



Russian Occupation Update, April 3, 2025

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ISW is introducing a new product line tracking activities in Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine. The Russian Occupation Updates will examine Russian efforts to consolidate administrative control of annexed areas; forcibly integrate Ukrainian citizens into Russian sociocultural, economic, military, and governance systems. This product line is intended to replace the section of the Daily Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment covering activities in Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine.

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

Key takeaways:

- **The Russian “Helping Ours” Foundation facilitated the deportation of 39 Ukrainian children from occupied Luhansk Oblast to a Russian government-controlled medical facility in Moscow Oblast in late March 2025.**
- **Russian military intelligence veterans opened a new military-patriotic education club for Ukrainian youth in occupied Crimea. Ukrainian children will train in accordance with Soviet and Russian special forces and counterintelligence doctrine.**
- **Russia is using the court system in occupied Ukraine to pursue illegal charges and fabricated cases against Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) and civilians.**
- **Russian occupation authorities continue to conduct coerced passportization in occupied Ukraine by requiring Russian citizenship as a prerequisite for obtaining a SIM card.**

The Russian “Helping Ours” Foundation facilitated the deportation of 39 Ukrainian children from occupied Luhansk Oblast to a Russian government-controlled medical facility in Moscow Oblast in late March 2025.[1] Russian-controlled Donbas-based media sources reported on March 30 that 39 children from occupied Rubizhne, Kreminna, Lysychansk, and Svatove travelled to the “Klyazma” sanatorium near Moscow for “treatment.”[2] Some portion of the children reportedly travelled with their mothers, although it is unclear how many.[3] Russia’s Federal Medical and Biological Agency (FMBA; notably a Russian federal agency) runs the “Klyazma”

sanatorium, which is located just northeast of Moscow.[4] FMBA medical specialists will examine and treat the Ukrainian children to help them “recuperate after difficult life situations.”[5] Russia has reportedly deported over 1,200 Ukrainians, including children, from occupied Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts to the “Klyazma” sanatorium since 2022.[6] ISW previously reported on several instances of cooperation between the “Helping Ours” Foundation and “Klyazma,” suggesting that the two organizations share an institutional-level partnership that facilitates large-scale deportations.[7]

Russia has frequently used the guise of medical or psychological treatment to deport Ukrainian children to Russia, but even the deportation of children for medical reasons is inconsistent with international legal requirements on Russia as an occupying power.[8] Rubizhne, Kreminna, Lysychansk, and Svatove are all within 15 kilometers of the frontline in Ukraine, so Russia is technically legally obligated to facilitate the transfer of children back to territory controlled by Ukraine if they do require immediate medical care. Instead, Russia deported these children over 700 kilometers away from their homes under tenuous circumstances and has provided no clear guarantees for their return to Ukraine.

Russian military intelligence veterans opened a new military-patriotic education club for Ukrainian youth in occupied Crimea.[9] Crimea-based Russian state media outlet *Ria Novosti Krym* reported on March 23 that Russian military intelligence veterans opened the “Gryphon” military-patriotic club in occupied Simferopol, which will teach children aged seven to 17 “basic military training” and “foster patriotism and respect for military service.”[10] Russian veterans and active military personnel will teach children in accordance with the training doctrine of Russian General Staff’s Main Directorate (GRU) Spetsnaz, the Soviet Committee for State Security (KGB), the Soviet People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD), and SMERSH (the Stalinist-era Soviet counterintelligence service).[11]

These Soviet and Russian organizations have a history of employing particularly brutal counterespionage and repression tactics, and the fact that their training methods are being used with Ukrainian children as young as seven speaks to the degree of militarization and indoctrination that the Russian occupation regime hopes to instill in occupied territories. “Gryphon” instructors will likely teach children how to identify and report pro-Ukrainian sentiment in their households and communities to Russian occupation authorities, thereby enabling a culture in which pro-Russian hyper-militarism thrives and propagates. Programs such as “Gryphon,” furthermore, prepare Ukrainian children for service in the Russian military. Russia is using these military-patriotic education clubs and programs to create a pool of mobilizable manpower for future conflicts—a direct violation of Geneva Convention Article 51, which forbids Russia as an occupying power from “compelling protected persons to serve in its armed or auxiliary forces.”[12]

Russia is using the court system in occupied Ukraine to pursue illegal charges and fabricated cases against Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) and civilians. The Ukrainian Media Initiative for Human Rights (MIHR) presented a report on March 31 that analyzed nearly 600 trials in occupied Ukraine and in Russia and found that Russia is systematically violating the right to a fair trial of up to 6,000 Ukrainian

citizens.[13] The MIHR report emphasized that Russian authorities often open criminal cases against Ukrainians, particularly in occupied Crimea, for simply holding pro-Ukrainian views or for not complying with the occupation regime.[14] MIHR experts also noted that Russian courts often try Ukrainian POWs under domestic criminal laws, therefore treating them as civilians instead of combatants, despite the fact that international humanitarian law forbids criminal prosecutions against lawful combatants on the sole basis of their participation in combat.[15]

A Russian court sentenced 23 Ukrainian POWs who defended Mariupol in 2022 on terrorist charges to 13 to 23-year sentences in maximum-security penal colonies on March 26.[16] Ukrainian Human Rights Commissioner Dmytro Lubinets submitted official letters to the United Nations (UN) and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to lodge appeals against these sentences as violations of international humanitarian law, as the Ukrainian POWs, as lawful combatants, should not face criminal trial or terrorist charges under Russian domestic law.[17]

Russian occupation authorities continue to conduct coerced passportization in occupied Ukraine. Kherson Oblast occupation head Vladimir Saldo announced on March 31 a deadline for residents of occupied Kherson Oblast to re-register their SIM (subscriber identity module) cards with Russian passports no later than July 1, 2025.[18] Russian law requires presenting a passport to obtain a SIM card, and the application of this Russian law to occupied territories is likely meant to coerce Ukrainians to receive Russian passports or risk losing the ability to communicate via mobile devices.[19] ISW has reported at length on Russian efforts to passportize occupied Ukraine by tying Russian citizenship to the ability to obtain basic services and necessities.[20]

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[1] <https://t.me/donbassr/85782>

[2] <https://t.me/donbassr/85782>; <https://novoe-dot-media/news/lnr/detey-iz-prifrontovyykh-territoriy-luganshchiny-podlechach-v-sanatorii-podmoskovya/>

[3] <https://t.me/donbassr/85782>

[4] https://yandex-dot-ru/maps/org/sanatoriy_klyazma_mrik_fmba/189967149037/?ll=37.834067%2C55.971658&z=16; https://fmba.gov-dot-ru/o-fmba-rossii/podvedomstvennye-organizatsii/detail/?ELEMENT_ID=153

[5] <https://novoe-dot-media/news/lnr/detey-iz-prifrontovyykh-territoriy-luganshchiny-podlechach-v-sanatorii-podmoskovya/>

[6] <https://t.me/donbassr/85782>

[7] <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-may-10-2024>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-september-29-2023>;

<https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-april-1-2023>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-june-4-2023>;
<https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-august-20-2023>

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[9] [https://www.facebook.com/ppu.gov.ua/posts/pfbid028ZFUJAatdBdSjxcRzreWxMHwg4URBh4D2HBd8i8uCoGBZ5qxtfJ8hXQPSbi1PTjjl?__cft__\[o\]=AZVvt31Wf7XUgfKQJO7B3G_51TnDItCzHlw8ouDturGCIidKbokVIacvrFNaSfLv9N6XW2RdozImbpNatlKQI7IQhonlLuPZjsgkJrwsCyTd9mfq6ffLfXxuzUdn6qs02-N7CwW4x8lQi_TN9DN4-jGimB8uHs3J3ZPMF5G18iAExPXTPB6jK_32Cam99UTeMhg&__tn__=%2CO%2CP-R](https://www.facebook.com/ppu.gov.ua/posts/pfbid028ZFUJAatdBdSjxcRzreWxMHwg4URBh4D2HBd8i8uCoGBZ5qxtfJ8hXQPSbi1PTjjl?__cft__[o]=AZVvt31Wf7XUgfKQJO7B3G_51TnDItCzHlw8ouDturGCIidKbokVIacvrFNaSfLv9N6XW2RdozImbpNatlKQI7IQhonlLuPZjsgkJrwsCyTd9mfq6ffLfXxuzUdn6qs02-N7CwW4x8lQi_TN9DN4-jGimB8uHs3J3ZPMF5G18iAExPXTPB6jK_32Cam99UTeMhg&__tn__=%2CO%2CP-R); <https://crimea.ria dot ru/20250323/zaschischat-sebya-i-uvazhat-stranu-kursy-ot-razvedchikov-dlya-detey-v-krymu-1145040412.html>

[10] <https://crimea.ria dot ru/20250323/zaschischat-sebya-i-uvazhat-stranu-kursy-ot-razvedchikov-dlya-detey-v-krymu-1145040412.html>

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[12] <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gciv-1949/article-51>

[13] <https://mipl.org dot ua/na-300-zrosly-terminy-uvyaznennya-rosiya-zasudzhuye-ukrayincziv-zhorstokishe-nizh-do-povnomasshtabnoyi-vijny/>

[14] <https://mipl.org dot ua/na-300-zrosly-terminy-uvyaznennya-rosiya-zasudzhuye-ukrayincziv-zhorstokishe-nizh-do-povnomasshtabnoyi-vijny/>

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[17] https://t.me/dmytro_lubinetzs/8297

[18] https://t.me/SALDO_VGA/6580

[19] [https://bratsk-raion dot ru/верхнее-меню/news/vedomstva_info/сообщения_прокуратуры/сим-карты-в-чем-опасность/#:~:text=продали%20сим-карту.-,Кодекс%20РФ%20об%20административных%20правонарушениях%20\(КоАП%20РФ\)%20предусматривает%20ответственность%20за,от%202000%20до%205000%2](https://bratsk-raion dot ru/верхнее-меню/news/vedomstva_info/сообщения_прокуратуры/сим-карты-в-чем-опасность/#:~:text=продали%20сим-карту.-,Кодекс%20РФ%20об%20административных%20правонарушениях%20(КоАП%20РФ)%20предусматривает%20ответственность%20за,от%202000%20до%205000%2)

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[20] <https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/24-210-01%20ISW%20Occupation%20playbook.pdf>;

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