



Russian Occupation Update, March 31, 2025

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ISW is introducing a new product line tracking activities in Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine. The 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:

- **Russian occupation authorities have intensified law enforcement activity in occupied areas of Ukraine since mid-March.**
- **Putin's March 20 decree, "On the Peculiarities of the Legal Status of Certain Categories of Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons in the Russian Federation," likely accounts in part for the intensification of raids in occupied areas.**
- **Russia continues efforts to indoctrinate Ukrainian children using civic youth-engagement and military-patriotic education programs.**
- **Militarization of Ukrainian children also continues within occupied territories.**
- **Russia continues to pursue logistics infrastructure projects in occupied Ukraine in order to maximize economic control over occupied territories.**
- **Russian occupation authorities also continue efforts to incentivize Russian citizens to relocate to occupied Ukraine from Russia in a clear violation of international law.**

Russian occupation authorities have intensified law enforcement activity in occupied areas of Ukraine since mid-March, likely in part due to Russian President Vladimir Putin's March 20 decree ordering Ukrainians living in

occupied areas to obtain Russian citizenship or risk deportation.[1] Sevastopol occupation governor Mikhail Razvozhaev stated on March 29 that Russian law enforcement authorities in occupied Sevastopol conducted "preventative measures to control compliance with migration legislation" and searched 1,500 private homes.[2] Razvozhaev claimed that law enforcement detained six individuals for "violating migration legislation." [3] The Kherson Oblast occupation administration reported on March 20 and March 23 that Russian law enforcement, including local Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), Rosgvardia, and Federal Security Service (FSB) units, conducted "preventative measures" to check the citizenship status of residents of occupied Henichesk Raion.[4] Footage and images from the resulting raids show armed Russian personnel inspecting private homes, detaining individuals at gunpoint, and collecting biometric data such as fingerprints.[5] Russian authorities detained at least 82 individuals during these two raids.[6] The Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) MVD additionally conducted a raid in occupied Donske, Donetsk Oblast, on March 25 and inspected 1,500 apartments and 600 private homes in order to check residents' documents.[7] The DNR MVD reportedly forced residents who still had Ukrainian license plates to re-register their vehicles with Russian authorities immediately and specifically looked for residents who were still holding Ukrainian passports.[8] The Ukrainian Resistance Center noted on March 21 that Russian law enforcement personnel in occupied Luhansk Oblast have intensified interrogations and document checks at roadside checkpoints in order to identify residents who have pro-Ukrainian views.[9]

Putin's March 20 decree "On the Peculiarities of the Legal Status of Certain Categories of Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons in the Russian Federation" likely accounts in part for the intensification of raids meant to check personal documents in occupied areas. The March 20 decree stipulates that Ukrainian or "foreign" citizens living in occupied areas of Ukraine must either "regulate their legal status" or leave their homes or else risk deportation.[10] This decree is effectively bureaucratic coercion — it forces Ukrainians to obtain Russian citizenship under the risk of expulsion from their homes and detention and deportation to an unspecified location.[11] This and previous presidential decrees grant Russian authorities the ability to classify Ukrainian citizens living in occupied Ukraine who refuse or have not obtained Russian citizenship as "foreigners," granting the Russian government the ability to execute Russia's harshest deportation and migration laws against them.[12] So-called "migration raids" against Ukrainian citizens living in occupied areas are likely to continue in order to "passportize" (or forcibly grant Russian citizenship) more and more of the occupied population.

Russia continues efforts to indoctrinate Ukrainian children via civic youth-engagement and military-patriotic education programs. Ukrainian teenagers from occupied Crimea, Kherson, Zaporizhia, Donetsk, and Luhansk oblasts attended the Fourth Congress of the Russian youth-led civic engagement organization "Movement of the First" in Moscow on March 26 to 28.[13] Putin signed a decree in 2022 creating the "Movement of the First," which brands itself as a civic education program that seeks to instill in youth a "respect for the traditions and culture of the peoples of Russia, historical continuity, and participation in the fate of [Russia]."[14] The "Movement of the First" organization has been operating in occupied Ukraine since its creation and has served as a tool to indoctrinate Ukrainian youth through exposure to pro-Russian sentiments,

Kremlin-sanctioned historical and sociocultural narratives, and military-patriotic programming.[15] Russian occupation authorities have incentivized trips and excursions for Ukrainian youth to visit Russia in order to further enforce youth buy-in to the Russian civic and political system.[16]

The militarization of Ukrainian children also continues within occupied territories. Ukrainian outlet *Suspilne* published an investigation on March 24 detailing how Russia is building a "Voin" (Warrior) training camp at the site of a demolished children's camp in occupied Mariupol, Donetsk Oblast.[17] This will be the fourth such "Voin" military training camp in occupied Ukraine. "Voin" camps are primarily intended to teach Ukrainian children basic military skills, such as small arms fire, tactical first aid, and drone operation, under the supervision of Russian veterans and active military personnel.[18] Beyond instilling hyper-militaristic ideals in Ukrainian children, the "Voin" program also supports various Russian efforts to prepare Ukrainian children for eventual service in the Russian military. Ukrainian Luhansk Oblast Head Artem Lysohor noted on March 25 that upwards of 12,000 children in occupied Luhansk Oblast alone are undergoing military-patriotic indoctrination and military training in programs such as "Voin" and "Yunarmia (Russian Young Army Cadets National Movement)."[19] The Ukrainian Resistance Center similarly reported that Russian occupation authorities in occupied Melitopol, Zaporizhia Oblast, have mandated military training for all 10th and 11th grade students in order to prepare students for the Russian military's "conscription standard." [20] The "Voin" branch in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast will oversee this military training.[21]



Russia continues to pursue logistics infrastructure projects in occupied Ukraine in order to maximize economic control over occupied territories. The Unified Institute of Spatial Planning (EIPP) of the Russian Federation, a subordinate entity of the Russian Ministry of Construction, Housing, and Utilities, published a proposal on March 25 detailing plans to develop a 441-kilometer-long network of railway lines in occupied Kherson Oblast.[22] The EIPP plans note that the goal of the proposed railway construction is to "increase the accessibility and investment attractiveness of coastal tourist and recreational areas and allow the development of industrial clusters and logistics centers." [23] The EIPP plans also notably include railway schemes for the right (west) bank of Kherson Oblast, which Russia does not occupy — signaling Russia's continued intent to secure additional territorial gains in Ukraine.[24] Ukrainian Mariupol Mayoral Advisor Petro Andryushchenko noted on March 25 that Russian authorities are also constructing three new bridges, including one railway bridge, in occupied Donetsk Oblast in order to improve logistics running from Rostov Oblast along the Novoazovsk-Mariupol-Volnovakha-Donetsk City route.[25] Such logistics infrastructure projects will augment Russian military logistics capabilities in occupied Ukraine, allow Russia to continue to extract economic benefit from the occupied territories, and further integrate occupied Ukraine into the Russian economic sphere.[26]

Russian occupation authorities also continue efforts to incentivize Russian citizens to relocate to occupied Ukraine from Russia in a clear violation of international law. Andryushchenko posted footage on March 25 of a building site in occupied Mariupol and noted that Russian authorities are dismantling existing high-rise apartments and rebuilding large apartment complexes intended for Russian citizens to relocate to from Russia.[27] Russian occupation authorities are likely offering preferential mortgages to Russians who move to occupied Mariupol to permanently change the demographics of occupied Mariupol, as ISW has previously reported.[28]

These construction projects permanently displaced the Ukrainians who previously lived in these areas. Ukrainian outlet *ArmyInform* reported on March 27 that up to 18,000 Ukrainian residents of occupied Mariupol currently lack adequate housing and have to shelter either in destroyed building complexes, on the street, or in temporary shelters (which the Russian occupation regime likely runs).[29] Andryushchenko noted that recent Russian reconstruction efforts in Mariupol have dismantled buildings where up to 20,000 people previously lived.[30] International humanitarian law requires Russia, as an occupying power, to refrain from destroying real estate or private property—a rule which Russia appears to be consistently violating by destroying housing in Mariupol and other occupied cities.[31] International humanitarian law also clearly forbids Russia from transferring its own civilian population to territories it occupies.[32] ISW has long assessed that Russia has been engaging in a deliberate campaign to repopulate occupied Ukraine with Russian citizens in order to forcibly integrate Ukraine further into the Russian Federation and weaken Ukraine's rights to its own territories and people by manipulating the demographics of occupied territories.[33]



[1] <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounders/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-20-2025>; <https://ria.ru/20250320/ukraintsy-2006224734.html>; <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/document/0001202503200022?index=2>

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[3] <https://t.me/razvozhaev/10841>

[4] https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/29151; https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/29077

[5] https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/29151; https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/29077

[6] https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/29077; https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/29151

[7] <https://mipl.org.ua/okupaczijna-policziya-provodyt-rejdy-u-selyshhah-donechchyny/>

[8] <https://mipl.org.ua/okupaczijna-policziya-provodyt-rejdy-u-selyshhah-donechchyny/>

[9] https://t.me/sprotyv_official/6503

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- [11] <https://www.kyivpost.com/post/49294>
- [12] <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/49235>; <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202304270013?rangeSize=1&index=1>;
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- [13] <https://khogov.ru/news/delegaciya-hersonskoj-oblasti-pribyla-na-iv-sezd-dvizheniya-pervyh-v-moskve/>; https://главалнр.рф/news/all/all/Aktivisti_iz_LNR_priynali_uchastie_v_otkritii_IV_Sezda_Dvizheniya_pervikh_v_Moskve?id=2963; <https://crimea-news.com/society/2025/03/27/1629789.html>; <https://zo.gov.ru/news/show/delegaciya-zaporozhskoj-oblasti-na-iv-sezde-dvizheniya-pervyx-v-moskve-novye-gorizonty-i-dostizheniy>; kremlin.ru/events/president/news/76542; <https://t.me/BalitskyEV/4980>;
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- [16] <https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/24-210-01%20ISW%20Occupation%20playbook.pdf>
- [17] <https://suspilne.media/978535-zamist-bazi-morskih-pihotinciv-baza-okupantiv-uf-u-mariupoli-rosiani-buduut-militarnij-tabir-dla-ukrainskih-ditej/>
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[25] <https://t.me/andriyshTime/35232>

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

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