblast to the Republic of Bashkortostan were children whose status was "not defined"; these children had parents who had not been deprived of parental rights.¹⁸² Ivanova claimed that Russia's authorities would search for the children's parents and "go to the court to deprive them of rights" if the parents were in Russia and were "unwilling" to care for the children.¹⁸³ Yale HRL could not confirm specific instances of parents whose children with "status not defined" were formally deprived of their rights via a court of law.

However, Yale HRL identified at least 25 out of the 32 children brought from Donetsk oblast to the Republic of Bashkortostan, including 14 children whose database profiles stipulated that at least one parent had been restricted or deprived of parental rights. Three additional profiles claimed that guardianship and trusteeship authorities had removed the child from their maternal guardians. Yale HRL was unable to determine whether any of the 25 children identified previously had a status of "not defined" in which parental rights were later revoked.

Someone who identified themselves as the grandmother of a child at that institution inquired where children deported from an institution in Ukraine had been taken in Russia, further suggesting some of these children may have had living relatives in Ukraine. In July 2022, she posted on the VK page of one of the institutions in Ukraine from which children were deported and asked where the children were located.¹⁸⁴ At least 21 children deported from this institution were later identified on Russia's databases.

Yale HRL has not determined how many children identified in this report may have had living relatives in Ukraine when they were placed with citizens of Russia or listed in Russia's databases.

DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

Age

The children identified in this report ranged in age between two and 17 years at the time they were taken to Russia, with the average age of children listed in Russia's databases or placed with citizens of Russia being approximately eleven years. Russia's databases listed the child's age or year of birth; Yale HRL relied on open source data to determine the age of children placed directly with citizens of Russia. Among the 314 children identified, as many as eighteen children will reach the age of majority by the end of 2024 and therefore may age out of Russia's program of adoption and fostering. As children age out this system, they may become eligible for conscription or to enlist with Russia's security services.

Russia's databases contains a profile each child, detailing their personally identifiable information and demographic data. The following section details the aggregated demographic data of the 148 children assessed to be from Ukraine who were listed in Russia's databases. Yale HRL was unable to collect comparable data for the 166 children placed with citizens of Russia; those 166 were therefore excluded from the following analysis. Figure 4.2 below represents the demographic data described below as well as additional information related to citizenship status and origin.

Gender

The dataset of children listed skews slightly male (59.5%). Except for one case in which gender of the child is unknown, Yale HRL identified 60 girls and 87 boys on Russia's databases.

Sibling Status

Approximately half (46.6%) of the children identified in Russia's Change One Life database are stated to have siblings according to their profiles; HRL identified these siblings in the database. Yale HRL was unable to assess the sibling status of 14 individual children who did not have Change One Life profiles.

Yale HRL has identified at least one instance in which siblings appeared to have been separated from each other. Four purported siblings who were taken to the same boarding school in Russia and listed on Russia's databases appear to have been separated after the youngest three siblings were placed with citizens of Russia while the eldest sibling (age 15 at the time) remained in the state-run institution.¹⁸⁵ This reporting is consistent with information reflected on Russia's databases: as of 21 August 2024, the profiles of the three

FIGURE 4.2. DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN OF CHILDREN IDENTIFIED IN THIS STUDY

	Children identified in databases	Children placed with citizens of Russia	Total
Number of children	148 (47.1%)	166 (52.8%)	314
Number of regions to which children were taken	5	16	21
Naturalized as Russian citizens	10	57	67
Age range	4-16	2-17	2-17
Number of children taken from an institution in Ukraine	86	36	122
Stated to have siblings	69	-	-
Forms of Placement	-	-	-
Adoption, Guardianship, Trusteeship	99	-	-
Adoption, Guardianship	26	-	-
Guardianship, Trusteeship	15	-	-
Guardianship	7	-	-
Health Group*	-	-	-
Group 1	9	-	-
Group 2	96	-	-
Group 3	33	-	-
Group 4	4	-	-
Group 5	5	-	-

Figure 4.2. depicts the demographic breakdown of children taken from Ukraine and listed in Russia's databases or placed with citizens of Russia.

*Yale HRL was unable to identify the health group and forms of placement of one child listed in Russia's databases.

younger siblings stated that they had been placed with citizens of Russia, while the profile of the oldest sibling indicated that she was still located at the boarding school and stated that she was available for adoption and guardianship.¹⁸⁶

Yale HRL has identified at least two accounts of sibling separation among children not identified in this report. Siblings from Kharkiv were taken to Russia by Russia's military, after which the younger sibling was placed with citizens of Russia without his older sister.¹⁸⁷ Another child who was transported alongside children from Ukraine later identified in Russia's databases reported that he and his brother had been taken to separate institutions in Russia, despite the child being under the impression that they would be taken to the same location in Russia.¹⁸⁸ Yale HRL was unable to determine what happened to the separated siblings described in both cases; they could not be identified in Russia's databases and their locations remain unknown. Yale HRL was unable to determine the extent to which siblings may have been separated through Russia's program of coerced adoption and fostering.

Family form of placement

The profiles of children listed on Russia's databases specify the forms of placements for which children are eligible: adoption, guardianship, and/or trusteeship (see *Section 3 for definitions on the forms of placement*).

The vast majority of children (84.4%) assessed to be from Ukraine and identified on Russia's databases were listed for adoption, including 66.8% of children who were listed for "adoption, guardianship, and trusteeship" and 17.5% of children who were listed for "adoption and guardianship."

Health Status

Approximately 64.9% of children identified in Russia's databases were assessed by health professionals in Russia to be "practically healthy" children, including children who may currently have or have had health issues that do not interfere with the child's ability to "work or study."¹⁸⁹ These health officials are directed by Russia's Ministry of Health, which mandates that all children aged three to 17 are assigned a numerical health group that describes the child's general state of health.¹⁹⁰ According to language analysts at Yale HRL, health groups described by Russia's Ministry of Health range from Group 1 (child with no persisting health issues or additional support needs) to Group 5 (disabled child with extensive additional support needs) (see *Annex I for Russia's Ministry of Health's official categorization of each health group*).¹⁹¹ Russia's Change One Life database claims that local pediatricians or doctors affiliated with children's institutions assign each child a health group, which is then listed in each child's profile across all three of Russia's child placement databases identified in this report.¹⁹²

Purported Reason for Lack of Parental Care

Children's profiles on Russia's ANO TsRSP and Ministry of Education databases include the stated reasons for "lack of maternal and paternal care of the child," respectively. Approximately two thirds (66.2%) of children identified in Russia's databases reportedly had at least one parent whose parental rights were revoked or restricted by a court of law.

4B. EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN

COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCES

Yale HRL concluded that Russia's federal government targeted highly vulnerable children from conflict zones in Ukraine for their systematic and widespread program of coerced adoption and fostering. Russia's deportation, adoption, and fostering of children from Ukraine— and their concealment of this system— is embedded in the Kremlin's documented effort to erase cultural and national identity amongst children from Ukraine.

At least three children identified in this investigation have been placed with the families of Russia's officials or Russia's military forces. Sergey*—taken from a Donetsk institution in 2022— was listed on Russia's databases starting in November 2022. A little over a year later, Sergey was placed with the family of a Russian soldier.

Midpoints played an essential role in the experiences of children taken from Ukraine to Russia. Some children were deported to midpoints approximately three hours after employees in Ukraine's boarding schools had been directed to transport the children to Russia, accompanied by local occupation authorities and Russia's border guards.¹⁹³

Masha* was taken from an orphanage in Luhansk and placed with citizens of Russia in October 2022. They reported that Masha is bereft at having been separated from her friends and now prefers to be left alone.

At least some of the children who were part of this rapid transfer were not told they were being deported to Russia for subsequent placement in Russian institutions and with citizens of Russia; instead they were told that they were going on an "adventure" or "excursion."¹⁹⁴ Russian media reports also indicate that children had been taken in the middle of the night and transported to one midpoint in Rostov oblast, where they were guarded by as many as five agencies among Russia's security and military forces.¹⁹⁵ More than 500 children from Ukraine—including those later found listed in Russia's databases—taken to this Rostov midpoint were

guarded by multiple agencies, including the non-departmental security of the Russian Guard, a local police squad, Cossacks, the Ministry of Emergency Situations, and border guards.¹⁹⁶

Vika* stated that she did not want to be placed with a citizens of Russia but believed that if she refused, her younger siblings would be separated from her and placed in a boarding school.

Once they arrived at midpoints in Russia, the children then underwent medical and psychological examinations in what the official website of the Kremlin described as “preparation” for the children’s placement with citizens of Russia.¹⁹⁷ Some of the children were then taken to a military airfield in Russia— including those transported on Russia’s Ministry of Defense aircraft—where they were subsequently placed with citizens of Russia.¹⁹⁸ In at least one instance in July 2022, citizens of Russia met the children from Ukraine placed in their custody at the military airfield where they arrived.¹⁹⁹

According to Lyubov’s* foster parent, Lyubov only learned that she had been permanently placed with a citizens of Russia after her arrival in their home. She had thought that she would be returned to Ukraine after she temporarily stayed with citizens of Russia and was shocked to find out that she would be living with them until she came of age.

Children placed in institutions and subsequently listed on Russia’s databases underwent pro-Russia re-education at these institutions.²⁰⁰ Children were also recruited by Russia’s Investigative Committee for cadet schools and exposed to militaristic propaganda, where they were lectured on Russia’s army and assembled weaponry (see the “re-education” subsection below).²⁰¹

These activities, particularly re-education, are a part of the Kremlin’s systematic effort to “Russify” children from Ukraine.

Individual accounts

Yale HRL identified individual accounts of children taken from Ukraine placed in Russia’s program of coerced adoption and fostering. The experiences documented below were identified in interviews with the children

Figure 4.3. Pull quotes with experiences of children identified in Russia’s program of coerced adoption and fostering

*All children described have had their names changed to protect their identities. Yale HRL was unable to corroborate the individual accounts of children from Ukraine placed with citizens of Russia.

and/or the citizens of Russia with whom they were placed. All interviews were identified in Russia’s open source media.

According to various interviews, multiple children expressed feelings of isolation. Additionally, Yale HRL documented at least three accounts in which children appeared unaware that they were being permanently placed with citizens of Russia or felt coerced into being placed with citizens of Russia.

Gleb* was taken alongside 233 other children from a boarding school in Donetsk in February 2022 and placed with a citizens of Russia. According to Gleb, he was told that his placement would be temporary. Gleb also said that he used to dream of returning to Ukraine; when asked [by his foster parent] about returning to Ukraine now, he shrugged and stated that he does not have anyone to return to.

KEY TRENDS

Yale HRL identified three primary trends among children in Russia’s program of coerced adoption and fostering: 1) children were systematically naturalized as Russian citizens; 2) children underwent medical and psychological assessments upon arrival in Russia; and 3) children were exposed to pro-Russia re-education.

NATURALIZATION

The naturalization of children from Ukraine is the cornerstone of Russia’s program of coerced adoption and fostering; this systematic effort enables children to be permanently placed with citizens of Russia.

Yale HRL assessed that it is highly likely that most—if not all—children identified in this report have been naturalized as Russian citizens. As discussed in the previous section, Putin’s government needed to naturalize Ukraine’s children as Russian citizens to facilitate their program of adoption and fostering. Additionally, Lvova-Belova stated that children must have Russian citizenship in order to be placed for guardianship and adoption with citizens of Russia.²⁰² Lvova-Belova also claimed that Russian citizenship allowed the children’s placement with citizens of Russia to become “permanent.”²⁰³ In October 2023, Lvova-Belova stated that all children from Ukraine placed in foster care had been naturalized as Russian citizens.²⁰⁴

Putin and Lvova-Belova, among others, amended federal citizenship laws with the explicit intent of placing children from Ukraine with citizens of Russia (see Section 3C).²⁰⁵ According to the official website of the Kremlin, Lvova-Belova recommended procedures for simultaneously naturalizing purported orphans as Russian citizens with the submission of documents to transfer

them to Russia.²⁰⁶ Three months later, Lvova-Belova asserted that children from Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts received “immediate” citizenship upon being taken to Russia.²⁰⁷

At least 67 (21.3%) of the children identified in this investigation were confirmed to have been naturalized as citizens of Russia, including 6.8% of those on Russia’s databases and 34.3% of children placed with citizens of Russia. Yale HRL identified at least 13 of the 314 children in this report being presented with Russian domestic passports, which are issued only to Russian citizens. The ceremonial presentation of a Russian citizen’s first internal passport—which is used for domestic affairs and access to government programs and not for international travel—is customary when a Russian child turns 14 years of age.²⁰⁸

In addition to being required for permanent placement with citizens of Russia, Russian citizenship is also necessary for access to higher education, medical care, and what is referred to as “rehabilitation” and “health-improving recreation.”²⁰⁹ Yale HRL identified at least one account in which a child from Ukraine placed with citizens of Russia was unable to access medical treatment until he was naturalized as a Russian citizen.²¹⁰

MEDICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS

Children underwent medical and psychological examinations at the hands of Russia’s medical professionals, who also facilitated the placement of children from Ukraine with citizens of Russia. According to the Kremlin, doctors and psychologists conducted medical examinations and psychological assessments of children deported from Ukraine to “prepare” children for being placed with citizens of Russia.²¹¹

Children taken to midpoints in Russia underwent medical examinations by medical professionals from a nearby hospital and were asked about their former health history, including the presence of illnesses.²¹² As previously established, doctors assigned each child later listed in Russia’s databases a “health group”—a five-tier numerical score that reflects the absence or extent of health issues associated with each child (see *Annex I for Russia’s Ministry of Health’s official categorization of each health group*). Yale HRL has not verified whether children directly placed with citizens of Russia without first being listed on the databases were assigned health groups.

Russia’s federal government facilitated the involvement of psychologists in Russia’s program of coerced adoption and fostering. On 1 June 2022, Lvova-Belova claimed that all children must undergo psychological rehabilitation before being placed with citizens of Russia.²¹³ Approximately eight months later, Russia’s Investigative Committee stated that “psychological assistance” had been provided at temporary accommodation centers.²¹⁴

Federal guidance issued on 22 February 2022 by Russia’s Ministry of Education promulgates that educational psychologists working with children located at “temporary accommodation centers” should “not support politicization and discussions about the reasons for what is happening at this stage.”²¹⁵ The document also recommends “a corrective psychological tool” (корректирующий психологический инструмент) to work with child and adolescent anxiety “in a situation of forced stay.”²¹⁶ This document explicitly acknowledges that these children were: a) not permitted to leave Russia (“in a situation of forced stay”), b) experiencing psychological distress, c) undergoing treatment by Russia’s health professionals with direct support from Russia’s government, and that each of the above conditions was known to the Russian government at the time. The document illustrates how Russia’s federal government orchestrated the involvement of medical professionals in their system of coerced adoption and fostering.²¹⁷

Psychologists showed introductory videos of potential families in Russia to children taken from Ukraine since at least September 2022, organized online meetings between the children and potential foster families, and engaged with children to identify—supposedly jointly—citizens in Russia with which the children would be placed.²¹⁸ Psychologists also issued necessary documents for transferring the children to Russia, carried out diagnostic testing of an unknown nature on children ahead of their placement, and accompanied children for their placement with citizens of Russia.²¹⁹

Yale HRL is unable to provide information about the psychologists’ credentials or the medical necessity of the examinations conducted at this time.

RE-EDUCATION

Russia’s program of coerced adoption and fostering serves as an integral vehicle for the “Russification” of children from Ukraine by subjecting them to systematic re-education. Yale HRL documented re-education, including pro-state and militarized propaganda, in all eight (100.0%) facilities to which children from Ukraine were transferred and subsequently listed on Russia’s databases. Yale HRL’s February 2023 report documenting Russia’s widespread re-education of children from Ukraine defined re-education as the promotion of cultural, historical, societal, and patriotic messages or ideas that serve the political interest of the State.²²⁰

In recent years, Russia’s Ministry of Education has increasingly introduced initiatives in Russia’s education system to mandate pro-State narratives, including skewed or false narratives legitimizing Russia’s war in Ukraine.²²¹ Children integrated into Russia’s educational system are consistently exposed to re-education, including narratives criticizing Ukraine’s right to independence and justifying Russia’s actions in Ukraine, as well as curricula and events glorifying Russia.²²²

Children identified in this report attended events celebrating Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and lectures establishing the annexation of Crimea as "[their] common heritage and the most important factor in stability in the region and the country."²²³ Another institution held an event dedicated to "ideological and patriotic education in modern conditions" that taught children about figures deemed heroes throughout Russia.²²⁴

One state-run institution dedicated a week to "form in children ideas about our Motherland, its heroic past," where children attended lectures about Russia's history. At the end of the week, the institution concluded that "the children came to the realization that in order for peace and friendship to always exist, there should be no quarrels and grievances. We must be friendly from childhood, respect, take care of each other, because we are the children of one mother, our common homeland – Russia."²²⁵

Children were exposed to various pro-Russia events by Russia's officials. One institution commemorated Russia's illegal annexations of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson, during which regional officials from Russia's Ministry of Internal Affairs, Emergency Situations, and the FSB hosted a soccer tournament with children from Ukraine who had been taken to the institution and then listed on Russia's databases.²²⁶

Children were subjected to military education in at least five of the eight institutions identified above. While Yale HRL documented that a portion of the children identified in this report were exposed to military education on at least seven separate occurrences, analysts have assessed that the frequency of these events is likely much higher. One of the most notable events was organized by an institution in the Republic of Bashkortostan that aimed:

1. To expand children's understanding of the army, branches of the armed forces, and defenders of the Fatherland. To introduce children to military equipment.
2. To cultivate love for the Motherland, feelings of pride in their army. To cultivate a desire to be like strong Russian soldiers.
3. To develop memory and imagination."²²⁷

Children in several other institutions in Bryansk oblast and the Republic of Bashkortostan underwent so-called "military-patriotic" activities in which children dressed in military uniforms and gas masks, assembled machine guns, and engaged in activities aimed to mimic life in the military.²²⁸ One of these events appears to have been part of a month-long initiative called "Military duty-honor and destiny" and described by the institution as "military-patriotic" education.²²⁹ Yale HRL is unable to confirm whether the weapons children handled were weapons or replicas. It is unknown what safety protocols were followed.

Russia's federal officials, including military and security forces, routinely visited children taken to Russia and listed on Russia's databases and tried to enlist them in Russia's security services. Russia's Investigative Committee attempted to recruit children from Ukraine deported to Russia to their cadet schools and informed them of the admissions "quota" for orphans and children left without parental care.²³⁰ In March 2023, Russia's Investigative Committee stated that many children from Ukraine—including those purported to be orphans—were already enrolled in cadet schools.²³¹

Yale HRL was unable to confirm whether any of the children identified in this report were enrolled in cadet schools or whether any children enrolled in cadet schools underwent Russia's broader program of coerced adoption and fostering. Military recruiters also visited an institution in Saratov oblast to which children from Ukraine were taken to and listed on Russia's databases, and lectured children about "the importance of preparing for military service."²³² It is unknown whether children from Ukraine were present at this event.

4C. LOGISTICS OF HOW CHILDREN MOVE THROUGH THE PROGRAM

Russia’s illegal 2022 annexation of Ukrainian territories marked a shift in its program of coerced adoption and fostering of children from Ukraine. The children identified in this report can be grouped into two types:

1. Those placed directly with citizens of Russia, which largely occurred prior to the illegal referendum. Yale HRL did not identify these children in databases prior to their placement with citizens of Russia.
2. Those placed in institutions and subsequently listed in Russia’s child placement databases, a process that Yale HRL assessed to have begun after September 2022. (See Section 3 on the strategic shift in Russia’s program of coerced adoption and fostering).

Yale HRL assessed that at least some children identified

FIGURE 4.4. CHILDREN’S MOVEMENT THROUGH THE PROGRAM

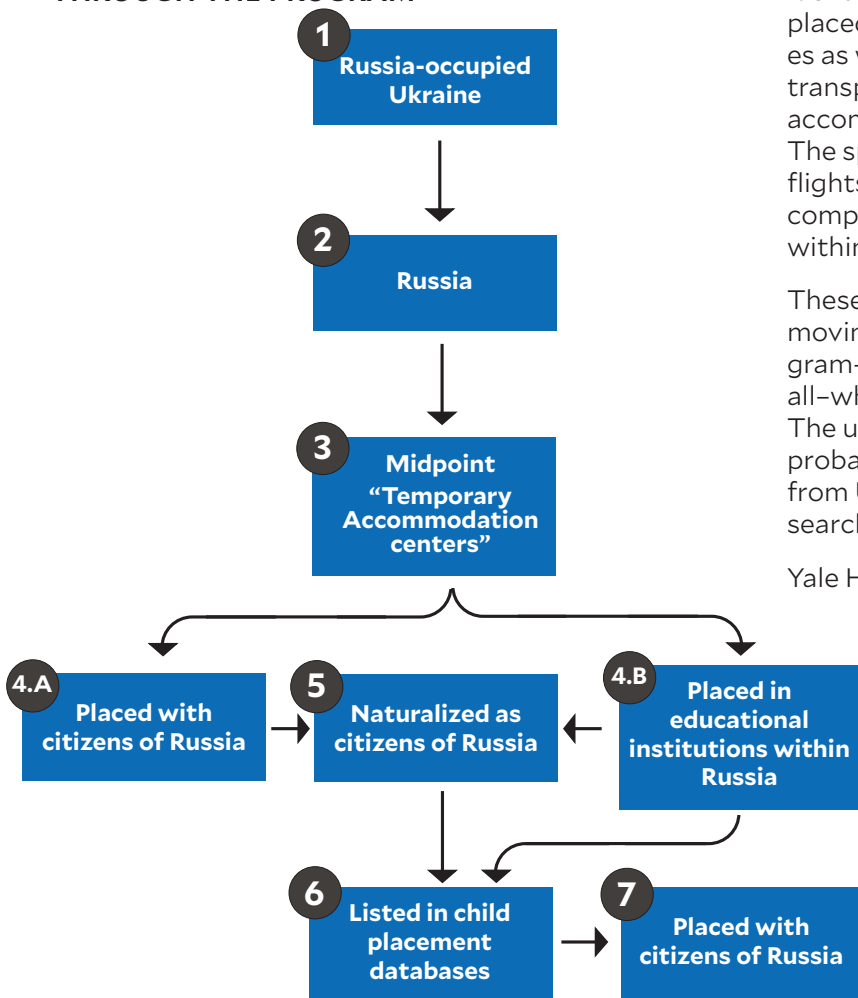


Figure 4.4. depicts the overall journey by which many children identified in this report were taken from Ukraine to Russia and subsequently naturalized as Russian citizens. The figure is not representative of all journeys among children identified in this report.

in these two groups were initially deported from Russia to a midpoint in Kursk oblast together, after which they were separated and taken to various regions throughout Russia where they were either directly placed with citizens of Russia or placed in institutions and listed in Russia’s child placement databases. Yale HRL was unable to identify a meaningful difference between the demographic profiles of children directly placed with citizens of Russia and those listed in Russia’s databases. It is unknown why some children were directly placed with citizens of Russia while others were placed in institutions and listed on Russia’s child placement databases. Figure 4.4 illustrates how these two groups of children moved through Russia’s program of coerced adoption and fostering.

TRANSPORTATION OF CHILDREN USING MILITARY AND GOVERNMENT ASSETS

Using satellite imagery and open source information, Yale HRL confirmed that children from Ukraine, including some children identified in this report, were transported using government assets. In all instances identified, children were transported prior to being placed with citizens of Russia. Russia’s Aerospace Forces as well as Putin’s administration orchestrated these transports. Lvova-Belova facilitated and, in some cases, accompanied children from Ukraine on these flights. The specific military unit which operated some of the flights has prior connections to Russia’s private military company Wagner PMC.²³³ All flights identified occurred within Russia between May and October 2022.

These modes of transport are not commonly used for moving children in Russia’s fostering and adoption program—or generally for moving children within Russia at all—which may connect these children to armed conflict. The use of government assets for these transports is probative of Putin’s intent and awareness that children from Ukraine were moved within Russia. Future research should investigate these transportation units.

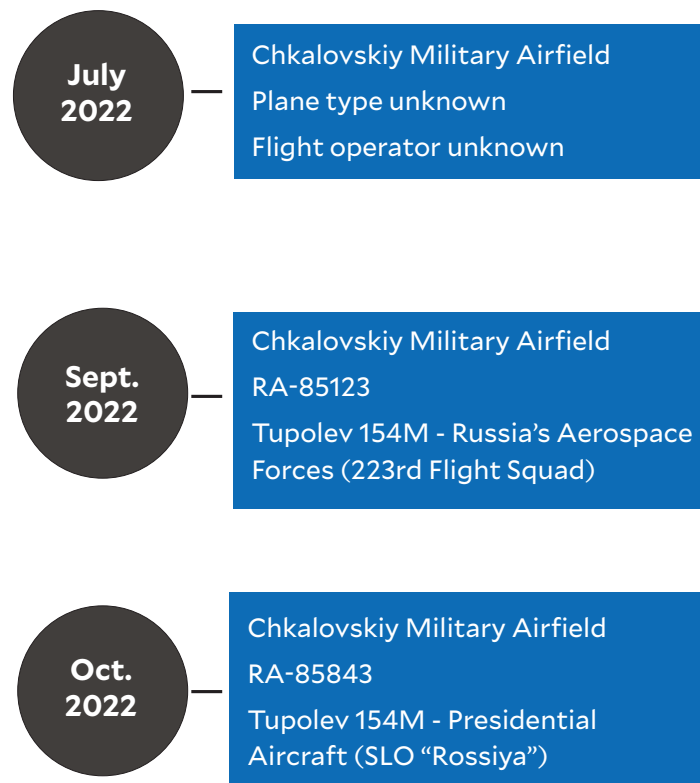
Yale HRL corroborated that Chkalovskiy military airfield was active between 11 and 21 July 2022 consistent with open source reports of the children’s arrival. Satellite imagery corroborated the active status of the airfields and was used to identify the type of aircraft present at the airfields. It also identified the possible time and departure location of the May 2022 Presidential flight carrying children from Ukraine from Rostov to Moscow.

Russia's Aerospace Forces and Chkalovskiy Airfield

Some of the children identified in this report were transported from an unknown location within Russia to the Chkalovskiy military airfield in Moscow oblast on 14 July 2022.²³⁴ Russia's Aerospace Forces transported children to this airfield, which is several miles north of Moscow city, on at least two instances in 2022.²³⁵ Low-resolution satellite imagery depicts an aircraft consistent with the shape of a TU-154M or IL-76 at the Chkalovskiy military airfield between 11 July 2022– approximately three days prior to the arrival of children from Ukraine– and 21 July 2022. This confirms that the airfield was active in the timeframe children were reported to have arrived at the airfield. The type of plane on which children were transported is unknown.

The official website of the Kremlin stated that Lvova-Belova visited the so-called DPR between 12-14 July 2022, after which she transported 13 purported orphans from institutions in Donetsk city, Shakhtarsk, and Makiivka on her return flight to Russia.²³⁶ Lvova-Belova then joined 19 children from Ukraine who had previously been taken from Ukraine to Rostov-on-Don and stated that [her] recent trip to the Russia-occupied territories aimed to bring children from social institutions in the so-called DPR to Russia.²³⁷ Yale HRL has determined that the two respective groups of 13 and 19 children

FIGURE 4.5. TIMELINE OF ARRIVALS OF CHILDREN FROM UKRAINE TO THE CHKALOVSKIY MILITARY AIRFIELD IN MOSCOW OBLAST



from Ukraine were likely among those transported to the Chkalovskiy military airfield on 14 July 2022.

Military transport: Tupolev Tu-154M

Sources claim that children Russia purports to be orphans from Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts were transported via Russian Aerospace Forces to the Chkalovskiy military airfield in Moscow oblast in September and October 2022.²³⁸ Multiple sources– including the Kremlin's official website– show children arriving on a Tupolev Tu-154M (NATO designation "Careless"²³⁹) transport plane on at least two occasions: 16 September 2022 and 7 October 2022.²⁴⁰ Lvova-Belova facilitated the transfer of children from Ukraine to Russia on these flights.²⁴¹

Within Russia, the Tupolev Tu-154 aircraft has been primarily used by Russia's military forces (including Russia's Aerospace Forces and Navy) as well as Russia's government entities (including Russia's Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Administration of the President) since October 2020.²⁴²

Transport Unit: 223rd Flight Squad of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation

Children taken to the Chkalovskiy military airfield on 16 September 2022 were later identified by analysts to have been placed with citizens of Russia in Nizhny Novgorod oblast, which confirms that their transportation was followed by their placement into custody. Seventy-seven children were transported from Rostov-on-Don to the Chkalovskiy military airfield on a plane with tail number RA-85123.²⁴³ According to the official website of the Kremlin, these children– alongside 23 children transported via train– represented 100 children from Donetsk oblast taken to Rostov and Kursk oblasts for placement with citizens of Russia.²⁴⁴

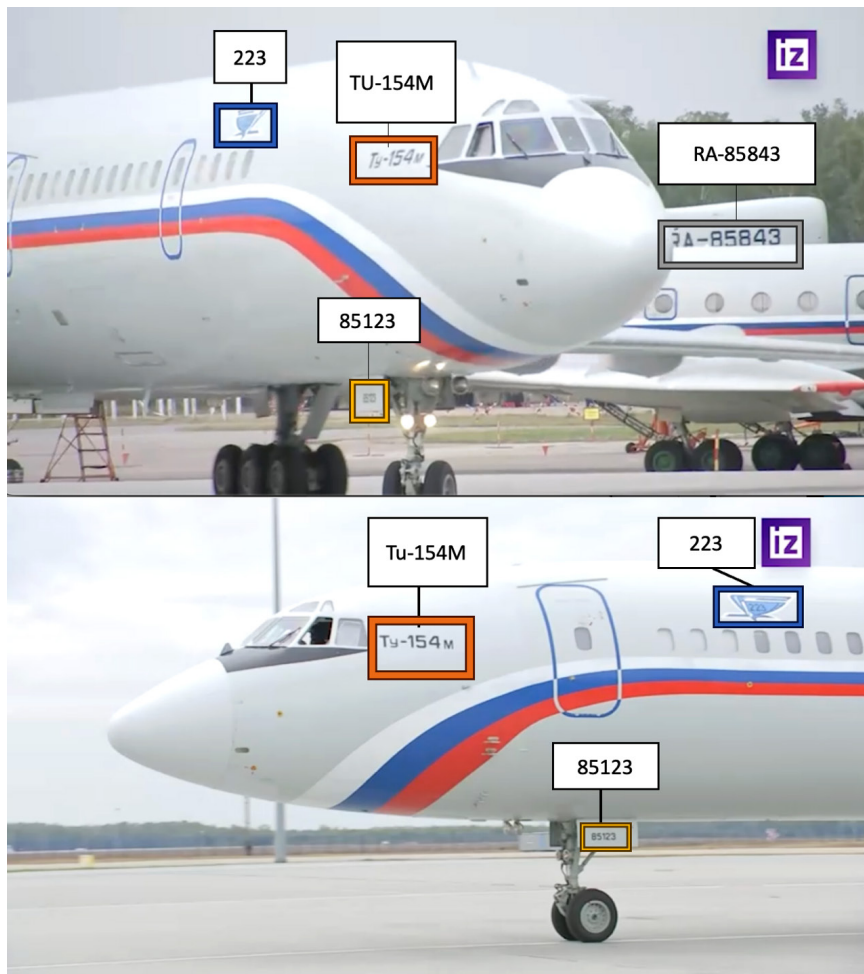
According to crowd-sourced typing of Russian planes, RA-85123 is a TU-154M operated by the 223rd Flight Squad of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation.²⁴⁵ Yale HRL triangulated this information with flight tracking data and reporting depicting the 223rd Flight Squad logo and the flight's tail number to confirm that this flight was operated by Russia's Ministry of Defense.²⁴⁶ This unit is part of the Russian Aerospace Forces and directly reports to Russia's Ministry of Defense and operates on transportation licenses to conduct "irregular (charter) transportation" according to the Federal Air Transport Agency (Rosaviatsiya).²⁴⁷ The 223rd Flight Squad of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation became a US-sanctioned entity in July 2024 for their reported connection to Russian Private Military Company Wagner by the United States Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control's Special Designated National's List (SDN).²⁴⁸

Open sources depicted two aircraft in addition to RA-85123 present at the Chkalovskiy military airfield on 16 September 2022, including a Tu-154M plane with tail number RA-85843 that was used to transport children

from Ukraine on 7 October 2022.²⁴⁹ An aircraft with tail number RA-86555 was identified contemporaneous to the arrival of children from Ukraine on plane number RA-85123.²⁵⁰ Multiple sources, corroborated by flight tracking data, designate this aircraft as an Ilyushin Il-62M (NATO designation “Classic”) plane.²⁵¹ It is unknown whether this second aircraft was used to transport children from Ukraine or played a role in Russia’s coerced adoption and fostering program.

At least three other groups of children from Ukraine whom Russia purports to be orphans were taken to Moscow oblast on aircraft belonging to Russia’s Ministry of Defense and President Putin’s administration in October 2022. At least one of these groups was taken to the Chkalovskiy military airfield at the same time.

FIG 4.6. TRANSPORTATION OF UKRAINE’S CHILDREN TO MOSCOW OBLAST



Screenshots from a video published in September 2022 of the two flights that transported children from Ukraine to Chkalovskiy Airfield in September and October 2022. The first image depicts RA-85123 (yellow) and RA-85843 (grey) next to each other in September 2022. RA-85123 is a TU-154M (orange) that belongs to the 223rd Flight Squad of Russia’s Aerospace Forces (blue).

According to the official website of the Kremlin, 234 purported orphans from Ukraine were transported to Moscow via Ministry of Defense planes within the first week of October 2022, where they were placed with citizens of Russia.²⁵² Previous media reports stated that 234 orphans were taken from a boarding school in Donetsk oblast– one of the two institutions identified by Yale HRL from which children were taken and listed on Russia’s databases– to midpoints in Kursk oblast in February 2022.²⁵³

Yale HRL finds it highly likely that at least some of the 234 children– if not all– were among the 234 children taken to Moscow oblast in October 2022. According to the official website of the Kremlin, some of the 234 children transported to Moscow oblast in October 2022 had previously been taken to ‘temporary accommodation centers’ in Rostov and Kursk oblasts. These children were then placed in institutions in Russia upon being taken to Moscow oblast.²⁵⁴ Yale HRL identified children from Ukraine– all of whom had been placed in institutions in Russia– who had been listed in Russia’s databases as early as October 2022. Yale HRL has not yet confirmed whether any of the 314 children identified in this report were among the 234 children taken to Moscow oblast in October 2022.

SLO “Rossiya”: Presidential planes used to transport Ukraine’s children

At least two groups of children placed in Russia’s program of coerced adoption and fostering were transported on aircraft managed by the Presidential Property Management Department within the Presidential Administration in May and October 2022, respectively. Putin’s own administration provided the resources to transport children from Ukraine prior to placing them with citizens of Russia.

One of the three groups of children transported to the Chkalovskiy military airfield in October 2022 were transported via presidential plane. According to the official website of the Kremlin, 53 purported orphans from three children’s institutions in Donetsk were transported to the Chkalovskiy military airfield to be placed with citizens of Russia. Lvova-Belova and Moscow governor Andrey Vorobyëv facilitated the transfer of these children–all aged 5 years and below– to Russia.²⁵⁵ Yale HRL identified that children were transported on a plane with tail number RA-85843 on 7 October 2022.²⁵⁶ It is unknown whether the children in this transport were among the 314 children identified in this report.

While the official website of the Kremlin claims that children were transported via Russia’s Aerospace

Forces on a Ministry of Defense aircraft, flight tracking data shows that the October 2022 flight was operated by Russia's Federal Budgetary Institution "Special Flight Squad "Russia" (hereafter referred to as SLO "Rossiya"), which reports to the Presidential Property Management Department of the Russian Federation.²⁵⁷

The official website of Putin's administration claims that SLO "Rossiya" provides air transportation services for Putin and members of Russia's government, acting as the Presidential air transportation fleet.²⁵⁸ According to Russia's Federal Air Transport Agency (Rosaviatsiya), SLO "Rossiya" operates under licenses to conduct "irregular (charter) transportation."²⁵⁹ The Administrative Department of the Presidency, its parent organization, is directed by Putin's chief of staff, Aleksandr Sergeevich Kolpakov.²⁶⁰ SLO "Rossiya" operated under at least 47 contracts worth RUB 114,205, 012 over an unknown period,²⁶¹ including at least one contract with the 223rd Flight Squad worth RUB 4,880,130.²⁶²

At least one of the children identified in this report was transported via aircraft operated by SLO "Rossiya" in May 2022. According to independent investigations, 31 children taken from basements in Mariupol were transported by bus to Rostov-on-Don on 26 May 2022, where they were subsequently flown to Moscow oblast.²⁶³ The 31 children were transported from Rostov oblast to the Vnukovo airport in Moscow oblast on a flight operated by SLO "Rossiya."²⁶⁴

SLO "Rossiya" is registered at a facility approximately 500 meters from the Vnukovo Airport in Moscow oblast.²⁶⁵ The Vnukovo Airport has operated tenders with the 223rd Flight Squad, whose aircraft was used to transport from Ukraine children in September 2022 as previously discussed above.²⁶⁶

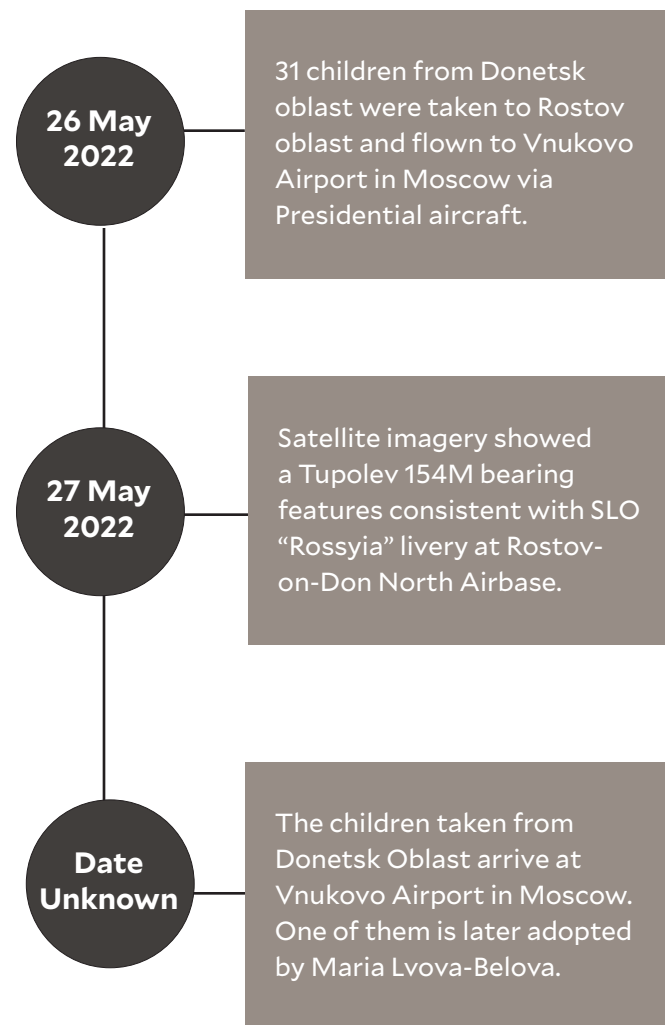
The precise location of the May 2022 flight within Rostov oblast was not established in existing sources. Yale HRL identified the possible location of departure by correlating satellite imagery analysis with the time-frame and area established from other sources.

Rostov-on-Don North Airbase

Through analysis of satellite imagery, Yale HRL identified an object consistent with a Tu-154M personnel transport plane at the Rostov-on-Don North airbase on 27 May 2022. This object was present the day after the 31 children from Mariupol and Donetsk were taken from Donetsk oblast to Rostov oblast, according to news reports and the public statements of Lvova-Belova.²⁶⁷ The aircraft's features include black markings on the aircraft's wings consistent with the SLO "Rossiya" livery.

It is unknown if these 31 children were transferred to the Rostov-on-Don North airbase or whether the plane observed at the airport in Rostov oblast had been used to transport children from Ukraine to Moscow. Further investigation is required to determine whether children from Ukraine had been taken to this airbase.

FIG 4.7. TIMELINE OF MOVEMENT OF UKRAINE'S CHILDREN IN MAY 2022



Timeline depicting possible itinerary and timeline of the group of 31 children from Donetsk taken to Rostov and flown to Moscow via Presidential aircraft in May 2022.

During the broader period in which children from Ukraine were placed in Russia's program of coerced adoption and fostering, Yale HRL detected high tempo ground and air operations at the Rostov-on-Don North airbase between 7 and 8 April 2022. Yale HRL assesses that Rostov-on-Don North airbase may have operated or is currently operating as a military base. Satellite imagery analysis found objects present at the facility consistent with hardened concrete hangars, military aircraft, and military vehicles on 7 April 2022. Satellite imagery reveals two convoys of transportation vehicles, including what Yale HRL analysts assess to include features consistent with 11 light-toned passenger buses ranging between ten and fifteen meters. Nine military vehicles of an unknown type are also visible and three Ilyushin Il-76 (NATO designation Figure "Candid") heavy transport planes are present on the western tarmac.²⁶⁸

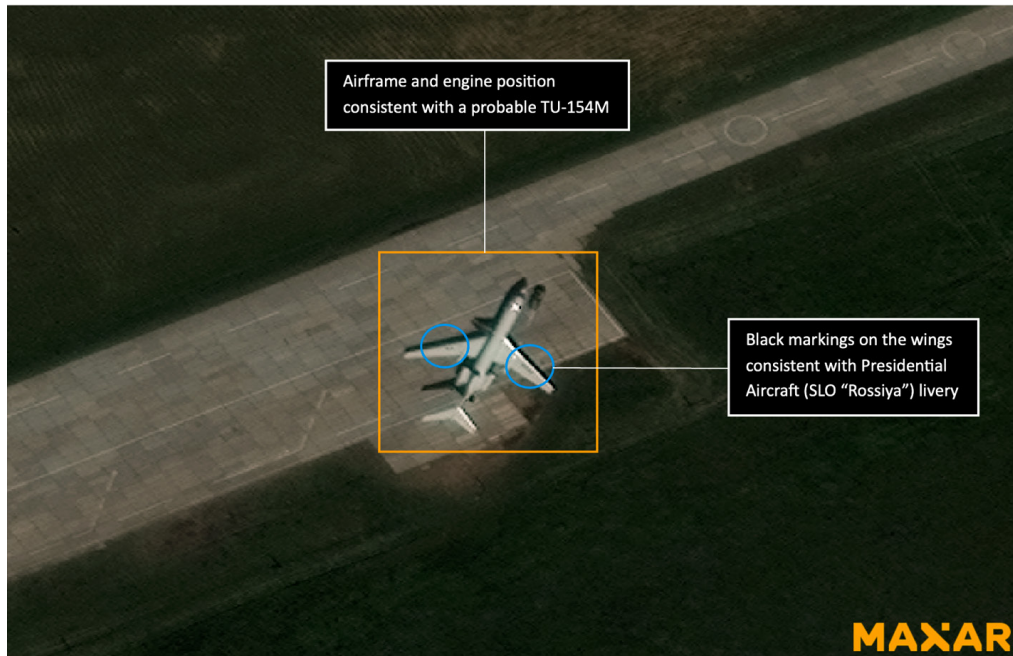
Yale HRL analysts also identified eighteen vehicles consistent with passenger buses ranging between eight and fifteen meters and three military cargo trucks seen in the central part of the airport. It is unknown for what purpose the passenger buses were used. Yale HRL was unable to identify the nature of this event or whether this airbase or the events described

above are associated with Russia's program of coerced adoption and fostering. However, this permutation of vehicles was present during the broader period during which children from Ukraine were taken to Russia and placed with citizens of Russia and institutions.

It is unknown whether children from Ukraine were taken to this airbase in April 2022. Yale HRL recommends further investigation of the Tu-154M consistent airframes, as well as transportation hubs- including airports, air bases, and train stations- potentially relevant to the transportation of children from Ukraine.

Analysis of commercial satellite imagery, combined with open source information, established that Putin's government transported children from Ukraine on Ministry of Defense aircraft, as well as presidential aircraft, prior to placing the children in Russia's program of coerced adoption and fostering.

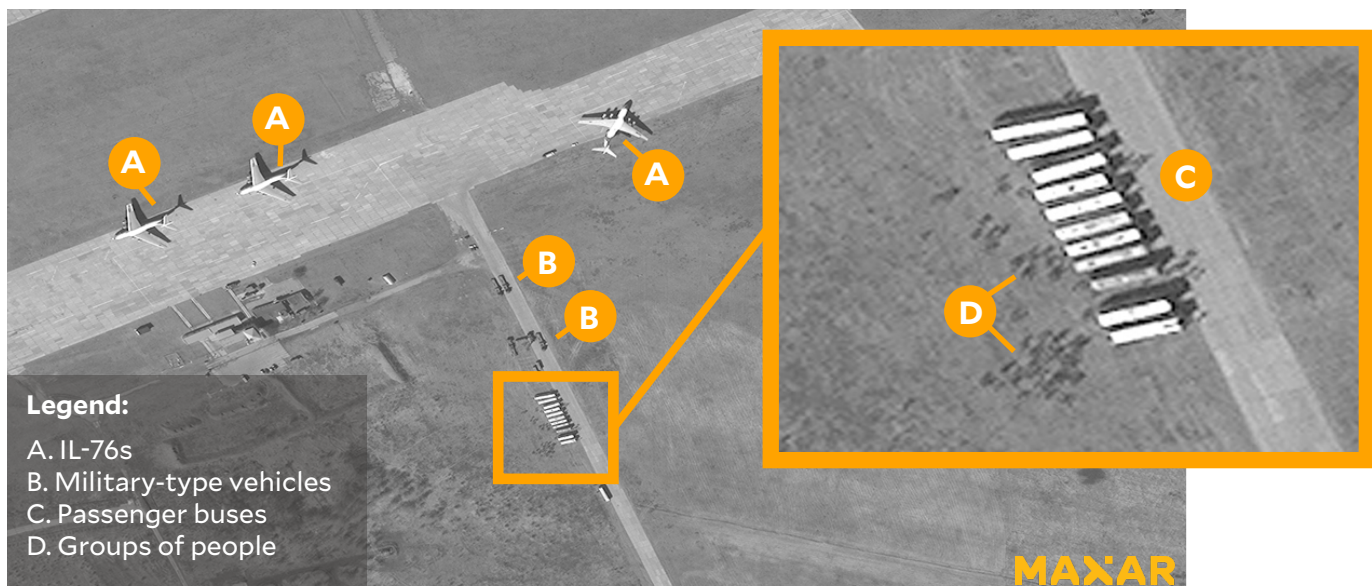
FIGURE 4.8. SATELLITE IMAGE DEPICTING A PROBABLE TU-154M AT ROSTOV-ON-DON NORTH AIRBASE



Satellite imagery © 2022 Maxar

On 27 May 2022, a probable TU-154M with features consistent with Presidential Aircraft (SLO "Rossiya") livery was present at Rostov-on-Don North Airbase.

FIGURE 4.9. HIGH TEMPO AIR AND GROUND OPERATIONS AT ROSTOV-ON-DON NORTH AIRBASE



Satellite imagery © 2022 Maxar

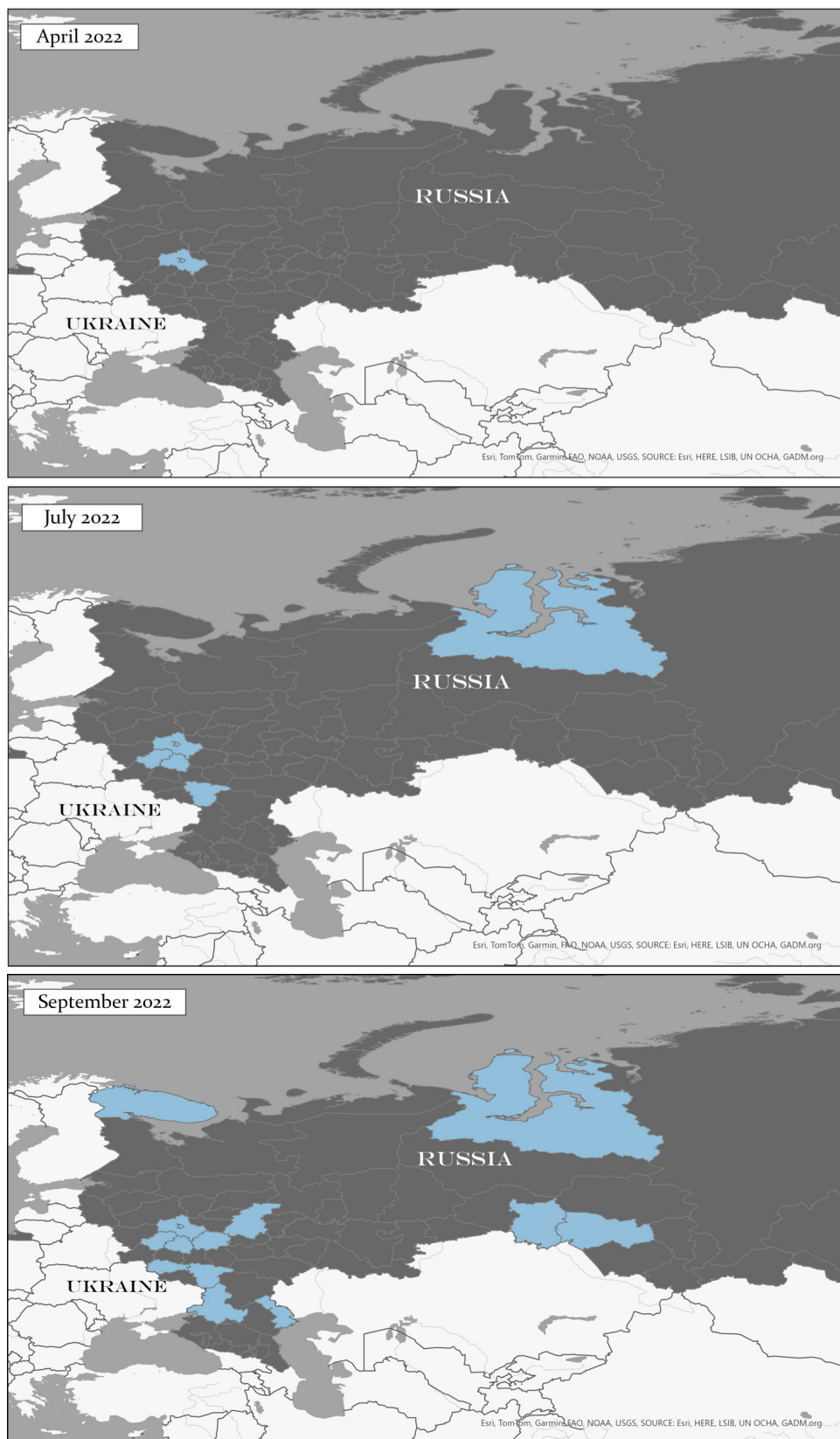
4D. CHILDREN PLACED WITH CITIZENS OF RUSSIA

Yale HRL identified 166 children who have been placed directly with citizens of Russia across 16 regions of Russia since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Russia's government officials and Russian media stated that these children were from Ukraine and had been placed with citizens of Russia. The overwhelming majority of these 166 children (72.9%) were placed with citizens of Russia between April and September 2022. At least 20 children were placed with citizens of Russia between October and December 2022. Yale HRL was unable to identify the exact period in which the remaining 25 children were placed with citizens of Russia after Russia's full-scale invasion.

While Lvova-Belova has claimed that 380 children from Ukraine have been placed under guardianship with citizens of Russia, this report only includes children whose individual identities could be assessed by Yale HRL.²⁶⁹ Children taken from Ukraine and placed with citizens of Russia whose individual identities could not be established were not included in the group of 166 children identified. Yale HRL acknowledges that this number is not representative of all children from Ukraine placed with citizens of Russia and assesses that the true number is likely significantly higher.

Yale HRL further acknowledges that children were likely placed in families throughout additional regions in Russia not identified in this report. Lvova-Belova claimed that children from Ukraine had been placed with citizens of Russia in 19 regions throughout Russia.²⁷⁰ Lvova-Belova further claimed that children had been or would be placed with citizens of Russia throughout at least five additional regions—including the Belgorod, Chelyabinsk, Penza, Samara, and Volgograd regions—not included among the 16 regions examined in this report (see *Section 2 on methodology and limitations*).²⁷¹ Further research is required

FIGURE 4.10. EVOLUTION OF PLACEMENT WITH CITIZENS IN RUSSIA BETWEEN APRIL AND SEPTEMBER 2022



to confirm whether children from Ukraine have been placed with citizens of Russia throughout additional regions. The findings below describe Russia's systematic placement of children from Ukraine with citizens of Russia.

JOURNEYS

At least 36 of the 166 children (21.7%) were taken from institutions in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts to Russia. Yale HRL assessed that some children were directly taken from Ukraine and placed with citizens of Russia, while other children were taken to additional locations throughout Russia.²⁷² Children were often initially transported to or within Russia in groups of 100-200, after which they were divided into smaller groups between 10 and 50 that were distributed to various regions and placed with citizens of Russia. At least 108 of the 166 children identified by Yale HRL were taken to Russia as part of larger group of children taken from Donetsk and Luhansk for placement with citizens of Russia.

Some children were taken to multiple locations throughout Russia prior to being placed with citizens of Russia, including several children from Donetsk oblast who were taken to at least three Russian regions before being placed with citizens of Russia.²⁷³ Yale HRL did not identify this pattern among children listed in Russia's databases, who were found to have been taken directly from midpoint facilities to institutions throughout Russia and listed on Russia's databases (*see section 4E on the journeys of children listed in Russia's databases*). Yale HRL is currently unable to determine why some children were moved through more locations compared to other children before being placed with citizens of Russia.

Russia's program of coerced adoption and fostering rapidly expanded throughout Russia in 2022. Figure 4.10 depicts the regions in which the children from Ukraine identified in this report were placed with citizens of Russia over time. Yale HRL identified children to have been first placed in families in the Moscow region in April 2022. Within three months, children had been placed in with citizens of Russia throughout six regions. By the end of 2022, children had been placed with citizens of Russia throughout at least fourteen regions of Russia.

IDENTIFICATION OF CITIZENS OF RUSSIA WITH WHOM CHILDREN FROM UKRAINE WERE PLACED

Russia's officials specifically identified citizens of Russia with previous fostering experience with whom children from Ukraine could be placed. Lvova-Belova authorized the Union of Foster Parents—an organization created in 2016 to centralize support systems for foster families—to compile lists of families with previous fostering experience who had expressed their willingness to adopt and/or foster a child from Ukraine.²⁷⁴ Governor Vorobyëv directed that a similar register be created for the Moscow region.²⁷⁵ Regional authorities throughout Russia used these lists to place children from Ukraine with citizens of Russia.²⁷⁶ In some cases, these families reported that regional authorities had directly contacted them to inquire if they were willing to have a child from Ukraine placed with them.²⁷⁷ Yale HRL was unable

to determine whether all 16 regions identified in this report utilized lists of potential foster placements, or if regional authorities used any lists made by entities other than the Union of Foster Parents.

Additionally, regional authorities and the Union of Foster Parents posted messages in online forums asking citizens of Russia if they were willing to adopt or take custody of children from Ukraine; they also advertised individual children from Ukraine who were available for adoption or fostering.²⁷⁸

Placing children in families with previous fostering experience enabled Russia's officials to expedite the placement of children from Ukraine with citizens of Russia, as citizens of Russia are required to undergo specialized training prior to adopting or fostering a child.²⁷⁹ This training informs citizens about the fostering and adoption process and aims to determine whether citizens are fit to become foster or adoptive parents.²⁸⁰ The Head of the Union of Foster Parents, Natalya Gorodiskaya, claimed that prioritizing placement with experienced foster families ensured that no delays were incurred due to trainings needed prior to fostering.²⁸¹ Yale HRL has not determined whether all citizens of Russia with whom children from Ukraine were placed had previous fostering experience.

METHODS BY WHICH CHILDREN WERE PLACED WITH CITIZENS OF RUSSIA

Yale HRL determined that there was no single standardized method by which all children from Ukraine were placed with citizens of Russia. Within Russia's highly structured and coordinated program of coerced adoption and fostering, individual placements varied and lacked uniformity both across and within regions.

Yale HRL concluded that some children from Ukraine were placed with citizens of Russia in a manner consistent with a premeditated and methodical plan. Russia's officials publicly discussed the various steps they took to facilitate these placements. As previously mentioned, the Union of Foster Parents first identified citizens of Russia with fostering experience who were willing to have children from Ukraine be placed in their families.²⁸² According to Lvova-Belova, Russia's authorities then selected several potential foster family candidates for children, who in turn created videos introducing themselves that were later shown to children from Ukraine.²⁸³ Russia's health professionals facilitated online meetings with potential families and—alongside the child—identified the family in which the child would be placed.²⁸⁴

In contrast, several citizens in Russia reported that children from Ukraine were placed in their family with little warning. One foster mother in Novosibirsk oblast described how children from Luhansk oblast were removed from their guardians, transported to Novosibirsk, and placed in her family within a three-week

period in October 2022. She detailed first meeting the children on a video call five days after the children were removed from their guardians in Luhansk oblast and recounted that approximately one week passed between when she was asked to take custody of the children and when they were placed in her family.²⁸⁵ On another occasion, guardianship and trusteeship authorities reportedly asked a woman to take guardianship over four children from Luhansk oblast as the children were on the flight to Novosibirsk oblast.²⁸⁶ Russian media also reported that a foster mother who had been preparing documents to take guardianship over a child the following year was told she needed to take children “faster,” after which two children from Luhansk oblast were placed in her family within several weeks.²⁸⁷

Yale HRL also identified several instances in which Russia’s guardianship authorities placed children from Ukraine with citizens of Russia who were given incomplete or inaccurate information about the children and/or did not initially agree to the number of children placed in their care. One family in Novosibirsk reported that they had offered to take a maximum of two more children but received one week’s notice that five children from Ukraine would be placed with them instead. The parents, who now have at least 14 children under their care, said that families are advised not to have more than eight biological and foster children in one

family – but when placing children from Ukraine, guardianship authorities reportedly told the family to “take as many [children] as [they] want.”²⁸⁸

The family further claimed they were told inaccurate information about the children: they were told they would be placed with three girls and two boys, but that four girls and one boy had been placed in their family. Additionally, this family claimed that some of the children had additional health needs despite authorities’ initial claims.²⁸⁹ In another instance, Moscow oblast’s officials reportedly instructed a woman to take in children from Ukraine despite her initial refusal due to health concerns. In an interview with Russian media, the woman claimed that despite fostering children being a “voluntary process,” Moscow oblast’s officials forced her to take custody over children from Ukraine.²⁹⁰

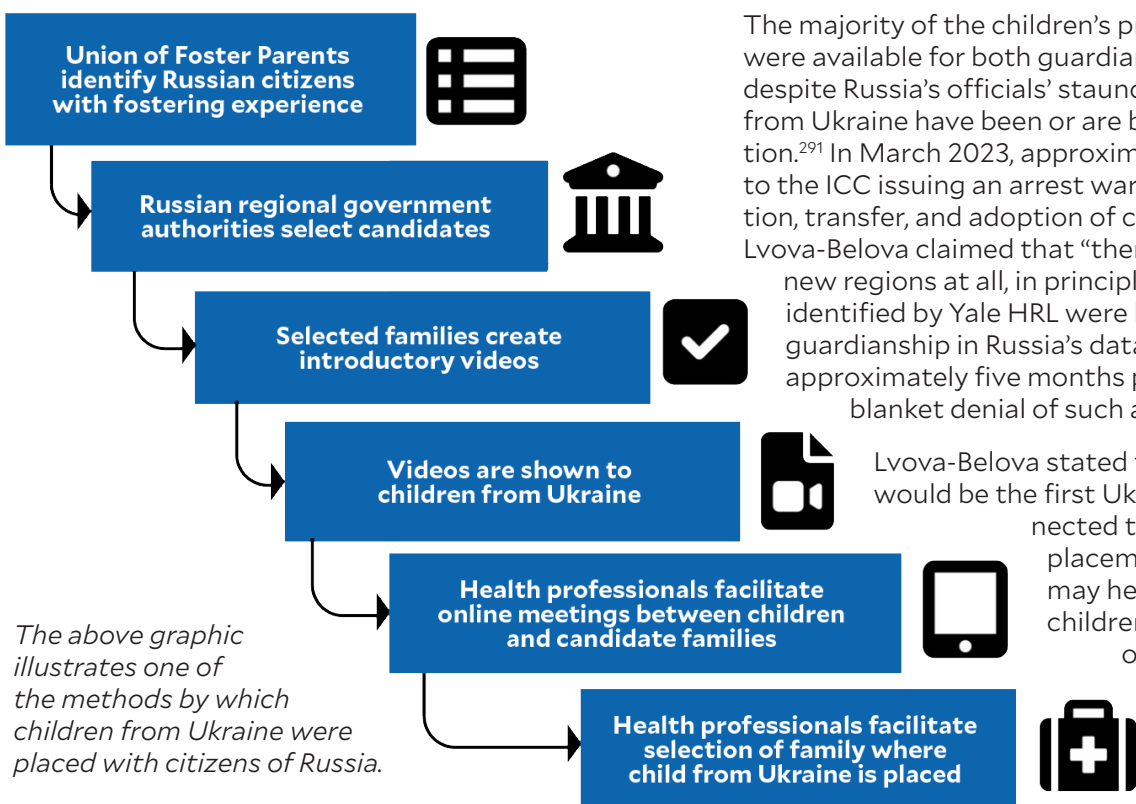
4E. CHILDREN PLACED IN INSTITUTIONS AND LISTED ON RUSSIA’S CHILD PLACEMENT DATABASES

Yale HRL identified 148 children assessed to have been taken from Luhansk or Donetsk oblast(s) to institutions throughout five regions of Russia and subsequently listed on Russia’s child placement databases. The majority of children (80.4%) were taken from Donetsk oblast. Yale HRL was unable to disambiguate whether the remaining approximately 20.0% of children identified on Russia’s databases were taken from Donetsk oblast or Luhansk oblast.

The majority of the children’s profiles stated that they were available for both guardianship and adoption despite Russia’s officials’ staunch denials that children from Ukraine have been or are being placed for adoption.²⁹¹ In March 2023, approximately two weeks prior to the ICC issuing an arrest warrant for the deportation, transfer, and adoption of children from Ukraine, Lvova-Belova claimed that “there is no adoption from new regions at all, in principle.”²⁹² The first children identified by Yale HRL were listed for adoption and guardianship in Russia’s databases in October 2022, approximately five months prior to Lvova-Belova’s blanket denial of such activity.

Lvova-Belova stated that the so-called DPR would be the first Ukrainian region connected to Russia’s federal child placement database, which may help explain why most children identified by Yale HRL on Russia’s databases were taken from Do-

FIG 4.11. METHODS BY WHICH SOME CHILDREN FROM UKRAINE ARE DIRECTLY PLACED WITH CITIZENS OF RUSSIA



The above graphic illustrates one of the methods by which children from Ukraine were placed with citizens of Russia.

netsk oblast.²⁹³ Media sources state that children taken from at least two institutions in Luhansk oblast in February 2022 returned to Luhansk oblast in the following months.²⁹⁴ Yale HRL was unable to verify these claims. It is unknown whether the sample of children identified in this report is representative of the population of all children from Ukraine placed on Russia's child placement databases.

JOURNEYS

The majority of children identified on Russia's databases (58.1%) were taken from two institutions in Donetsk oblast. Yale HRL assessed that it is likely that children from these two institutions were taken to Russia under the guise of purported evacuation between 18 and 19 February 2022. The Ministry of Education and Science of the [so-called] Donetsk People's Republic stated that 626 children from seven institutions were taken to Rostov and Kursk oblasts between 18 and 19 February 2022.²⁹⁵ Among the children identified from the two Donetsk institutions, Yale HRL identified nearly half (44.1%) of these children at midpoints in Kursk between March and September 2022.

At least 80 of the 148 children identified by Yale HRL were taken to one of four midpoints located in Rostov and Kursk oblasts, including children's social and rehabilitation centers and educational institutions. Some of the children were transported via bus and rail for approximately 29 hours before being placed in a midpoint in Kursk oblast in the days leading up to Russia's full-scale invasion.²⁹⁶ Satellite imagery showed three 24-meter rail cars and one locomotive at the nearby rail line approximately one kilometer from this midpoint facility on 21 February 2022. It is unknown whether the children from Ukraine were present on this train. Yale HRL estimates that some children remained at these midpoints for up to six months before being moved to another region in Russia, where they were subsequently listed on Russia's child placement databases.²⁹⁷ Yale HRL was unable to determine whether all children identified on Russia's databases were taken to midpoints.

Children were taken to at least five Russian regions—including the Republic of Bashkortostan, Bryansk, Orël, Pskov, and Saratov—where they were placed in eight facilities, including four boarding schools and four children's centers. At least one institution to which children were taken includes a cadet corps program within the school; Yale HRL identified children assessed to have been taken from Ukraine and listed in Russia's databases wearing uniforms of the school's cadet corps.²⁹⁸ Yale HRL assessed that children were often listed on Russia's databases several months after being taken to these institutions. Most children's profiles identified by Yale HRL were posted on Russia's databases between October and December 2022 and between February and March 2023.

All facilities to which children were taken appear situated in remote, rural areas proximate to railway stations, including one facility that was approximately one kilometer from a large military installation. Any operational relationship between this force deployment and children's activities remains unknown.

4F. WHERE CHILDREN ARE NOW

At least 208 of the 314 children (66.2%) identified in this report have been placed with citizens of Russia since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. In addition to the 166 children placed directly with citizens of Russia, at least 42 of the 148 children identified on Russia's databases (28.4%) have also been placed with citizens of Russia. The profiles of these 42 children – which originally included multimedia videos, personally identifiable information, and demographic information of each child – have been replaced with a message stating that the child has been placed in a family. Yale HRL assesses that the remaining children whose profiles were found on Russia's databases are still available for adoption, guardianship, and/or trusteeship with citizens of Russia at time of last assessment. These children were last known to have been located at Russian institutions from which they were listed on Russia's databases. Yale HRL has not determined the locations of children placed with citizens of Russia at this time.

5. LEGAL ANALYSIS

The coerced deportation, re-education, and adoption and fostering of children from Ukraine documented in this report may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity under customary international law and as codified by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (Rome Statute).²⁹⁹ While these acts, in isolation, likely would not provide the sole basis for criminal charges of genocide, taken together with other evidence, this report's findings could support a broader case. Finally, the acts documented in the report violate Russia's obligations as a State Party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.³⁰⁰

5A. WAR CRIMES

The 1949 Geneva Conventions (GCs) and the 1977 Additional Protocols (APs) regulate the actions of belligerent parties during armed conflict, including the forced movement, transfer, or deportation of civilians within the context of both internal and international armed conflicts.³⁰¹ In recognition of the particular vulnerabilities faced by children as civilians enduring the scourges of war, the Fourth Geneva Convention (GCIV) and Additional Protocol I (API) also delineate specific non-derogable principles to protect children during armed conflict beyond the general protections granted to all citizens. Grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions constitute war crimes under the Rome Statute.³⁰²

Under the Rome Statute, the war crime of "unlawful deportation or transfer" involves the following elements: (1) The perpetrator deported or transferred one or more persons to another State or to another location; (2) Such person or persons were protected under one or more of the Geneva Conventions of 1949; (3) The perpetrator was aware of the factual circumstances that established that protected status; (4) The conduct took place in the context of and was associated with an international armed conflict; and (5) The perpetrator was aware of factual circumstances that established the existence of an armed conflict. This report demonstrates that Russia's actions meet all five elements to potentially constitute a war crime.

(1) Russian officials deported or transferred one or more persons from Ukraine to Russia.

This report details how Russia has engaged in the forcible transfer and deportation of hundreds of children from occupied territory in Ukraine to Russia, where they were subject to coerced adoption or placed under the guardianship of citizens of Russia.³⁰³ Limited exceptions to the prohibition on non-consensual transfers and relocations exist under international law. None of those exceptions are met in this case.

The Fourth Geneva Convention specifies that the occupying power can perform forced evacuations of a given area for "the security of the population or imperative military reasons," though these evacuations cannot result in the displacement of protected persons beyond the bounds of the occupied territory except "when for material reasons it is impossible to avoid such displacement."³⁰⁴ Under international law, an occupying power cannot undertake evacuations for the security of the population if it is itself responsible, through unlawful actions, for the humanitarian crisis necessitating their removal.³⁰⁵ Here, Russia is the occupying power, and Russia is itself responsible for the crisis in the occupied territories from which the forced deportations took place.

The Fourth Geneva Convention also prescribes that upon cessation of the hostilities in the particular area from which the persons have evacuated, the evacuated persons must be transferred back.³⁰⁶ The coerced naturalization and placement of children from Ukraine with citizens of Russia through guardianship, foster care, and adoption facilitates their permanent removal into Russia, thereby directly contravening Russia's obligation under this provision to transfer the population back as soon as the hostilities have ceased.

Parties to a conflict have a specific obligation under GCIV to remove children from "besieged or encircled areas."³⁰⁷ In carrying out transfers or evacuations, however, states must ensure that family members are not separated.³⁰⁸ For children separated from or without parents, the parties have an obligation to "facilitate the reception of such children in a neutral country for the duration of the conflict."³⁰⁹ The occupying power must arrange for the continuance of the education of orphaned children and those separated from their parents as a result of the war "if possible by persons of their own nationality, language and religion"³¹⁰ or by "persons of a similar cultural tradition."³¹¹ The occupying power must also take "all necessary steps" to achieve the identification of children and the registration of their parentage.³¹² Simultaneously, the Convention prohibits the occupying state from changing the child's personal status, including their family status or nationality.³¹³

The Russian government has failed to abide by its legal obligations to ensure family unity and, if evacuations were deemed necessary, to facilitate the transfer of children without guardians to a neutral country. In addition, this report has confirmed pro-Russia reeducation programs to "Russify" children from Ukraine have been undertaken at all institutions to which children were transferred. Moreover, Russian authorities have engaged in deceptive practices and implemented legislation to facilitate the naturalization of children from Ukraine. This disruption of the children's education with the intent to indoctrinate children from Ukraine using pro-Russia messaging and the government's systematic efforts to obfuscate and alter their nationality may constitute grave breaches the Geneva Conventions.

(2) The children from Ukraine transferred from Ukraine to Russia are “protected persons.”

The Fourth Geneva Convention defines “protected persons” as “those who at a given moment and in any manner whatsoever, find themselves, in case of a conflict or occupation, in the hands of a Party to the conflict or Occupying Power of which they are not nationals.”³¹⁴ Children also receive special protections as protected persons under international law. Article 78 of Additional Protocol I (API), to which Russia is a party, establishes that “no party to the conflict shall arrange for the evacuation of children, other than its own nationals, to a foreign country except for a temporary evacuation” necessitated by compelling reasons of the children’s health or medical treatment or, “except in occupied territory, their safety, so require.”³¹⁵ Furthermore, “where the parents or legal guardians can be found, their written consent to such evacuation is required.”³¹⁶

Russia’s transfer of children from Ukraine may constitute a grave breach of these legal obligations. A child with Ukrainian citizenship in the hands of Russian military or civilian authorities is a “protected person” under the Fourth Geneva Convention. The seizure of children by Russia’s forces from institutions in Ukraine, transfer into Russian-controlled territories, and placement into Russian homes or on Russian adoption databases does not meet the criteria established for the stringent and time-limited exceptions enabling temporary evacuations and therefore violates the GCIV’s strict prohibition of forcible transfers and deportations as well as the API’s specific provisions governing the evacuation of children.

In addition, under API, Russia has an obligation to establish a process to facilitate the return of evacuated children to their families and to their country of origin. API instructs that “the authorities of the Party arranging for the evacuation and, as appropriate, the authorities of the receiving country” must establish for each child a card with photographs containing information, including the child’s first and surname, sex, place and date of birth, father’s full name, mother’s full name, and other biographical details, which they must send to the Central Tracing Agency of the International Committee of the Red Cross.³¹⁷ However, Russia has refused to adhere to these requirements. Russia’s failure to release information to authorities, including by refusing to compose and transfer a list of evacuated children to the Central Tracing Agency, directly violates the API. The failure to note children’s Ukrainian national identities in the adoption databases, in addition to the coerced adoptions facilitated by Russian legislation simplifying the citizenship process for children from Ukraine, is a serious violation of the Geneva Convention.

(3) The Russian officials involved were aware of the factual circumstances that established that protected status.

Russian officials were aware of the children’s protected status while undertaking the forced transfers and deportations. Russian officials knew that the children were of Ukrainian nationality while transferring them to Russian territory and listing the transferred children on Russian adoption databases.³¹⁸ Putin’s May 2022 decree simplifying the process for orphans from Ukraine to receive Russian citizenship demonstrates the awareness that these transferred children were not nationals of Russia.³¹⁹ In addition, this report details statements from high-level Russian officials, including the Presidential Children’s Commissioner and occupation officials openly describing their involvement in placing transferred children from Ukraine into Russian foster families.³²⁰ This acknowledgment of the children’s origins in Ukraine further confirms the widespread awareness that these children were not Russian nationals. As a result, the Russian Federation, as a party to the API that establishes the meaning of “protected persons,” maintained knowledge that these children thereby counted as protected persons when in the hands of Russian authorities.

(4) The conduct took place in the context of and was associated with the international armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

Common Article 2 of the 1949 Geneva Conventions defines international armed conflict as “all cases of declared war or of any other armed conflict which may arise between two or more of the High Contracting Parties, even if the state of war is not recognized by one of them.”³²¹ The Conventions also apply in cases of partial or total occupation resulting from hostilities.³²² The existence of an international armed conflict involves a factual determination based on the prevailing conditions rather than on the subjective views of the parties to the conflict. An international armed conflict thus exists “whenever there is a resort to armed force between states” according to international law.³²³ This means that the Geneva Conventions apply in all cases of armed conflict between two or more states even if one or all parties deny the existence of the conflict.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine since February 2022 clearly constitutes an international armed conflict according to the standards set forth under international law. The parties have engaged in ongoing hostilities that have killed hundreds of thousands of troops on both sides of the conflict and destroyed large swaths of Ukrainian territory.³²⁴ Despite Putin’s subjective categorization of the conflict as a “special military operation,” Ukraine and the international system have recognized the ongoing state of war since the states resorted to armed force after Russia’s invasion in February 2022.³²⁵

5) *The Russian officials were aware of factual circumstances that established the existence of that armed conflict.*

The Russian officials involved in the forced deportation of children from Ukraine to Russia were aware that an armed conflict between Ukraine and Russia existed at the time of the transfers. Putin referred to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine as a “war” as early as December 2022, ten months after Russia’s full-scale invasion.³²⁶ Following the indictment of both Putin and Lvova-Belova by the ICC, some Russian officials claimed children were being placed in “temporary” guardianship with citizens of Russia rather than permanent adoption.³²⁷ These statements clearly demonstrate the Russian official’s unequivocal awareness of the existence of the armed conflict with Ukraine.

5B. CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

In 2019, the International Law Commission recognized the prohibition on crimes against humanity as a peremptory norm of international law (*jus cogens*) from which no State may derogate.³²⁸ Consistent with customary international law, the Rome Statute categorizes the forced deportation of civilian populations as a crime against humanity.³²⁹

Under the Rome Statute, forced deportation is a crime against humanity when “committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack[.]”³³⁰ The crime is further defined as the “forced displacement” of people “by expulsion or other coercive acts from the area in which they are lawfully present, without grounds permitted under international law.”³³¹ The crime is made up of five elements:³³² (1) The perpetrator deported or forcibly transferred, without grounds permitted under international law, one or more persons to another State or location, by expulsion or other coercive acts; (2) Such person or persons were lawfully present in the area from which they were so deported or transferred; (3) The perpetrator was aware of the factual circumstances that established the lawfulness of such presence; (4) The conduct was committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population; and (5) The perpetrator knew that the conduct was part of or intended the conduct to be part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population. This report demonstrates that all five elements are met.

(1) *Russia forcibly transferred children by coercive acts.*

The *Elements* define “forcibly” to include physical force, and “threat of force or coercion, such as that caused by fear of violence, duress, detention, psychological oppression or abuse of power against such person or persons or another person, or by taking advantage of a coercive environment.”³³³ Drawing on ICTY jurispru-

dence, certain factors may indicate that deportation was involuntary, “such as taking advantage of coercive circumstances.”³³⁴ If individuals consent to deportation, it is not a crime against humanity, though “that consent must be real in the sense that it is given voluntarily and as a result of the individual’s free will, assessed in the light of the surrounding circumstances.”³³⁵ There is no requirement that “the perpetrator intended to displace the individual across the border on a permanent basis.”³³⁶

Russia’s efforts to transfer children from Ukraine to Russia may constitute deportation or forced transfer. Three hundred and fourteen children, some of whom had been taken from educational institutions for orphans and children without parental care in Ukraine, were placed in Russia’s foster and adoption system.³³⁷ Thousands of children with clear guardianship have been lured away from Ukrainian families under coercion or duress³³⁸ by Russia’s Federal Government to a system of forty-three camps and facilities across Russia and Crimea.³³⁹ These facilities re-educate children through academic instruction, political and nationalistic indoctrination, and military training.³⁴⁰ In at least four instances, camps have delayed or declined to return children to their families.³⁴¹ Ukrainian parents have been coerced to sign consent forms by teachers, armed forces, and occupation authorities or did so under duress – seeking to evacuate their children from conflict zones or to secure their access to sanitation, healthcare, or food.³⁴² Still, many children at these camps lack uncoerced parental consent.³⁴³ For those children who have documentation of parental consent, there is mounting evidence that consent was obtained through coercion by occupying forces.³⁴⁴ In addition, consent may be considered involuntary in light of the coercive environment where parents have no other option to get their children access to food, healthcare, and sanitization.³⁴⁵

The Geneva Conventions institute protections for children who are orphaned or separated from their families as a result of war, including the transfer of those children away from hostilities. As already noted, however, the forced deportation of children from Ukraine to Russia does not meet the requirements established in Geneva Convention IV, including the obligation to facilitate the transfer of children to a neutral country.³⁴⁶

(2) *The children from Ukraine were lawfully present in the area from which they were so deported or transferred.*

The children from Ukraine were citizens of Ukraine and lawfully present in the areas from which they were deported.³⁴⁷

(3) *Russian officials were aware of the factual circumstances that established the lawfulness of such presence.*

Russian officials were aware that these children were lawfully present in Ukraine.³⁴⁸ Russian officials identified

the acquisition of Russian citizenship as the main bottleneck to “permanent” placement and adoption in Russian foster families.³⁴⁹ Putin signed a decree on May 30, 2022, easing the process for orphans from Ukraine to attain Russian citizenship to ease such bottlenecks.³⁵⁰ These statements and actions make clear that Russian officials were aware that these children are citizens of Ukraine and thus were lawfully present in the area from which they were deported.

(4) Russian officials’ conduct was committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population.

Russian officials’ actions were clearly part of a widespread or systematic attack against Ukrainian civilian populations. According to investigative reporting done by *The New York Times*, over 100 hospitals, 100 churches, and 700 schools have been destroyed as of June 2024.³⁵¹ As many as 210,000 buildings have been leveled across an 800-mile frontline and deep within Ukrainian territory.³⁵² Whole towns have been destroyed and wiped off the map.³⁵³ OHCHR estimates civilian casualties have reached 35,000, including more than 2000 children.³⁵⁴

The program of coerced transfer of children is also itself widespread or systematic. Russian federal legislation was introduced in May 2022 to expedite Russian citizenship for orphans from Ukraine, seemingly to facilitate permanent placement in and adoption by citizens of Russia.³⁵⁵ There has been a notable increase in the scope and intensity of the efforts to deport children from Ukraine since February 2022. Yale HRL has identified 314 children that have been taken from Ukraine and placed in Russia’s program of coerced adoption and fostering. Yale HRL has also pinpointed 148 children from Ukraine listed for adoption, guardianship, and/or trusteeship on Russia’s three main child placement databases, all of which are either run by or coordinated with Russia’s federal government.³⁵⁶ High-level government officials also frequently travel to occupied regions to discuss the movement of children,³⁵⁷ and children have been placed in at least 21 regions in Russia.³⁵⁸

(5) Russian officials knew that the conduct was part of or intended the conduct to be part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population.

The report details ongoing involvement of high-level government officials in the systematic deportation and coerced adoption of children from Ukraine. Putin, Lvova-Belova, Russia’s Ministry of Education, and the Russian State Duma have all been directly involved. Russian officials have explicitly stated their involvement. For instance, Lvova-Belova openly discussed transferring children from Ukraine to Russian foster families and listing children from Ukraine on adoption databases.³⁵⁹ Lvova-Belova signed a protocol of intent soon after meeting with Putin in March 2022.³⁶⁰ There is ample evidence of the results of their involvement, such as legislative changes signed by Putin, listings for adoption

on a Russian state-controlled adoption database, and the placement of children from Ukraine with citizens of Russia facilitated by Lvova-Belova. In addition, both the so-called LPR and DPR issued decrees ordering the transfer of children from Ukraine.³⁶¹ After the ICC indicted both Putin and Lvova-Belova for the war crimes of unlawful deportation of children and unlawful transfer of children from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation,³⁶² several of the officials involved have denied their involvement or denied wrongdoing, for instance denying adoptions have taken place or claiming that placements were temporary.³⁶³

5C. GENOCIDE

The prohibition on genocide is a peremptory norm of international law, an obligation from which no derogation is permitted.³⁶⁴ Russia is therefore bound by this prohibition. It is also bound to prevent and punish crimes of genocide as a State Party to the Genocide Convention, which explicitly proscribes “[f]orcibly transferring children of the group to another group” with the “intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical racial or religious group.”³⁶⁵ The distinctive *dolus specialis* (special intent) *mens rea* element creates a high burden of proof.

The Rome Statute incorporates the language of the Genocide Convention.³⁶⁶ The ICC *Elements of Crimes* clarifies that the genocidal crime of forcibly transferring children requires the perpetrator to have forcibly transferred one or more persons who belonged to a particular national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, and, in doing so, the perpetrator “intended to destroy, in whole or in part, the national, ethnical, racial or religious group as such.”³⁶⁷ The transfer must involve moving the person or persons “from that group to another group,” and the transferred person or persons must have been younger than 18 years old, a fact which the perpetrator knew or should have known.³⁶⁸ Forcible transfer can include “threat of force or coercion, such as that caused by fear of violence, duress, detention, psychological oppression or abuse of power, against such person or persons or another person, or by taking advantage of a coercive environment.”³⁶⁹ Finally, the genocidal conduct must take place “in the context of a manifest pattern of similar conduct directed against that group, or as conduct that could itself effect such destruction.”³⁷⁰ As noted earlier, while Russia is not party to the Rome Statute, Russian individuals are liable for crimes committed in Ukrainian territory under the Court’s territorial jurisdiction.

Russia has clearly used physical force and coercion to transfer children from Ukraine to Russia, to place them into camps and foster care, and to facilitate the forced naturalization and adoption of children from Ukraine by citizens of Russia. However, proving the specific intent to destroy is difficult. Few cases alleging genocide have

been brought, and fewer genocide convictions have survived appeal.³⁷¹ No one has ever been convicted of genocide for the forcible transfer of children.³⁷² Lacking precedents, it is unclear what evidence would be sufficient for a conviction on these grounds alone, though this report's findings could support a broader case.

5D. UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provides a broad set of protections to safeguard the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of children. This includes a provision directing states to treat the best interests of the child as the primary consideration in all actions taken concerning children.³⁷³ As parties to the UNCRC, Russia and Ukraine are obligated to adhere to the specific protections outlined in the Convention.

Article 8 of the UNCRC obligates states to “respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognized by law without unlawful interference.”³⁷⁴ The CRC calls on states to ensure that a child is not “separated from his or her parents against their will” and permits such separations only when it is in the best interests of the child.³⁷⁵ With regard to adoption, the CRC specifies that “the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration” and that family separation leading to adoption can only take place in cases where the competent authorities have determined “that the adoption is permissible in view of the child’s status concerning parents, relatives and legal guardians and that, if required, the persons concerned have given their informed consent to the adoption.”³⁷⁶ Simultaneously, states have the obligation to take measures to “combat the illicit transfer and non-return of children abroad.”³⁷⁷

The facts in this report suggest Russia is not in compliance with its legal obligations under the CRC. In direct violation of the CRC’s prohibition of the transfer and non-return of children abroad and its obligations to preserve the child’s nationality, name, and family relations, Russian authorities have transferred children from Ukraine to Russia, intentionally obfuscated their identity information including their nationality, and enabled the naturalization and adoption of children from Ukraine by citizens of Russia. In particular, Russia’s decree simplifying the process of applying for Russian citizenship for orphans and children without parental guardians has enabled the absorption of children from Ukraine into Russian society and the potentially permanent alteration of their nationality. As a result, the transfer of children with citizens of Russia further violates the CRC’s provision that, for a child temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment, including through fostering and adoption, the state

must pay “due regard...to the desirability of continuity in a child’s upbringing and the child’s ethnic, religious, cultural, and linguistic background.”³⁷⁸ Upon entering Russia, many of the children listed for adoption or placed with citizens of Russia appear to have been naturalized as Russian citizens and subjected to pro-Russia re-education, directly contravening the CRC’s obligation to enable the preservation of children’s personal identification information and infringing on the continuity of the child’s upbringing with regard to their ethnic and cultural background.

Under the CRC, children also have the right to maintain personal contact with both parents on a regular basis while separated.³⁷⁹ Russia’s transfer of children to its territory, separating them from their families or legal guardians without a system for reunification or identification, impedes the ability of children to establish or maintain contact with their guardians. The refusal to transmit the children’s information in accordance with the Geneva Convention’s prescription to record and convey specific identity details for each child to the Central Tracing Agency further prevents the identification of separated children and the establishment of contact with their guardians. As a result, this also directly violates Russia’s obligation under the CRC to respect the rules of international humanitarian law that are relevant to the child during armed conflict.³⁸⁰

6. CONCLUSION

Russia continues to place children from Ukraine in their program of coerced adoption and fostering. In order for these children to be returned, the following five steps must occur:

1. Russia must provide a register of all children from Ukraine currently in its custody, as mandated by the Geneva Conventions;
2. Ukraine, with support from allies and partners, must define the framework for the return of children from Ukraine;
3. Russia and Ukraine must establish the conditions of return, including their time, location, and the process of return;
4. Ukraine, as a sovereign state, must set the terms for how children in which an existing family member or guardian is not available will be placed upon return; and
5. Children returned to Ukraine or a neutral third country must be provided with psychosocial, financial, and other forms of reintegration support.

All children are known to have been taken from territory in Ukraine occupied by Russia, so the question of where these children should be returned is often complicated. Reintegration, after being taken to Russia and returned to Ukraine, will be a complex challenge for each child regardless of their individual experiences. There will need to be individual reintegration support among cohorts and tailored support for each child.

This report highlights many of the barriers to return these children face, which were largely the result of Russia's actions. First, Russia transferred the children in violation of international law. Second, Russia failed to register the children with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Third, Russia created legal barriers that made the children more difficult to identify and return. Fourth, Russia placed the children from Ukraine amongst children from Russia in child placement databases that did not reveal they were children from Ukraine.

It is worth noting that there are additional barriers to returning children from Ukraine who have been deported to Russia and placed in Russia's program of coerced adoption and fostering. The passage of time exacerbates efforts to identify and return children. Young children may not remember the details of being taken or their lives in Ukraine. Amongst the children identified in this study, the youngest child— who was placed in this program at 2 years—is now approximately 4 years old. The oldest child, who was 17 years, is now between 19-20 years old and has reached the age of majority in Russia. Those who were placed in the

program as children but have since reached the age of majority need to be allowed to return to Ukraine immediately and without conditions.

Russia's actions – including use of deception, denial of access, and sowing confusion on children's birth origins – have effectively put the onus on Ukraine's government and civil society to trace where the children originated from in Ukraine and where they have been subsequently moved within Russia. This systematic program and efforts to prevent the identification of children from Ukraine have been camouflaged by Russia as humanitarian action.

This study builds on a growing body of evidence outlining Russia's coerced deportation of children from Ukraine. Russia's program of coerced adoption and fostering should continue to be investigated by law enforcement agencies, documented by civil society, and cross-examined by international government agencies in order to facilitate the return of Ukraine's children.

The total number of children currently in Russia's custody is not known. Further research on the scope and nature of Russia's allocation of resources, including the role of medical professionals, is required. In light of the mounting evidence of Russia's efforts to deport and nationalize children from Ukraine, Russia must share all available data about these children with relevant authorities in Ukraine and international organizations.

ANNEX I: HEALTH GROUPS


Health Status, as defined by Russia's Ministry of Health*	
Health Group	Description
Group 1	Healthy children with normal physical and mental development, without developmental issues or any deviations from the norm.
Group 2	<p>Practically healthy children who do not have chronic diseases but have some functional and morpho-functional disorders. For example, children who have suffered severe or moderate infectious diseases; children with general delay in physical development without endocrine pathology (short stature, low weight or overweight).</p> <p>This group also includes frequently ill children and children with physical disabilities (consequences of injuries or operations), but who have retained all functions.</p>
Group 3	Children who have chronic diseases, with rare exacerbations and who are in remission at the time of examination. This group includes children with physical disabilities, consequences of injuries and operations, subject to compensation for the corresponding functions (that is, existing disabilities should not limit the child's ability to study or work).
Group 4	<p>Children suffering from chronic diseases in the acute stage or in the stage of unstable clinical remission (with frequent exacerbations), which limit the child's life activities or require maintenance therapy.</p> <p>This group includes children with preserved or compensated functional capabilities with physical disabilities, consequences of injuries and operations with incomplete compensation of the corresponding functions, which, to some extent, limits the child's ability to study or work.</p>
Group 5	Children suffering from severe chronic diseases, with frequent exacerbations or continuous relapses, with severe decompensation of the functional capabilities of the body, requiring constant therapy. As well as children with disabilities, children with physical disabilities, consequences of injuries and operations with a pronounced violation of the compensation of relevant functions and a significant limitation in the ability to study or work.

ANNEX II: CHILD PROFILES ON RUSSIA'S DATABASES

Below are examples of child profiles listed on each of the three databases identified in this report. All personally identifiable information about the children has been redacted for protection purposes. The profiles below were chosen at random from Russia's three child placement databases. Yale HRL has no information suggesting these children were taken from Ukraine and were therefore not included as part of the 314 children identified in this report.

SAMPLE PROFILE FROM RUSSIA'S MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (MoE) DATABASE

Главная > Банк Данных



в банк данных →

Дата рождения: [REDACTED]


Регион: [REDACTED]

Возможные формы устройства: [REDACTED]

Группа здоровья: [REDACTED]


Братья или сестры: [REDACTED]

Номер анкеты: [REDACTED] [сохранить информацию](#)

 **КУДА ОБРАЩАТЬСЯ**

Характеристика

[REDACTED]

 [Видеоанкета](#)

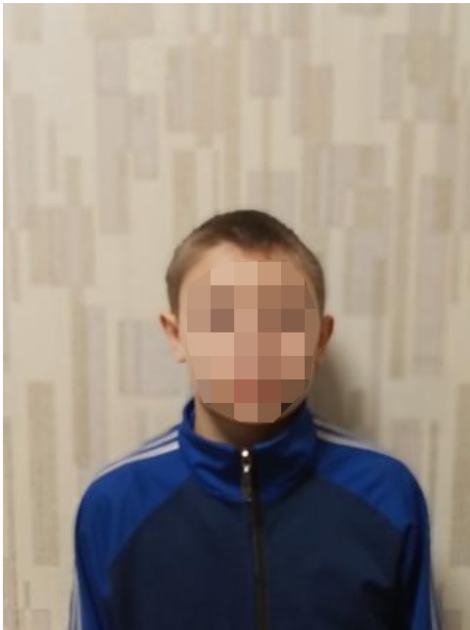
Причина отсутствия родительского попечения матери: [REDACTED]

Причина отсутствия родительского попечения отца: [REDACTED]

Цвет глаз: [REDACTED]

Цвет волос: [REDACTED]

EXAMPLE PROFILE FROM RUSSIA'S CENTER FOR DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL PROJECTS (ANO TsrSP) DATABASE



Имя: [blurred]

Номер анкеты: [blurred]

Регион: [blurred]

Возраст: [blurred]

Цвет глаз: [blurred]

Цвет волос: [blurred]

Характер: [blurred]

Возможные формы устройства: [blurred]

Группа здоровья: [blurred]

Причина отсутствия родительского попечения матери: [blurred]

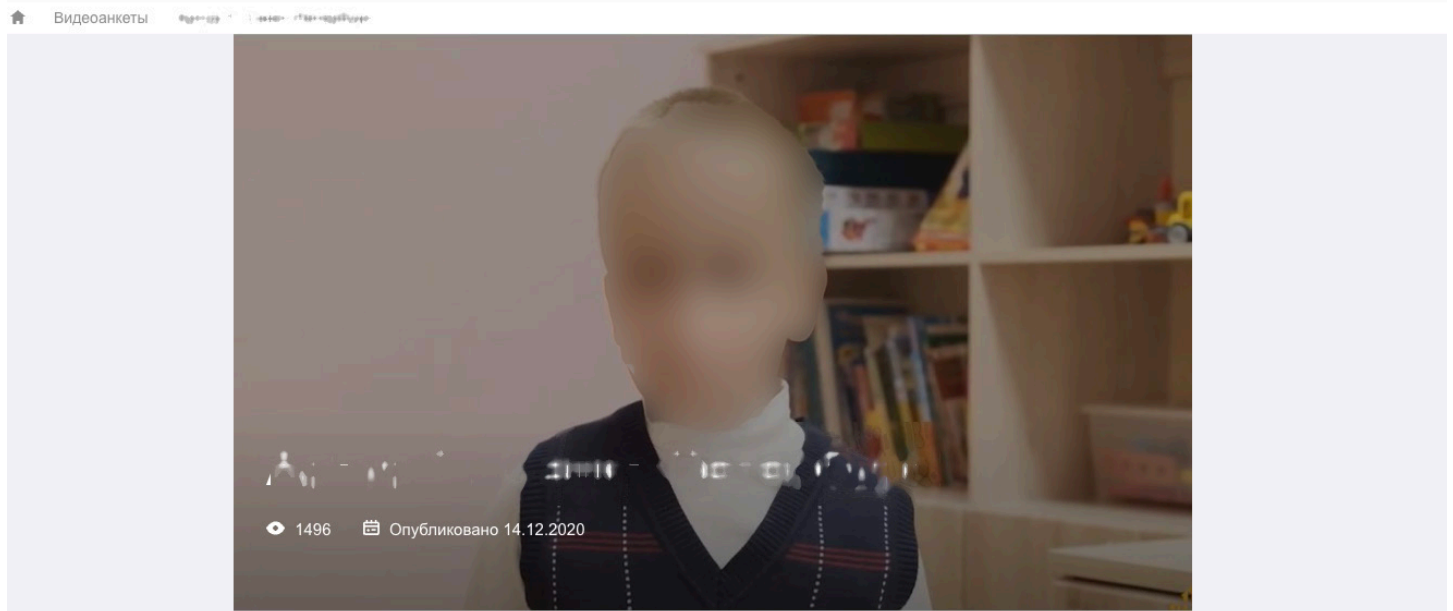
Причина отсутствия родительского попечения отца: [blurred]

Братья или сёстры: [blurred]

Дата публикации фотографии — [blurred]

[Куда обращаться](#)

EXAMPLE PROFILE FROM RUSSIA'S CHANGE ONE LIFE (COL) DATABASE



СТАТЬ АНГЕЛОМ-ХРАНИТЕЛЕМ 2

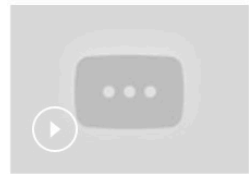
Кто такие Ангелы-хранители

ФИЛЬТР ПО БАЗЕ



ПОДЕЛИТЬСЯ АНКЕТОЙ

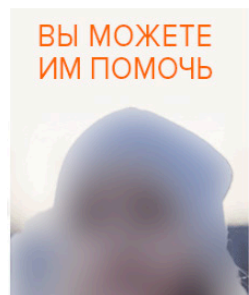
Другие анкеты ребенка



18.12.2020

18.12.2020

18.12.2020



Куда обращаться?

Телефон регионального оператора банка данных о детях, оставшихся без попечения родителей, в [region]

Дата рождения: [date]

Регион: [region]

Возможные формы устройства: [options]

Группа здоровья: [group]

Карточка ребенка в федеральной базе: [перейти](#)

Получить информацию о ребенке в базе данных регионального оператора детских учреждений в [region]

Узнайте [blurred text]

- Как работает база видеоанкет
- Как взять ребенка в семью
- Диагнозы детей-сирот
- Вопрос-ответ

ANNEX III. TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date of event	Description
24 April 2019	Putin issues Decree 183 allowing citizens of Ukraine and “stateless persons permanently residing in the territory of Ukraine” the conferral of Russian citizenship in a simplified manner.
July 2019	Russia’s Ministry of Education and ANO TsRSP sign Information Cooperation establishing mutual collaboration and information sharing to maintain the ANO TsRSP database and help place children in families.
15-Jun-20	Russia’s Ministry of Education issues order establishing itself as the principal operator of the MoE child placement database and the data contained in the database.
18 February 2022	Denis Pushilin and Leonid Pasechnik issue decrees ordering the “evacuation” of institutions from the so-called DPR and LPR. Pushilin’s decree targets orphans and children left without parental care living in state institutions.
18-19 February 2022	The Ministry of Education and Science of the [so-called] DPR executes Pushilin’s order and arranges for the “evacuation” of 626 purported orphans and children without parental care from at least seven institutions in Donetsk oblast to Rostov and Kursk oblasts in Russia.
19-23 February 22	Children purportedly “evacuated” from Ukraine– including 234 children taken from a boarding school in Donetsk oblast– are placed in temporary accommodation centers in Kursk and Rostov oblasts in Russia. Some of these children are listed on Russia’s child placement databases six months later.
21 February 2022	Putin issues decrees recognizing the so-called DPR and LPR as independent states.
22-Feb-22	Russia’s Ministry of Education issues recommendations for psychologists working with children “in situations of forced stay.”
9-Mar-22	Putin instructs Lvova-Belova to identify the “bureaucratic delays” to placing children from Ukraine with citizens of Russia. Putin claims he will remove legislative barriers with the Duma.
10-Mar-22	Lvova-Belova signs a Protocol of Intent with the Commissioners for Children’s Rights of the [so-called] DPR and LPR establishing their coordination on “the protection of the rights of orphans and children without parental care.”
16-Mar-22	The State Duma amends Russia’s legislation to allow the adoption of orphans from “Donbass” who do not have Russian citizenship

*6 April 2022	United Russia, alongside Lvova-Belova and the Heads of the [so-called] DPR and LPR, establish headquarters to synchronize legislation for the guardianship and adoption of children from Ukraine and select citizens in Russia with whom children from Ukraine would be placed.
*6 April 2022	Lvova-Belova claims that adoption is “the highest priority.”
*6 April 2022	United Russia and Russia’s Ministry of Education draft an “international” agreement to facilitate placing Ukraine’s children with citizens of Russia.
*6 April 2022	The Government of the Moscow oblast develops a pilot program to place children from Ukraine with citizens of Russia.
*19 April 2022	Lvova-Belova authorizes the Union of Foster Parents to compile lists of families in Russia with previous fostering experience who had expressed their willingness to adopt and/or foster children from Ukraine.
*23-Apr-22	The first known group of purported orphans from Donetsk oblast are placed under “temporary guardianship” with citizens of Russia as part of Moscow oblast’s pilot program.
26 May 2022	31 children taken from basements in Mariupol and Donetsk by Russia’s military and security services are transported to Rostov oblast and flown by Putin’s presidential aircraft to Moscow oblast.
30 May 2022	Putin signs a decree authorizing orphans and children left without parental care in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts to be naturalized as citizens of Russia in a simplified manner.
*30 May 2022	Lvova-Belova claims the aforementioned 31 Mariupol children will be “first in line for adoption.”
*1 June 2022	Lvova-Belova takes custody of one of the 31 children taken from Mariupol and Donetsk identified by Russia’s military and security services.
1 June 2022	Lvova-Belova claims that all children must undergo psychological rehabilitation before being placed with citizens of Russia.
*2 July 2022	The first known group of Ukraine’s children placed with citizens of Russia in Moscow oblast are naturalized as Russian citizens at a ceremony presided by Lvova-Belova and Moscow’s Governor Andrey Vorobyëv.
12-14 July 2022	Lvova-Belova travels to Donetsk oblast and identifies 13 purported orphans from institutions for transfer to Russia.

14 July 2022	Children from Ukraine– likely including the 13 children identified above– are transported to the Chkalovskiy military airfield in Moscow oblast for placement with citizens of Russia.
*22 July 2022	Lvova-Belova claims that she wants the placement of children from Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts with citizens of Russia to become “systematic.”
23-26 July 2022	Dmitry Medvedev, Deputy Chairman of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, holds a meeting of the Interdepartmental Commission of the Security Council of the Russian Federation on Improving State Migration Policy.
4-6 August 2022	Lvova-Belova meets with Heads of the [so-called] DPR and LPR to synchronize legislation on the adoption and guardianship of children from Ukraine and discuss legal issues pertaining to transferring children to the custody of Russian citizens. She suggests that the orphans from Ukraine be naturalized as Russian citizens while their documents are submitted to relevant authorities for their transfer to Russia.
16 September 2022	77 children from Ukraine are transported from Rostov-on-Don to the Chkalovskiy military airfield on a plane belonging to Russia’s Aerospace Forces for placement with citizens of Russia.
23 September 2022	A leaked document from the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the [so-called] DPR states that following Medvedev’s 23-26 July 2022 Security Council meeting, Russia’s Ministry of Education was directed to take “urgent measures” to “relocate orphans and children without parental care” who were taken from Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts to temporary accommodation centers in Russia.
30 September 2022	Russia illegally annexes the occupied territories of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia in Ukraine.
30 September 2022	The earliest known group of children later listed on Russia’s child placement databases is relocated from temporary accommodation centers and placed in an institution in Russia.
First week of October 2022	234 children from the so-called DPR and LPR– at least some of whom had been taken to temporary accommodation centers in Russia– are transported to Moscow on aircraft belonging to Russia’s Aerospace Forces or Putin’s Presidential aircraft for placement with citizens of Russia.
Mid-October 2022	The earliest known record of a child from Ukraine is listed in Russia’s child placement databases (among the 148 children identified in Yale HRL’s dataset).
*13 October 2022	Lvova-Belova states that following the annexation of occupied territories in Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia, children from Ukraine will no longer be placed with citizens of Russia and will instead be listed on Russia’s federal child placement databases.

*13 October 2022	Lvova-Belova claims children from Ukraine placed with citizens of Russia would “immediately” be naturalized as citizens of Russia.
29 October 2022	Lvova-Belova denies children from the so-called DPR and LPR are adopted by Russian families, instead claiming that children are only placed under “guardianship.”
26 December 2022	Putin issues decree authorizing heads of institutions in Russia and those with custody of children from Ukraine to renounce Ukrainian citizenship on behalf of children under 14 years of age.
3 January 2023	Putin instructs that more work should be done to “identify” orphans in the new Russian regions and provide [unspecified] support.
*16 February 2023	Lvova-Belova reportedly announces to Putin that she has adopted the child from Mariupol taken into her custody in June 2022.
6 March 23	Lvova-Belova claims there is “no adoption [of children] from new regions at all, in principle.”
17 March 2023	The ICC issues arrest warrants for Putin and Lvova-Belova on the deportation and transfer of children from Ukraine.
18 March 2023	The Duma passes a law enabling parents, guardians, and heads of institutions to renounce Ukrainian citizenship on behalf of children.
29 March 2023	Lvova-Belova claims the so-called DPR would be the first Ukrainian region connected to Russia’s federal child placement database.
*4 April 2023	Lvova-Belova continues to deny that children from the so-called DPR and LPR were adopted in Russia.
*4 April 2023	Lvova-Belova claims that new Russian citizens retain existing Ukrainian citizenship if they did not express a voluntary desire to renounce it.
*5 April 2023	Russian [official] claims that children from Ukraine are solely placed under guardianship, rather than adoption, at an informal UN security council meeting.
23 April 2023	The Duma passes a law stating that Russia does not recognize dual citizenship for those with Russian passports.
May 2023	South Africa considers changing its laws to allow Putin to attend the BRICS Summit in August despite the ICC warrant preventing Putin’s attendance.
July 2023	South Africa’s largest political opposition party brings the issue of whether Putin should be allowed to attend BRICS before the High Court in Pretoria.

- *19 July 2023 Officials in Russia and South Africa state that Putin will not attend BRICS 2023 in South Africa.
- *13 October 23 Lvova-Belova claims that all children from Ukraine placed in foster care in Russia have been naturalized as citizens of Russia.
- 4 January 2024 Putin signs Presidential Decree allowing all children from Ukraine to be naturalized as Russian citizens in a simplified manner.

ENDNOTES

1 Lifton, Robert Jay, "Doctors and torture," *New England Journal of Medicine* 351, no. 5 (2004): 415-416.

2 CB054 has been withheld for protection purposes.;

CB126 has been withheld for protection purposes.;

CB080 has been withheld for protection purposes;

CB023 has been withheld for protection purposes.;

Schelfaut, Sanne, "Politie Traceert 8 Door Rusland Gedeporteerde Kinderen: 'Onze Mensen Hadden Meteen Beet,'" AD, September 2, 2024, <https://archive.ph/75yu6>, <https://www.ad.nl/buitenland/politie-traceert-8-door-rusland-gedeporteerde-kinderen-onze-mensen-hadden-meteen-beet~ae8b5546/?referrer=https://www.google.com/>;

CB161 has been withheld for protection purposes.;

CB160 has been withheld for protection purposes.

3 CB045 has been withheld for protection purposes.

4 CB162 has been withheld for protection purposes..

5 The Moscow Times, "Putin's Children's Envoy Reveals She Adopted Child From Mariupol," The Moscow Times, February 16, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240926160539/https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/02/16/putins-childrens-envoy-reveals-she-adopted-child-from-mariupol-a80249>, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/02/16/putins-childrens-envoy-reveals-she-adopted-child-from-mariupol-a80249>;

CB126 has been withheld for protection purposes.

6 Юлия Борта, "«Сразу Поняла — Это Мой Сын». Детский Омбудсмен Взяла в Семью Сироту Из ДНР," Аргументы и Факты, October 29, 2022, <https://archive.is/tOxfB>, https://aif.ru/society/people/srazu_ponyala_eto_moy_syn_detskiy_ombudsmen_vzyala_v_semyu_sirotu_iz_dnr.

7 Freeman, Lindsey, Alexa Koenig, and Eric Stover, "Berkeley Protocol on Digital Open Source Investigations," Human Rights Center, January 30, 2022, <https://perma.cc/V8EN-QS9V>, <https://humanrights.berkeley.edu/berkeley-protocol-digital-open-source-investigations>.

8 The Russian Federation is comprised of six types of administrative divisions: Republics, Krai, Oblasts, Federal Cities, Autonomous Oblast and Autonomous Okrugs, all of which hold equal status within the country and are referred to as subjects of the Russian Federation.

9 Raymond, Nathaniel A., Card, Brittany L.; Baker, Isaac L. (2014), "A New Forensics: Developing Standard Remote Sensing Methodologies to Detect and Document Mass Atrocities," *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal*: Vol.8: Iss.3: 33-48.

10 Khoshnood, Kaveh, Nathaniel A. Raymond and Caitlin N. Howarth et al., "Russia's Systematic Program for the Re-education and Adoption of Ukraine's Children," 14 February 2023, Humanitarian Research Lab at Yale School of Public Health: New Haven, <https://archive.ph/8RFsv>, <https://hub.conflictobservatory.org/portal/apps/sites/#/home/pages/259fe204b4344f90a865c1e796a232a5>.

11 *Id.*

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