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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.

Key Takeaways:

- **Russia is setting conditions to broadly prosecute residents of occupied Ukraine for alleged “anti-Russian” activity that took place before Russia’s 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine.**
- **Russia is mobilizing deported Ukrainian youth into the Russian military in clear violation of international law.**
- **Russian officials, federal entities, and federal subjects continue to facilitate the forced removal and deportation of Ukrainian children for their indoctrination and militarization.**
- **Russia continues to consolidate control of the media space in occupied Ukraine in an effort to “manufacture consensus” within the local population to create the impression of popular buy-in for the Russian occupation.**
- **Russia is incentivizing the relocation of Russians to occupied Ukraine to compensate for labor shortages in occupied areas. These relocation programs also support Russian efforts to Russify occupied Ukraine by repopulating occupied areas with Russian citizens.**
- **Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a law on July 25 codifying incentives for businesses to invest in Russia’s occupation of Ukraine.**

Russia is setting conditions to broadly prosecute residents of occupied Ukraine for alleged “anti-Russian” activity that took place before Russia’s 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The Zaporizhia Oblast occupation prosecutor’s office announced on July 25 that it

investigated a resident of occupied Yamykivka (Russified as Akimovka) for anti-Russian “extremist statements” that the resident posted on a social media page in 2014.[1] The occupation prosecutor’s office concluded that the resident was guilty of an administrative offense, fined him 10,000 rubles (\$123), and forced him to remove the post.[2] The Yamykivka case is noteworthy because it suggests that Russia will begin to prosecute residents of occupied Zaporizhia Oblast with perceived “crimes” or indiscretions committed eight years before Russia’s illegal invasion and annexation of Zaporizhia Oblast in 2022. Russian officials will likely pursue similar cases in the other occupied oblasts. Russian occupation courts have frequently used similar cases against Ukrainians between 2022 and 2025 for perceived “anti-Russian” activity by levying spurious “treason” or “espionage” charges, as ISW has previously reported.[3] The Yamykivka case will open the door for Russia to prosecute any resident of occupied Ukraine for any activity they have ever engaged in that the occupation administration deems as “anti-Russian,” no matter when said activity took place.

Russia is mobilizing deported Ukrainian youth into the Russian military in clear violation of international law. *The Times* published a story on July 24 detailing how Russia is sending deported Ukrainian children to fight in Russian military formations on the frontline of Ukraine once they turn 18.[4] *The Times* estimated that Russia has mobilized “thousands” of deported young Ukrainians based on anecdotal evidence, and cited Ukrainian Presidential Administration Chief of Staff Andriy Yermak, who noted that Ukraine has already found the bodies of young Ukrainians on the battlefield.[5] *The Times* reported that Russia is mainly deporting Ukrainian boys to military training camps to prepare them for future service in the Russian armed forces, which coheres with ISW’s assessments about Russia’s concerted campaign to militarize Ukrainian youth to prepare them to fight in the Russian military.[6] This practice violates multiple mandates of international law—first and foremost, Russia is engaged in the illegal deportation of Ukrainian children, and secondly, international law prevents Russia, as a belligerent occupying power, from forcing members of the population it occupies to serve in its armed forces.[7] Russia is already mobilizing residents of occupied Ukraine at a substantial scale—Ukrainian military intelligence estimated that Russia had forcibly mobilized between 55,000 to 60,000 men from occupied areas between 2022 and July 2023 alone.[8] Ukrainian outlet *Berdyansk 24* reported on July 24 on the story of a 19 year old from occupied Berdyansk who Russia forcibly mobilized into the Russian military in summer 2024 shortly after he turned 18.[9] Russia likely intends to continue the forced mobilization of both deported Ukrainian youth and of youth in occupied Ukraine to remedy Russia’s domestic recruitment and manpower shortfalls.

Russian officials, federal entities, and federal subjects continue to facilitate the forced removal and deportation of Ukrainian children for their indoctrination and militarization. International law differentiates between “forcible transfer/removal” and “deportation,” with “forcible transfer/removal” referring to occasions when the occupying power (in this case Russia) forcibly moves people within internationally-recognized national boundaries (in this case internationally-recognized Ukrainian territory), whereas “deportation” refers to the forced removal of individuals from outside of national boundaries.[10] ISW has long assessed that Russia is engaged in a deliberate campaign to deport Ukrainian children to eradicate their Ukrainian identities, and that the length of their deportation in Russia is less relevant than the conditions they face there.[11] Russian officials speak openly about their involvement in this broader removal/deportation campaign. Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev organized a trip to St.

Petersburg for a group of naval cadet classes from occupied Schastlivtsevo, Kherson Oblast for the celebration of Russian Navy Day.[12] Russian-controlled cadet programs are intended to train Ukrainian children for service in the Russian military, and are therefore a powerful tool of indoctrination and militarization.[13] Kherson Oblast occupation head Vladimir Saldo additionally reported on July 28 that the Russian Ministry of Natural Resources provided vouchers for a group of children from occupied Kherson Oblast to spend 10 days at the Ugra National Park in Kaluga Oblast.[14] Saldo claimed that such visits to Russia are “necessary...because love for the Motherland (Russia) begins with small things.” Russian Ambassador-at-Large and former Russian occupation official Rodion Miroshnik reported on July 27 that the Russian “Helping Ours” foundation brought 43 children and some mothers from occupied Kreminna, Severodonetsk, and Rubizhne to the Federal Medical and Biological Agency’s (FMBA) Klyazma sanatorium near Moscow “for rehabilitation” and treatment from living in a combat zone.[15] Miroshnik noted that Klyazma intends to extend its programs to occupied Kherson Oblast in August to bring children from occupied Kherson Oblast to Moscow for similar treatment. “Helping Ours” has reportedly facilitated the deportation of 1,200 people from occupied Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts since 2023.[16] ISW has previously reported on the relationship between the Russian FMBA, Klyazma, and “Helping Ours” and the roles these respective entities play in the deportation of Ukrainian children.[17]

Russian federal subjects are also involved in the forced removal of Ukrainian children to other areas in occupied Ukraine for their indoctrination and militarization. The occupied Luhansk Oblast-based branch of Russian newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda* reported on July 28 that Russia’s Altai Krai is organizing trips for children from occupied Slavyanoserbsk Municipal Okrug, Luhansk Oblast, to attend the Ayvazovskiy children’s camp in occupied Feodosia, Crimea.[18] Altai Krai signed an agreement with the Slavyanoserbsk Okrug in 2023 to facilitate sending children to summer camps in occupied Ukraine and likely in Russia. ISW has recently reported on similar efforts by Russian federal entities, including Russian nuclear energy operator Rosatom, to sponsor the removal of Ukrainian children to camps and programs in occupied Crimea to expose them to military training and ideological indoctrination.[19] Ukrainian partisan sources emphasized on July 28 that a camp similar to the Ayvazovskiy camp in occupied Crimea is forcing Ukrainian children in attendance to sing the Russian national anthem, highlighting how Russia uses these camps as a control mechanism to target Ukrainian children.[20]

Russia continues to consolidate control of the media space in occupied Ukraine. Russia’s continued occupation of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhia oblasts requires the constant “manufacturing of consensus” both in the occupied territories and in Russia, in order to create the impression that Russia’s occupation is widely supported and lend the occupation project informational legitimacy.[21] Russia is engaged in an effort to consolidate the media space in occupied Ukraine to support its effort to manufacture consensus, particularly amongst Ukrainian youth. The Kherson Oblast occupation Minister of Youth Policy and the Patriot Youth Center held a media rally in occupied Berdyansk, Zaporizhia Oblast, on July 23 as part of the “Youth and Children” federal project.[22] Rally administrators taught Ukrainian children how to create their own media displaying the “development” (Russian restoration efforts) of occupied Ukraine to portray the occupied territories as better off under Russia than they were under Ukraine. The media rally and similar events involve Ukrainian children in Russia’s efforts to manufacture consensus and sets multigenerational conditions for buy-in to Russia’s

occupation.

Russia has established several new media exchange and training centers in occupied areas in an effort to integrate the local population into the occupation media apparatus.[23] The Russian Military Historical Society, Russian video platform RuTube, and the Nikolai Danilevsky Film Studio announced in June that they are opening a “content creator and blogger space” in occupied Melitopol, Zaporizhia Oblast.[24] This space will facilitate the production of blogs and videos that glorify Russian history and the occupation of Ukraine, further manufacturing consensus for the occupation by making Ukrainians part of the wider media apparatus. Russia is supplementing its efforts to create its own media space in occupied Ukraine with steps to erode Ukrainian media. ISW previously wrote about Russia’s attempts to mandate the installation of “Russkiy Mir” satellite dishes and the banning of the Ukrainian “Gorynych” dishes and assessed that this measure isolates occupied territories from everything except pro-Russian sources.[25] Kherson Oblast occupation head Vladimir Saldo announced on July 25 that the occupation administration recalled and will completely remove any remaining “Gorynych” dishes.[26] Russia has also physically targeted Ukrainian media organizations and journalists, including murdering and kidnapping journalists in occupied areas and shutting off Ukrainian broadcasts.[27] The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) recently ruled on July 21 that Russia is committing a “systematic purge of the Ukrainian media sphere.”[28] ISW assesses that Russia will continue to consolidate control of the media space in occupied Ukraine in order to manufacture consensus and suppress dissent in occupied territories.

Russia is incentivizing the relocation of Russians to occupied Ukraine to compensate for labor shortages in occupied areas. Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Chernyshenko claimed at a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin on July 23 that federal authorities are expanding the “Zemsky Coach” (Rural Coach) program, offering Russian sports coaches a one-time 2 million ruble payment (\$25,000) to teach in occupied Ukraine.[29] Russian Deputy Prime Minister Tatyana Golikova claimed at the same meeting that Russian authorities will allocate 33 billion rubles (\$406 million) through 2030 to the “Zemsky Doctor” (Rural Doctor) program, which has offered Russian medical personnel a one-time 2 million ruble payment to move to occupied Ukraine to work there since 2023.[30] Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) Minister of Science and Education Ivan Kusov claimed on July 24 that occupied Luhansk Oblast received funding from the “Zemsky Teacher” program for two teachers to move from Russia to occupied Luhansk Oblast in 2025.[31] Kherson Oblast occupation Minister of Education Alexei Grigoriev claimed on July 24 that he is also recruiting two teachers through the “Zemsky Teacher” program, but suggested that the occupation administration is having difficulties attracting Russian teachers to move to occupied Kherson Oblast for the long term.[32]

ISW previously reported on Zemsky Teacher, a program offering two million rubles to Russian teachers to move to towns and villages with populations under 50,000, which frequently experience teacher shortages.[33] Grigoriev claimed on July 22 that occupied Kherson Oblast suffers from a shortage of over 450 teachers.[34] Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) Minister of Health Dmitry Gartsev claimed on March 25 that 52 percent of doctor positions in occupied Donetsk Oblast are unfilled and proposed on July 7 to staff medical facilities with medical students from their first year of medical school onwards.[35] ISW previously reported the “catastrophic” shortages of medical personnel in occupied Ukraine, which are exemplary of Russia’s challenges in maintaining a productive labor pool in occupied

areas.[36] Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine directly caused these labor shortages. Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights Dmytro Lubinets stated on June 23 that 4.6 million Ukrainians are still internally displaced in Ukraine, and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees recorded over 5.6 million Ukrainian refugees abroad as of July 1.[37] Russia's invasion of Ukraine forced many Ukrainian specialists to flee abroad or to territory controlled by the Ukrainian government, and Russia is now struggling to compensate for the labor shortages it caused.

Zemsky programs also support Russian efforts to Russify occupied Ukraine by repopulating occupied areas with Russian citizens. The Zemsky Teacher program, for example, supports Russia's campaign to eradicate Ukrainian identity through the school system by importing teachers who will only instruct students using Kremlin-approved curricula.[38] Head of Ukrainian human rights organization Almenda Mariia Sulialina stated on June 26 that occupation officials send Ukrainian teachers to "retraining" classes and punish them for being insufficiently pro-Russian or failing to teach the imposed Russian curriculum.[39] Zemsky programs are encouraging Russian teachers, doctors, postal workers, and sports coaches to resettle in Ukraine, thereby Russifying occupied areas and further cementing Russia's occupation.

Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a law on July 25 codifying incentives for businesses to invest in Russia's occupation of Ukraine.[40] The new law expands the list of activities that are counted as investment projects in occupied Ukraine to include capital investments for the cost of restoration and repair of fixed assets. The Russian Territorial Development Fund praised the new law and claimed that it will "increase the investment attractiveness" of occupied areas.[41] Russia's occupation of Ukraine is expensive—the federal government is channeling potentially billions of rubles into maintaining its presence in occupied territories, and private investment is an important means of diversifying cash flow going towards the occupation. Russian restoration projects in occupied Ukraine are also a core component of Russia's wider occupation strategy in Ukraine, as they support the curated image of occupied areas as happy and productive parts of the Russian Federation. Russia has recently gone to great lengths to attract investment into occupied Ukraine to expedite restoration projects and increase the economic and financial benefits of its illegal occupation.[42]

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