



Children are vulnerable in many aspects, one is the limited independent access to public services.

PHOTO: MARIAN WEYO/SHUTTERSTOCK

Childhood in the conditions of war

The Ukrainian experience

by **Anastasiia Chupis**

Russia's war against Ukraine has been going on for nine years. During this time, a whole generation of children was born and started studying at school. After graduating from school, these children, living in two different world systems – in territories controlled by the government of Ukraine and non-controlled territories – will have a bipolar political understanding, since this consciousness is formed by educational programs, depending on whether they are approved by the Ministry of Education of Ukraine or changed under the pressure of the Russian occupiers. This war for the consciousness of Ukrainian children and against Ukrainian cul-

ture is reinforced by the systematic abduction and deportation of children from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine to the territory of Russia, which by its very nature is a war crime.

However, the informational and cultural front is only one dimension of the war against Ukrainian childhood. Children are one of the largest and most vulnerable categories of the civilian population, who are drawn into the conflict against their will and suffer war injuries of varying degrees and severity. The war unleashed by the Russian Federation not only inevitably steals the happiest time of Ukrainian youth, but also poses risks to life and health, and violates many children's rights and freedoms.

The war crimes committed by the Russian Federation against Ukrainian children include physical harm (murders, injury, mutilation, child abuse, rape), violations of the rule of law (illegal imprisonment; denial of children's rights to education, security, and access to humanitarian support; abduction; illegal transfer to custody), psychological damage, destruction of educational institutions' resources, and using children for propaganda and military purposes. All these factors create enormous challenges for children and their parents in the context of future choices to ensure better living conditions and security. These are not only the issues of individual families but also a significant challenge for the government of Ukraine, which should already form a vision for the integration and reintegration of children into the post-war peaceful Ukrainian environment, taking into account their interests in the processes of post-conflict development and reconstruction of the state.

Stolen childhood during war

The unjust war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine is stealing the childhood of Ukrainian children. And that's not just a powerful metaphor. Unfortunately, children are one of the most vulnerable categories of the population, because they are limited in their independent access to public services, such as legal services, which they can receive mostly through the mediation of parents or authorized persons. According to international law and Ukrainian legislation, a child is a person under the age of 18 (that is until he reaches the age of majority). According to Article 6 of the Family Code of Ukraine, a child is considered a minor before reaching the age of 14, and a juvenile between the ages of 14 and 18.

Since February 24, 2022, according to the annual report of the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine Dmytro Lubinets, 7.9 million have received various forms of temporary protection from other states, while 4.9 million citizens of Ukraine are internally displaced persons. 35% of the total number of displaced persons are children.¹ According to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories, Iryna Vereshchuk, as of April 2023, 4.8 million citizens in Ukraine officially have the status of internally displaced persons (IDPs), 1 million of whom are children.² These figures are the largest indicators of population migration within Europe since the Second World War and exceed the figures for population displacement as a result of the wars in the territory of former Yugoslavia. According to the assessment of the Council of Europe, the total number of displaced persons in former Yugoslavia was 3.8 million people, while in Ukraine this figure is about 12.7 million.³ Such an unprecedentedly large number of refugees within the European Union causes a lot of discussions. It very often becomes a bargaining chip in the Russian Federation's PsyOps aimed at destabilizing the diplomatic unity of Ukraine's partner countries. Rus-

sia has repeatedly speculated on the issue of Ukrainian refugees in the international media field. However, attempts to destabilize the energy system of Ukraine, carried out by the Russian Federation during the autumn-winter heating season of 2023, caused a new wave of migration of women and children abroad. These actions may indicate attempts to cause systematic migration pressure on the countries receiving Ukrainian refugees and force these countries to refuse to aid or reduce humanitarian and military support.

As a result of forced migration, women and children may also become victims of human trafficking, due to the vulnerability of their position.

Children at risk

Children often become victims of landmines left by the Russian military in recently de-occupied territories. In Ukraine, at the beginning of the full-scale war, the Ministry of Health created a separate registry that collects information about children's injuries and ensures that such children are provided with the necessary care and conditions for further rehabilitation. As of the beginning of 2023, according to the Head of the State Emergency Service of Ukraine (SES) Serhiy Kruk, 30 percent (174,000 km²) of the territory of Ukraine is contaminated by explosive devices of various shapes and configurations.⁴

On April 10, 2023, during a joint briefing with Acting Minister of Defense of the Kingdom of Denmark Troels Lund Poulsen, Minister of Defense of Ukraine at the time being (a new minister has been appointed since September 2023), Oleksiy Reznikov noted that demining the territory of Ukraine, taking into account foreign experience such as demining Croatia, will require at least 30 years and about five thousand specialists. According to these data, children, and young people living in the de-occupied territories for the next three decades could potentially be vulnerable to significant injuries from mines and projectile fragments,

a situation that could cost hundreds, if not thousands, of lives. This factor can also affect the possibility of the civilian population returning to their homes; that is, due to the increased risk of trauma, Ukrainians will be faced with the choice of risking the health and lives of themselves and their children, or settling in another city of Ukraine, or another state in general, integrating in the future at the place where they have settled. For those who have already returned to the de-occupied territories despite the security risks, an online course on the basics of mine safety was created in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, with the support of UNICEF, with the aim of training broad sections of the population, and especially children, in the rules for handling explosive objects. Such courses and materials should help children and teenagers to be careful with suspicious objects and

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protect them from injuries and other serious consequences from interaction with shells and mines.⁵ Potentially, these courses can be either partially or completely included as educational disciplines in the list of school subjects.

It should be noted that the Russian Federation systematically violates all possible international laws and norms and has been waging the war against Ukraine with hybrid and unconventional methods. Abductions, filtering measures, murder, mutilation and torture of children and young people are among the types of war crimes against the civilian population committed by representatives of the Russian Federation's armed forces, officials of various branches and levels of government, and certainly the leadership of the aggressor state. All these actions indicate purposeful genocide of the Ukrainian nation.

The status, rights, and norms regarding the treatment of children in conditions of armed conflicts are enshrined in such international acts as the 4th Geneva Convention (1949) the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and its optional protocols on armed conflicts and human trafficking for sexual purposes (2002), and additional protocols (1977); the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998), and the statutes and case law of other international criminal tribunals: Customary International Humanitarian Law, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and Civil and Political Rights (1976), and UN Security Council Resolutions on Children and Armed Conflict, including UN Security Council Resolutions 1261, 1314, 1379, 1460, 1539, 1612, and 1882.

Ukrainian Laws on Childhood Protection

In the Ukrainian legal field, the rights of the child are enshrined in the Constitution of Ukraine, the Family Code of Ukraine, the Civil Code of Ukraine, and the Laws of Ukraine "On Childhood Protection", "On Prevention of Violence in the Family", and "On Education".⁶

According to the norms of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have the right to personal life and protection from encroachments on it, the right to protection from all forms of physical and psychological violence, the right to rest and leisure; protection from economic exploitation and from performing any work that may pose a health hazard, be an obstacle to the child's education or harm his health, physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development; for protection from illegal abuse of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances; protection from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse; protection of the child from all forms of exploitation that harm any aspect of the child's well-being; protection from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading forms treatment or punishment.

"THE BIGGEST THREAT TO UKRAINE IS THE LACK OF ANY REGISTER OF CHILDREN STAYING ON THE TERRITORY OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION."

The Convention on the Rights of the Child and Resolution 1261 emphasizes the inadmissibility of using children as soldiers. Article 2 of Resolution 1261 strongly condemns attacks on children in situations of armed conflict, including killing and maiming, sexual violence, abduction and forced displacement, recruitment and use of children in armed conflict in violation of international law, and attacks on objects protected by international law, including places where there are usually many children, such as schools and hospitals, and calls on all parties concerned to put an end to such practices; Article 7 calls on all parties to armed conflicts to ensure that the protection, welfare, and rights of children are taken into account during peace negotiations and throughout the post-conflict peace-building process. And in Articles No. 8 and 9, parties to armed conflicts are called upon to take possible measures during armed conflicts to minimize the harm caused to children and to comply with specific obligations to ensure the protection of children in situations of armed conflicts.⁷

As of October 10, 2023, according to the state portal Children of War, since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, the Russian military and their actions have killed 506 children, and 1133 children have been injured. 1187 children are considered missing, 19 546 children have been deported, of whom 18 775 have been located, and 386 children have already been returned to Ukraine. According to the data of the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine, the facts regarding the perpetration of sexual violence by the Russian military against 13 children have been established. It is impossible to establish the exact number of injured children due to active hostilities and the temporary occupation of part of the territory of Ukraine.⁸

Illegal detention of Ukrainian children

According to Iryna Vereshchuk, Russia is illegally detaining 4 396 orphans in the temporarily occupied territories and has illegally taken them to Russian territory (as of April 10). For their return to Ukraine, a Coordination Council has been formed under the patronage of the President's office, which is working on the creation of an international coalition,

which should become a platform for the liberation and return of children through diplomatic channels under the protectorate of one of the international humanitarian organizations.⁹

The biggest threat to Ukraine is the lack of any register of children staying on the territory of the Russian Federation, and the actions of Russia aimed at banning access to the children by Ukrainian human rights

defenders, government officials, medical workers, and representatives of international humanitarian organizations, which makes it impossible to monitor the conditions in which children are being held and work to ensure their return to families or care institutions in the territories under the control of the Ukrainian



Then, after he cut his veins, I had to clean the cell.

Vladyslav Buryak, 16 years old, was in Russian captivity for three months. He tells about grim torture.

PHOTO: CHILDREN OF WAR

government. Moreover, it is also illegal to transfer children to the care of families of Russian citizens.

In addition to the fact that Ukrainian children are being traumatized or killed as a result of the criminal actions of the Russian army, according to the deputy director of the Department for the Protection of Children's Rights and Ensuring Equality Standards of the National Social Service, Volodymyr Vovk, 6 447 children were left without parental care during the war for various reasons. For 1 233 children, this was due to the death of one or both parents.¹⁰

In a report recently presented by the Humanities Research Laboratory of the Yale School of Public Health, research was conducted based on open data on the activities of the Russian Systematic Program for the Re-education and Adoption of Children from Ukraine. According to the researchers' data contained in the report, as of February 2023, a network of 43 camps and other institutions was discovered in which at the time of the report, at least 6 000 children from Ukraine were being held within the occupied territories. All these institutions are located on the territory of the temporarily occupied Crimea and directly on the territory of the Russian Federation. The analysts involved in compiling the report also presented the categorization of children who are in institutions of this type. A total of 4 categories were distinguished, namely: 1) children who have parents or obvious family guardianship; 2) children who Russia considers orphans; 3) children who were under the care of state institutions of Ukraine before the invasion in February 2022 (often due to severe physical or mental disabilities); 4) children whose guardianship is unknown or uncertain due to wartime circumstances caused by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

According to the report, the primary goal of the camps is political re-education: at least 32 (78%) of the camps identified by the Humanities Research Laboratory at the Yale School of Public Health appear to be involved in systematic re-education efforts that expose Ukrainian children to scientific, cultural, patriotic and/or military education focused on Russia. Numerous camps approved by the Russian Federation are advertised as "integration programs" with the apparent aim of integrating children from Ukraine into the Russian government's vision of national culture, history, and society.¹¹

In the course of investigations, Ukrainian law enforcement officers repeatedly established the fact of illegal detention of Ukrainian children in temporarily occupied places and their detention in harsh conditions with the use of physical and psychological pressure. In the interviews given by the children who were successfully returned from Russian captivity, it was noted that they were subjected to torture and witnessed war crimes regarding the military's inhumane treatment of representatives of the civilian population who were suspected of supporting the actions of the Ukrainian army or had openly patriotic pro-Ukrainian views. Thus, in an interview for the Ukrainian government project "Children of War", a 16-year-old teenager from Melitopol (Zaporizhia region), Vladyslav Buryak, who was in Russian captivity for three months, tells that he and his cellmate, a 24-year-old young man, were tortured for three days with electric current, including on the genitals, which led the young man to commit suicide in front of the child. Also, Vladyslav's captors, the military of the Russian Federation, forced him to wash the blood from his cell after torture.¹²

Is Vladyslav's case unique? Unfortunately not. Law enforcement agencies of Ukraine carefully record and study the facts

of non-conventional treatment of children, but active hostilities and the inability to collect reliable data and evidence about violations in the temporarily occupied territories make it impossible to provide timely legal, medical, and psychological assistance to the victims. That is why Ukraine needs active international institutional support in this aspect for the fastest return of all children and to ensure their basic rights and freedoms, defined by international acts and normative documents of Ukraine.

Children as tools in propaganda

In addition, Russia also uses kidnapped children to create propaganda stories. Thus, on February 22, 2023, at a rally concert in Luzhniki organized in support of the war, illegally transported children from Mariupol were brought onto the stage and everyone was forced to thank the Russian military for their “rescue”. The cynical use of children is not just an immoral act, but also an important part of the propaganda mechanisms to strengthen electoral support for Putin and his United Russia party, and it is also part of the narratives for the justification of waging war against Ukraine for Russian citizens.

On March 17, the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin. In addition, a warrant was issued against the commissioner for children’s rights in Russia, Maria Lvova-Belova.¹³ This means that potentially, Putin and Lvova-Belova can be arrested in 123 countries that have ratified the Rome Statute of the ICC to ensure the execution of the court decision.

On September 13, 2023, the European Parliament called on the International Criminal Court in The Hague (ICC) to issue an arrest warrant for the Belarusian illegitimate president Alexander Lukashenko. In a resolution approved by European deputies, he is named as an accomplice in the forcible removal of more than 2,150 children, including orphans, from the Russian-occupied regions of Ukraine to the so-called health camps in Belarus, where “they are subjected to Russification and ideological indoctrination.” The European Parliament holds Lukashenko and his regime responsible for these war crimes in the same way as Vladimir Putin and children’s ombudsman Maria Lvova-Belova.¹⁴

Undoubtedly, abductions, murders, and rapes causing physical and psychological injuries to children are unprecedented and the most serious crimes committed against children and youth in wartime conditions. However, another difficult aspect and at the same time a challenge for the Ukrainian government is ensuring children’s right to access to education.

According to the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, as of January 20, 2023, a total of 3 051 educational institutions were affected by the conflict, of which 420 were completely destroyed. Almost half of them are secondary schools.

Thus, as of January 23, 2023, 1 259 secondary schools were damaged, and 223 were completely destroyed. The largest share of schools affected was in Donetsk (67%), Kharkiv (43%), and Luhansk (41%) regions. Together, the affected schools of these three regions account for half of all damaged and destroyed schools in the country. In quantitative terms, the most affected schools are in Donetsk (328) and Kharkiv regions (304), and a significant number – more than 100 institutions – were also affected in Mykolaiv, Kyiv, Luhansk, and Kherson regions, as well as in Zaporizhia regions (97 schools).¹⁵

As a result of Russia’s full-scale military aggression against Ukraine, the number of students in educational institutions in the East, South, and North of the country has decreased. The research data of the Ministry of Education and Culture of Ukraine shows that the outflow of students occurred due to a forced move abroad and a change of place of study and relocation to another region of Ukraine. At the same time, some students are forced to study in the temporarily occupied territories. The center of Ukraine is the only region where the number of students increased. This happened at the expense of the children of internally displaced persons.

Access to education hindered

Some students, despite the fact that they continue to study in the same institutions where they received their education until February 24, 2022, have changed their place of residence. 27%

of primary school students and 23% of basic and senior high school students moved from the East region to other settlements in Ukraine. 16% of elementary school students and 14% of basic and senior high school students moved from the South to other settlements of Ukraine, and 17% and 14%, respectively, moved abroad. More students from the North currently live abroad (8%) than in other regions of Ukraine (6%). In the Center and in the West, 92% and 95% of students, respectively, are in the same settlement

as on February 24, 2022. During the war, the number of students receiving education via distance learning increased 43 times: from 17 669 (0.41%) to 772 909 (18.88%) students. The number of students who receive education on an individual basis has also increased. The number of those receiving homeschooling, when parents independently organize the educational process for their children, has increased 13 times (from 4 695 to 64 409 students).

The proportion of students from socially vulnerable categories who do not have access to the educational process in an educational institution is highest in the south of the country. 41% of students from low-income and socially disadvantaged families do not have opportunities for education to varying degrees, 33% of those from families with many children, 28% of students with special educational needs, and 22% of IDPs. In the center

“THE GOVERNMENT OF UKRAINE APPROVED AN EMERGENCY MECHANISM FOR THE FORCED EVACUATION OF CHILDREN FROM AREAS OF ACTIVE HOSTILITIES.”



As part of a working visit to Lviv region, the team of the Ministry of Reintegration headed by Vice Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk visited the Zhuravne neuropsychiatric nursing home, where young IDPs with special needs from dangerous regions of Ukraine have found shelter.

PHOTO: GOV.UA

and west of the country, indicators of access to the educational process among vulnerable categories of students are somewhat higher but lower than in the north and east.

According to educational institutions and surveys of students' parents, the organization of the educational process is most hindered by air alarms – 53%, lack of electricity – 41%, lack of Internet – 35%, and lack of shelter – 29%. In the east and south of the country, leaders also attributed hostilities in the territory to obstacles to the educational process – 46% and 23%, respectively.

The efforts of the occupying forces to destroy any mention of Ukraine in the newly captured territories should also be added to the problems of the education sector. Occupation representatives are destroying literature and any documentation in the Ukrainian language, which has been repeatedly reported in various regions. The so-called “Ministry of Education and Science of the LPR” (representatives of the occupation authorities in the Luhansk region) sent a document to the heads of city and district administrations, as well as to subordinate educational organizations, advising them to remove books from the school library from the list, which contained 365 items.

In September 2022, it became known that the Russian occupiers had removed all Ukrainian literature from the libraries of temporarily occupied Melitopol.¹⁶

They are trying to replace the seized Ukrainian literature with Russian as soon as possible. According to the Center of National Resistance, the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation allocates 200 million rubles for the purchase and distribution of Russian books in the temporarily occupied territories of the south and east of Ukraine. At the same time, about 120 million rubles will be directed to the creation of three model libraries in each temporarily occupied region, and 40 million to finance the libraries of the temporarily occupied regions of Ukraine controlled by the Russian invaders.¹⁷

In addition, in November, the Russian Federation opened

regional branches of the Russian military-patriotic movement Yunarmiya in the occupied Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia regions.¹⁸

Children as “human shields”

Attempts to create paramilitary training programs are part of the systematic propaganda activities of the occupation authorities, but they may be not only cultural but also practical for the regular troops of the Russian Federation because, since the beginning of the war in 2014, researchers have repeatedly drawn attention to attempts to recruit children to collect information about the positions of the military armed forces and as combatants. An article by Ukrainian researchers Yevhen Tsokur and Iryna Chaika, published in 2019, mentions the practice of recruiting children in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine to 15 such units of paramilitary groups in the quasi-republics of the LPR and DPR. Analyzing the current situation is rather difficult due to objective reasons; however, data has repeatedly appeared in the Ukrainian media about attempts to use children and the civilian population as “human shields” for reconnaissance of the positions of the regular army of Ukraine – especially at the beginning of a full-scale invasion, as reported by the Security Service of Ukraine, warning the civilian population against such actions.¹⁹

Military actions of the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine, massive missile attacks, and their consequences also worsen the moral and psychological condition of children. Given the fact that the 2022-2023 school year was extreme for all participants in the educational process, the psycho-emotional state of students worsened. For example, according to the Ministry's report for the beginning of 2023, the number of high school students who feel safe has decreased by 20%.²⁰

According to the results of a survey by the “Rating” group, based on the data of mothers' questionnaires, since the beginning of the full-scale invasion 41% of children have an increased level of irritability and apathy; indifference to education, and previous hobbies are noticed in 39% of children – these manifestations are more common in children of middle and older school age. A relatively common problem is outbursts of anger, aggression among children – 38%. There is also fear and crying for no reason in 35% of children. Such signs of anxiety states as fear of the future, sleep problems, nightmares, and problems with memory and concentration were more often recorded in older children (16-17 years old). The reflection of traumatic events in games and creativity was observed among the youngest children (3-9 years old). 60% of children witnessed or participated in various war-related events.

Most often, according to the mothers, children experienced the following traumatic events: separation from family and friends (28%), moving to another region of the country (25%), shelling and bombing (24%), prolonged stay in a cold room (17%). 11% of children moved abroad, 8% were under occupation, 6% witnessed the death of relatives or loved ones, 5% lost their homes, and another 5% experienced hunger and lack of water.

19% of the surveyed mothers currently live outside the home.

20% left, but have already returned, and 61% did not change their place of residence. 20% of respondents consider their current place of residence unsafe. Most of these people live in the de-occupied front-line regions and in Kyiv. Also, 41% of mothers noted that among their close relatives (husband, brother, sister, children, and parents) there are those who fight.²¹

The World Health Organization calls for the protection of children in armed conflicts. According to its data, ten percent of people who have experienced a traumatic event will later have symptoms of psychological trauma, and another ten percent will demonstrate behavioral changes or psychological disorders that become an obstacle to full participation in everyday life (the most common disorders are anxiety disorders, depression, and psychosomatic disorders).²²

However, in addition to psychological problems, the threat to children's health in the temporarily occupied territories is also an artificially created humanitarian crisis. Due to the blocking of logistical routes and humanitarian aid, the chances of leaving the territory controlled by Ukraine are minimal. Attempts to create a humanitarian crisis and famine in the temporarily occupied territories and where active hostilities are ongoing do not stop.²³

The most dangerous thing for children is to stay in the territory not under the control of Ukraine, and even more so in the immediate vicinity of the front line. Among the most significant problems faced by children and their parents who remain in such territories are: complete or partial destruction of critical infrastructure, complete absence or limited access to medicines and basic necessities, a large number of explosive devices in the environment, and the possibility of being hit during hostilities, the impossibility of obtaining medical, legal and educational services, and involvement in hostilities as combatants.

Evacuation of children

Parents who deliberately refuse to evacuate from areas as close as possible to the front line pose the greatest danger to their children. In response to such actions, on March 7, 2023, the Government of Ukraine approved an emergency mechanism for the forced evacuation of children from areas of active hostilities. Prior to the introduction of changes in the mandatory evacuation of children, parents (or those with parental responsibility) could refuse to evacuate themselves and their children by signing a refusal form. This led to the fact that children remain in the zone of active hostilities, risking death from shelling, and hiding in basements. On August 2, 2022, the Government adopted an order that provides for the mandatory evacuation of the population of Donetsk region.²⁴

It is stipulated that the evacuation of the child is carried out accompanied by one of the parents, a person with parental responsibility, or another legal representative. According to the



May 6, residents of the east can leave the shelling by the Pokrovsk-Lviv train.

PHOTO: FREERADIO.COM.UA

current legislation, the legal representatives of the child are the parents (adopters), guardians (custodians), adoptive parents, parent-educators, heads of educational institutions, health care institutions, and social protection institutions where the child is (if no guardianship has been established or no guardian or custodian has been appointed). At the same time, grandparents and other relatives, even if they live with minors, are not legal representatives of the child.

But in practice, if the parents refuse to evacuate, the child can be handed over to other relatives. If the child is an orphan, it is handed over to an authorized representative of the guardianship authority.²⁵

According to the testimony of the Head of the Donetsk OVA, Pavlo Kyrylenko, all children were evacuated from all the most dangerous areas, such as Bakhmut, Bakhmutsky district, from the city of Chasiv Yar, where shelling often occurs", and all children were evacuated from the cities of Vugledar and Maryinka. According to his comment to Radio Svoboda on May 18, five to seven children remain in Krasnohorivka and nearby villages, whose parents have changed their location and are hiding their children from evacuation. More than 700 children live in the Toretsk community, which is relatively far from the front line. The evacuation of parents with children has already gradually begun there.²⁶

There are 46 children left in the communities of the Zaporizhzhia region which are located on the front line. Yurii Malashko, the head of Zaporizhzhia OVA, spoke about this on air during the national telethon Yedini Novyni.²⁷

The work of evacuating children continues constantly because the front line is no place for a child.

Conclusion

Ukraine conducts systematic work to protect and ensure the rights of children and youth on the territory of the state and tries to minimize the impact of the war on these categories of the pop-

ulation, as well as to carry out the timely and complete recording of violations of these rights. However, there are a number of challenges that are the result of systematic violations on the part of Russia, and reluctance to conduct a dialogue with Ukraine and international institutions regarding the provision of the civilian population's humanitarian rights during the war.

The war crimes committed by the Russian Federation against Ukrainian children include physical harm (murders, injury, mutilation, child abuse, rape), violations of the rule of law (illegal imprisonment, deprivation of children's right to education, security, access to humanitarian support, abduction, illegal transfer to custody), psychological damage, destruction of resources of educational institutions, and use of children for propaganda and military purposes. All these aspects listed above are a direct violation of the norms of international law and the customs of warfare and should be investigated in detail, and the guilty punished.

The children of Ukraine deserve a safe and comfortable environment for growth and development, which Ukraine should become after the end of this bloody war.

One of the priorities of the government of Ukraine in the field of child and childhood protection should be the psychological and social adaptation of various categories of children (those who were in the temporarily occupied territories, those who were illegally separated from their parents, those who remained with guardians, those who suffered injuries and mutilations, those who were forcibly resettled both within the state and abroad). All these children have different degrees and different forms of traumatization, but it is an indisputable fact that the state and specialized international organizations such as UNICEF should strengthen cooperation in implementing programs of medical, psychological, socio-economic, safety, and educational support for children. It will also be valuable to study foreign experience in this area and to develop strategic documents for the purpose of their implementation both at the regional and national levels. ✘

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