



Violations of International Humanitarian Law Affecting Education in Ukraine

(February 2022 – May 2025)



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The analytical report highlights systemic violations by Russia of international humanitarian law in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine affecting education. Based on 162 in-depth interviews with teachers, psychologists, parents, their children, and other civilians, numerous war crimes were documented. These include the shelling of civilian infrastructure and educational institutions, which resulted in the killing and injury of civilians, including children. The report describes facts of the placement by Russian army units of military equipment in schools, the conversion of schools into headquarters, and the use of educational premises for the illegal detention of civilians. Systemic cultural violence has been recorded, including attempts to impose Russian identity through the education system. The report emphasizes that such actions by the Russian occupation government have severe consequences for the mental and physical health of children and teachers, pose threats to safety, educational rights, and the cultural identity of Ukrainian citizens in the temporarily occupied territories.

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Cover: Novotoshkyvske Lyceum No. 1 Back cover: Rubizhne Gymnasium No. 4. Photos provided by respondents to the CF "East SOS" documentation team.

CONTENT

<u>List of Abbreviations</u>	4
<u>Summary</u>	5
<u>Research Methodology and Methods</u>	8
<u>I. Respondent Profile</u>	10
<u>II. Hostilities and Their Impact on Children in Ukraine</u>	11
<u>A. Casualties and Injuries among Children, and Violence Committed by the Russian Military Personnel</u>	11
<u>B. Consequences of Hostilities for Children’s Mental and Physical Health</u>	12
<u>III. Education Under Temporary Occupation</u>	16
<u>A. Imposition of russian Education Standards</u>	16
<u>B. Ukrainian Online Schools</u>	22
<u>IV. Crimes Against Teachers Based on Their Identity</u>	27
<u>V. Russian Attacks on Schools as Civilian Infrastructure</u>	33
<u>VI. Russian Attacks on School Infrastructure</u>	36
<u>Conclusions and Recommendations</u>	41

List of Abbreviations

IHL	international humanitarian law
Media	mass media
TOT	temporarily occupied territories
AoH	area of hostilities
CF	charitable foundation
DPR/LPR	so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics
RF	Russian Federation
ROC	Russian Orthodox Church
HEIs	higher education institutions
GSEI	general secondary education institution
UN	United Nations

SUMMARY

This report is the result of an analysis of war crimes committed by the Russian military personnel and the occupation government in the temporarily occupied territories (TOT) that are affecting education sector since the outbreak of the full-scale invasion in February 2022, as recorded by documenters of the CF "East SOS". In some cases, for a more detailed analysis of war crimes and to demonstrate the systematic nature of Russia's unlawful actions, war crimes committed in the TOT dating back to 2014 are also described in the report. The described war crimes are committed by Russia against schools as civilian infrastructure, as well as against teachers, school administrators, schoolchildren, and their parents. Such actions constitute grave violations of international humanitarian law.

The report describes deliberate killing, torture, deprivation of a person of the means of subsistence, deliberate attacks on civilian objects, unlawful deprivation of liberty, deportation of children, imposition of Russian educational standards in the TOT, and militarization of education. The report also presents information on the impact of Russian crimes on the physical and mental health of Ukrainian children, based on testimonies of teachers and psychologists providing support to children affected by Russian attacks.

The report provides examples of systematic attacks on civilian infrastructure and educational institutions in Ukraine. Shelling led to the killing and injury of children and educators. In many cases, schools had no military significance and were not used by the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Targeted destruction of educational institutions is regarded as a war crime and an element of a broader strategy of terror against the civilian population.

The report describes the persecution of Ukrainian educators and their subjection to filtration procedures. Such persons are deprived of liberty without lawful grounds and without access to legal assistance. Detained educators are subjected to interrogations and psychological pressure.

The report provides information on covert deportation of children, carried out by Russia under the guise of evacuation from the combat zone. After the death of their parents, children are sent to orphanages, where they are subjected to Russian ideological indoctrination.

The cases described in the report regarding the introduction of Russian standards and militarization of education in the TOT are a purposeful practice implemented by Russia in temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories since 2014. Militarization of education manifests itself in the introduction of military patriotic educational programs, establishment of paramilitary children's organisations such as "Yunarmia" (Young Army), forced involvement of children in activities related to the Russian army, and ideological indoctrination aimed at legitimizing the war against Ukraine.

Based on the foregoing, we recommend:

◆ To the Government of Ukraine:

1. In connection with systematic shelling of educational institutions by the Russian army, strengthen their security: ensure the functioning of monitoring and rapid response mechanism to military threats for educational institutions in frontline and temporarily occupied territories; develop a system of shelters for pupils and educational staff; and improve training in first medical and psychological aid for the safety of the civilian population.
2. Facilitate the mandatory evacuation of children from areas in proximity to the line of contact and provide armoured vehicles and personal protective equipment for the evacuation process.
3. Facilitate the admission of youth from the TOT to Ukrainian HEIs, provide support in organising their departure and obtaining necessary documents. Stimulate the development of integration programs in GSEIs and HEIs for persons who stayed under occupation, and ensure the functioning of programs to compensate for the educational losses of pupils and students who left the TOT. Conduct a public communication campaign among population explaining that children who managed to flee the TOT are victims of war and require support for their adaptation and integration.
4. Continue systematic recording and transfer of evidence of war crimes to the International Criminal Court, the UN, and the European Court of Human Rights. Identify and prosecute collaborators in the education sector who facilitate the introduction of the occupation curriculum. At the same time, establish a clear system to determine the degree of culpability of teachers who agreed to cooperate with the temporary occupation government. Strengthen advocacy efforts abroad regarding Russia's crimes against children and education.
5. Create support programs for affected teachers and children and introduce an effective monitoring mechanism to guarantee timely access for evacuated children and education workers to psychological, social, and legal assistance, largely provided by public sector.
6. Continue to support distance learning for children in the TOT, develop alternative platforms to obtain Ukrainian education, taking into consideration the security risks, individual schedules, and the double burden on a child.

◆ **To the International Community:**

1. Expand sanctions lists of persons responsible for the forced Russification of education and the deportation of Ukrainian children.
2. Increase funding for programs to evacuate children with parents or other legal representatives, covering, *inter alia*, mandatory costs for purchasing armoured vehicles and personal protective equipment for crews and evacuees. Provide financial support for first medical and psychological aid training for humanitarian workers and mine-safety training for children and youth remaining in frontline areas.
3. Exert pressure on Russia to provide information on deported and missing Ukrainian children. Ensure their return and stop the illegal alteration of their identity.
4. Counter Russian disinformation in education by developing and conducting information campaigns for the international community on Russia's crimes affecting education sector.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Research goal: Based on in-depth interviews recorded by documenters of the CF “East SOS”, to describe violations of IHL committed against the Ukrainian education system, teachers, and children living under conditions of hostilities and temporary occupation on Ukraine’s territory.

Research objectives:

- to characterize sources of information;
- to identify documented violations of IHL;
- to describe the impact of war crimes on the psychological condition and health of schoolchildren;
- to facilitate public awareness of these crimes in international and Ukrainian media.

Research methods

The report is based on and analysed in-depth interviews with school administrators and teachers who were victims or witnesses of war crimes. Documenters also interviewed a number of school graduates and parents of children in the TOT, as well as psychologists working with children who need support. Open-source information was used to verify and analyse individual crimes.

The research focuses on the analysis of war crimes documented by the CF “East SOS” team, committed by the Russian Federation against the Ukrainian education system during 2022–2024. The report separately examines crimes committed against teachers and schoolchildren based on their identity. The research also partially brings to light the violations of international humanitarian law that do not directly pertain to the education but were recorded based on respondent testimony. At the same time, some testimonies may fall outside the specified chronological period due to the length of the occupation and the need to reconstruct the full context of events.

Practical Significance

This analytical report is not an academic research. The documented facts may serve as evidentiary foundation in future legal proceedings to hold those responsible for attacks on Ukraine’s education system accountable. The report can be used as an information source on the current situation by institutions working on education during wartime, including the Ministry of Education and Science, the Secretariat of the Human Rights Commissioner, HEIs admitting applicants from the TOT, the State Border Guard Service, embassies, donor organisations, and civil society representatives, etc. The collected facts may

also be submitted to the International Criminal Court, the European Court of Human Rights, and other international institutions for consideration of cases concerning violations of humanitarian law. At the same time, the publication of the report in the media and by the human rights organisations will help draw global attention to Russia's crimes against education, potentially leading to strengthening of sanctions and diplomatic pressure on the aggressor.

1 RESPONDENT PROFILE

1. The war crimes documentation team conducted in-depth interviews with educators, school principals, parents of schoolchildren, graduates who completed their education during the full-scale invasion, and psychologists who witnessed violations of international humanitarian law in education.
2. Documenters of the CF “East SOS” interviewed **87 educators**: 66 from Luhansk Oblast (region), 10 from Donetsk Oblast, 3 from Kherson Oblast, 1 from Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, 2 from Chernihiv Oblast, 2 from Kharkiv Oblast, 2 from Zaporizhzhia Oblast, 1 from the city of Kyiv. Respondents were in the following age groups: 18–35 (5 persons), 36–50 (11), 51–65 (32), 65+ (6), no data (33). Additionally, 4 kindergarten teachers were interviewed by the Foundation’s documenters: 2 from Kherson Oblast, 1 from Donetsk Oblast, 1 from Luhansk Oblast. Respondents were in the following age groups: 36–50 (1 person), 51–65 (2), no data (1).
3. The CF “East SOS” documenters interviewed **35 civilians** who managed to flee from the TOT and witnessed IHL violations in education: 14 from Kharkiv Oblast, 8 from Kherson Oblast, 5 from Donetsk Oblast, 3 from Luhansk Oblast, 3 from Zaporizhzhia Oblast, 1 from Chernihiv Oblast, 1 from Mykolaiv Oblast. Respondents were in the following age groups: 18–35 (4), 36–50 (4), 51–65 (12), 65+ (11), no data (4).
4. The CF “East SOS” documenters interviewed **24 parents** whose children were affected by the actions committed by the Russian army: 6 from Luhansk Oblast, 7 from Kharkiv Oblast, 3 from Kherson Oblast, 7 from Donetsk Oblast, 1 from Kyiv Oblast. Respondents were in the following age groups: 18–35 (2), 36–50 (13), 51–65 (4), 65+ (2), no data (3).
5. The CF “East SOS” documenters interviewed **7 school graduates** from the TOT: 3 studied in the city of Luhansk, 3 in the city of Donetsk, and 1 from Kherson Oblast who witnessed temporary Russian occupation. Interviews were recorded after the children had returned to territory controlled by the Government of Ukraine.
6. The CF “East SOS” documenters interviewed **7 psychologists** working with children affected by hostilities, enabling a deeper analysis of the situation. Some of these children had experience of living under temporary occupation.

2 HOSTILITIES AND THEIR IMPACT ON CHILDREN IN UKRAINE

A. Casualties and Injuries, among Children and Violence Committed by the Russian Military Personnel

7. Schoolchildren became victims of shelling of civilian infrastructure by Russian armed forces. According to Mykhailo Katralieiev, Vice Principal of Gymnasium No. 3 in the city of Rubizhne, as a result of shelling by Russian military personnel of a residential neighbourhood at 99 B. Khmelnytskoho Street, two schoolchildren were killed:

*"On 22 March, two schoolchildren from grade 5-A were killed – a brother and a sister. They were killed together with their mother; only their father survived. They were sleeping in the room, and a shell hit the room directly. The father came running to the school. You know, I've never seen such an empty look – a person perished in an instant when he lost absolutely everything. He didn't need to be consoled or given water – he just came and sat there. He told his story and that was all."*¹

8. According to the testimony by Tetiana Synychenko, Vice Principal for Academic Work of Popasna Lyceum No. 1 named after Viktor Shulika, on 27 March 2022, as a result of shelling by Russian forces of a residential neighbourhood in the city of Popasna, a 7th-grade pupil, Danylo Levashov, was killed:

*"A concrete slab shifted [as a result of the shelling – author's note] and landed on two people: an elderly woman who was in the shelter and our schoolboy. At that time, he was a 7th-grade student. Unfortunately, they both died during that shelling. Our colleagues were all there at the time. They were only able to bury them near the school building. Later, they were reburied at another time."*²

9. One of the causes of children's deaths in the occupied and frontline areas is the heavily mined terrain. A teacher from Luhansk Oblast reported the death of a schoolboy from Popasna Lyceum as a result of a mine explosion:

*"He died – he was blown up by a mine. This was already after the full occupation. Essentially, he is also a victim of the hostilities."*³

10. Russian military personnel regularly fire on vehicles carrying civilians, including children. The Foundation's team recorded the testimony about a Russian rifleman shooting at a car in which a female respondent was travelling with her husband and granddaughter. The girl was wounded and later died

¹ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-1/17.06.2022

² Interview Code: East SOS-EU-2/31.10.2024

³ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-3/16.12.2024

due to the lack of medical assistance. The crime was committed during the temporary occupation of Kharkiv Oblast in 2022:

"Shrapnel. It hit the car. Grandpa slowed down. Our granddaughter was sitting in the back. She started climbing between us to the front. I told her, 'Katushechka, sit down. We'll get home soon, everything will be okay.' She lifted her jacket, and there was a little hole. Here, on her chest, just above the stomach."⁴

11. Hostilities and the regular shelling of civilian objects by the Russian army affected the mental state of schoolchildren, as teachers also noted in interviews. To protect themselves and their children, parents left their homes in the temporarily occupied territories. However, even in territory controlled by Ukrainian Government, children's lives and health remain at risk, as Russia continues to shell civilian infrastructure using strategic aviation and loitering drones (the so-called kamikaze drones):

"...she was already in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast. A missile struck the neighbouring yard. The child has now stopped turning on her camera and stopped actively participating. She does written assignments."⁵

12. Under the guise of evacuation, Ukrainian children were deported to Russian territory. Sisters from the village of Novokrasnianka in Luhansk Oblast shared their story. At the end of March 2022, still minors, Viktoriia and Anna were "evacuated" together with their mother to Ryazan Region. After their mother's premature death, the girls were immediately transferred to a Russian orphanage:

"Two hours after our mother's death – maybe even less – they immediately told us, 'Pack your things, we are going to an orphanage.' The next day, after our mother's funeral, they took us to a tuberculosis dispensary and treated us for something unclear. They took away our things, gave us other clothes, took our phones. But my sister insisted that we keep our phones so we could communicate with our sisters, and they returned the phones. She said, 'I have to communicate with them, or I won't give you my phone.'"⁶

The girls' older sister Maria, who had reached adulthood by the time of the full-scale invasion and lived in another region of Ukraine, had to travel to the Russian Federation to formalize guardianship and save her younger sisters from the Russian orphanage.

B. Consequences of Hostilities for Children's Mental and Physical Health

13. Prolonged stay of children in bomb shelters not designed for long-term occupancy, combined with insufficient food and water, led to illness. One

⁴ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-4/05.04.2023

⁵ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-3/16.12.2024

⁶ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-5/15.02.2025

such case was reported to the Foundation team by the mother of a newborn in Mariupol:

*"The children became seriously ill. My four-month-old Maria – can you imagine – got sick for the first time in Mariupol, in the basement. Her fever reached 39°C, no medication, nothing at all! We ran to 'Savona' under shelling. There was a paediatrician in the bomb shelter. He said, 'There is no medication. If you can't bring the fever down, come back.' But the child is only four months old! I barely managed to give her water to help with the fever. The building was damaged, we were in the basement, it was freezing – even minus 10°C hit that March [20]22, as if on purpose, you know? She was soaking wet; everything was damp and cold, she was wet, and I had to continue giving her water."*⁷

14. Insufficient food, and the resulting malnutrition, had consequences for children's mental health, as they were forced at an early age to confront the possibility of their own death. One boy in Mariupol virtually expected to die, as reported by his mother:

*"We ran out of oatmeal, semolina, canned meat and fish, and even the bread cubes I had toasted were gone. There was no food left, and no one went to get water. For three days, the only things we ate or drank were two crates of tangerines gifted to us by our neighbours from the ninth floor, who were Azerbaijanis; that's it. The most terrifying moment for me was when my youngest son asked me, 'Mum, how much food do we have left? How long until we die?'"*⁸

15. Constant stress experienced by children in shelters subsequently led to numerous health problems:

*"My child has seborrheic dermatitis; stress-induced red spots are now appearing on his head. This is all an echo of our time in the basement. He even has one grey hair already."*⁹

16. In instances where parents tried to leave temporarily occupied territories for areas controlled by the Government of Ukraine, they encountered disproportionate administrative procedures and discriminatory treatment by Russian border guards, who forced children and mothers to wait for extended periods in the cold. Russia created no proper conditions for border control for Ukrainians:

"The last border was Kolotilovka, right at the border with Ukraine. I was standing with my daughter, we handed over our passports. He [Russian border guard] said, 'No, Ukrainian passport.' I gave them our Russian passports for control and kept the Ukrainian ones in my bag, not showing

⁷ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-6/11.07.2024

⁸ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-7/14.07.2024

⁹ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-8/15.07.2022

them. He approached me and said, 'You have a Ukrainian passport, give it to me.' I took out the Ukrainian passport and gave it to him. He took it, walked away, looked. We were standing outside – in the cold, snow, rain. The weather was terrible – we were freezing, but it didn't matter."¹⁰

17. The Russian invasion of Ukraine caused severe mental trauma among children who witnessed hostilities, lost loved ones, were forcibly displaced, or spent time under temporary occupation. Chronic stress, anxiety, depression, and sleep disorders are among some psychological consequences observed in children of all ages. These constitute direct violations of IHL, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention, which obliges parties to the conflict to ensure special protection for children. One psychologist described the most common cases she encountered:

"[...] many cases of heightened anxiety affecting different areas of life. This includes social anxiety related to interaction with peers and sometimes even with parents, adults. I had cases where children were worried about their parents, afraid of being apart from their father or mother – we addressed this as well."¹¹

18. Educators working with children who are, or were for a long time, under temporary occupation reported to the East SOS documenters that such schoolchildren were depressed and withdrawn:

"You know, children in the TOT are withdrawn; my children – they are withdrawn. And I thought, you know, when you live in this bubble – a bubble of displaced people, a bubble of people from the TOT – it seems normal that children don't talk about their personal life, don't share what games they play. I think perhaps constant stress affected everyone. When I went to work in a school in Odesa though... There, the children live with things constantly flying over their heads. [...] But they are different, they tell you what is happening at home, what they play, and they communicate. In the first month, I was simply in shock. In those two years, I had forgotten what it was like for children to be open, happy, joking."¹²

19. Children who spent extended periods in bomb shelters without adequate access to food and water suffered mental trauma:

"Their backpack was completely filled with food and water. One boy had two two-litre bottles of water. Two two-litre bottles! I asked him, 'Sweetie, why do you need so much?' He said, 'Because if there is no water, I will give some to my classmates to drink.' Later, he started carrying only one two-litre bottle."¹³

¹⁰ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-9/07.06.2024

¹¹ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-10/05.02.2024

¹² Interview Code: East SOS-EU-12/24.03.2025

¹³ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-13/31.03.2025

Thus, regular shelling of civilian infrastructure by the Russian army has led to significant casualties among children. According to the Prosecutor General's Office, as of 3 June 2025, 661 children were killed and 2,203 were injured.¹⁴ These actions constitute grave violations of Articles 48, 51, and 52 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, which provide for the protection of civilians.

Forced extended stay of children in bomb shelters has serious negative effects on their physical and mental health, such as development of chronic illnesses, exacerbation of neurological conditions, decreased cognitive function, symptoms of anxiety and fear, PTSD. This evidences violations of Article 24 of the Fourth Geneva Convention regarding the special protection of children during armed conflict, as well as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which obliges State Parties to take all possible measures to protect children from the consequences of war.

¹⁴ Interfax-Ukraine. Prosecutor General: Enemy kills 661 children, destroys/damages more than 4,500 schools and kindergartens during the war. Interfax-Ukraine. URL: <https://interfax.com.ua/news/general/1115877.html> (reference date: 27.10.2025).

3 EDUCATION UNDER TEMPORARY OCCUPATION

A. Imposition of Russian Education Standards

20. Since 2014, the Russian occupation government in the TOT has been forcing children to receive education according to Russian standards. The Foundation's team recorded that since 2022 Russia has been scaling up this practice. In particular, as a teacher from Donetsk Oblast reported, starting in 2022 social services of the occupation government conducted home visits to schoolchildren and threatened parents:

"...if parents did not send their child to this Russian school, then social services would remove those children and send them to orphanages. [...] So parents were forced, whether they wanted to or not, so to speak, to send their children to that school, the Russian one."¹⁵

21. According to an educator from Luhansk Oblast, the occupation administration carried out home visits to school students accompanied by Russian military personnel:

"And at times teachers went together with armed soldiers. And they were saying, 'If you don't send your children to school, we will take the children away because you are not allowing them to study,' – that did happen."¹⁶

22. According to respondents who studied in schools in the temporarily occupied territories of the so-called "LPR/DPR", changes to the curriculum started yet in 2014:

"Russian-language textbooks appeared immediately... New Ukrainian books disappeared. During the occupation, old books from 2004, from the 2000s, were used for studying. We had books that were that old. All new editions at that time – they disappeared. Most likely they were burned."¹⁷

23. For teachers working in schools in the TOT, the occupation administration prepared special teaching guidelines for the first lesson of the school year. For instance, such materials were distributed to schools in Kherson in 2022. On the first day of the school year, educators were required to justify the legality of the Russian occupation:

"This was a methodological teaching guide – a historical overview of how Kherson Oblast emerged. It referred to the decrees of Catherine II, about how Kherson Oblast was 'Wild Fields' ('Dyke Pole' in Ukrainian) and was settled only thanks to the Russian monarchy. At the end there was a conclusion stating that historically the south of Ukraine was, in fact, Russian territory.

¹⁵ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-14/15.10.2024

¹⁶ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-15/26.02.2025

¹⁷ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-16/30.01.2025

This was the methodological guide for the first lesson that was given to all teachers. They were required to have a homeroom period specifically focused on this topic.”¹⁸

24. Respondents reported that after the occupation of Ukrainian territories in 2014, Ukrainian language was continued to be taught in schools in the so-called “LPR/DPR”, but only as a foreign language once a week:

“Until [20]20, Ukrainian language and literature were still taught at our school. It was one lesson per week. One week it was literature, the other – Ukrainian language lesson. At the same time, the teacher also taught a class called ‘Lessons of Donbas Civics’. We were taught how Donbas historically belonged to Russia.”¹⁹

25. In the temporarily occupied Luhansk Oblast, parents were forced to write submissions asking to reduce the number of hours dedicated to studying the Ukrainian language:

“The Ukrainian language was eradicated immediately. A statement from the parents’ chat was forwarded to the teachers’ staff. It contained the requirement to file a submission that you want the subject ‘Ukrainian language’ to be taught one hour per week. So, they filed such submissions. Until the end of [20]22 they were still using Ukrainian textbooks, but they were requiring to speak Russian at school.”²⁰

26. According to the testimony of an anonymous female respondent from Donetsk Oblast, Ukrainian language and literature were taught at school until 2020:

“Ukrainian language and literature were removed from the curriculum yet before the full-scale invasion. When I was in 9th grade, we were told that there would be no more lessons.”²¹

27. Instead, the occupation administration stimulated the Russification of children in the TOT by conducting additional classes in Russian language and literature at school under the guise of extracurricular activities:

“After the full-scale invasion, they introduced a subject, the name of which I don’t remember, but we were additionally studying Russian literature during it. I don’t know why there was even such a thing, but we were graded for it, and at the same time we already had a Russian literature lesson.”²²

28. Children who remained in the TOT of Luhansk Region in 2022 studied their native Ukrainian language in secret:

¹⁸ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-17/23.05.2025

¹⁹ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-17/06.02.2025

²⁰ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-15/26.02.2025

²¹ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-18/02.05.2025

²² Interview Code: SOS-EU-18/02.05.2025

*"Children who are staying there attend Ukrainian-language teachers who are out of necessity remaining in the occupied territory. The children secretly attend them and study Ukrainian language."*²³

In addition, since the outbreak of the full-scale invasion, children in the TOT have been secretly studying online in Ukrainian schools in order to receive a proper education. The occupation administration is trying to obstruct this and is putting pressure on parents, forcing them to enrol their children in Russian schools.

29. Pro-Russian activities in schools in the temporarily occupied territories became more intensive a year before 24 February 2022. They included excursions to the sites of commemoration of the so-called "Great Patriotic War", as well as events commemorating Russian military personnel who have been killed on the territory of the so-called "LPR/DPR" since 2014:

*"We were gathered as a whole school, they even brought children from other schools by bus. And they took us to the 'Memorial to the Defenders of Donbas'; many schools were gathered. Russian flags were already there. And the essence of this event was to honour the memory of those who died for the liberation of Donbas. But it was presented not as liberation in the World War II – they were drawing parallels with what was happening in our time. It was 2021, Russian flags were all around. A boy about eight or nine years old came out on stage and recited a poem about 'Ukronazism.'"*²⁴

30. A female respondent from Donetsk Oblast reported that during the school year under temporary occupation, Ukrainian schoolchildren were forcibly engaged in celebrating commemorative dates from the history of Russia:

*"This was us – we were forming something: the sun, the 'DNR' flag, I think the Russian flag, and something else. Rehearsals took a lot of time; we went there instead of lessons. We didn't see the concert; they brought us, we waved these pieces of paper from the stands. And they immediately took us back home, that's it. Now, my younger sister has a new event added on 3 September – 'Day of Solidarity in the Fight against Terrorism'. Then, 30 September – 'Day of the Reunification of the 'DNR' and 'LNR', Zaporizhzhia and Kherson Regions with Russia'. 5 December – 'Heroes of the Russian Federation Day', and before that 'Russian Flag Day', 'Russia Day' and 'National Unity Day' on 4 November. And all this is only at the school level. We are not a school with military focus, we are not a school with patriotic education."*²⁵

31. The occupation government has introduced the dissemination of religious ideas of the ROC into the education system in the TOT:

²³ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-18/02.05.2025

²⁴ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-19/06.02.2025

²⁵ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-19/06.02.2025

*"There was a compulsory elective – 'Christian Ethics'. We had it for a year; we studied the Bible there. We were not graded for it."*²⁶

32. The so-called "Conversations about Important Things" program, which is actively implemented in the Russian education system, has a clearly ideological focus and is aimed at shaping a distorted perception of political reality among children. In the context of the TOT of Ukraine, such practice poses a serious threat to the mental and national self-determination of Ukrainian children. Forced participation in these classes, which often contain justification of aggression against Ukraine, glorification of war crimes, and humiliation of Ukrainian identity, may cause deep internal disorientation, loss of critical thinking, anxiety, and psychological splitting. A schoolboy from Donetsk Region reported the following to the Foundation's documenters:

*"Already after the full-scale invasion, as of [20]23, they introduced lessons called 'Conversations about Important Things'. They were every Monday. At the beginning of the lesson – since we studied remotely through 'Yandex-Telemost' app – they first turned on a broadcast of the raising of the Russian flag to the anthem. And after that, they turned on the video of the raising of the "DNR" flag to the anthem. After that, there were various topics where they told us how much Russia does for Donbas, for people."*²⁷

33. Russian military personnel and the military personnel of the so-called "LPR/ DPR" often visit schools in the TOT and lead "educational" events for students. During these events, the military personnel promote service in the occupation army and share memories of their fallen friends. They also convince children that committing war crimes against Ukrainian military personnel is acceptable and commendable:

*"Then, I think it was [20]17. And Russian military personnel from the so-called "DNR" came to our school. They gathered us all in the assembly hall. They used the projector to show us a video where terrorist 'Givi' puts AFU soldiers on their knees at Donetsk airport, cuts off the patch with the Ukrainian flag from their sleeve and forces them to chew it. We were still very small, and they forced us to watch this. I remember this very well. We were probably about nine or ten years old."*²⁸

34. Within the framework of implementing the "Conversations about Important Things" program in the temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories, Russian military personnel conduct visits to schoolchildren. During such sessions, military personnel spread fake information about the war against Ukraine, convincing children that the AFU deliberately shell civilian infrastructure of Ukrainian cities:

"It was one of these events when they gathered us – the eleventh grade, also the eighth. And there were very little ones: literally children from

²⁶ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-18/02.05.2025

²⁷ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-19/06.02.2025

²⁸ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-19/06.02.2025

second-third grade. And there were people with cameras at this lesson. And also, there was a serviceman from this 'Movement of the First' who was mobilized in Donetsk in [20]22. He was demobilized and came to the school to tell how things are going at the front. He told us that it was not Russia that bombed Mariupol. Very... they emphasized this very strongly, saying, 'I was there, I saw all of this.'"²⁹

35. Russia involves Ukrainian children who remain in the temporarily occupied territories in the so-called "Movement of the First" – a Russian youth organisation with a clear indoctrination goal. The organisation fosters loyalty to the Russian authorities and imposes the symbols and narratives of the occupying state, which falls under the definition of forced assimilation and ideological indoctrination:

"The Russians promote this movement very actively, and they instil in children that they are Russians, that Ukraine is Russia. They encourage joining the movement by promising to provide children with recreation, for example, taking them to Moscow, to Saint Petersburg. And people from Donetsk – children, rather – who for many years stayed put, having received such a free opportunity, of course go. And during the trip, they are given sessions spreading Russian propaganda."³⁰

36. The curriculum in the temporarily occupied territories is oversaturated with additional ideological programs and "patriotism-focused" clubs. As a result, children do not have enough time to study:

"And they say it's also the case in the Bilovodsk schools because the children can't manage. Last year they complained, 'We can't manage, our dad rushes us there by car.' Because, for example, senior students after lessons have some other mandatory class or a Russian patriotism-focused club."³¹

37. The educational process in the TOT does not meet proper education standards. The occupation authorities recruit people without specialized pedagogical education to work in schools.

"To be honest, the teachers there finished only 8 or 10 grades themselves. They are teaching children now. In [20]23 I had an acquaintance there; he worked at a school. He said, 'In the whole school we have two people with higher education.'"³²

38. In autumn 2022, according to an anonymous source, a graduate of a Luhansk school, the removal of Ukrainian-language textbooks has started, which were replaced with textbooks printed in Russian:

²⁹ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-19/06.02.2025

³⁰ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-19/06.02.2025

³¹ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-15/26.02.2025

³² Interview Code: SOS-EU-20/18.05.2024

*"They [the books] started to be banned. They even sent inspectors. I don't know whether they were law enforcement or just some officials. They checked the library. My mother worked, and still works, as a librarian in that same school. [...] they simply hid [the books] somewhere in a separate stack [...] they didn't burn them, no, just separated them."*³³

39. After the occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol in 2014, the Russian authorities began the eradication of Ukrainian-language books, as reported by a witness who studied in the city of Armiansk:

*"Near our school, there is a little yard where these books were burned. Ukrainian books were either thrown away or simply burned. That is, you cannot go to my school and get a textbook in Ukrainian."*³⁴

40. In the temporarily occupied territories, the destruction of Ukrainian identity has been a regular practice of the occupation government since 2014. This is manifested, in particular, in the concealment of Ukrainian national symbols in textbooks. Pupils themselves were forced to cover them up. The occupation government introduced this practice in the TOT as early as 2014. This was reported by a respondent who studied at one of the schools in Donetsk Oblast:

*"I can say that in the second grade we had Ukrainian textbooks. And since the subjects were taught in our school in Ukrainian, they were in Ukrainian. In the language and literature textbooks we covered up the page with the flag, the anthem – the Ukrainian symbols. But we still used those textbooks. Then, already in the middle of second grade – or maybe it was already third [grade] – we were given Russian textbooks, and teaching was already in Russian."*³⁵

41. The Foundation's team recorded cases in which the occupation government carried out measures to impose Russian identity on Ukrainian schoolchildren by using Russian symbols in schools and by imposing a different ethnic affiliation on children:

*"We were told that we were all Russians. That wasn't emphasized as much – there were more symbols of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic. Since 2021, a decision was made that for the Farewell Bell eleventh-graders must come with the flags of the 'DNR' and Russia. Two flags were also raised. On the Russia Day, the Russian Flag Day, they also forced us to make drawings. [...] on every such special occasion they forced children to do themed activities: organise events, make drawings, hold student assemblies."*³⁶

³³ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-21/5.07.2024

³⁴ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-21/12.08.2024

³⁵ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-19/06.02.2025

³⁶ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-19/06.02.2025

42. According to an educator from Kherson Oblast, the occupation administration in the TOT regularly monitors the devices used by children. The temporary occupation authorities sought to identify schoolchildren who were studying in Ukrainian schools online:

"Just reaching out to a child via devices to talk to them is not allowed – everything is very tightly controlled there. They even check phones, check traffic: at what time they go online. And they can check this almost every day, almost every other day. In cities – every day, and in villages – twice a week, three times a week."

43. In the temporarily occupied territories, Ukrainian schoolchildren are regularly subjected to discrimination by teachers, which constitutes psychological violence:

"We encountered situations where teachers told us, 'We will not use textbooks because, firstly, the curriculum is not adapted to us. And secondly, we are not smart enough to handle this curriculum.' And that was the first red flag we saw as children. Then education turned into a race toward Russian standards. We were all told that we had to go to universities in Russia. But at the same time, we were always told, 'You are not smart enough for Russian universities.' They belittled our language skills, assuring us, 'Your Russian is very bad.' They tried to convince us that our knowledge was insufficient, repeating, 'You are very weak.' There were no prospects, no school laboratories, no proper school libraries or proper school events – none of that existed; and instead, new specialized courses were introduced. Namely, 'Lessons of Donbas Civics and Spirituality'. It was something like local studies in a historical and social context. But it was very... it wasn't that the teacher... followed a curriculum; it included things like, 'Abortion must be banned. And the only religion that can exist here is Christianity, Orthodoxy.' Between this, they taught us about the 'Mertsalov Palm' and... many other topics... But that subject wasn't the only one – it changed, shifted into short modules of several class hours or a full-year course."³⁷

B. Ukrainian Online Schools

44. After 24 February 2022, Ukrainian schools continued teaching using online learning tools. Through the course of its work, the team of the CF "East SOS" documented the challenges faced by Ukrainian educators in the educational process during the war, as well as the feedback of children who studied in Ukrainian online schools while living under temporary occupation.

45. Ukrainian online schools enabled children in the temporarily occupied territories to receive proper education, preserve their identity, and strengthened the belief that people would not be abandoned. This was described by a student

³⁷ Interview of East SOS–EU–19/05.03.2025

who was under temporary occupation and studied in a Ukrainian online school in 2020–2021:

"I truly hope these online schools continue. They mean so much to children (and especially to their parents) who are currently living in the occupied territories and continuing their education [...]. If I hadn't attended a Ukrainian school like that, I wouldn't know what I would be going through now."³⁸

46. The war and online learning changed the usual rhythm of Ukrainian educators' work. This was especially evident for teachers from relocated educational institutions. Educators had to rapidly develop digital competencies and skills for interactive engagement with students. An educator from one of the schools in Lysychansk who worked online said:

"Yes, teachers have far too much to do now, a lot of everything. Because, first, you have to prepare and engage the children so that they don't fall asleep in class, at least. You have to learn something new, you have to know how to get them interested, make some cool interactive exercises, create presentations, find videos."³⁹

47. It is difficult for schoolchildren to maintain attention during online classes given constant dangers – night sleep deprivation due to shelling, daytime air-raid alarms, difficult living conditions, lack of a separate workspace for children, and other factors:

"Yes, it's much harder for teachers, but you can also see the children's feedback when they know that in the middle of a lesson I can say, 'Kids, now put some cool emojis showing how you feel about the lesson.' I keep them on their toes, and when I say to put emojis, they do. So, I can see who is sleeping and who is sitting in class and listening. It has become much harder, but also more interesting. We're developing, attending courses – from 9 AM to 2PM I teach, and after that I search for courses, develop some new, cool exercises for the children. It's somewhat more difficult and entertaining, yet I honestly like it."⁴⁰

48. For children and youth from the TOT, the role of civil society organisations assisting people on the path to Ukrainian education is crucial. The CF "East SOS" specialists, together with partners, have been supporting students and applicants from TOT since 2014. The Foundation works to inform children, parents, and educators about simplified admission opportunities for those from the TOT to HEIs in Ukraine. The team develops and distributes informational materials, provides legal and informational consultations to prospective applicants, and participates in drafting regulations, orders, and concepts concerning education for young people living under temporary occupation or those who have left the TOT. A website has been created containing all detailed

³⁸ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-22/30.01.2025

³⁹ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-23/10.11.2024

⁴⁰ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-23/10.11.2024

information about educational opportunities for people from the TOT (www.osvita-tot.com). Training has been conducted for representatives of educational centres "Crimea-Ukraine" and "Donbas-Ukraine" at HEIs (170 participants) and authorized GSEIs (107 participants), training on digital safety for educators (224 participants), as well as for teachers delivering education to schoolchildren residing in the TOT (3,199 participants).

"There are numerous challenges and obstacles for people in the TOT on the path to Ukrainian education: lack of information, precarious financial situation, physical danger, missing documents, insufficient statistical data, complicated relocation process, and fragile mental state. All of this affects access to Ukrainian education. Children and youth in temporary occupation are in the most vulnerable position and therefore require additional support from the state and society. The Foundation's task is to facilitate the process of admission and obtaining educational documents, and to provide people with as much information and support as possible, so they feel welcomed in Ukraine and know they belong here. Much has been done, but the challenges remain complex and require active engagement from us, our public sector partners, and representatives of state agencies. It is important for everyone working on education during the war to always remember that millions of Ukrainians remain in temporary occupation, and that Ukraine as a state must do everything possible for them on the path to Ukrainian education," says Yuliia Kishenko, Educational Programs Manager at CF "East SOS".

Currently, multifaceted efforts are underway in Ukraine to improve access to education for people from TOT. These efforts involve the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, the Ministry for Development of Communities and Territories of Ukraine, the Mission of the President of Ukraine in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, higher education institutions, vocational pre-higher education institutions, general secondary education institutions, the President of Ukraine's initiative "Bring Kids Back UA", the Coordination Centre for Family Upbringing and Child Care Development, SE "Reintegration and Recovery," as well as public organisations – CCE "Almenda", Civil Association "Ukrainian Child Rights Network", CF "Helping to Leave", CF "Save Ukraine", NGO "ZNOvU", NGO "MINZMIN," and the Coalition of Organisations protecting the rights of those affected by the armed aggression against Ukraine, which includes: ZMINA Human Rights Centre, NGO "Donbas SOS", NGO "CrimeaSOS", CF "Right to Protection", CF "East SOS", NGO "Civil Holding "GROUP OF INFLUENCE", CF "Stabilization Support Services", and the Crimean Human Rights Group.

All of these institutions, foundations, and organisations have done a lot, but considering the situation in the TOT described in this report, it is clear that even much more is needed to protect citizens in temporary occupation and ensure their access to Ukrainian education.

49. Among the respondents of the CF "East SOS" documenters are Anastasiia Biliaieva and Olha Koval, the co-founders of NGO "ZNOvU." They described the methodology of teaching and the safety measures the organisation follows while working with schoolchildren:

"We provide detailed recommendations on digital safety for schoolchildren in the TOT, for their parents, and also for teachers working with them. We are aware that the security situation varies greatly in different cities and different temporarily occupied regions. We know that some families whose children study with us are extremely cautious. They have multiple devices, use online resources very carefully, and clear everything as needed. This, in principle, helps avoid such situations. So far, everything has gone well with our students, thankfully. We are very happy about that and do everything possible to ensure it continues this way."⁴¹

50. The organisation ZNOvU also provides psychological support to children who are struggling with the consequences of temporary occupation:

"We had a first-grade boy from a territory that was occupied after [20]22. He had heightened fear and slept poorly. The psychologist gave recommendations to the parents for grounding practices that they should do. There was a full list of exercises. We know that his mother did these exercises together with her child as recommended. Additionally, throughout the period of studying with us, he attended meetings with the psychologist. By the end, his condition improved somewhat. Both the mother and psychologists noted that he began reacting more calmly to triggers and slept better."⁴²

51. Teacher's emotional and psychological support is critically important for children living under temporary occupation. It helps reduce anxiety, strengthens the sense of safety and trust, and creates a stable environment where a child can focus on studying despite stress. Teacher's care supports schoolchildren's mental health and emotional resilience. The co-founders of NGO "ZNOvU" shared their experience:

"It is very important to integrate socioemotional learning, where we teach children to manage their emotions, reflect on their state, and take care of their resources – even within academic classes. For example, you can ask, 'What do you see in this picture? What kind of croissant are you today?'"⁴³

Therefore, Russian Federation's actions aimed at forcibly integrating Ukrainian children into the educational space of the occupying state violate fundamental principles of IHL, in particular the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, as well as its Additional Protocols.

⁴¹ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-24/11.03.2025

⁴² Interview Code: East SOS-EU-24/11.03.2025

⁴³ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-24/11.03.2025

The introduction of Russian educational standards in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, the forced imposition of Russian ideology on schoolchildren, distortion of historical facts, propaganda lessons (including “Conversations About Important Things”), and the production of teaching materials legitimizing the occupation constitute a gross violation of Article 50 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which explicitly prohibits interference with the educational practices of the population of an occupied territory.

Restrictions on learning the Ukrainian language, the forced memorization of the Russian national anthem, raising the Russian flag, and the presence of occupying state military personnel in classrooms are forms of forced Russification, which can be considered an attempt to assimilate the occupied population. This directly contradicts Article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which establishes criminal liability for crimes against humanity, including persecution on national grounds and erasure of cultural identity through coercion.

Additionally, the militarization of education and participation of Russian military personnel in the educational process further endanger children, violating the principle of child protection during armed conflict, as outlined in both the Geneva Conventions and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This may also entail liability for involving children in war propaganda and preparing them for participation in hostilities, which is explicitly prohibited under international law.

4 CRIMES AGAINST TEACHERS BASED ON THEIR IDENTITY

52. Since 24 February 2022, Ukrainian teachers have been among the most vulnerable groups. A significant number of educators have been killed as a result of hostilities and Russian shelling of civilian infrastructure. In November 2024, Ukraine's Minister of Education Oksen Lisovyi reported that 89 educators and academic staff had died due to Russian aggression, and over 500 higher education diplomas had not been issued. Homes were taken from 228,000 children, 16 universities were forced to abandon their campuses, and approximately 1,000 schools ended up on the other side of the front line.

53. The Foundation's documenters recorded the disappearance of one teacher in the Beryslav District of Kherson Oblast in March 2022. The occupiers detained and accused Volodymyr Borysovykh Darmostuk of providing coordinates for adjusting fire on their positions. His daughter, Iryna Zhupetska, told the Foundation's documenters about this:

"They stopped my father when he was riding a bicycle, wounded him by shooting, threw him in the trunk, and kept him in captivity for a whole month. He had a leg wound. He was given antibiotics for five days, dressings were changed irregularly. His wound was very large. Overall, there were six captives. Four were released, and two were kept. I don't know why. My father was one of those kept. No one knows where they were taken or in which direction – they were not seen or heard from."⁴⁴

54. On 24 February 2022, the first day of the full-scale invasion, the director of the inclusive resource centre in Vuhledar, Olha Shramko, was killed during a Russian military strike on the local hospital, as confirmed by an educator from one of the Vuhledar schools, Yevheniia Shevchyk.⁴⁵

55. As a result of a Russian strike on the city of Zolote in Luhansk Oblast, a teacher at Zolote Secondary School (Levels I-III) No. 5, Viktoriia Borodachenko, was killed, as mentioned in an interview by her colleague Oleksandra.⁴⁶

56. During the battles for Mariupol, the Russian army systematically shelled residential areas. Oksana Sanatorchuk, a Ukrainian language and literature teacher at Mariupol School No. 64, reported the deaths of her colleagues in March 2022:

"Two of my colleagues were killed. One was Larisa Oleksandrivna Lvova, a home economics teacher. Her house was hit, and the explosion threw her body out of the apartment. Afterwards, we were also searching for our

⁴⁴ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-25/16.05.2025

⁴⁵ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-26/16.12.2024

⁴⁶ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-27/08.10.2022

*primary school vice principal, Nadiia Petrivna Kramar, but she was also dead. She died under the rubble of the building.*⁴⁷

57. The Foundation team recorded the detention and subsequent imprisonment of an educator from Luhansk Oblast. She was taken to a detention centre in Luhansk for interrogation, which was split in two main parts. First, Russian investigators questioned her about the Ukrainian education system and textbooks in Ukrainian schools. Second, she was questioned about territorial defence organisation. She was held in inhumane conditions:

*"They brought me to the SIZO [pretrial detention facility – translator's note]. Evidently, no one tells you where you're taken. They stripped me of everything that could pose a danger, so I would not harm myself. I was left in a T-shirt, sweater, hoodie, pants, shoes, and socks, and taken to a cell. They gave me a pillow, mattress, bedding, and I went into the cell. There was another woman already in the cell. The cell had a camera (i.e. surveillance camera), so everything you did was monitored. There was no way to maintain basic hygiene, no warm water, absolutely nothing."*⁴⁸

58. According to Andrii, an computer science teacher from Kherson Oblast and a village council deputy, the occupation administration conducted so-called "friendly" talks to win trust and persuade to cooperate with Russian authorities. If a teacher refused, Russian military personnel visited them. For example, Andrii was visited at night by Russian soldiers with codenames "Greek" and "Kombat" who threatened to kill him for refusing to cooperate:

*"Well, the second one, 'Greek,' says, 'Look, if Kombat vouches for you, I don't know... **I would probably kill you**, but like – if Kombat vouches for you, then you have to serve him.' And Kombat says, 'No, no need... no need to serve anywhere, no need to do anything.'"*⁴⁹

59. The Russian occupation authorities identified representatives of the population considered most dangerous by the Russian officials. Security forces searched for military personnel, volunteers, and teachers. Searches are thus a regular practice by Russian security forces in the temporarily occupied territories. During searches, they sought Ukrainian-language literature or other patriotic printed materials. In some cases, families of teachers with relatives in military service were searched. According to an anonymous educator from Luhansk Oblast, some searches were conducted by Kadyrovite units:

"I can speak about my own house – everything was ransacked, and I had a search carried out. Everything was broken. I know that on the first day, when the Kadyrovites entered the city, they were filming and went into the

⁴⁷ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-28/12.2023

⁴⁸ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-28/10.11.2024

⁴⁹ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-29/09.01.2024

ground floor of the school. I saw it – the video is online. And in general, they go through all the houses, checking phones.”⁵⁰

60. In addition, the respondent reported that Kadyrovite army units deprived people of their means of sustenance. She witnessed Russian military personnel looting an elderly woman:

«“[...] she is an elderly woman. The Kadyrovites came to her house, took her son’s car from the garage, took the fuel, took all the food from the cellar and from the house, rummaged through everything, and in the end forced her out of her home. Today she is living with a friend. And they [the Kadyrovites] moved into her house.”⁵¹

61. An educator in Kherson reported an incident in which a Russian soldier pointed a loaded weapon at her, even though she had not provoked him:

“I was walking from school. A car drove up – a ‘Z’ vehicle. One Russian soldier went into a café; another was standing by the car. I was just walking past, heading home, tired. I wasn’t confronting him, no; I was tiredly coming back from work. I didn’t provoke him in any way, not even with a look. I was just a tired person walking. But he raised his rifle and pointed it at me – slowly aiming the barrel at me and tracking me with the weapon as I walked past. I wasn’t walking toward him, just past him. And he followed me with the rifle, keeping me in his sights, so I would be afraid. This shows such contempt – that we Ukrainians are treated as second-class people.”⁵²

62. School principals and teachers of history, Ukrainian language and literature were targeted in particular. Russian security forces did not limit themselves to a simple search. After identifying those they considered most “dangerous” to the occupation regime – those who continued to resist and refused to cooperate – they carried out repeated searches, often accompanied by interrogations and physical violence.

63. A teacher from Kherson Oblast, Oleksandra, reported her forced expulsion (deportation) by the Russian occupation government from the TOT:

“The second time it was an interrogation and a search. We didn’t expect it; I thought nothing else would happen, but it was a terrible search. Armed men came, about ten soldiers. They went through the whole house. They interrogated me while searching the house with my husband. After the second search, there was a third interrogation and search. They searched the yard mostly; the house – not so much, but searched the yard. After the third search, they told me, ‘You have two options: either we launch an investigation, and you will go to prison for violating Russian law.’ I interrupted and said, ‘But I am a citizen of Ukraine. How can I violate Russian laws?’

⁵⁰ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-30/07.07.2022

⁵¹ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-30/07.07.2022

⁵² Interview Code: East SOS-EU-17/23.05.2025

How's that possible?' 'That's how it goes,' he said, 'Either Lefortovo (and he named this one specifically), or deportation.' I said, 'Well, of course deportation is better.' He smiled and said, 'Good.'"⁵³

By order of the occupation governor Yevhen Balytskyi, the Ukrainian teacher was to be deported. Russian soldiers drove her to the front demarcation line, pointed toward Ukrainian-controlled territory, and ordered her to go on her own:

*"I asked, 'Can I go?' 'Yes, go.' So I went. Then he said to someone else, **'Don't shoot her – let her make it.'**"*

64. Russia is actively implementing the "Zemstvo Teacher" program in the TOT ("zemstvo" means "municipality" – translator's note). Educators from Russia are brought in to teach in the occupied Ukrainian territories:

"A new principal arrived, and she was aggressive toward everyone. She was seconded from Russia. Russians come to the occupied part of Ukraine, and they are paid much more than local teachers."⁵⁴

65. Searches were conducted not only in schools but also in institutions and organisations related to education. FSB and Kadyrovite units took part in the procedures. Olha Tsylinko, founder and director of the Kherson local NGO "Sofia Centre for Family Rehabilitation of Children with Disabilities and Disabling Conditions", described one such instance. The search included threats against Olha's family:

"...the search was led by either a Dagestani or a Kadyrov fighter. There were Dagestanis in Kherson, many of them. They drove around in armoured vehicles with their flags. So our search was led by a Dagestani. Let me tell you: three went upstairs, three downstairs, and about five searched the yard and garage. More than a dozen in total. [...] They were very aggressive – threatened the child with a weapon. I've got a little one – it's not like you can keep him on a leash at home. My son rides his bike around. There was a time when they stopped him – at Korabeliv Square, at the roundabout there. They stopped him. One of them came up and said, 'Hand over your backpack,' and pointed a rifle at the boy's leg. 'If I find anything now, I'll cripple you.'"⁵⁵

66. Russian authorities persecuted teachers of history, Ukrainian language and literature. Telling example recorded by the Foundation team occurred in Bilovodsk, Luhansk Oblast, during a gathering of humanities educators:

"The new authorities gathered all educators in the community centre to organise schooling. [...] They gathered history teachers, Ukrainian language

⁵³ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-31/11.01.2024

⁵⁴ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-32/02.05.2025

⁵⁵ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-33/01.11.2023

and literature teachers. [...] At that meeting they presented what curricula we had to follow, how we had to work, and what we would get for it.”⁵⁶

Senior officials of the so-called “LPR/DPR” attended and justified ending learning of Ukrainian language and literature in schools:

“We had a so-called “minister” of education and her first deputy for vocational education visiting. They presented to us how kindergartens would operate under their preschool curriculum. Then they presented how we would be working – that we would follow their curricula, without Ukrainian language and literature. After that, the vocational schools [representatives] also started talking about their curricula – how excellent they were, how thoroughly tested, and how everything would be implemented.”⁵⁷

67. If teachers showed disloyalty during such teaching staff meetings, the military command removed them from the hall where the meeting was held:

“I started asking uncomfortable questions, and the commandant’s office was called in. Another principal and I were forced out of the community centre so we wouldn’t ‘stir up the crowd.’”⁵⁸

68. The occupation administration imposed forced introduction of passport system on teachers in the TOT. In order to survive under occupation, educators sought employment in schools operating under Russian curricula. However, they were permitted to work only on the condition that they obtained a Russian passport:

“Many have already obtained these passports because it’s a matter of employment. Almost all the teachers, I think, received them, and they’re working at the school – they were assigned some teaching hours there.”⁵⁹

Therefore, the targeted persecution of teachers as bearers of Ukrainian identity, language, and values demonstrates an attempt by the occupying authorities to destroy the national cultural affiliation of the population and to forcibly integrate the temporarily occupied territories into the political and legal system of the occupying state. Such actions exhibit elements of persecution on political or ideological grounds, which is expressly prohibited under Articles 27 and 32 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The deliberate killing and injuring of teachers constitute grave breaches of IHL (Article 147 of the Fourth Geneva Convention) and may qualify as war crimes.

The unlawful deprivation of liberty of educators and forced searches carried out without proper legal grounds violate the guarantees afforded to civilians

⁵⁶ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-32/08.10.2022

⁵⁷ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-32/08.10.2022

⁵⁸ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-32/08.10.2022

⁵⁹ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-33/17.03.2025

during temporary occupation (Articles 33, 49, and 147 of the Fourth Geneva Convention).

The deportation or forcible displacement of people from temporarily occupied territory, not justified by imperative security reasons, likewise constitutes a serious breach of international humanitarian law and is considered a war crime under Article 8(2)(a)(vii) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

5 RUSSIAN ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS AS CIVILIAN INFRASTRUCTURE

69. An anonymous respondent reported the shelling by Russian military personnel of Secondary School No. 13 in the city of Soledar, located at 10 Preobrazhenska Street:

"A strike hit School No. 13 — that's our central school. Two years earlier, major renovations had begun there, a magnificent renovation under the auspices of the UN, with very substantial funds invested. And this school sustained several hits; it caught fire several times. And the closed school that had been closed earlier in Sverdlovka direction – there had been military there earlier as well – that school was also bombed. Not a single school remained intact. There were also strikes on kindergartens."⁶⁰

70. Among the means of destruction used against schools were aerial attacks. The head of Kotliareve Starosta District in Mykolaiv Oblast, Olha Kravchenko, attested:

"Around 13–14 March [2022 – editor's note], during that artillery shelling, an aerial bomb hit the school; i an aerial bomb was dropped."⁶¹

71. Cases of the Russian army using multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) to shell schools were documented. An anonymous resident of Siverskodonetsk reported the shelling of Secondary School No. 16 at 97 Haharina Street using MLRS:

"Then the 'Grad' started firing. They shelled randomly with 'Grad' launchers; they also hit residential buildings and schools. I would also like to say that schools and kindergartens were shelled especially often. School No. 16 – that's the school where I studied. It was one of the first to be hit; a shell struck the roof."⁶²

72. Russian military personnel shelled humanitarian aid distribution points set up in school premises:

"They were distributing humanitarian aid at School No. 1 (i.e., Vuhledar Educational Complex, 20 Trynadtsiaty Desantnykiv Street, Vuhledar), [...] they fired at it. They were firing all around Vuhledar. Residential buildings were hit. Even now, we watch videos on the phone – houses are still burning there, houses where nothing remains: no windows, no doors."⁶³

⁶⁰ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-34/09.08.2022

⁶¹ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-35/12.10.2023

⁶² Interview Code: East SOS-EU-36/10.08.2022

⁶³ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-37/19.09.2024

73. An anonymous source from Rubizhne in Luhansk Oblast attested that vehicles delivering humanitarian aid to a school that served as a shelter for many city residents were also shelled. The school itself was struck:

"There were hits, but closer to the end of May the roof was damaged, and the main entrance was damaged. It's very sad because it had just been renovated before the war; it was beautiful. Our building also houses an inclusive centre on the other side of the school – the blast wave blew out the plastic doors there as well, that is, there were hits."⁶⁴

74. One respondent reported that Russian forces fired from civilian residential areas, thereby endangering the population:

"Sometimes a tank would pull up. Near our school – across from it – there is a boiler house. A tank would position itself there and fire toward Lysychansk, Novodruzhevsk, and Pryvillia."

75. In the village of Kozachi Laheri in Kherson Oblast, eyewitnesses reported that Russian forces used the local school grounds to fire from an armoured personnel carrier (APC). In addition, the Russian armoured vehicles would also position themselves at some distance from the school and fire at it, after which information would be disseminated alleging that the AFU had attacked the school:

"I heard them take position by the school, and then correspondents started filming, 'The AFU destroyed the school.' And then they started firing again; the 'orcs' started firing at the school again. They had just turned around, about to film it all, and the 'orcs' started firing at the school again."⁶⁵

76. There were also documented cases of schools being used as launch sites for firing weapons:

"They were launching missiles from the school grounds. When they launch, you would drop to the ground because of the terrifying roar. It was frightening. They could launch two or three missiles a day from the school grounds."⁶⁶

77. The Foundation's documenters recorded the deployment of Russian military hardware on school grounds:

"They dig their tanks in. Right here in the centre – once on the children's playground, a small playground equipped for kids. And near the school boiler house. On the next street, Averina Street, in people's gardens, tanks were dug in. They were all over the village. They didn't stay all in one place. The tanks kept moving, tanks were roaming around all day – back and

⁶⁴ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-38/25.06.2022

⁶⁵ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-39/01.02.2024

⁶⁶ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-39/01.02.2024

*forth. On one, it said, 'For Crimea' — painted in white on the barrel. On another, 'Russians are coming'. Just like that.*⁶⁷

78. According to respondents, schools in the temporarily occupied territories were also turned into observation posts and firing positions for Russian grenade launchers:

*"They set up checkpoints on the school building for observation. [...] our school is two-stories and grenade launchers were positioned in three places. Wherever they saw some target, they would fire grenade launchers at it."*⁶⁸

79. According to one respondent, Russian grenade launchers fired at large buildings – including schools and kindergartens – assuming Ukrainian military personnel was stationed there:

*"Our people saw one spotter. The targets he adjusted fire for were large buildings. I think their logic was that since they themselves were stationed in a school, our troops, when pushing them out, would also take positions in a school. That's why they targeted the school. Wherever they saw large buildings – the village council, for example, which is two stories as well – they targeted it. The community centre, also large – they targeted it. As far as I understand, they tried to hit those facilities because they thought our troops were there."*⁶⁹

Therefore, the documented cases indicate mass and systematic violations by the RF of IHL concerning the protection of children, schools, humanitarian relief activities, and civilian infrastructure during armed conflict. Indiscriminate attacks by the Russian military against educational institutions violate the principle of distinction, which obliges parties to an armed conflict to distinguish between civilian facilities and military targets. Attacks against humanitarian aid distribution points located in schools constitute violations of the protection afforded to humanitarian relief activities under the Geneva Conventions, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. The use of school grounds for military operations and for the deployment of military hardware violates the prohibition against using civilian infrastructure for military purposes. Such actions deprive the school of its protected status under IHL while simultaneously exposing the civilian population to the risk of disproportionate harm. Firing from school premises is contrary to the prohibition of using civilians as "human shields" (Article 51(7) of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions) and effectively transforms the school into a target, in breach of the prohibition on attacks against civilian facilities.

⁶⁷ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-40/14.04.2024

⁶⁸ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-41/14.02/08.05 2024

⁶⁹ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-41/14.02/08.05 2024

6 RUSSIAN ATTACKS ON SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE

80. According to a respondent, the occupying forces removed everything that had any value from the school. Classrooms were looted; an interactive whiteboard, projectors, computers, and laptops were stolen. Books from the school library were placed on windowsills to conceal movement inside the building from snipers. Similar testimony was provided by an anonymous source regarding the completely looted GSEI No. 16 in Siverskodonetsk, Luhansk Oblast:

"The school has been completely looted; there is no equipment left – no laptops, projectors, printers – everything that was there is gone. All the classrooms have been ransacked, the doors to every classroom have been broken down."⁷⁰

81. An anonymous source from Yevsuh Lyceum (Bilovodsk village council, Luhansk Oblast) reported that searches by security forces were conducted at the school to seize any educational materials of a national nature. Among the literature confiscated by occupiers were works by poets Vasyl Stus and Vasyl Symonenko, research devoted to the UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army), and materials concerning political figures Roman Shukhevych and Stepan Bandera:

"...everything that was found in the educational institution – anything related to Ukrainian symbols, handout materials, teaching materials such as professional journals. In the locations where these activities were happening, all of this was piled into one large heap like garbage and burned on the school grounds. Everything related to textbooks on 'Defence of Ukraine' and history. All Ukrainian materials were centrally removed to Bilovodsk."⁷¹

82. An anonymous source from Luhansk Oblast reported that the occupying administration raised the issue of the Ukrainian-language library at the school, which contained more than 30,000 literary and academic works. Parents were also involved in the process and were required to bring any textbooks remaining at home:

"They first gathered them in the gym and didn't know what to do with them. Then there were rumours that they would either hand them over or burn them. Later, they supposedly moved them to the basement and said, 'Let them stay there for now.' In general, they started pawing through the library."⁷²

⁷⁰ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-42/21.09.2022

⁷¹ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-23/10.11.2024

⁷² Interview Code: East SOS-EU-43/16.12.2022

83. According to an anonymous source from the village of Kozachi Laheri in Kherson Oblast, Russian military personnel placed particular emphasis on destroying national symbols of the state. As the source stated:

"Just before the war, new kitchen equipment had been delivered – roasting pan, electric pots, all brand new and beautiful. They burned everything. When they saw our Ukrainian embroidered towels in the cafeteria, portraits of Lesia Ukrainka and Shevchenko – they burned everything Ukrainian, burned it all. They first removed all the computers, the small school desks, the good blackboard, the classroom computers. They took all that away, and then whatever they didn't need, they burned – burned everything. And we saw how they shelled for two days. 42 shells hit the school – I counted – 42 shells in two days, just to burn down the school..."⁷³

84. The school's material resources were looted by Russian military personnel and used to equip their military vehicles:

"I don't know why the desks were dismantled. They were new in three classrooms – the kind assembled with bolts – all of them were unscrewed. I couldn't understand it. Later I was told they used the wooden boards from the desks in their APCs and tanks as additional armour. They brought books from the library and stacked them – do you understand? From the windowsill all the way to the top, they stacked piles of library books to completely hide the windows."⁷⁴

85. In one of the schools in the TOT, Russian military personnel deliberately defiled classrooms, including relieving themselves on school desks. This constitutes another example of barbaric conduct of invaders aimed at the demonstrative destruction of Ukrainian cultural and educational space:

"Near the cafeteria, you can't imagine what they did – you couldn't even walk through there. They were apparently afraid to go far, so they would step outside and everything was right along the wall. The wall is long – when you walk there, you'll see, everything behind it and here – all of it defiled. We assumed they were also firing pistols there. Officers even slept in the cafeteria. They wrote on one of the walls in school, 'Sorry, we're from Kemerovo.'"⁷⁵

86. In Lytvynivka, Starobilsk District, during March–April 2022, Russian authorities forced teachers to destroy wall paintings of a national character at the school. This incident may be regarded as an act aimed at erasing Ukrainian identity:

"We had, you know, [...] with symbols, some Ukrainian girl was depicted – all of that was painted over. No new posters were provided. Either

⁷³ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-44/01.02.2022

⁷⁴ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-45/21.06.2023

⁷⁵ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-46/05.04.2023

they removed everything, burned it, or I don't know where they put it. In Lytvynivka, during COVID, when we were on distance learning, teachers decorated the halls with ornaments, painted them beautifully, decorated the school. Then, during that period when children were not studying – March, April – teachers were scraping those ornaments off the walls so that nothing, God forbid, would be visible anywhere.”⁷⁶

87. In individual cases, schools were turned into detention sites for unlawfully detained civilians and torture sites. According to an anonymous respondent, Russians set up torture chambers in the basements of GSEI No. 6 and GSEI No. 2 in Izium, Kharkiv Oblast, where members of the Russian Armed Forces were also stationed. In Kalynove, Kherson Oblast, Russian military personnel held civilian men.

“There was a torture chamber in School No. 6. And also in School No. 2. Mostly men, of course, young ones [were brought there]. I don't know about elderly men. I know Volodymyr Vasylovych has a friend. He had been a collective farm head in Kamianka. He was already retired. When the Russians came, someone reported him. That he was who he was. They took him to that torture chamber. They beat him there. I think it was School No. 6.”⁷⁷

88. In a school in the village of Petrivka in Donetsk Region, Russian military personnel set up their military headquarters, while nearby, in a kindergarten, they held captives who were forced to build defensive fortifications:

“About ten men, at least. [...] They were kept in the basement and made to dig trenches. They lived in the kindergarten, and the school was used as their headquarters. There was also a basement there.”⁷⁸

89. A respondent informed the Foundation's documenters that he was unlawfully detained and held for an extended period in school premises, where he was subjected to torture:

“They brought me to the school [...]. In the school, in the toilet, they beat me, used me as a punching bag. They beat me severely and dragged me outside [...], I lay there in the cold. They caused me to have an epileptic seizure – they beat me so badly. They were beating me as foam came from my mouth. This was when I started coming up, trying to move away because I had bitten my tongue. I was tortured for three days.”⁷⁹

90. In the village of Hrakove in Kharkiv Oblast, Russian military personnel killed and buried two persons on school grounds. The bodies were reburied after the de-occupation of the settlement in autumn 2022:

⁷⁶ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-47/26.02.2025

⁷⁷ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-48/04.04.2023

⁷⁸ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-49/23.03.2023

⁷⁹ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-50/18.09.2024

*"In the centre, they dug up two people. Near the school. Not locals. I don't know where they were from. They killed them and buried them near the school."*⁸⁰

91. As a result of regular shelling of civilian infrastructure by the Russian army, school grounds were often contaminated with unexploded ordnance. A respondent reported such a case at Secondary School No. 16 in Siverskodonetsk:

*"Their mines were the kind that didn't detonate. They were everywhere in the city; people later stepped on them. They were in our area too, and in Lysychansk – a nurse stepped on one, and her legs were blown off. I almost stepped on one. My mine (fortunately not mine, thank God) was waiting for me at School No. 16, at the stadium. I was walking through courtyards [sighs] because it was easier to hide there; there were many craters, thank God. Our inner-yard roads are in poor condition. Sometimes that's a big advantage – you fall into a hole, and it can save you."*⁸¹

Schools in the temporarily occupied territories were used by Russian military personnel as torture sites, constituting a grave breach of international humanitarian law. Russian forces abused civilian infrastructure, violating the principle of distinction between civilian facilities and military targets.

Therefore, the described actions of the Russian Armed Forces demonstrate the deliberate destruction of the educational and cultural environment in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. These actions constitute systemic violations of IHL and may qualify as war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The looting of school property by Russian military personnel (including the theft of interactive equipment, computers, laptops, etc.) violates the prohibition of pillage expressly set forth in Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention and Article 8(2)(b)(xvi) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Such acts constitute a war crime.

Searches conducted in schools involving the seizure of Ukrainian literature and destruction of national symbols demonstrate a policy of cultural assimilation, violating international humanitarian law norms that guarantee respect for cultural authenticity and national identity in the temporarily occupied territories (Hague Regulations of 1907; Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 27).

The defilement of school premises, including relieving physiological needs in classrooms, constitutes not only an affront to human dignity but also a grave violation of the obligation to respect civilian facilities. Such acts are aimed at moral humiliation of the population and may amount to psychological violence in the context of armed conflict.

⁸⁰ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-51/24.03.2023

⁸¹ Interview Code: East SOS-EU-52/10.05.2023

The use of schools as headquarters and detention sites, as well as evidence of torture of civilians in educational institutions, constitutes a serious violation of international humanitarian law, including Article 147 of the Fourth Geneva Convention (prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment), Article 75 of Additional Protocol I, and Article 8(2)(a)(ii) of the Rome Statute (torture as a war crime).

Turning schools into places of unlawful detention and torture demonstrates intentional disregard for the principles protecting civilians and civilian infrastructure.

CONCLUSIONS

- 1 The war crimes described in this report confirm numerous instances of attacks by Russian military personnel against the civilian population, resulting in deaths and injuries among adults and children.
- 2 The report documents numerous instances of shelling of educational institutions by the Russian side. Such actions were taken by the Russian side even where no Ukrainian military presence was recorded on the premises. Schools were shelled even when used as shelters for civilians, including through the use of multiple launch rocket systems and aerial strikes.
- 3 Cases were documented of Russian military personnel being stationed in schools in the TOT and of school buildings being converted into military headquarters, thereby turning schools into legitimate military targets. At the same time, schools were used for the unlawful detention of civilians.
- 4 The placement of Russian military hardware on school grounds was documented. Russian military personnel conducted shelling of surrounding areas from the grounds of educational institution.
- 5 The report describes structural changes imposed by Russia on Ukrainian education in the TOT. These measures contradict the identity and culture of the local population. The imposition of ideology through the education system constitutes a form of cultural violence and may qualify as a violation of humanitarian protections afforded to civilians and, in certain cases, as a war crime against cultural rights and the rights of the child.
- 6 Documented cases include the looting of Ukrainian schools by Russian military personnel: theft and removal of school equipment, destruction of Ukrainian textbooks in certain cases, damage to other school property, and acts of vandalism.
- 7 Cases were recorded of teachers being sent without lawful grounds to detention centres, as well as searches and threats against their family members.
- 8 Evidence demonstrates that the Russian occupation administration obstructed access of Ukrainian children in the TOT to education, while imposing its own curricula. School administrations in temporarily occupied territories regularly engages children in visits to propaganda exhibitions dedicated to so-called "heroes of the SVO" [SVO stands for special military operation – translator's note]. Facts were confirmed of the installation of "Hero's Desks" in schools and educational activities aimed at imposing Russian identity.

- 9 Evidence confirms that the occupation administration engaged individuals having no proper pedagogical qualifications in the educational process, contrary to the basic principles of quality education and in violation of international humanitarian law. Such practices may be regarded as deliberate distortion of the educational process and disregard for the child's right to quality education, as guaranteed by international law and generally recognised humanitarian standards.
- 10 It has been proven that the activities of the Russian occupation administration in education sector have led to deterioration in the physical and mental health of children and teachers.



**MOVING FORWARD
TOGETHER**

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