United Nations Children's Fund

(UNICEF)

Forced transfer of Ukrainian children to Russia

Research Report

Leiden Model United Nations 2023

"let us sing songs of freedom together"

Forum: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Issue: Forced transfer of Ukrainian children to Russia

Position: President

Introduction

Alina is a fifteen year old girl who wants to stay with her Ukrainian identity. Unfortunately her pride for her country got violated when she got trapped in a trick by her Russian friend. She expected to go somewhere with her, followed by the unknown of getting kidnapped by Russian soldiers. In exchange for extraditing her friends, her Russian 'friend' got plenty of custody over them as she was assigned as their 'attendant'. Luckily Alina could flee, but that is not the case for other deported Ukrainian children.

- *RTL nieuws, June 15th 2023*

On the 24th of February 2022, the Russian army began invading Ukraine in the eastern town Luhansk Oblast. And ever since this atrocity has taken place, thousands of children have been affected by the war in Ukraine. Thereupon children have been separated by their families, communities, and country. They have been forcibly transferred to Russian-occupied territories or deported to Russia. Some have been placed in Russian foster care and adoptive families, and given Russian nationality.

Other reports indicate that children from Ukraine are being transferred to camps and facilities in Russia and Russia-occupied territories, where Russian officials have said they are integrated and receive patriotic education. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has underlined that international humanitarian law prohibits forced transfers and deportation of protected persons, which may constitute war crimes. Therefore this continuing process is a serious issue of violating numerous lives.

Definition of Key Terms

Key terms could help understand the context of the research report and further in the debate.

Forced transfer:

Transfer by force or compulsion, without the consent of the parents or guardians of the affected children.

Child trafficking:
Where children and young people are tricked, forced or persuaded to leave their homes and are moved or transported and then exploited, forced to work or sold.

Child labor:
An industry in which children get illegally or exploitatively employed in either a criminally or sexual form.

Deportation:

Expulsion by executive agency or authority whose presence in a country is deemed unlawful or detrimental.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

A psychiatric disorder that can develop which occurs in people after they have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event.

Russification

Forcing children to give up their identity and essentially become Russian.

Propaganda

A form of convincing a target group of their standpoint through influencing the public opinion.

General Overview

The forced transfer of Ukrainian children to Russia is a deeply concerning and multifaceted issue that has garnered international attention due to its violation of fundamental human rights and the destabilizing impact on the lives of affected families.
The Russian authorities are not denying their deportation of Ukrainian children, on the contrary they are claiming to have the Ukrainian children sended to 'holiday camps'. They mean to perform this practice with safety and medical care purposes. But as the Geneva Conventions in 1949 state in Article 4 'Children are to be evacuated to safe areas when possible and reunited with their families', the Russian authorities are nor bringing them to safe areas and are nor establishing any contact with families. There are 43 different camp locations across Russia and the Kremlin where they get deported to.

The Ukrainian ombudswoman of children's rights assumes that the Russian army has kidnapped about 200,000 children. She controls an online portal, which contains data and statements from relatives, acquaintances and witnesses about the deportation of the children. In the deportation camps, also called filtration points, they will receive reeducation and some will even enter military camps.

Multiple families in Ukraine got the opportunity to sign a document in which they agreed to have their children sended to holiday camps for safety reasons regarding the militaristic acts in their surroundings. Despite this agreement, the Russian authorities did in fact not sign this

document. Through this process they deceived families for their parental consent. In some cities the Russian soldiers even promised the parents that their children would come back once their Ukrainian town turned into Russian territory.

The process principle maintains as follows. The children get deported to one of the 43 deportation locations where they will receive a Russian passport ensuing thus a Russian identity. After this they will follow a reeducation camp or military camp. Some children even get adopted by Russian families, causing their biological relatives to let the children be untraceable.
This operation was actually already practiced before they entered Ukrainian territories. They in fact established a 'Train of Hope', which would abduct Ukrainian children to the Cremea with the results of illegal adoptions.

Even though there are multiple resources claiming information, it has been alleged that the children are experiencing inevitable circumstances, as well as mentally demolishing as physically damaging.

In this picture you can see a mother showing a picture of her Ukrainian son in a classroom of a military camp. He had to wear a Russian military uniform. They learned for example on how to put on a bulletproof vest.

Major Parties Involved

Ukraine

The impact of the deportation of the children is massive towards their parents. They are suffering in all kinds of ways. Such as emotional trauma, being uninformed about the well-being of their child and the inability to take care of them. Or financial hardship, they are struggling in protracted legal difficulties attempting to regain custody. The Ukrainian and Russian legal systems can be complex and biased against Ukrainian parents, especially if they lack the financial resources for adequate legal representation.

Russia

Russia has been disseminating propaganda towards their citizens. They are broadcasting reunions on television, in which Russia means that they are helping mothers to find their children again. It looks very heartwarming which makes it even more deceptive.

On March 17th 2023, the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague had issued warrants for Mr Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin and Ms Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova on a war crime of unlawful deportation of a population of children. The Kremlin spokesman returned that they found the questions "outrageous and unstoppable" and noted that Russia, and other countries, did not recognize the jurisdiction of the ICC. As they stated "And accordingly, any decisions of this kind are null and void for the Russian Federation from the point of view of law."

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

UNICEF continues life saving operations for children in and around Ukraine. Humanitarian actors are continuing to expand their presence in recovered areas of eastern and southern Ukraine, with them contributing to inter-agency convoys providing: food, water, sanitation, shelter and supplies to help thousands of people stranded for five months during the winter months. Unaided families and children's gear. But also by:

- Delivering vital humanitarian supplies to conflict zones, including medical supplies, surgical equipment, midwifery equipment, oxygen concentrators,transport clean water for drinking, and sanitation;
- Support mobile teams providing psychological and psychosocial support and protection services to children;
- UNICEF also disseminates information on explosive devices and remnants of war to broad audiences through a variety of channels, including digital engagement.
- Continuing to take emergency measures to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Established "Blue Dot" safe rooms at border crossings in neighboring countries, provides essential information and services to displaced children and families, and identifies and registers unaccompanied children.

Save Ukraine
(non-governmental organization (NGO))

Mykola Kuleba, an Ukrainian activist and the ombudsman for children, established Save Ukraine. The organization has helped families with saving and bringing back their children through logistics, transportation and planning. As a result of these completed missions, children came back with brutal stories. They were told that their parents had signed them up for a two week summer camp, which resulted into 5 months of 5 deportation moments and living with rats and cockroaches. They also got told that their parents did not want to be united with them ever again. By Save Ukraine's actions, groups of children get rescued and be brought together with their family again.

Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Ukraine
(non-governmental organization (NGO))

This project is led by German researchers and various organizations. They provide online training and consultation for Ukrainian therapists working with directly affected children. This experience taught them the importance of direct intervention during ongoing trauma and early in a person's life to heal the wounds of complex adversity. Trauma-focused CBT is a form of coping with a trauma. Scientific research has shown that it has helped recovering from PTSD. Which is a very ongoing disorder among the Ukrainian children, because of the traumatizing events occurring around them. PTSD can cause kids to relive vivid perceptions, such as the sounds, smells and touches in their surroundings. It will make them feel fearful, helpless, stressed and out of control. But through this Trauma-Focused CBT these perceptions should be less upsetting as the conversations on it should give it a more "organized" space in the children's heads.

Timeline of Events

Here below, you can find a timeline of events to get an overview of the important occurrences over the time period.

February 24th 2022	Russia invaded Ukraine
February 2022	Russia started "evacuating" 500 orphans to Russian territories
March 22nd 2022	Ukraine and US authorities claimed that more than 2300 children had been kidnapped by Russian forces.
May 30th 2022	Vladimir Putin signed a decree to adopt Ukrainian orphans, or those without parental care, by giving Russian citizenship.
March 17th 2023	ICC issued warrants of arrest for Mr Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin and Ms Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova for a war crime of unlawful deportation of a population of children.
April 2023	The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) reported an estimate of 19,348 deported children.
September 19th 2023	Zelensky calls upon the UN in New York to unite against the 'malicious' Russia.

Possible Solutions

Increasing International Awareness and Pressure

Raise awareness of the issue on the international stage through media, advocacy, and diplomacy. Encourage governments, NGO's, and the public to exert pressure on Russia to cease the forced transfer of Ukrainian children and respect international norms and agreements regarding child rights. Sanctions and other diplomatic measures could be considered to incentivize compliance.

Digital Guardianship Program

Develop a digital guardianship program that leverages blockchain technology and artificial intelligence. Ukrainian children at risk of forced transfer could be registered on a secure blockchain platform, and algorithms would monitor their well-being and location in real-time. Any attempt to forcibly move a child across borders would trigger alerts to relevant authorities and international organizations. This system would also provide a secure channel for communication between separated families, reducing their isolation and ensuring their safety.

International Youth Exchange for Peace

Create an international youth exchange program specifically designed for children affected by conflicts like the one in Ukraine. This program would allow Ukrainian and Russian children to participate in joint activities, workshops, and educational projects in neutral, third-party countries. By fostering personal connections and understanding between these children, the program would aim to break down prejudices and barriers. Over time, it could contribute to peacebuilding efforts and reduce the likelihood of forced transfers as people on both sides of the conflict develop empathy and connections.

Meeting between parents who have lost their child due to deportation

Talking about your difficulties could help cope with them. Establishing such gatherings could help parents share their stories and find consolation with the others. There should be a professional therapist that could manage the gathering to bring everyone together and help them open up, if willing to, to create a protected space.

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