

Author: Karolina Hird

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*ISW's Russian Occupation Update tracks the activities that occur in the Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine. The occupation updates will examine Russian efforts to consolidate administrative control of annexed areas and forcibly integrate Ukrainian citizens into Russian sociocultural, economic, military, and governance systems. This product line replaces the section of the Daily Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment covering activities in Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine.*

To read ISW's assessment of how Russian activities in occupied areas of Ukraine are part of a coerced Russification and ethnic cleansing campaign, click [here](#).

### Key Takeaways:

- The Russian “Voin” military-patriotic training center network has taken “patronage” over orphans from occupied Donetsk Oblast and intends to train these orphans for service in the Russian armed forces.
- The Kremlin-controlled Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) continues to consolidate its control over occupied Ukraine.
- Russian occupation authorities are leveraging the labor of Ukrainian students to staff occupation administrations and support production at various state-controlled industries in occupied Ukraine.
- The ever-expanding ecosystem of Russian military-patriotic youth groups continues to facilitate the re-education and indoctrination of Ukrainian children via “educational trips” to Russia.

**The Russian “Voin” military-patriotic training center network has taken “patronage” over orphans from occupied Donetsk Oblast and intends to train these orphans for service in the Russian armed forces.** Occupied Donetsk Oblast-based Russian outlet *Donetsk News Agency* reported on May 14, citing occupied Donetsk Oblast “Voin” branch director Alexander Kamyshev, that “Voin” has “taken patronage” over orphans from the Children’s Social Center and Amvrosiivska Boarding School No. 4.[1] “Voin” patronage over the two orphanages means that “Voin” organizes events for the children, including training sessions in drone operation, tactical medicine, and basic military affairs. Russian combat veterans will train and instruct the children. ISW previously assessed that “Voin” is a critical component of Russia’s wider campaign to indoctrinate and militarize Ukrainian children to prepare them for eventual service in the Russian military.[2] Russia’s targeting

of orphans for indoctrination and military training is particularly nefarious, as these children are left vulnerable by the absence of families or guardians who can advocate for them.

**Russia is registering pro-Russian Cossack organizations in occupied Ukraine to facilitate the integration of occupied territories into the Russian administrative and military spheres.** Russia officially established the Southwestern Directorate for the Federal Agency for Ethnic Affairs (FADN) in August 2023 to oversee nationality and ethnic policy in occupied Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts.[3] Part of the directorate's mandate includes organizing and maintaining relationships with Cossack societies in occupied Ukraine. Acting Head of the Southwestern Directorate Sergei Mildzikhov noted in an interview in April 2025 that Russia has developed a legal mechanism for the formation of Cossack societies in occupied Ukraine and has registered 10 Cossack societies in occupied Luhansk Oblast, eight in occupied Donetsk Oblast, eight in occupied Kherson oblast, and three in occupied Zaporizhia oblast.[4] Cossack organizations serve civil society functions in Russia, and their implementation in occupied Ukraine allows the Russian state oversight and control over how civil society develops and proliferates in occupied areas.[5] Russian occupation officials also notably use Cossack societies to indoctrinate and militarize residents of occupied Ukraine.[6] Cossack combat units are active across the frontline in Ukraine and are recruiting residents in occupied Ukraine for service in various Cossack formations.[7] Representatives of Cossack societies also teach schoolchildren pro-Russian military-patriotic ideals and provide military training courses for youth to prepare them for future service in Cossack formations and the Russian military.[8] ISW previously reported on Russian efforts to establish branches of the All-Russian Cossack Society throughout occupied Ukraine, and assessed that Cossack societies in part are intended to increase Russia's mobilization reserve, while also disseminating pro-Russian military-patriotic ideals in occupied communities with active Cossack organizations.[9]

**The Kremlin-controlled Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) continues to consolidate its control over occupied Ukraine.** ROC Head Patriarch Kirill appointed Bishop Peter (Ivan Dmitriev, previously a bishop in Russia's Chelyabinsk Oblast) to head the ROC dioceses in occupied Berdyansk and Primorsk and manage ROC parishes throughout occupied Zaporizhia Oblast.[10] Bishop Peter will notably oversee parishes in major cities such as Melitopol and Enerhodar, and will effectively act as the Kremlin-appointed bishop for all of occupied Zaporizhia Oblast.[11] The ROC exercises considerable influence in occupied Ukraine and acts as a direct extension of the Kremlin's governance policy, as ISW has assessed at length.[12] Patriarch Kirill's appointment of a Russian bishop with experience leading ROC parishes highlights Russia's efforts to use ROC clergy to implement Russian control over social, cultural, and spiritual life in occupied Ukraine.[13]

**Russian occupation authorities are leveraging the labor of Ukrainian students to staff occupation administrations and support production at various state-controlled industries in occupied Ukraine.** A Ukrainian partisan student group posted images on May 16, reportedly of documents it acquired from Russian authorities, calling for the Donetsk National Technical University (DNTU) in occupied Donetsk City to encourage students to work for the Donetsk People's Republic Ministry of Internal Affairs (DNR MVD).[14] The student group noted that DNR MVD representatives held an open online lecture for DNTU students during which they gave students the option to work for the MVD or else risk mobilization into the Russian army. The DNR MVD is a

constituent entity of the Russian federal MVD, so Ukrainian students who have been coerced to work for the DNR MVD would be working as law enforcement agents for the Russian state in occupied Ukraine. Another Ukrainian partisan group recently reported that Russian occupation officials in occupied Luhansk Oblast and occupied Dzhankoi, Crimea, are coercing high school-aged students to work at Russian-controlled agricultural enterprises and warehouses that produce goods for the Russian military.[15] ISW has recently reported on severe staffing shortages in multiple industries throughout occupied Ukraine, and Russian officials are likely coercing high school and university students into work in part to compensate for these shortages.[16]

**The ever-expanding ecosystem of Russian military-patriotic youth groups continues to facilitate the re-education and indoctrination of Ukrainian children via “educational trips” to Russia.** The Kherson Oblast occupation administration reported on May 15 that 90 high schoolers from occupied Kherson Oblast travelled to Moscow and Oryol cities on an “educational trip” organized through the “Faces of Victory” and “Road to Victory. Eagle Storm” patriotic education programs.[17] The programs brand themselves as invested in “developing in schoolchildren a sense of belonging to the historical heritage and respect for the feat of the Soviet people.” The high schoolers visited Soviet battle memorials, museums, and monuments in Russia, and images from the trip show the teenagers posing with Russian flags.[18] The Russian Federal Agency for Youth Affairs’ (Rosmolodezh) “More than a Journey” program implements both “Faces of Victory” and “Road to Victory. Eagle Storm” through its “New Horizons” program. “New Horizons” claims to show youth from occupied Ukraine “the diversity and achievements of Russian regions” and recently claimed that over 10,000 youth from occupied Ukraine and from Russia’s border regions will take part in its various programs in 2025.[19] These programs expose Ukrainian children to Russian pseudo-historical narratives and military-patriotic programming while villainizing Ukrainian national identity and Ukraine’s history. They may also rise to the level of illegal deportation, as Russian officials are physically removing these children from their homes and bringing them to Russia to participate in activities intended to eradicate their identities. The Russian government notably directs and funds these programs via Rosmolodezh, continuing to suggest that the indoctrination of Ukrainian children is a core Russian state policy.

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[1] <https://dan-news dot ru/exclusive/centr-voin-vzjal-shefstvo-nad-detmi-sirotami-donecka-i-amvrosievki.-chemu-uchat/>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-june-4-2024>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-14-2024>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-28-2024>

[2] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-occupation-update-march-31-2025>

- [3] <https://fadn.gov.ru/agency/territorialnyie-organyi/yugo-zapadnoe-upravlenie-federalnogo-agentstva-po-delam-naczionalnostej>
- [4] <https://kazachestvo.ru/20250404/1657799.html>
- [5] <https://jamestown.org/program/new-cossack-societies-to-open-in-ukrainian-oblasts/>
- [6] <https://t.me/andriyshTime/37280>
- [7] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-22-2025>
- [8] [https://t.me/sprotyv\\_official/6850](https://t.me/sprotyv_official/6850); [https://t.me/sprotyv\\_official/6809](https://t.me/sprotyv_official/6809);  
<https://t.me/luhanskaVTSA/26211>
- [9] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-20-2025>
- [10] <https://t.me/berdeparhia/5341>; <https://t.me/vrogov/20343>
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- [13] <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2025/04/07/soul-occupation-en>
- [14] [https://t.me/nihto\\_movement/19](https://t.me/nihto_movement/19)
- [15] [https://t.me/yellowribbon\\_ua/11302](https://t.me/yellowribbon_ua/11302); [https://t.me/yellowribbon\\_ua/11329](https://t.me/yellowribbon_ua/11329)
- [16] <https://isw.pub/OccupationUpdate050825>
- [17] <https://khogov.ru/news/shkolniki-hersonskoj-oblasti-prodolzhayut-puteshestvovat-po-istoricheskim-mestam-rossii/>
- [18] [https://t.me/VGA\\_Kherson/30767](https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/30767)
- [19] <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/23417755>