

GENEVA ACADEMY
of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights

a joint centre of

**GENEVA
GRADUATE
INSTITUTE**



**UNIVERSITÉ
DE GENÈVE**

WORKING PAPER

**DIS-INFORMATION AS A TOOL OF WAR:
INFORMATION AND IDENTITY WARFARE
AFFECTING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND
TEMPORARILY OCCUPIED UKRAINIAN
TERRITORIES**

DECEMBER 2025 | MARIA IMMACOLATA FICO

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This working paper examines how the Russian Federation uses indoctrination, digital censorship, forced child transfers, and militarized youth programming as part of a broader dis-information campaign targeting, particularly, children.¹ The findings presented here indicate that these mechanisms are not isolated but form a coherent system of cognitive warfare that raises grave concerns under international human rights law (IHRL), international humanitarian law (IHL), and international criminal law (ICL).

OUTCOMES:

→ **Indoctrination in Education:**

Russia's *curricula*, textbooks, and youth-organizations institutionalize patriotism, militarism and loyalty to the State. In the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, Ukrainian-language instruction is dismantled, and Russian ideology imposed. These measures raise concerns particularly regarding cultural identity, non-discrimination, and the use of education in contexts of occupation, with possible implications under criminal accountability.

→ **Digital Censorship and Surveillance:**

In Russia, the Sovereign Internet Law and school-based monitoring systems isolate children from independent information and restrict expression. In temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, rerouted infrastructure and device checks block Ukrainian media and render online Ukrainian schooling unsafe, affecting the access to information and continuity of education.

→ **Forced Transfers and “Re-Education” Camps:**

Thousands of Ukrainian children have been unlawfully deported, naturalized as Russian citizens, placed in ideological "re-education" camps, or subjected to militarized youth training. These acts raise concerns under the prohibitions on forcible transfer, identity erasure, and war propaganda.

→ **Militarized Youth Organizations:**

Russia's youth movements - *Yunarmiya*, *The Movement of the First*, and others - operate as state-directed tools of ideological conditioning and militarized socialization. Children, some as young as 6, are drawn into training, loyalty rituals, and patriotic programs, often under coercive conditions. In occupied Ukrainian territories, these structures advance Russification and pre-recruitment preparation, with participation tied to access to education or services. All raising serious concerns particularly regarding forced participation and the militarization of children in conflict settings.

→ **Regional Dimension - Belarus:**

Similar strategies appear in Belarus and influence information operations in neighbouring states, confirming that Russia's model of cognitive warfare and child-focused identity manipulation extends beyond Ukraine and undermines regional human rights protections.

Russia's use of propaganda, censorship, and forced identity reconfiguration against children represents a coherent system of cognitive warfare. By erasing cultural identity, controlling information, and reshaping loyalty, these practices inflict long-term harm and raise concerns of core principles of international law. Protecting children from such manipulation is a binding legal duty essential to upholding the integrity of the international legal order.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The **UN-HRC** should mandate a fact-finding mission to legally assess (IHRL, IHL and ICL) and document the forced transfer, indoctrination, systematic re-classification of citizenship and unlawful adoption of Ukrainian children in Ukrainian TOTs.
- **UNICEF** and the **CRC Committee** should develop guidelines or a General Comment on child protection during information warfare, including the psychological impact of propaganda, militarized education, and identity erasure. These guidelines should clarify the State's obligations under IHRL and IHL regarding psychological manipulation, militarized schooling, and the use of dis-information to obstruct family reunification processes.
- The **CoE** should give heightened and explicit institutional priority to the phenomenon of child-targeted cognitive warfare - including dis-information, indoctrination, militarized education, digital repression, and identity engineering - as a cross-cutting human rights concern, ensuring that this emerging pattern of violations affecting children is systematically addressed across its standard-setting, monitoring, accountability, and co-operation activities.
- **Russia** should immediately cease its dis-information campaign actions, both within and outside the borders, affecting of children's rights under the CRC, ICCPR, ICESCR, Geneva Conventions and the Rome Statute. In line with the UN Special Rapporteur on the Russian Federation Ms. Mariana Katzarova's recommendation 141(e), Russia should end surveillance-based punishment and repeal the July 2025 laws criminalizing VPN use and online information-seeking, which severely restrict children's access to education, information, and identity-preserving content. **Belarus** should prevent any cooperation that facilitates the unlawful transfer or re-education of Ukrainian children and ensure independent humanitarian access to relevant facilities.
- **Ukraine** should strengthen child-reunification mechanisms and expand digital tools to identify, trace, and recover children separated or unlawfully transferred. RCHR's *Way Home* framework proposes a UNGA resolution codifying these obligations and bilateral/triangular arrangements ("Ukraine - third neutral state - Russia") enabling returns through neutral states.² Additionally, an individualized "return trajectory" model and independent best-interest assessments should be adopted (which, for the policy, must exclude Russian participation due to conflict of interest under AP I and the CRC). The Inter-agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children's Tool N.19, of the *Toolkit on Unaccompanied And Separated Children*, offers guidance of all the sample tools and resources to support program design.³
- **Third States not party to the conflict** should actively support Ukraine's child-recovery and reunification efforts, including through the *Bring Kids Back UA* initiative, by providing political mediation, technical assistance, and financial resources.⁴ Such support should strengthen Ukraine's capacity to counter child-targeted Russian dis-information, including deepfakes, forced-adoption narratives, and psychological operations aimed at families, and enable safe, neutral, and verifiable return pathways for unlawfully transferred or deported Ukrainian children, including through, for example, triangular arrangements ("Ukraine - third neutral State - Russia") as proposed by the RCHR's *Way Home* policy.⁵ In parallel, Third-Party States hosting Ukrainian children should draw on states's good practices identified in the CoE's Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine (CGU) *Mapping Study*, including approaches to compulsory educational practices, access to psychological support, and safeguards for Ukrainian language, history, and cultural continuity.⁶ Moreover, Third-Party States should provide political and financial support to existing international and regional mechanisms addressing accountability, documentation, and victim-centered responses to war-related violations against children, including, where relevant, mechanisms developed within the CoE's framework (such as the CGU and the Register of Damage for Ukraine).⁷
- **International child-protection actors** as **ICRC, UNICEF, UNHCR, IOM** and **specialized child-agencies** should operationally lead the tracing, verification, psychosocial support, and reintegration of returned children, following examples used in Sierra Leone, Uganda, Rwanda,

Colombia, and the Balkans.⁸ The **ICRC** should secure humanitarian access to children unlawfully transferred or held in TOTs, and document the role of dis-information and coercive “re-education” practices.

- The **ICC** should assess, within the ongoing open investigations in Ukraine, whether systematic dis-information targeting Ukrainian children - including narratives on “evacuation”, adoption, indoctrination, or militarized schooling - constitutes evidence of intent for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and/or genocide, including under Arts. 6(e), 7(1)(h)-(k), and 8(2) (a)(ii), (a)(vii), (b)(viii), (b)(xxvi) of the Rome Statute and the Genocide Convention.⁹
- **Social Media Platforms** should enhance conflict-zone content moderation, with priority given to detecting and removing dis-information that targets children, especially narratives portraying unlawful transfers as “rescue” operations. Enterprises should respect the human rights of individuals belonging to specific groups or populations that require particular attention, as children, where they may have adverse human rights impacts on them.¹⁰ Moreover, as elaborated by the UNGP N.12 in situations of armed conflict enterprises should respect the standards of international humanitarian law.¹¹
- **Child-protection** and **mental health professionals** working with Ukrainian children affected by deportation, indoctrination, digital censorship, and identity erasure should apply integrated, multi-layered mental health and psycho-social support approaches in crisis and post-return settings, including trauma-informed, non-pathologizing care; cross-sectoral coordination (education, child protection, family tracing); identity-preserving, culturally and linguistically appropriate support; and structured supervision to prevent secondary trauma, in line with the manual of the CGU's Manual on children's mental health in emergencies.¹²

INTRODUCTION

Armed conflicts in the twenty-first century no longer unfold exclusively through conventional battlelines. The regulation of perception, memory, and truth has become a distinct theatre of hostilities, in which states deploy dis-information, militarized education, and identity engineering not only to weaken adversaries but also to shape the consciousness of future generations.

This “cognitive front” of warfare assumes particular urgency when children are made its primary targets. Children cannot readily resist systematic indoctrination, digital censorship, or coercive identity reconfiguration; their formative years render them uniquely vulnerable to long-term social and psychological manipulation. When state authorities redesign *curricula*, weaponize youth organizations, censor digital environments, and normalize militarism as civic virtue, the injury extends far beyond temporary distortion of facts: it represents an assault on children's autonomy, identity, developmental rights, and threatens the integrity of the international legal order that exists to shield children from political exploitation. These practices also affect children's psycho-social well-being insofar as they disrupt the family, educational, linguistic, and cultural environments through which identity and healthy development are formed.

The original contribution of this paper lies in its integrated legal and factual analysis of three mutually reinforcing mechanisms of dis-information targeting children: indoctrination, transfer in “re-education camps”, digital censorship, and militarized youth organizations; all of them understood not in isolation but as a coherent system of cognitive warfare targeting children. By connecting these practices within a unified framework, the paper seeks to clarify how the manipulation of identity, education, and information forms part of a larger strategy with deep legal and societal implications.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur (UNSR) on the situation of human rights on the Russian Federation, Ms. Mariana Katzarova, describes how the Russian Government has subordinated the entire information space, cultural sector, and public education system to pro-war narratives and a militarized vision of “traditional values” creating the structural conditions within which children become primary targets of ideological manipulation. She has described how especially the past three years have seen a deliberate strategy to wipe out dissent through intensified censorship, politically motivated prosecutions, and the consolidation of State ideology.¹³ These findings reinforce the central claim of this working paper: that Russia's manipulation of education, information, and identity is neither incidental nor improvised, but forms part of what multiple assessments consider to be a coordinated system with profound consequences for children's rights. It is further noted in the working paper, based on the several analysts and civil society organizations that what are the mechanisms happening within Russia create an enabling environment for the acts happening outside the Russian Federation.

Since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and with dramatically escalating scope and sophistication following the full-scale invasion in 2022, Russia has transformed education, culture, youth programs, and information ecosystems into instruments of state ideology. At home, compulsory school programs such as *Conversations about Important Things*, new militarized *curricula*, and the expansion of youth movements like *Yunarmiya* and the *Movement of the First*, merge patriotic ritual with military training and normalize loyalty to the state. Digital repression, anchored in the 2019 “Sovereign Internet Law”, has further entrenched the state's capacity to restrict minors' access to plural information, while school-based surveillance, loyalty tracking, and internet filtering systems generate an environment of constant ideological monitoring.

In the temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories, these measures intensify into a coercive system aimed at erasing Ukrainian identity. This working paper examines how Russian authorities have dismantled Ukraine's educational structures, imposed Russian *curricula*, criminalized Ukrainian language and culture, and embedded militarized youth organizations into schools. Parallel digital censorship regimes, device

searches, and communications controls cut children off from Ukrainian media and safe remote learning. Compulsory participation in patriotic rituals, “security and defence” classes with weapons instruction, and Kremlin-run youth centers accelerates the transformation of the education sphere into a mechanism of occupation governance. Crucially, these practices link directly to the unlawful deportation and forcible transfer of Ukrainian children to Russia and Belarus, where standardized “re-education” programs, foster placements, and passportization procedures further sever children from their families, national identity, and cultural heritage.

As of December 2025, Ukrainian authorities identified 19,546 deported or forcibly transferred children, while more than 260,000 minors remain under effective Russian control.¹⁴ In 2025 around 1902 children have been identified to be returned from Russian captivity since the beginning of the full-scale invasion.¹⁵

This working paper, therefore, addresses this central research question: *How does state-sponsored disinformation, indoctrination, and identity engineering in Russia and in the temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories affect children's rights under international law, and how should the international community respond?*

To answer this question, the analysis proceeds in accordance with the structure set out in the outline. Initially, the working paper identifies the relevant legal framework, clarifying how children's rights to expression, identity, education, and cultural continuity are protected under IHRL and how these obligations interact with IHL and ICL in situations of armed conflict and occupation ([Chapter 1](#)). Then, it examines, in turn, the principal mechanisms through which children's rights are affected in Russia and temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine: indoctrination in schools, digital censorship, and the mobilization of youth organizations. Each mechanism is analyzed separately within the Russian Federation and within the temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories to capture the distinct legal context and the differing modalities of coercion. In addition, this paper also highlights, in dedicated Boxes at the end of each section, the international legal standards that these practices may implicate under IHRL, IHL and ICL. For each standard identified by the author, the [Annex](#) offers a detailed breakdown of treaty provisions, authoritative interpretations, and relevant jurisprudence. This allows the paper to distinguish clearly between factual findings, concerns raised by international actors, and the author's identified legal framework, within which such concerns must be understood ([Chapter 2](#)). Thereafter, with the same analysis, the working paper broadens its horizons looking at cognitive warfare within a broader regional context by examining, specifically, Belarus as a parallel and supporting actor and, also here, it maps the relevant legal framework ([Chapter 3](#)). Finally, the paper offers policy and accountability recommendations aimed at strengthening prevention, protection, and child-centered resilience strategies at the international level.

The significance of this research is fourfold. First, it bridges human rights law and hybrid warfare, filling a gap in the literature by analyzing how cognitive manipulation in conflict settings harms the legal and developmental rights of children, a dimension underexplored in traditional security analyses. Second, it identifies an emerging form of child victimization in which minors are not merely collateral victims of violence but are deliberately transformed into ideological instruments of state power. Third, it maps which international legal mechanisms of protection exist and the specific rights and obligations present within the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Geneva Conventions, the Rome Statute and the Genocide Convention. Fourth, it offers policy guidance, including early-warning indicators, counter-narrative strategies, and child-centered resilience mechanisms that frame propaganda and identity manipulation as human rights violations with long-term societal repercussions.

Methodologically, the study synthesizes empirical evidence from UN bodies (OHCHR, UNICEF, CRC), local NGO's investigations, displacement/migration data and Ukrainian monitoring reports, anonymous interviews with international and local civil society organizations, combined with qualitative case studies

and legal analysis of treaty frameworks and jurisprudence. The theoretical orientation draws on doctrinal international law, child rights theory, and critical pedagogy, particularly Paulo Freire's critique of authoritarian education, to illustrate how cognitive manipulation operates as a tool of domination and identity restructuring.

By clarifying and identifying both the legal framework and the operational mechanisms of child-focused information warfare, this study shows that propaganda, indoctrination, and censorship targeting children are not peripheral political acts but practices that are increasingly being identified as raising serious concerns under international law. Protecting children from such practices is therefore not optional: it is a legal obligation grounded in international treaties, affirmed by jurisprudence, and demanded by the principle of humanity.

1. CHILDREN'S RIGHTS: LEGAL FRAMEWORK

This *Chapter 1* examines the legal protections afforded to children under IHRL, IHL and ICL. The interconnectedness of these regimes ensures that children's rights are upheld, even in conflict and occupation contexts. These protections go beyond overt acts of violence, addressing the more subtle methods through which political authorities may attempt to shape children's identities, disrupt their cultural continuity, or suppress their intellectual autonomy.

KEY PROTECTIVE RIGHTS

In sum, across all three regimes, a shared normative framework emerges, grounded in the following core principles:

- **Identity and Cultural Continuity:** Children have a right to preserve their name, nationality, language, religion, and cultural heritage. Occupying powers must not alter these elements through re-registration, indoctrination, or forced assimilation.
- **Family Unity and Reunification:** Children must not be arbitrarily separated from their families. States and occupying powers must facilitate reunification, and any alternative care must reflect the child's cultural background.
- **Education and Intellectual Autonomy:** Education must support critical thinking, dignity, and human rights. Indoctrination, military-style schooling, and information control contravenes international legal standards.
- **Freedom of Expression and Access to Information:** Children are entitled to plural, diverse, and reliable sources of information. Censorship, dis-information, and digital manipulation targeting children raise serious legal concerns.
- **Non-Discrimination and Equal Protection:** All children - regardless of status, origin, or political affiliation - are equally protected. Special attention is owed to those at risk of exclusion, erasure, or coercion.
- **Best Interests of the Child:** In all actions, including administrative and legal decisions during conflict or occupation, the child's best interests must be a primary consideration, assessed case-by-case.
- **Protection from Transfer, Recruitment, and Exploitation:** IHL and ICL prohibit the forcible transfer, deportation, or recruitment of children. Such acts may constitute grave breaches, crimes against humanity, and/or genocide.

Detailed legal references and interpretive guidance for each of these protections appear in the Boxes at the end of each subsection of *Chapter 2 - 3* and they are fully elaborated in the *Annex*.

International law accords children a uniquely protective status, framed through an integrated body of norms drawn from IHRL (I), IHL (II), and ICL (III). These regimes apply concurrently in situations of armed conflict and occupation, ensuring that children remain autonomous rights-holders even when state authorities attempt to shape, discipline, or reconfigure their identities. The legal architecture surrounding children therefore limits not only overt acts of violence but also the more subtle mechanisms, educational, cultural, informational, administrative, through which political authorities may attempt to mould children's allegiances or suppress their cultural, linguistic, or familial continuity.

I. INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

At the center of this framework stands the CRC, which sets out comprehensive guarantees that remain in force in armed conflict and under occupation. Its non-discrimination principle requires States to secure equal enjoyment of all rights for all children, including those belonging to minority or politically targeted groups (CRC Art. 2; CRC GC 5 §12; GC 14 §41).¹⁶ This entails proactive measures to identify and protect

children whose rights are endangered by exclusionary or assimilationist State practices, a standard directly relevant to contexts where an occupying power suppresses a child's national or linguistic identity.

The CRC's foundational concept of the best interests of the child requires that all authorities, including occupying administrations, treat children's rights and welfare as a primary consideration in every decision concerning them (CRC Art. 3(1)). As clarified by the Committee, this principle governs all legislative, administrative, and institutional action (GC 14 §§ 6-15) and must be applied case-by-case with due consideration of the child's identity, family relations, language, culture, and vulnerability (GC 14 §§ 55-60). In conflict settings, this principle interacts directly with the obligation in CRC Art. 38 to respect IHL relevant to the child, meaning that educational, digital, and ideological policies adopted by a belligerent or occupying power must respect both IHRL and the specific child-protection norms under IHL.

Identity, understood as an integrated whole encompassing name, nationality, family relations, language, religion, and cultural ties, receives elevated protection under CRC Art. 8. The Committee has emphasized that preserving children's identity is an affirmative duty (GC 14 § 55), and that State authorities, including occupying powers, must refrain from altering a child's personal status, nationality, or cultural belonging. This obligation is reinforced in IHL: the ICRC Commentary to the Fourth Geneva Convention (GC IV) underscores that an occupying power is *forbidden* to change the personal or family status or nationality of children (GC IV Art. 50; 1958 ICRC Commentary, §§ 1-2).¹⁷ These protections are triggered precisely in situations involving administrative re-registration, passportisation, or the provision of substitute identities.

Parallel protections arise in the child's right to family unity (CRC Arts. 9, 10, 16; GC 14 § 56), and in the requirement that children deprived of family care receive culturally appropriate alternative care (CRC Art. 20(3); GC 14 §60). Under IHL, children separated from parents due to conflict must receive care, education, and maintenance consistent with their cultural, linguistic, and religious background (GC IV Art. 24; 2025 ICRC Commentary, §§ 2075-2093).¹⁸ Occupying authorities must therefore avoid practices that sever family links or place children in environments that erode their cultural identity.

The rights to freedom of expression, thought, conscience, and access to information (CRC Arts. 12-17; ICCPR Arts. 17-20) provide the normative foundation for children's intellectual autonomy.¹⁹ The Human Rights Committee has repeatedly clarified that restrictions on expression or access to information must meet strict tests of legality, necessity, and proportionality (HRC GC 34 §§ 22, 40-43).²⁰ Blanket bans, ideological censorship, propaganda for war, or advocacy of national hatred are incompatible with the ICCPR (ICCPR Arts. 19-20; HRC GC 11 § 2²¹; GC 34 § 43). Within the CRC, Art. 13 protects children's right to receive information from diverse sources, while Art. 17 imposes an affirmative obligation to ensure access to plural, high-quality and reliable information, including online (CRC GC 25 §§ 52-54).²² The Committee warns that digital environments must not expose children to surveillance, automated profiling, or manipulative content that interferes with their ability to form independent views (CRC GC 25 §§ 56-62).

The right to education, protected under CRC Art. 29 and ICESCR Art. 13, requires that schooling contribute to the full development of the child's personality, dignity, and mental and cultural capacities (CESCR GC 13 § 38).²³ Education must foster respect for human rights, prepare children for life in a free society, and respect their cultural identity (CRC Art. 29(1)(e)-(d); CESCR GC 21 §§ 26-27).²⁴ Indoctrination, militarization, or *curricula* designed to suppress a child's national identity are inconsistent with these norms. Under the ICESCR, the obligation to ensure non-discrimination in education requires both formal and substantive equality (ICESCR Art. 2; CESCR GC 20 § 8).²⁵ Restrictions on language of instruction or the imposition of assimilationist curricular content may therefore constitute violations of both human rights and humanitarian law.

II. INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

In situations of armed conflict, IHL complements these obligations. GC IV imposes a duty on all parties to ensure the care, relief, and education of children (GC IV Art. 24). Education must be entrusted, where possible, to persons of the same cultural tradition as the parents, and children must be protected from propaganda that would alienate them from their identity (2025 ICRC Commentary, §§ 2092-2093). The occupying power must facilitate, not replace, existing institutions for children's care and education (GC IV Art. 50; 1958 ICRC Commentary §§ 3260-3262). IHL also expressly regulates access to education in temporarily occupied territory. Under GC IV Art. 50(1) the Occupying Power “shall, with the cooperation of the national and local authorities, facilitate the proper working of all institutions devoted to the care and education of children”. Unless absolutely required by its security obligations, this entails a negative duty not to interfere with existing educational structures, including a prohibition on requisitioning staff, premises or equipment for military purposes, and a positive duty to ensure continuity of education, for example by providing materials or rebuilding facilities damaged by hostilities. (see also GC IV Art. 64; Hague Regulation IV Art. 43).²⁶ Using functioning schools or other educational facilities for military purposes has been interpreted as incompatible with this facilitation obligation, as it both disrupts schooling and increases the risk that such facilities become military objectives. Crucially, propaganda, coercion, or inducement aimed at securing children's participation in the occupying power's armed or auxiliary forces is strictly prohibited (GC IV Art. 51; 1958 ICRC Commentary § 1).

The most stringent IHL prohibition relevant to conflict-affected children is the ban on forcible transfer or deportation (GC IV Art. 49; 1958 ICRC Commentary §§ 1-2). Evacuations are permitted only temporarily, for imperative security or humanitarian reasons, and displaced children must be returned as soon as hostilities cease. Transfers aimed at assimilation, ideological re-orientation, or demographic engineering are absolutely prohibited and constitute grave breaches (GC IV Art. 147). Additional Protocol I reinforces these standards by requiring special respect and protection for children (AP I Art. 77 and its ICRC Commentary §§ 3177, 3181) and limiting evacuation of children to temporary humanitarian situations requiring parental and protecting-power consent (AP I Art. 78; ICRC Commentary §§ 3200-3203).²⁷

Building on these hard-law duties, a complementary soft-law framework has developed around the protection of education from military use. In 2012 the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) launched the drafting of the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict, finalized in 2014 through a state-led process, and subsequently anchored in the 2015 Safe Schools Declaration.²⁸ These instruments do not create new legal obligations but provide operational guidance to reduce the military use of schools and universities, preserve their civilian character, and promote continuity of education during hostilities, in line with IHL and human rights law (GCPEA, Guidelines; Safe Schools Declaration, 2015; ICRC, Commentary on the Guidelines, 2025).²⁹ They are particularly relevant where parties use schools for weapons storage, troop accommodation, or propaganda activities, or where educational institutions are instrumentalized for ideological and military purposes.

Under these guidelines, it has been identified as customary IHL further requires that children affected by armed conflict receive “special respect and protection” in both international and non-international armed conflicts (AP I Art. 77(1); AP II Art. 4(3); GC IV Arts. 23(1), 24, 50).³⁰ In practice, this obligation is engaged whenever the proximity of children to armed forces or military objectives increases their vulnerability, for instance, when functioning schools are used for military purposes, exposing students to risks of recruitment, forced labour, sexual and gender-based violence, abduction or harassment owing to their proximity to weapon-bearers. Refraining from military use of schools is thus one concrete way of giving effect to the obligations of special respect, best interests, and care and aid owed to children, and of preventing interference with their education.

As identified by the 2025 ICRC Commentary on GCPEA Guidelines, under customary IHL on cultural property, buildings dedicated to education may, based on recent state practice, and depending on their characteristics and role, qualify as cultural property and enjoy protection from seizure, destruction and willful damage (ICRC Customary IHL Study, Rules 38, 40; Hague Regulations Art. 56; 1954 Hague Convention on Cultural Property).³¹ Where schools are of “great importance to the cultural heritage of every people”, their use for purposes likely to expose them to destruction or damage is prohibited unless imperatively required by military necessity (AP I Art. 53; AP II Art.16). In contexts where educational institutions serve as key carriers of national language and culture, attacks on or militarization of such facilities may therefore implicate both cultural-property protections and children's rights to identity and education.

The Safe Schools framework also highlights that even when armed forces are deployed “for security”¹¹ round educational facilities, their presence can blur the civilian character of schools and increase the risk of attack or incidental harm. *Guideline 5* recommends that fighting forces not be used to guard schools and universities except where no alternative means exist, and that, where this is unavoidable, their presence inside school grounds be avoided and evacuations of children be planned consistently with IHL rules on precautions and on evacuation and non-forcible transfer (AP I Art. 58(b); GC IV Arts. 49, 50, 78). This guidance is particularly salient in situations where purported “evacuations” or “protective” deployments around schools mask broader policies of deportation, transfer or identity-focused “re-education”.

III. INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL LAW

Finally, international criminal law crystallizes the most gross violations of children's rights in armed conflict and occupation. Under the Rome Statute:³²

- War crimes → The unlawful deportation or transfer of protected persons, including children, constitutes a war crime under Art. 8(2)(a)(vii) of the Rome Statute and a grave breach of Geneva Convention IV. The ICRC Commentary clarifies that the prohibition covers coercive transfers and evacuations in occupied territory, including outside active hostilities, and that mental suffering and the particular vulnerability of children are relevant to the gravity of the offence (GC IV Art. 49, 1958 ICRC Commentary §§ 1-2; GC IV Art. 147, 2025 ICRC Commentary §§ 6626, 6640, 6687, 6693, 6695). The conscription or enlistment of children under 15 is separately criminalized under Art. 8(2)(b)(xxvi) of the Rome Statute, reinforced by the prohibition on pressure, propaganda, or inducement to enlist under GC IV Art. 51 (1958 ICRC Commentary). In addition, where measures implemented in occupied territory intentionally inflict severe mental suffering on children - taking into account their age, dependency, and heightened vulnerability - as part of broader coercive practices, they may, depending on the level of severity, fall within the prohibition of torture or inhuman treatment under Art. 8(2)(a)(ii) of the Rome Statute. (ICTY, *Orić* Trial Judgment (2006) § 352; ICTY, *Blaškić* Trial Judgment (2000) §§ 66, 187; ECtHR, *Selmouni v France* (2000) 29 EHRR 403, § 100; ECtHR, *Bouyid v Belgium* (2015) § 88).³³
- Crimes against humanity → Where acts such as unlawful transfer, systematic indoctrination, cultural erasure, or coercive identity reconfiguration are committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population, they may amount to crimes against humanity. Relevant offences include persecution on national, ethnic, or cultural grounds under Art. 7(1)(h) and other inhumane acts intentionally causing great suffering or serious mental harm under Art. 7(1)(k). The ICRC Commentary confirms that severe psychological harm, particularly affecting children due to their age and cultural vulnerability, may satisfy the material threshold of inhuman acts (GC IV Art. 147, 2025 ICRC Commentary §§ 6687, 6693, 6695).
- Genocide → At the highest threshold, the forcible transfer of children from one group to another, when committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a protected group, constitutes an act of genocide under Art. 6(e) of the Rome Statute and Art. II(e) of the Genocide Convention.³⁴

Recent national jurisprudence has also shown an increased willingness to engage with the protection of children's identity and group continuity when assessing genocidal intent, illustrating an evolving interpretative approach to Art. II(e) of the Genocide Convention. (Stockholm District Court, Yazidi Case (2025) pp 186-202).³⁵

These legal categories are not mutually exclusive: a single policy or practice may simultaneously engage multiple offences depending on its scale, pattern, and intent, including the specific intent to destroy cultural or national identity.

Across these bodies of law, a common normative thread emerges: children's rights to identity, culture, family, and intellectual freedom impose firm limits on state power. Educational and informational systems must equip children to think, not merely to obey; care arrangements must preserve rather than reconfigure identity; and any attempt to militarize, indoctrinate, or forcibly assimilate children is prohibited under both peacetime human rights law and the laws of armed conflict. Therefore, all the protections under international human rights law, international humanitarian law and international criminal law outlined above constitute the normative framework within which the following chapters should be read and assessed.

2. MECHANISMS AFFECTING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN RUSSIA AND TEMPORARILY OCCUPIED TERRITORIES³⁶

Crisis and emergency situations can affect children's psycho-social well-being where they involve the disruption or transformation of key protective environments through which children develop a sense of stability, belonging, and continuity. The Council of Europe Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine emphasizes, in its 2025 Manual for Professionals on Mental Health and Psycho-Social Support for Children in Crisis and Emergency Situations, that children's development is closely linked to the immediate family, social networks, and community institutions such as schools, which normally provide routine, language environments, and social reference points.³⁷ Where conflict-related measures interfere with these environments - through family separation, displacement, or the alteration/destruction of educational settings - schools and other community structures may cease to function as protective spaces.³⁸ The Manual notes that, in such contexts, children may experience a range of mental health difficulties, including anxiety-related reactions, depressive symptoms, post-traumatic stress reactions, prolonged grief, and behavioral or emotional regulation difficulties. These difficulties are associated not only with exposure to violence or loss, but also with prolonged uncertainty, disruption of routine, and erosion of stable social and educational frameworks that support children's resilience and development.³⁹

In this context, it can be, therefore, argued that psycho-social harm cannot be understood as detached from questions of identity, nor from the broader use of dis-information and narrative control as tools of contemporary warfare. The disruption or deliberate reconfiguration of environments identified as protective - family relations, language of instruction, educational settings, and cultural reference points - directly affects the processes through which children form and maintain a sense of self, belonging, and continuity over time. Where changes to schooling, language use, and social narratives are imposed through coercive information practices, rather than occurring through voluntary or protective measures, the erosion of these identity-forming structures intersects with children's mental health and developmental rights. In such settings, psychological harm arises not only from separation or instability, but from sustained exposure to manipulated narratives, denial of access to plural information, and the systematic replacement of cultural and linguistic reference points. The impact on children's psychological well-being, therefore, becomes inseparable from the right to identity, family life, and cultural continuity under international law, as the harm extends beyond temporary distress and engages legally significant questions on children's development and personal integrity.

Against this background, *Chapter 2* examines the concrete mechanisms through which dis-information operates as a tool of war against children's rights and identity. It analyzes the concrete mechanisms affecting children's rights: indoctrination and forcible transfer into re-education camps (A), digital censorship (B), militarization in youth organizations (C). It distinguishes between how these mechanisms operate inside Russia and how they are intensified and used in the temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories.

A. INDOCTRINATION

This first section examines indoctrination and the forcible transfer of Ukrainian children as parts of a single system of identity engineering. Russia's domestic propaganda model-militarized *curricula*, loyalty rituals, and youth movements (I) is exported into temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories, where it becomes coercive and explicitly assimilationist (II). Within this framework, the forcible transfer of children and their placement in "re-education" camps represent one of the most extreme forms of imposed ideological control (III).

I. RUSSIA

State-directed indoctrination constitutes a central mechanism through which children's rights are systematically eroded in the Russian Federation. In the context of cognitive warfare, the education system becomes a strategic *fulcrum* because it enables the State to shape children's perceptions, loyalties, and historical memory at a formative stage, through pedagogical and cultural tools that appear legitimate, routine, and non-coercive.

The indoctrination architecture within Russia can be analytically organized around three interrelated macro-patterns: curricular and legal re-engineering (1), cultural indoctrination and historical narrative control (2), and coercion, intimidation, and enforcement (3).

1. Curricular and Legal Re-Engineering

Propaganda within Russia permeates classrooms through *curricula*, rituals, and extracurricular programs designed to normalize war and cultivate loyalty to the state.⁴⁰

Children as young as 8 are enrolled in militarized initiatives such as *Conversations about Important Things*, and the youth movements *Yunarmiya* and the *Movement of the First* are open from the 7th grade, i.e., 12-13 years of age.⁴¹ These activities merge patriotic instruction with practical military skills, including firearms handling and trench training, while encouraging students to write letters to soldiers, participate in militarized pageantry, and pledge loyalty to the Russian Federation.⁴²

The 2024 course *Fundamentals of Security and Defence of the Homeland* further entrenched this militarized orientation. This program expanded significantly in 2024-25, both downward into pre-school education and deeper into weekly school routines. The Ministry of Education introduced mandatory Monday flag-raising and weekly classes with the first 2024-25 lesson delivered personally by President Vladimir Putin. By January 2025, the format had reached kindergartens in Vologda as a pilot phase for nationwide pre-school adoption.⁴³ Simultaneously, federal legal amendments required teachers to base pedagogy on “traditional Russian spiritual and moral values”, to “foster patriotism”, and to instil respect for “heroes”, transforming ideological content into a statutory obligation.⁴⁴ These amendments thus converted propaganda into a legally mandated component of teaching and extended state indoctrination into early childhood education.⁴⁵

Conversations about Important Things, launched in 2022 as mandatory weekly lessons, serves also as the centerpiece of this ideological ecosystem.⁴⁶ Lessons on patriotism, military pride, and loyalty to the Russian state are commonly delivered by uniformed teachers, veterans, or other military-affiliated figures. Examples include “The Importance of the Motherland”, “Russia's Military Glory”, and “Why We Must Trust Our President”. A 2025 empirical study confirms that this compulsory class increases authoritarian attitudes and support for aggression among adolescents, indicating that education has been repurposed as a cognitive-warfare.⁴⁷

In parallel, the *Strategy for Countering Extremism in the RF for 2025* designated Ukraine as a principal source of “extremism” a framing incorporated into school and youth programming so as to equate pro-Ukrainian expression with extremist ideology.⁴⁸ These measures collectively demonstrate the use of state-engineered pedagogy to produce political loyalty rather than rights-based critical learning, creating grave concerns under the CRC and ICCPR.⁴⁹

Legally speaking, in December 2024, the State Duma amended Federal Law “No. 124-FZ On the Basic Guarantees of the Rights of the Child” mandating a unified extracurricular program promoting “traditional Russian spiritual and moral values”. The Ministry of Education's 2025 methodological guidelines now require camp and school personnel to conduct military-patriotic exercises and moral-

discipline drills.⁵⁰ This reform transforms ideological education from policy into a binding legal duty for educators and youth-camp staff. Amnesty International further notes that although Russian domestic law nominally guarantees freedom of thought, speech, and information, it effectively restricts children's rights to expression, assembly, and association.⁵¹ Legal guarantees for participation remain confined to controlled settings, while indoctrination under the rubric of nurturing “patriotism” was embedded in the 2020 constitutional amendments (Конституция Российской Федерации Art. 67.1(4)).⁵²

Recent UN findings reinforce this assessment. In February 2024, the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) expressed “serious concern” regarding “widespread and systematic State propaganda in schools about the armed conflict in Ukraine”, citing both the new history textbook and *Conversations about Important Things*, urging Russia to end the politicization and militarization of education.⁵³ The CRC affirms that developments invert aims of critical thinking and cultural identity.⁵⁴

Taken together, these measures demonstrate how propaganda has been transformed from an educational policy choice into a binding legal obligation, fundamentally distorting the aims of education as protected under IHRL.

2. Cultural Indoctrination and Historical Narrative Control

Beyond formal schooling, the Russian state consolidates ideological control through culture and history, aligning education with a centralized and militarized narrative of national identity.

According to the UNSR on the Russian Federation 2025 report, State ideology has been consolidated into a centralized narrative centered on “traditional values” and external existential threats, which is used simultaneously to justify aggression abroad and repression at home. The report documents that in 2023 alone, 1.6 billion roubles were channeled through the Presidential Foundation for Cultural Initiatives into pro-war cultural projects, patriotic campaigns, and the mobilization of social-media influencers to amplify militarized messaging.⁵⁵

Therefore, indoctrination also operates through cultural channels. History textbooks disseminate Kremlin narratives depicting Ukraine as a “neo-Nazi state” and presenting war as a legitimate dispute-resolution mechanism, while targeting minority identities such as those of Crimean Tatars.⁵⁶ Amnesty International records the rollout of a new state history textbook justifying the annexation of Crimea and the 2022 invasion, misrepresenting Ukrainian history, and undermining Ukrainians' cultural identity.⁵⁷

A University of Exeter study shows that museums and cultural institutions have likewise been mobilized for “ideological indoctrination”, aligning public exhibitions with classroom messaging.⁵⁸ Alongside this, grotesque dis-information, such as films alleging organ trafficking by Ukraine and Western NGOs, serves to cultivate hostility toward perceived enemies, further denying children their CRC-protected right to develop an independent cultural identity.⁵⁹

The UNSR on the Russian Federation, in her last 2025 report, further highlights how Russian history textbooks now systematically omit or falsify key historical facts, including Stalinist purges and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, replacing them with a militarized reinterpretation of “historical truth.”⁶⁰ In April 2025 the Government introduced a new and expansive legal definition of “genocide” committed by Nazis and their collaborators, which is explicitly deployed to legitimize the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

This systematic manipulation of history and culture affects children's right to develop an independent cultural identity, replacing plural historical understanding with state-imposed “historical truth”.

3. Coercion, Intimidation, and Enforcement

Parallel to this ideological reframing, control within this system depends on coercion and intimidation.

Art. 354.1 of the Criminal Code (“rehabilitation of Nazism”) is increasingly used as a censorship instrument: in 2024 alone, at least 52 individuals were convicted, often for symbolic acts or social-media posts.⁶¹ One such case involved a four-year-and-four-month sentence for a negative comment about the St. George ribbon, a State-promoted symbol of patriotic loyalty. These patterns reveal how historical revisionism functions as both a pedagogical tool and a punitive apparatus regulating children, educators, and families.⁶²

This ideological agenda is anchored in the education system: schools and universities are required to deliver patriotic and pro-war content, while teachers who depart from the State line face harassment, dismissal, or criminal prosecution.⁶³ Notably, in June 2025 a 65-year-old schoolteacher, Natalya Taranushenko, was sentenced in absentia to seven years' imprisonment simply for discussing reports about Bucha with her students—an illustration of the extreme penalties imposed for deviating from officially sanctioned narratives.⁶⁴ A similar pattern is reflected in other documented cases by Amnesty International, such as that of English teacher Irina Gen in Penza, one of the first educators charged with “disseminating false information about the Russian armed forces” for speaking out against the invasion at school, who received a five-year conditional sentence, illustrating the broader climate of criminalization facing teachers who depart from official narratives.⁶⁵

Amnesty International reports that schoolchildren are “exposed to indoctrination”, while families in temporarily occupied areas face threats that children could be sent to “re-education” centres or placed for adoption in Russia (examined more in detail in *Sub-section A(II) and (III)*).⁶⁶ Armed personnel stationed inside schools reinforce the atmosphere of fear.⁶⁷ Investigative reporting further reveals that parents resisting indoctrination face intimidation, social-service threats, and accusations of “discrediting the army” while schools are instructed to monitor “ideologically unreliable” families.⁶⁸ Families may face fines or loss of custody, and armed guards, sometimes participating in disciplinary actions, restrict parental access to schools. Amnesty's documentation of intimidation and armed presence corroborates a broader system of coercion that, together with surveillance and loyalty-monitoring practices, reflects a regime of control rather than genuine pedagogy.⁶⁹ Parallel analyses describe the expansion of youth-targeted indoctrination beyond classrooms: *Avangard* military-patriotic camps, *Yunarmiya* pipelines, and the *Movement of the First* now formally integrate pedagogy into pre-military socialization (examined more in detail in *Section 2(C)*).⁷⁰

These enforcement practices reveal that ideological conformity in education is maintained not through persuasion, but through fear, surveillance, and criminal sanctions.

Concluding Assessment

Taken together, it follows that the state-orchestrated transformation of Russia's educational and cultural sphere functions as a coordinated system of political socialization that directly undermines the rights of children and embeds loyalty-production at the core of childhood development. Russia's education-culture complex constitutes a “moral-patriotic” ecosystem oriented toward ideological obedience rather than critical learning, raising grave concerns of IHRL rights protected under CRC, ICCPR and ICESCR.

Box 1.

GENEVA ACADEMY'S MAPPING OF INTERNATIONAL LEGAL STANDARDS

IHRL: CRC Arts. [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [8](#), [12](#), [13](#), [14](#), [17](#), [28](#), [29](#), [31](#); ICCPR Arts. [2](#), [18](#), [19](#), [20](#), [24](#), [26](#); ICESCR Arts. [2](#), [13](#), [15](#).

These provisions safeguard children's rights to non-discrimination, identity, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, freedom of expression and access to plural information, and an education and cultural life aimed at critical and autonomous development. They further require that children's rights be implemented through measures guided by the child's best interests and supported by effective legislative, administrative, and institutional action. Accordingly, practices such as compulsory patriotic instruction, ideological curricula, militarized schooling, censorship, intimidation of teachers and families, and suppression of alternative viewpoints engage these protections insofar as they constrain children's ability to form views freely, preserve their cultural identity, and access an educational environment free from political or military indoctrination.

(for a provision-by-provision explanation, click on each article to access the Annex).

II. TEMPORARILY OCCUPIED TERRITORIES OF UKRAINE

Since Russia's initial invasion of Crimea in 2014, and with significantly increasing intensity following the full-scale invasion in 2022, education in temporarily occupied areas has been systematically targeted to erase Ukrainian identity and replace it with Russian state ideology. Scholars highlight a post-2014 clampdown on classroom expression and consolidation of textbook control, forming the infrastructure for exporting Russian narratives into occupied schools.⁷¹ Camps in occupied Crimea and Russia conduct “patriotic” programs requiring children to renounce Ukraine, glorify Russian military power, and adopt a pro-Kremlin worldview. On 31 January 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) held that changes to Crimea's education system limiting Ukrainian-language instruction constituted racial discrimination, violating CERD (§§ 369-370).⁷² On July 2025, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) similarly ruled that Russia's practices between 2014 and 2022 effectively denied the right to education, breaching Protocol No. 1 ECHR (§ 1165).⁷³ In March 2024, the CRC expressed grave concern over persecution of children for political opinions, school propaganda enforcement, and interference in education.⁷⁴

While acknowledging how the judicial system has classified the facts concerning Crimea, for the purpose of this working paper, the timeline of focus will be on the TOTs of the post-2022 full-scale invasion. Here, Russia has deployed, and is deploying, education as a central instrument of control, identity erasure, and political re-engineering. This section analyses the use of education in temporarily occupied territories as a tool of forced assimilation and militarization, focusing on structural changes to the education system (1), coercive enforcement practices (2), and the militarization of *curricula* and childhood (3).

1. Structural Takeover of Education and Erasure of Ukrainian Identity

This passage analyses how occupation authorities dismantle Ukraine's education system and replace it with Russian legal, curricular, and institutional frameworks.

Human Rights Watch documented, in its 2024 report “Education under Occupation”, that Russia's post-2022 education policy replicates, on an accelerated scale, the model first introduced in Crimea and the so-called “DNR/LNR”, including the rapid replacement of Ukrainian law with Russian educational legislation, despite the obligation of an occupying power to respect existing local law, against the requirements of GC IV.⁷⁵ In practice, this means that occupying authorities treats schools as if they were located inside the Russian Federation, requiring Russian accreditation, Russian teacher certification, and Russian oversight bodies such as Rosobrnadzor to assume control.⁷⁶

As documented in Ukraine's Ombudsman report *Cross-Pollinated Repression* and the OHCHR 2025 report, Russian authorities are dismantling Ukraine's educational framework and substituting it with one that glorifies aggression and denies Ukrainian nationhood.⁷⁷ OHCHR's 2025 findings also document a systematic imposition of the Russian state *curricula*, accompanied by punitive measures against children and parents for speaking Ukrainian or accessing online Ukrainian schooling.⁷⁸ The 2024 monitoring report of АЛЬМЕНДА, the Ukrainian NGO active in this sphere, quantifies this system: at least 590,900 children were absorbed into Russian educational standards by October 2024; Ukrainian was reduced to a marginal “native language/elective” (often capped at approximately three hours per week); and military-oriented programs, including the Nakhimov Naval School branch in Mariupol, channel minors toward uniformed service.⁷⁹

Instruction in Ukrainian is thus heavily suppressed, while Kremlin-approved textbooks portray Ukraine as illegitimate, justify the invasion, and glorify Russian military.⁸⁰ The new 11th-grade Russian history textbook distributed in occupied schools repeats Kremlin dis-information, including claims that Ukraine is a “neo-Nazi state”, that the Maidan was a “bloody coup” and that the 2022 invasion was necessary to prevent “genocide”.⁸¹ The textbook erases Ukrainian statehood and identity, depicts temporarily occupied territories as part of Russia, and justifies the annexation of Crimea, raising concerns on the prohibition on propaganda for war in education.⁸²

This system reflects an “unlawful takeover” of education: by mid-2022, occupation administrations openly asserted that children in Kherson and elsewhere would become “citizens of their country, Russia” and Russian officials required families to present Russian passports for school enrollment.⁸³ HRW found, in its 2024 report, that Russian authorities imported thousands of teachers from Russia and the Donbas to replace Ukrainian educators who refused to collaborate, while simultaneously denying Ukrainian students access to schooling unless their families accepted “passportization” policies.⁸⁴ The Council of Europe reports that the Russian Ministry of Interior has claimed the issuance of 3.4 million Russian passports in occupied regions by September 2024, along with *de facto* discrimination in access to education and social services for those without Russian documentation.⁸⁵

At the UN level, the CRC has confirmed in its reports that Russia is “enforcing...Russian *curricula* and military training in schools” within temporarily occupied areas, while attacks on or occupation of schools have restricted access to education for “millions of children”. The Committee called for recognition of schools as civilian objects and urged measures to deter military use.⁸⁶

It is important to acknowledge, as documented by HRW, that children's access to education is often disrupted not only by ideological interference but by the occupation authorities' inability or refusal to provide basic schooling conditions: schools lack staff, electricity, or materials, even as Ukrainian language learning was banned, and Russian-distance learning was enforced.⁸⁷ This demonstrates that the objective was not educational continuity but ideological control.

The cumulative effect of these measures confirms that the objective of the educational takeover is not continuity of schooling, but the systematic erasure of Ukrainian identity.

2. Coercion, Repression, and Attacks on Teachers, Families, and Schools

The structural transformation of education has been enforced through systematic coercion and repression.

HRW provides specific evidence of this coercion: occupying authorities in Kherson and Kharkiv regions used arbitrary detention, threats, and repeated home visits to force teachers to sign Russian contracts; some educators were tortured or expelled for refusing to collaborate.⁸⁸ After initial promises

of salaries and humanitarian aid in spring-summer 2022, occupation authorities increasingly resorted to threats, arbitrary detention and torture of teachers and school administrators who refused to collaborate.⁸⁹ Russian education officials, including the federal minister, have directly supervised these measures, altering the local Ukraine's 2017 Law on Education.⁹⁰

For example, OHCHR recorded at least 13 such cases by December 2023, including a school director in Kherson region detained twice for a total of 40 days and beaten to compel cooperation, while HRW interviews from Kharkivska and Khersonska regions describe teachers being threatened with being sent “to the basement” a director electroshocked during interrogation after hiding school documents, and even a case where a teacher's son was abducted and used as leverage to force him to work under the Russian system.⁹¹ These patterns underscore that the transformation of education in temporarily occupied territories is inseparable from attacks on education and personnel.⁹²

Additionally, repression reaches deeply into family life. Amnesty International documents that families seeking to maintain Ukrainian education online faced threats that their children would be removed to “re-education” institutions or made available for adoption (more details in *Sub-section A(III)*); armed personnel in schools enforced the imposed curriculum, exposing minors to indoctrination.⁹³ HRW provides additional evidence of coercion against families: occupation officials threatened parents with fines, loss of custody, or detention if they refused to enroll their children in Russian-run schools or if children continued online Ukrainian education.⁹⁴ Some parents hid their children to avoid forced Russification. HRW also notes that informants were recruited among students to report those who spoke Ukrainian; offenders were threatened with removal from their families, reflecting an alarming intrusion of state coercion into private family life.⁹⁵

Reports describe, moreover, exposure to pro-war content, staged ceremonies involving the burning of Ukrainian flags and punishments such as beatings directed to people, including children, for saying “Glory to Ukraine”. Compulsory flag-raising, anthem-singing, and ideological materials are identified as part of an effort to erase Ukrainian cultural identity and rewrite history.⁹⁶ Ground-level accounts confirm that occupation administrations impose Russian textbooks, enforce daily loyalty rituals, bus children to exhibitions, and pressure teachers to adopt “patriotic” methods, while parents who resist face surveillance and social-service threats, dynamics reflecting the “disciplinary power” of wartime schooling.⁹⁷ Museum and exhibition programs function as disciplinary tools, reinforcing imposed narratives through controlled and compulsory participation in curated “patriotic education” events.⁹⁸

These practices reveal how identity erasure is enforced through fear, punishment, and intrusion into private and family life.

3. Militarization, Patriotic Education, and Preparation for Service

Against this backdrop of coercion, education in occupied territories is further targeted through open militarization and preparation of children for service to the occupying power.

Beginning in September 2024, under Order No. 62 of the Ministry of Education, schools in occupied areas introduced, reflecting what was happening already within Russia, the compulsory 8th-grade subject, *Fundamentals of Security and Defence of the Homeland*, which included hands-on familiarization with grenades, small arms, anti-tank grenade launchers, and sniper rifles.⁹⁹ Russian servicemen have demonstrated weapons and trained children on assembly inside classrooms.¹⁰⁰ OHCHR further notes that, in 2024, state programs to “instill Russian patriotism” and for the military service have been elevated within the State Cultural Policy to 2030 and related youth-policy amendments. It also notes the curricular claims that “Ukraine did not exist... it was all Russian land” directly contravene CRC' s requirement that education respect a child's cultural identity.¹⁰¹

In the same year, occupation authorities reported that 58,000 children from Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia attended “patriotic” camps; classes requiring an oath of allegiance to the Russian Federation (244 classes in 78 schools in 2023-24) and had expanded to at least 11 schools in Zaporizhzhia and several schools in Kherson, Luhansk, and Donetsk by December 2024.¹⁰²

According to OHCHR, these practices exceed permissible educational regulation under occupation law (propaganda and pressure to secure enlistment) and human rights law (education oriented toward free and critical development rather than militarization).¹⁰³ HRW corroborates in its 2024 report this militarization: schools under occupation implemented paramilitary courses, weapons training, and participation in youth army programs. Even children as young as 6 were subjected to drills and war-oriented activities.¹⁰⁴

In the latest OHCHR 2025 report, it has been noted that at the beginning of the 2025-2026 academic year, the occupying authorities introduced mandatory weekly *Conversations about Important Things* lessons in preschools in occupied areas, extending a program previously required only for children aged 7 and above. Topics include holidays such as the “Day of the Defender of the Fatherland”.¹⁰⁵ The Russian Ministry of Education states that these lessons aim to “protect and strengthen Russian spiritual values” and cultivate students’ “value-based attachment to their homeland.”¹⁰⁶ The educational measures are intertwined with networks of forced transfer and camp indoctrination, ensuring that deported children encounter identical ideological content inside Russia and in occupied schools through standardized lessons, youth movements, and cultural programming.¹⁰⁷

A Yale HRL investigation characterizes this as an “industrial” system coordinating the indoctrination of deported and occupied-zone children through standardized textbooks, digital platforms, and state-run patriotic camps.¹⁰⁸ Ukrainian monitoring bodies confirm a 2025 surge in this industrialized pipeline: children are funnelled through school programs, camps, and organized trips into Russia, where they undergo ceremonies, exhibitions, and youth-movement activities aimed at replacing Ukrainian identity with a Russian civic-patriotic one.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, schools were instructed to submit lists of students aged 18 and older eligible for conscription, which, as assessed by OHCHR, does not comply with the IHL obligation forbidding to compel protected persons to serve in the occupying army.¹¹⁰

Russian officials openly acknowledge these efforts. Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova has boasted that children from Mariupol who once supported Ukraine now “love Russia”.¹¹¹

These practices reveal a coordinated system in which schooling functions as a pipeline for ideological loyalty and military socialization.

Concluding Assessment

Collectively, these measures demonstrate a system of sustained psychological warfare in which children are subjected to coercion, intimidation, militarization, and cultural erasure. The resulting education system is not merely a tool of indoctrination but a deliberate mechanism of identity destruction targeting the future of the Ukrainian nation, raising grave concerns on IHL, IHRL and ICL applicable legal standards.

Box 2.

GENEVA ACADEMY'S MAPPING OF INTERNATIONAL LEGAL STANDARDS

IHRL: CRC Arts. [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [8](#), [12](#), [13](#), [14](#), [17](#), [28](#), [29](#), [31](#), [38](#); ICCPR Arts. [2](#), [18](#), [19](#), [20](#), [24](#), [26](#); ICESCR Arts. [2](#), [13](#), [15](#).

These provisions protect children's rights to non-discrimination, family unity, identity and language, freedom of thought conscience and religion, freedom of expression and access to plural information, as well as to an education and cultural life oriented toward critical, rights-based development. They also require States to give practical effect to children's rights through coordinated legislative, administrative, and institutional measures guided by the child's best interests. Accordingly, the imposition of curricula, suppression of language, coercion of teachers and families, ideological rituals, and militarized schooling engage these guarantees insofar as they constrain children's ability to preserve their cultural identity, express themselves freely, and access an education free from coercion or indoctrination.

IHL: GC IV Arts. [24](#), [27](#), [50](#), [51](#), [64](#), [147](#); AP I Art. [77](#); HR Art. [43](#).

These norms require the occupying power to respect children's personal, cultural, linguistic, and family identity; to refrain from altering, replacing, or interfering with existing educational systems; and to ensure that schooling continues in the child's own national tradition. The occupying power must not substitute local welfare or education structures with its own, impede the functioning of schools, requisition their staff or facilities, use them for military purposes, impose discriminatory measures or new curricula-including propaganda or military instruction-change the language of teaching, obstruct the exchange of information needed for children's care and education, or undermine the accreditation or operation of existing institutions. In this context, the suppression of local curricula, militarized training, or punitive pressure on children, parents, or teachers will normally be incompatible with these obligations.

ICL: Rome Statute Arts. [7\(1\)\(h\)](#), [7\(1\)\(k\)](#), [8\(2\)\(a\)\(ii\)](#), [8\(2\)\(b\)\(xxvi\)](#).

*The first two provisions, as **crimes against humanity**, concern persecution on protected grounds and other inhumane acts when committed as part of a widespread or systematic course of conduct directed against a civilian population.*

*Regarding the third provision, as a **war crime**, where such practices intentionally inflict severe mental suffering on children, taking into account their particular vulnerability, age, dependency, and the cumulative impact of fear, coercion, and identity disruption, they may also raise concerns under the prohibition of torture or inhuman treatment, depending on the level of severity and the resulting impairment of human dignity. The last provision refers to the war-crime prohibition on the conscription, enlistment, or use of children under 15 in armed forces or groups. Practices involving coercive assimilation, identity suppression, ideological or militarized schooling, recruitment-linked educational structures, or exposure of children to military training may therefore be examined within this legal framework and constitute unlawful persecution.*

(for a provision-by-provision explanation, click on each article to access the Annex).

III. FOCUS: TRANSFER OF UKRAINIAN CHILDREN INTO RE-EDUCATION CAMPS

The forcible transfer and deportation of Ukrainian children by Russian authorities constitutes one of the most serious issues documented in the ongoing conflict.¹¹² This section addresses from deportation to indoctrination (1), then illustrates the evolution of a multi-stage campaign (2), before turning to required action (3).

KEY FINDINGS		
Estimated scale	At least 19,546 children identified as deported or forcibly transferred; over 260,000 under effective Russian control.	OHCHR; CRC; War Child & Save Ukraine
“Re-education” infrastructures	164 facilities by mid-2025; at least 8,330 children sent to camps in 2023, 8,380 in 2024, and 10,730 in 2025.	RCHR; Yale HRL; War Child & Save Ukraine

Categories of children affected	Orphans; institutionalized children; children separated during filtration; deported with relatives; unaccompanied minors.	CRC; HRW; RCHR
Authorities involved	Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights; Ministry of Education; regional “patronage” administrations; adoption and minors' commissions.	CRC; HRW; RCHR
Core practices	Forcible transfer; deprivation of family contact; simplified citizenship; adoption/foster placement; ideological indoctrination; transfer into militarized “re-education”-camps.	OHCHR; Yale HRL; Amnesty International
Re-education infrastructure	Camps and facilities across Russia, Crimea, Belarus, and TOTs; standardized patriotic and military training.	RCHR; Yale HRL

1. From Deportation to Indoctrination: Patterns of Child Transfer and Identity Re-Engineering

This passage documents the scale, organization, and legal characterization made by international organizations and civil societies of the forcible transfer of Ukrainian children to “re-education” camps and its linkage to identity re-engineering.

Numbers are clear, by December 2025, at least 19,546 Ukrainian children had been identified as deported or forcibly transferred; over 260,000 remaining under effective Russian control.¹¹³ Evidence shows the practice was organized before the full-scale invasion: from 18-21 February 2022, at least 421 orphans were taken from Donetsk and Luhansk to Russian regions.¹¹⁴ By April 2022, 2,161 orphans had been relocated and 380 placed with Russian foster families across 20 regions.¹¹⁵ These acts, centrally coordinated by the Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights, the Ministry of Education, and regional “patronage” administrations. HRW documents that more than 32,000 children in over 100 institutions were in temporarily occupied regions, with thousands transferred to Russia or Belarus during 2022-23.¹¹⁶ The 2025 *Return Every Child* report from War Child and Save Ukraine confirm that 39% of repatriated children described unlawful transfers or deportations to Russia, Crimea, or Belarus, underscoring the systemic nature of these practices and the actors involved.¹¹⁷

The CRC notes “reports...that thousands of children have been forcibly transferred or forcibly deported” from Ukraine and highlights Presidential Decree No. 11 (4 Jan 2024), which enables simplified citizenship for such children through applications by guardians or other authorized representatives. This measure operates alongside earlier decrees (No. 330/2019; No. 951/2022). The Committee called on Russia to end transfers, ensure accountability for each child, and guarantee non-deprivation of Ukrainian nationality.¹¹⁸ Independent policy analysis outlines a broader system in which deportation is followed by identity re-engineering through indoctrination, “from deportation to indoctrination”, combining legal-administrative mechanisms (including minors' commissions, data banks, and parental-rights termination) with ideological programming intended to erase Ukrainian identity.¹¹⁹ According to the CRC, these practices satisfy the *actus reus* of unlawful deportation and transfer.¹²⁰

OHCHR confirms the phenomenon and documents compulsory citizenship measures, allegiance tests for children, and educational policies that justify the invasion and erase Ukrainian national identity.¹²¹ According to the OHCHR, considering GC IV and Rome Statute, these findings support characterization as grave breaches (unlawful deportation/transfer).¹²² In its detailed verification, it has been noted obstacles to family reunification such as interrogations and detentions at checkpoints.¹²³ One mother was held for approximately 32 hours by the FSB when attempting to retrieve her child, and a 16-year-old reported beatings after mobile phone searches.¹²⁴

In parallel, compulsory “passport ceremonies” for minors and mass integration into Russian youth movements embed allegiance to the Occupying Power, evidence of identity erasure relevant to GC IV.¹²⁵ Testimonies document children being threatened with permanent separation from their parents if families refused Russian citizenship, an explicit coercive technique aligned with forced identity reconfiguration. It has been documented that 18% of repatriated children experienced separation from family resulting directly from Russian actions, including parents detained or prevented from returning to retrieve their children.¹²⁶ These documented obstacles to reunification, combined with practices demonstrating imposed allegiance, deportation-campaigns, indoctrination, and militarization, can be said to form part of the broader factual matrix constituting “the largest, most organized campaign of grave child rights violations in Europe since the end of the Yugoslav wars”.¹²⁷

Additional civil-society documentation offers a broader picture of ideological preparation emerges. Many children were told Ukraine “no longer existed” or that their parents had abandoned them, dis-information designed to sever emotional and identity ties.¹²⁸ The Regional Center for Human Rights (RCHR), Ukrainian NGO based in Kiev, has situated these developments within a broader propaganda architecture. Russian state media pre-recorded “evacuation” appeals on 16 February 2022, broadcast two days later as spontaneous pleas from Donbas residents, demonstrating advance planning.¹²⁹ Subsequent official narratives evolved from “temporary custody” to “integration with Russian families”, portraying Ukrainian children as “our children of Donbas” and denying their Ukrainian national identity.¹³⁰ War Child and Save Ukraine's 2025 report provides additional evidence of ideological engineering, with 55% of repatriated children reporting pro-Russian indoctrination, including mandatory screenings of propaganda films, punishment for using Ukrainian language, and constant pressure to express loyalty to Russia.¹³¹ This information policy forms part of a wider identity-eradication strategy.

Taken together, these practices demonstrate that deportation operates as the entry point to a broader system of coercive identity transformation.

2. The Evolution of a Multi-Stage Campaign

Building on the propaganda context described above, RCHR has documented the evolution of these violations into a systematic, multi-stage campaign in four stages combining physical displacement, manipulation of information, and ideological re-engineering:

1. The first stage (2014-2021) involved the removal of orphans and institutionalized children from Crimea, Donetsk, and Luhansk under the guise of “evacuation” and “rescue” operations, often without parental consent.¹³² These transfers populated Russian state orphan databases and facilitated adoption by Russian families. With the full-scale invasion in February 2022, deportations escalated dramatically: children from institutions such as Donetsk Residential School No. 1 and Teremok Preschool were moved to Rostov, Tver, and Kursk regions and re-registered in the Russian State Data Bank of Orphans, severing communication with relatives.¹³³ The evidence from this period provides a contextual background for understanding how later practices developed. Consistent with this, the War Child and Save Ukraine's 2025 report reveals that 41% of children experienced militarization through school-based drills, weapons training, and recruitment pressure, demonstrating how deportation and indoctrination feed into militarized identity formation.¹³⁴

2. The second stage (2022-2023) was marked by political centralization. Meetings between President Vladimir Putin and Children's Rights Commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova institutionalized procedures for transferring minors and placing them with Russian families.¹³⁵ Children were separated from parents during “filtration”, sent to Russian-controlled “social rehabilitation centers”, medical institutions, or summer camps, and cut off from family contact.¹³⁶ Propaganda reframed deportations as humanitarian “temporary evacuations”, concealing the

permanent loss of Ukrainian identity.¹³⁷ By end-2022, at least 380 children from the so-called “DPR/LPR” had been placed with families across more than 20 Russian regions.¹³⁸

3. The third stage (2023-2025) involves a vast expansion of militarized “re-education” infrastructure.¹³⁹ RCHR's 2025 analysis *The Weaponization of Children* reports that 37,000 children attended militarized camps in 2023, with over 65,000 planned for 2025.¹⁴⁰ Camps across Crimea, Russia, and Belarus, operated by the Ministry of Education, have been standardized through amendments to the Federal Law “On the Basic Guarantees of the Rights of the Child”, mandating patriotic and military training.¹⁴¹ Children wear uniforms, study tactical medicine, conduct drills, and participate in “heroic” reenactments glorifying the invasion. Facilities such as *Young Patriot* (Moscow Region) and *Avangard* (Volgograd Region) host thousands of teenagers from Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, Luhansk, and Donetsk (pp 6-7).¹⁴² Emerging investigations reveal an expanding infrastructure. Yale's Humanitarian Research Lab has identified more than 200 sites across Russia and temporarily occupied territories where Ukrainian children are held or “re-educated”, including at least 130 facilities engaged in ideological indoctrination and 39 providing military training. Several are expanding, underscoring an ongoing policy.¹⁴³ Media reports note that over half of these facilities are state-run and that some children appear on Russian adoption listings, heightening concerns under GC IV and Rome Statute.¹⁴⁴ In parallel, War Child and Save Ukraine's 2025 report has also identified 200 camps, 30% of the children surveyed reported staying at these ‘camp’ facilities, going from Krasnodar and Moscow to Chechnya and as far east as Magadan, nearly 4,000 miles from Ukraine.¹⁴⁵ It stresses that these camps across Russia, Belarus, and TOTs, are used for ideological programming and military training, forming part of a “multi-layered system of control” that restructures children's identity and loyalty.¹⁴⁶

Moreover, Russia's re-education infrastructure has expanded rapidly: 9 camps in occupied Crimea, 55 in Russia, and 13 in Belarus in 2023; 67 in Russia and 18 in Belarus in 2024; and 164 facilities by mid-2025.¹⁴⁷ At least 8,330 Ukrainian children were sent to these camps in 2023, 8,380 in 2024, and 10,730 in 2025.¹⁴⁸ Programs combine patriotic instruction with military drills, weapon assembly, tactical medicine, battlefield visits, such as at the Young Patriot Camp near Moscow, where 1,200 Ukrainian children wore military-style uniforms and studied Russian ranks.¹⁴⁹ Such militarization raise concerns regarding the obligations under GC IV and CRC, which requires education to be directed toward peace and tolerance. These quantitative data underscore both scale and acceleration, reinforcing that this is not incidental or sporadic but a rapidly expanding system. This stage provides substantial evidence of direct state involvement in militarized indoctrination, moving beyond transfer to structured identity remaking.

4. The fourth and current stage (2024 - *ongoing*)¹⁵⁰ represents consolidation into a coherent state-run system of identity erasure. Children are stripped of Ukrainian symbols, renamed, and subjected to constant ideological conditioning portraying Russia as their homeland and Ukraine as an enemy.¹⁵¹ These processes pursue dual goals: demographic engineering in temporarily occupied territories and the creation of “a generation loyal to the aggressor state”. This stage is presented by RCHR as showing how several strands of policy and practice converge.

This four-stage progression illustrates the transition from ad hoc transfers to a consolidated system of state-run indoctrination and militarization.

Recent Developments in the Interpretation of Art. II(e) of the Genocide Convention

Echoing the reasonings of all the above, War Child and Save Ukraine have concluded that Russian treatment of Ukrainian children constitutes a “state-driven policy of abduction, indoctrination, and militarization” that may amount to genocide under Art. 6(e) of the Rome Statute.¹⁵²

Comparative recent jurisprudence supports the relevance of identity-destructive practices in assessing genocidal intent, while underscoring the urgent need for careful, case-specific analysis. In February 2025, the Stockholm District Court convicted a former ISIS member of genocide against the Yazidi people, finding that the forcible transfer and abuse of Yazidi children constituted genocide under Art. II(e) of the Genocide Convention (substantially the same as Art. 6(e) of the Rome Statute).¹⁵³ The author argues that, while the factual matrix differs, it is highly relevant to the substantive facts of this working paper as the Court emphasized that genocide may be committed through acts directed at the destruction of a group's continuity via its children, including through separation from families, suppression of language and religion, and systematic identity replacement. As noted in a contemporaneous legal commentary written by Professor Paola Gaeta, the judgment confirms that genocidal intent may be inferred not only from physical destruction, but also from conduct aimed at dismantling a group's cultural, religious, and familial foundations through children.¹⁵⁴

Whether and to what extent analogous conclusions may be drawn in the present context requires further factual development and judicial assessment, particularly with respect to the specific intent element. This case is nonetheless remarkable in that it signals an evolving judicial willingness to interpret Art. II(e) in light of the contemporary use of modalities of group destruction, including through identity erasure and child-focused coercive practices, rather than limiting its application to paradigmatic forms of physical annihilation.

Additional Dimensions

Beyond transfer and re-education, additional administrative measures further entrench the long-term impact of these violations. Birth registration, citizenship imposition, and conscription risks further illustrate the breadth of violations. OHCHR reports that medical staff in occupied areas were required to issue Russian birth documents and prohibited from transmitting newborn data to Ukraine; broader measures compelled changes in children's citizenship and imposed the Russian curriculum.¹⁵⁵ Upon turning 18, boys face conscription into the Russian armed forces based on imposed citizenship, with first conscript groups departing in November 2024.¹⁵⁶

Furthermore, orphaned and unaccompanied children face heightened risk: many have been deported to Russia, placed in foster care or institutions, and subjected to ideological “re-education.”¹⁵⁷ These deportations are falsely presented as humanitarian rescues, with state media broadcasting staged images of children receiving gifts and Russian passports, dis-information concealing unlawful transfers and violations of family-reunification rights under international law.¹⁵⁸

3. Required Action

Addressing these violations requires coordinated international action focused on return, protection, and accountability.

The *Way Home* policy outlines individualized return trajectories incorporating rehabilitation, educational reintegration, and monitoring, drawing on CRC General Comment No. 6 (2005), UNICEF Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces (2018), and the doctrine of *parens patriae*.¹⁵⁹ It articulates a unified international return mechanism, grounded in AP I to the GCs and CRC, requiring immediate and unconditional repatriation and family reunification.¹⁶⁰ It proposes a UNGA resolution

codifying these obligations and bilateral/triangular arrangements (“Ukraine - third state - Russia”) enabling returns through neutral states.¹⁶¹

The framework includes an individualized “return trajectory” and independent best-interest assessment for each child, excluding Russian participation to avoid conflict of interest.¹⁶² This aligns with GC IV and UNSC Res. 1314 (2000).¹⁶³ RCHR identifies three categories of children under Russian control, those deported with relatives, unaccompanied minors, and separated children remaining in temporarily occupied territories.¹⁶⁴ Unaccompanied children are routinely re-classified as Russian citizens, issued passports, and placed in foster care within 6-8 months under Federal Law No. 48-FZ, erasing their Ukrainian identity and obstructing repatriation.¹⁶⁵ The proposed return framework also highlights areas where current practices diverge from established international standards on family reunification and child protection.

International responses also intensified: on 3 September 2025, the UK announced sanctions against officials and state-linked youth organizations “supporting attempts to forcibly deport and indoctrinate Ukraine's children and erase their Ukrainian cultural heritage”, citing a Russification policy in temporarily occupied territories.¹⁶⁶ Likewise, the EU sanctioned individuals and entities, especially key figures involved in the forced “re-education” of Ukrainian children or the illegal deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia, affirming that: “The state-owned and pro-Kremlin dis-information outlets are essential and instrumental in supporting Russia's aggression against Ukraine. They constitute a significant and direct threat to the EU's public order and security.”¹⁶⁷ These actions reflect the need for a growing international attention to the issue.

Absent such measures, the structural obstacles to repatriation and redress are likely to persist.

Concluding Assessment

Overall, the assembled evidence from UN bodies, NGOs, and independent investigations presents a multifaceted picture of child transfers, subsequent treatment, and associated administrative measures, which together raise significant legal concerns under specific rights and obligations under IHRL, IHL and ICL.

Box 3.

GENEVA ACADEMY'S MAPPING OF INTERNATIONAL LEGAL STANDARDS

IHRL: CRC Arts. [3](#), [4](#), [8](#), [9](#), [17](#), [20\(3\)](#), [28](#), [29](#), [38](#), [39](#); ICCPR Arts. [18](#), [20](#), [24](#), [26](#); ICESCR Arts. [2](#), [10](#), [13](#), [15](#).

These provisions protect children's rights to identity, family unity, access to information, culturally appropriate care, and an education directed toward their full and free development, as well as special protection for children affected by armed conflict; the forcible transfer of children, suppression of national identity, separation from families, indoctrination programs, war propaganda/incitement to hatred, militarized schooling, and obstacles to repatriation may therefore engage these guarantees insofar as they sever family ties, obstruct cultural continuity, and expose children to coercive, harmful, or militarized environments. They impose a positive obligation to implement children's rights through effective State action, ensuring that all decisions affecting children are guided by their best interests.

IHL: GC IV Arts. [24](#), [27](#), [49](#), [50](#), [51](#), [64](#), [147](#); AP I Arts. [74](#), [77](#), [78](#); HR Art. [43](#).

These norms oblige the occupying power to ensure children's maintenance, identity, and education in their own cultural and linguistic tradition; prohibit forcible transfer or deportation; require facilitation of family reunification; forbid propaganda, coercion, or any pressure toward military service; and classify unlawful transfer as a grave breach; the deportation of children, their placement in re-education facilities, identity substitution, impediments to family contact, and militarized training may therefore engage these obligations.

ICL: Rome Statute Arts. [6\(e\)](#), [7\(1\)\(h\)](#), [7\(1\)\(k\)](#), [8\(2\)\(a\)\(ii\)](#), [8\(2\)\(a\)\(vii\)](#), [8\(2\)\(b\)\(viii\)](#), [8\(2\)\(b\)\(xxvi\)](#); Genocide Convention Art. [II\(e\)](#).

*These provisions address several distinct categories of international criminal law. As **war crimes**, the framework regulates prohibitions relating to unlawful deportation or transfer of protected persons and the conscription, enlistment, or use of children under 15, providing the lens through which movements of children, their placement in facilities, or exposure to military-oriented environments may be examined. In addition, where unlawful transfer, prolonged separation from family, or coercive re-education result in serious psychological trauma, fear, or loss of identity for children - whose heightened vulnerability is a legally relevant factor - such conduct may, depending on its intensity and effects, engage the prohibition of torture or inhuman treatment as severe mental suffering contrary to human dignity. As **crimes against humanity**, the relevant norms concern persecution on discriminatory grounds and other inhumane acts committed as part of a widespread or systematic course of conduct, offering the legal context for analysing measures affecting children's identity, family relations, long-term placement or intentionally causing great suffering, or serious injury to mental health; and as **genocide**, the applicable rules address the forcible transfer of children of a protected group when carried out with the intent to destroy that group in whole or in part, outlining the parameters for assessing practices involving transfer, prolonged placement, or identity-altering measures within that conceptual framework.*

(for a provision-by-provision explanation, click on each article to access the Annex).

B. INTERNET CENSORSHIP

As another form of dis-information strategy, this section explores how Russia's regulation of the digital environment functions as a core mechanism affecting children's rights. This subsection examines how internet censorship, surveillance, and connectivity restrictions in Russia (I) and in temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories (II) raise grave concerns on children's rights to information, expression, identity, and education under IHRL, IHL and ICL.

I. RUSSIA

Digital sovereignty is central to cognitive manipulation because it allows the State to control the informational environment in which children learn, communicate, and access education, transforming connectivity itself into a tool of ideological governance.

Already in 2020, the ECtHR, prior to Russia's withdrawal, condemned in *Kharitonov v. Russia and Others* the State's broad use of internet shutdowns and surveillance.¹⁶⁸

The 2019 “Sovereign Internet Law” has entrenched the State's capacity to disconnect from the global internet and reroute all traffic through infrastructure controlled by Roskomnadzor, the federal media regulator (Федеральный закон от 01.05.2019 № 90-ФЗ).¹⁶⁹ This framework enables authorities to block websites, censor foreign platforms, and monitor users, creating a “RuNet” increasingly isolated from external sources of information.¹⁷⁰ Internet freedom in the past years Russia has, however, hit a new low, as authorities have used tests of the “sovereign internet” to trigger regional internet outages and begun throttling connectivity from May 2025, formally justifying these measures by reference to alleged security threats such as Ukrainian drone attacks (Freedom House: Global Freedom 12/100 and Freedom of Net 17/100 in 2025).¹⁷¹ In practice, major platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and large portions of TikTok's foreign content have been banned. Legislative developments in July 2025 further deepened digital repression.¹⁷² The use of VPNs has been legally classified as an aggravating circumstance in criminal proceedings, meaning that children or families attempting to circumvent censorship may face harsher penalties. A parallel law imposes administrative fines for advertising VPNs or even conducting online searches for materials designated as “extremist”—a registry that comprises over 5,400 banned books, websites, videos, and digital archives.¹⁷³ All of it is complemented by recurrent mobile and fixed-line shutdowns, including around public holidays such as Victory Day, and by technically sophisticated throttling of remaining foreign platforms, which together contribute to the progressive isolation of users from the global internet.¹⁷⁴

The UNSR on the Russian Federation also has reported in 2025 that widely used messaging platforms-including Signal and Viber-were blocked in 2024 on vague grounds of “extremism”. By December 2024, WhatsApp and an additional eleven messaging services had been compelled to store user data on servers accessible to Russian law enforcement.¹⁷⁵

The UNSR has stated that Roskomnadzor now monitors online content to track political attitudes, suppress dissent, and enforce ideological conformity. More than 1.2 million Internet resources are currently banned. In 2025 alone, authorities blocked 497 resources-87 designated as belonging to “foreign agents” and 410 linked to “undesirable organizations”. Since 1 November 2024, all social-media accounts with more than 10,000 subscribers must register with Roskomnadzor, effectively eliminating anonymity for young content creators and exposing minors to increased surveillance and risk of criminalization.¹⁷⁶ Freedom House further notes that Roskomnadzor has ordered the blocking or throttling of multiple end-to-end encrypted messaging applications and other user-generated-content platforms, and that courts have imposed prison sentences on individuals - including activists and journalists - for online criticism of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and of the Russian authorities more generally.¹⁷⁷

In 2025, the CRC has called on Russia to “prevent any attempt to rewrite school *curricula* and textbooks to reflect the political and military agenda of the Government”, a warning that extends to the digital sphere, where the Sovereign Internet Law and school-based surveillance/filtering systems curtail minors' access to diverse sources of information. In light of the Committee's broader concern over propaganda in schools (including state-produced teacher manuals), school-network filtering and loyalty-tracking should be understood as restrictions that raise grave concerns under the ICCPR, ICESCR and CRC on children's rights in the digital environment.¹⁷⁸

It is argued here that, by constraining access to digital information, online resources, and independent educational content, these measures raise serious concerns regarding children's ability to enjoy the right to education in its contemporary online dimension, as reflected in Arts. 28 and 29 CRC and Art. 13 ICESCR. It follows that these development poses acute risks to children's privacy and expression, and further normalizing a surveillance-based environment in which young people are monitored both offline and online. Teenagers caught circumventing these restrictions risk disciplinary sanctions or police questioning, reinforcing a climate of fear and self-censorship. Scholars argue that this internet isolation operates as a form of cognitive control, aligning educational reforms and patriotic *curricula* with dis-information strategies to cultivate a compliant youth identity.¹⁷⁹

Therefore, Russia's tightening regulation of the digital sphere demonstrates how censorship, surveillance, and information control function not only as tools of dis-information, but they are systematically undermining children's rights, raising concerns under IHRL. Together, these measures constrict minors' access to knowledge, suppress their expression and identity, and entrench a digital environment.

Box 4.

GENEVA ACADEMY'S MAPPING OF INTERNATIONAL LEGAL STANDARDS

IHRL: CRC Arts. [3](#), [4](#), [13](#), [14](#), [16](#), [17](#), [28](#), [29](#); ICCPR Arts. [17](#), [18](#), [19](#), [20](#), [24](#); ICESCR Arts. [2](#), [13](#), [15](#).

These provisions protect children's rights to freedom of expression and thought, privacy, access to plural and reliable information, and an education and cultural life fostering independent and critical development. They require that children's rights be actively protected through measures that place the child's best interests at the center of all decision-making. The blocking of platforms, surveillance of minors, punitive restrictions on VPN use, censorship of online materials, compelled data storage, and school-based monitoring may therefore engage these guarantees insofar as they limit children's ability to seek and impart information, form views freely, maintain privacy online, and access an educational environment free from coercion or state-controlled narratives.

(for a provision-by-provision explanation, click on each article to access the Annex).

II. TEMPORARILY OCCUPIED TERRITORIES OF UKRAINE

Building on the preceding analysis of internet censorship and digital repression within the Russian Federation, this section examines how the same legal and technological instruments are extended and intensified in temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories.

Although the UNSR's mandate concerns the Russian Federation, its findings regarding State ideology, digital censorship, historical distortion, and criminalization of dissent are directly relevant to the temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories.¹⁸⁰ Here, the effects of Russia's information controls are even more acute. The same legislative tools - “foreign agent” designations, “extremism” charges, VPN-related penalties, and information-control statutes-form the backbone of occupation governance, reinforcing the broader system of identity erasure.

Beyond direct curriculum imposition, occupation authorities have systematically weaponized digital surveillance to punish expressions of Ukrainian identity and deter access to Ukrainian education. As documented by the OHCHR, children and parents have been punished for attending Ukrainian online classes or for “expressions of cultural identity”, while residents risk interrogation for watching Ukrainian television, displaying Ukrainian symbols or songs, or possessing Ukrainian-language material on their phones.¹⁸¹ Soldiers reportedly enter homes, inspect mobile devices, question residents, and conduct searches based on trivial or anonymous reports.¹⁸² The OHCHR has recorded cases of detention and beatings following such searches, including in educational settings where students are encouraged to report peers for speaking Ukrainian or consuming Ukrainian news.¹⁸³ These practices render digital communication and remote learning unsafe, targeting connectivity to coerce identity alignment, and raise grave concerns, under IHRL, regarding privacy and access to diverse information, and, under occupation law, for exceeding permissible security regulation of communications by targeting protected identity and education rather than narrowly tailored military needs.¹⁸⁴

As the OHCHR noted in its latest 2025 report on Ukraine, civic space in the occupied territories has shrunk dramatically. Residents describe a climate of constant fear, with streets empty long before curfew and public life shaped by the need to avoid attention from occupying forces.¹⁸⁵ The OHCHR also documents how Russian laws on “Nazi or extremist symbols” have been used to prosecute people in Crimea and Donetsk for what would normally be protected expression - such as sharing Ukrainian songs or criticizing the occupation online.¹⁸⁶ At the same time, dozens more have been fined or even imprisoned under accusations of “discrediting” the Russian armed forces, revealing how these laws operate primarily as tools to silence dissent rather than protect security.¹⁸⁷

Information control has been tightened further through additional measures: bans on “unlicensed” satellite receivers capable of accessing Ukrainian channels, restrictions on VPNs and messenger apps, and the forced introduction of the insecure “Max” platform for civil servants. These steps raise clear concerns about privacy and the right to independent information.¹⁸⁸

These individual enforcement practices operate within a broader architecture of digital control. By extending the Sovereign Internet framework in Donetsk and Luhansk (and originally in Crimea), Russian authorities have cut off children and families from Ukrainian media, independent news outlets, and global communication platforms. Local internet infrastructure has been rerouted through Russian providers, ensuring that all online activity is subject to Russian filtering, monitoring, and censorship.¹⁸⁹ This architecture enforces the dominance of Kremlin narratives, including justifications for the invasion and depictions of Ukraine as a “neo-Nazi” state, while simultaneously eliminating access to Ukrainian-language digital content and civic education.¹⁹⁰ Such information blockades are prohibited under IHL: under GCIV, the occupying power must facilitate the proper education of children, including the preservation of their cultural identity and access to national *curricula*. Instead, Russia's digital censorship in temporarily occupied territories actively suppresses Ukrainian identity, raising grave concerns for the

right to identity, and for transforming the internet into an additional instrument of assimilation and indoctrination.

In November 2025, a Presidential decree has been enacted that formalizes the full integration of occupied Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson into Russia's legal, cultural, educational, and information systems. The decree sets a target of involving 2.56 million residents - including children - in Russian state civic-identity initiatives, underscoring the scale and intensity of this project.¹⁹¹

Taken together, Russia's sovereign internet regime and its extension into temporarily occupied territories reveal how measures framed as “cybersecurity” in fact operate as dis-information driven systems of authoritarian control that affects children access to accurate, diverse information and thereby raising concerns about core protections under IHRL, IHL and ICL.

Box 5.

GENEVA ACADEMY'S MAPPING OF INTERNATIONAL LEGAL STANDARDS

IHRL: CRC Arts. [3](#), [4](#), [8](#), [13](#), [14](#), [16](#), [17](#), [28](#), [29](#), [38](#); ICCPR Arts. [17](#), [18](#), [19](#), [20](#), [24](#); ICESCR Arts. [2](#), [13](#), [15](#).

These provisions set out protections relating to children's identity and family environment, privacy, access to information from diverse sources, freedom of expression and thought, and education directed toward their overall development, including in situations of armed conflict. They further establish that the realization of children's rights depends on best-interest-based decision-making and effective State implementation mechanisms. Accordingly, the lawfulness of measures affecting access to online information, communication with family members, exposure to particular narratives, or availability of educational content has to be assessed in light of these guarantees.

IHL: GC IV Arts. [24](#), [27](#), [50](#), [64](#); AP I Art. [77](#); HR Art. [43](#).

These norms regulate the responsibilities of an occupying power with respect to the care of children, respect for their personal, cultural, and family identity, the functioning of educational structures, private life, and the administration of local law. Accordingly, policies affecting educational frameworks, the circulation of information, or children's ability to access materials connected to their cultural or linguistic background have to be examined in light of these provisions.

ICL: Rome Statute Arts. [7\(1\)\(h\)](#), [7\(1\)\(k\)](#), and [8\(2\)\(a\)\(ii\)](#).

*The first two provisions refer to **crimes against humanity**, which include both persecution against identifiable groups on prohibited discriminatory grounds, and other inhumane acts that intentionally cause great suffering or serious injury to physical or mental health, when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against a civilian population. This encompasses policies targeting cultural expression, identity, or access to information where such measures form part of a broader discriminatory or coercive campaign, or where they inflict serious mental harm. In this sense, restrictive, punitive, or assimilationist practices that undermine a group's cultural or national identity, or that intentionally cause significant psychological suffering, may fall within the scope of these prohibitions depending on the contextual elements of the attack. The last provision refers to a **war crime**, where these measures are implemented as part of a broader and coordinated psychological campaign rather than as isolated acts, deliberately generate intense fear, humiliation, or psychological distress in children - by isolating them from family, language, culture, or trusted sources of information - and thereby seriously impair their mental integrity, they may also fall within the scope of torture or inhuman treatment, subject to the required threshold of severity under international criminal law.*

(for a provision-by-provision explanation, click on each article to access the Annex).

C. YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS

This last section examines how some, as simple as it may sound, youth organizations have become a *core* instrument of Russia's state-led project to shape children's identities and normalize militarization, as part of a broader dis-information strategy. It analyses the structure, scale, and coercive features of these organizations as mechanisms of ideological control both within Russia (I) and in temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories (II).

I. RUSSIA

Within Russia, state-sponsored youth groups operate as key vehicles of indoctrination and dis-information. This part analyses State-directed youth organizations through three interconnected dimensions: first, their role in ideological conditioning and identity re-engineering (1), second, their function as mechanisms of militarization and pre-recruitment (2), and third, the use of incentives, sanctions, and criminalization to render participation effectively coercive (3).

1. Ideological Conditioning and Identity Re-engineering

At the ideological level, youth organizations and associated camp systems function to reshape identity, historical memory, and civic belonging in line with State narratives.

To start with giving some context, Russian authorities and their proxies run an extensive camp network across the TOT, Belarus, and Russia, used to detain, indoctrinate, and militarize Ukrainian children. The origins of this system start shortly after 2014, when Russia began using pre-existing camps such as Artek in Crimea, later transforming it into a flagship site for post-2022 “re-education” programs overseen at national level by the Children's Rights Commissioner in coordination with senior Kremlin figures.¹⁹² Although framed publicly as a humanitarian mission, many children sent to these camps never returned on time and faced involuntary extended stays; documented cases include groups sent on “summer vacation” in Krasnodarskiy Krai who were instead enrolled in local schools, and a child from Kherson whom a Crimean camp refused to release even after his hometown was liberated. The War Child and Save Ukraine's 2025 report also records mistreatment such as a boy being stripped to his underwear, forced to stand against a Russian flag and filmed apologizing for pro-Ukraine tattoos.¹⁹³

Recent findings from the RCHR, prepared within the project “*Ensuring Accountability for War Crimes*” with support from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), provide further evidence that Russia is operating a vast and expanding system of “re-education camps” used to forcibly assimilate Ukrainian children. As already mentioned in *Sub-section A(III)*, the investigation identifies 13 facilities in the temporarily occupied territories, 18 in Belarus, and 67 in Russia, forming part of a broader network that has grown exponentially since 2014 and now encompasses hundreds of institutions.¹⁹⁴ According to RCHR, these camps aim to eradicate Ukrainian national identity through coercive patriotic programming, ideological conditioning, with militarized training addressed further below, including weapons handling, tactical preparation, and drone operation.¹⁹⁵

The curtailment of scholarships, exchange programs, and international academic cooperation has further deepened youth isolation, limiting access to alternative perspectives and intensifying the State's monopoly over identity formation. By pairing patriotic pageantry with restrictions on outward mobility, Russia constructs an environment in which youth are celebrated rhetorically as embodiments of national pride while being denied the cognitive tools to critically evaluate State narratives.

Taken together, these practices establish an ideological ecosystem in which alternative identities and narratives are systematically excluded.

2. Militarization of Youth and Pre-recruitment Pathways

Alongside ideological conditioning, these youth structures function as mechanisms of progressive militarization and pre-recruitment.

According to RCHR, camp programming includes militarized training such as weapons handling, tactical preparation, drone operation, parachuting, and mining. In 2024 alone, Russia increased federal spending on children's “vacation” programs by 11.6%, reaching 76.8 billion rubles, and transferred

approximately 40,000 Ukrainian children to such camps under the “Useful Vacation” initiative—nearly double the previous year.¹⁹⁶ These transfers frequently involve long-distance movement to sites in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Rostov-on-Don, Tula, or even thousands of kilometers away, where children undergo intensive propaganda and ideological re-socialization aligned with the standardized indoctrination *curricula* documented elsewhere in the paper (e.g., *Conversations About Important Things*, patriotic rituals, and militarized youth programming).¹⁹⁷

Under the authority of the Presidential Administration, youth movements as *Yunarmiya* and the *Movement of the First* are open from the 7th grade i.e. 12-13 years of age. Unlike independent youth clubs, this state-directed structure explicitly fuses patriotic education with military preparedness.¹⁹⁸ Activities include training camps conducted in partnership with the Ministry of Defense, marches and festivals glorifying the Russian military, and mandatory participation in Victory Day celebrations where children frequently wear military uniforms.¹⁹⁹ Participation is often coercive: loyalty to the organization is tied to academic assessments and opportunities for higher education, creating grave concerns for the children's rights to freedom of expression, freedom of thought and conscience, and freedom of association.²⁰⁰

RCHR's documentation shows that camps such as “Red Carnation” (a branch of *Artek* opened in Berdyansk) and training centers such as “AHMAT” and “Warrior” operate as hubs for systematic identity erasure, where Ukrainian children are trained in weapons use, parachuting, drone flying, and mining, paralleling the militarized “pre-recruitment pipelines” already analyzed in this section.²⁰¹

The questions arise spontaneously, what is the underlying intent of these “youth organizations”, and what does the data show about the extent to which they are fulfilling those aims?

OHCHR records that *Yunarmiya* aimed to enlist 10% of its members into Russia's armed forces and, in 2024, reported approximately 4,100 members in Donetsk and roughly 6,000 in Luhansk, with additional groups in Zaporizhzhia. The *Movement of the First* established 2,108 groups in occupied schools and runs annual *Zarnitsa 2.0* military-tactical games, featuring weapons assembly, drone tasks, and “storm trooper” drills, on school premises.²⁰² АЛЬМЕНДА provides region-specific totals for the *Movement of the First* as of end-2024: more than 60,000 members in Luhansk; over 18,000 in Donetsk; 16,000 in Zaporizhzhia (13,000 children + 3,000 mentors); approximately 11,400 in Sevastopol; over 13,000 in Crimea; and 2,000 in Kherson.²⁰³ The pipeline begins in primary school with *Eaglets of Russia* and continues through *VOIN* youth units offering explicit pre-service preparation, with branches opened across occupied cities in 2024-25.²⁰⁴

Between 2023 and 2025, the Kremlin intensified a triad of youth conduits, *Yunarmiya*, *Zarnitsa 2.0*, the *Avangard* militarized camps, and the *Movement of the First*, to normalize military service and inculcate combat-related skills. War Child and Save Ukraine's 2025 report identified the camps as vehicles of this process: children are given military-style training, prepared for pre-draft registration, and encouraged to view enlistment as an expected civic trajectory.²⁰⁵

This militarized *continuum* blurs the boundary between education, extracurricular activity, and preparation for armed service.

3. Incentives, Sanctions, and Coercive Participation

Participation in State-sanctioned youth organizations is shaped not only by ideology and militarization, but by a system of incentives and penalties that constrains genuine choice.

Testimonies collected in the report describe children being pressured to join military clubs or patriotic youth groups with promises of better academic grades or reduced likelihood of later

conscripted, illustrating how these organizations act as coercive instruments rather than voluntary associations.²⁰⁶

The practices are in continuous expansion, in June 2025, six new state-backed youth centers were inaugurated across Russia (Khabarovsk, Novy Urengoy, Arkhangelsk, Dagestan, Karachay-Cherkessia) reinforcing CRC's concerns about school-based militarization and, in temporarily occupied territories, amounting to prohibited propaganda and pressure under GC IV.²⁰⁷

It is important to notice that all the above developments occur within a broader context in which dissent is systematically criminalized. The UNSR on the Russian Federation reports that between 2024 and mid-2025, at least 912 individuals were prosecuted on politically motivated grounds, with approximately sixty new cases each month. Charges such as “espionage”, “extremism”, “terrorism”, or “rehabilitation of Nazism” are routinely used against activists, journalists, educators, and cultural workers, creating a climate of pervasive fear that directly shapes how children and youth experience school, extracurricular programs, and public life.²⁰⁸ In this environment, participation in State-sanctioned youth organizations becomes not only a pedagogical tool but a coercive mechanism of social control.²⁰⁹

Accordingly, incentives and sanctions operate as enforcement mechanisms that lock children into State-directed pathways.

Concluding Assessment

Taken together, these youth organizations form an integrated apparatus of ideological conditioning and militarized socialization, reinforcing state narratives and undermining children's fundamental rights under international law. Given their identity-destructive purpose, these conducts raise all grave concerns on the relevant legal standards under IHRL.

Box 6.

GENEVA ACADEMY'S MAPPING OF INTERNATIONAL LEGAL STANDARDS

IHRL: CRC Arts. [3](#), [4](#), [2](#), [8](#), [12](#), [13](#), [14](#), [15](#), [17](#), [28](#), [29](#), [31](#), [38](#); ICCPR Arts. [2](#), [18](#), [19](#), [20](#), [21](#), [22](#), [24](#), [26](#); ICESCR Arts. [2](#), [13](#), [15](#).

These provisions outline guarantees relating to non-discrimination, identity, freedom of expression, thought, association and peaceful assembly, access to plural information, participation in cultural life, and education directed toward the child's development, including special protections for children in the context of armed conflict; activities involving organized structures, structured programming, participation requirements, or exposure to particular ideological, cultural, or military content may therefore fall within the scope of these guarantees. They require States to operationalize children's rights through effective institutions and procedures grounded in the child's best interests.

(for a provision-by-provision explanation, click on each article to access the Annex).

II. TEMPORARILY OCCUPIED TERRITORIES OF UKRAINE

In the temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories, Russia has expanded its youth organizations into instruments of coercion, identity engineering, and militarization.

KEY FINDINGS

Evidence documented by OHCHR, War Child, Save Ukraine, and АЛЬМЕНДА indicates that the deployment of Russian youth organizations in temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories follows four recurrent patterns:

- **Coercion:** Participation is frequently mandatory in practice, enforced through pressure, linkage to educational or social benefits, and limited parental consent.
- **Militarization:** Children are systematically exposed to military training, including weapons handling, tactical exercises, drills, and combat simulations through camps, schools, and youth movements.
- **Identity Erasure:** Programs promote loyalty to the Russian Federation and the “Russian world”, while suppressing Ukrainian language, culture, and identity, often reframed as “extremism.”
- **Political Loyalty and Pre-recruitment:** Youth movements operate as mechanisms of ideological vetting and pre-recruitment, normalizing military service and alignment with Russian state structures.

In these territories, youth programs extend far beyond voluntary participation to function as mechanisms of coercion and control intended to accelerate “Russification”. Local children are integrated into the Russian state movements such as *Movement of the First*, *Yunarmiya*, and *Yugmolodi* where membership is frequently linked to access to educational or social benefits. Through militarized rituals, camps, and pageantry, children are instructed to glorify the Russian armed forces, pledge allegiance to the Russian Federation, and repudiate Ukrainian identity.²¹⁰ The 2024/2025 policy suite, particularly historical-education decree No. 314 (8 May 2024) and the 2025 anti-extremism strategy, frames youth participation as a defense of the “Russian world”, recasting dissent or expressions of Ukrainian identity as “extremism”.²¹¹ Instead, an occupying power has obligations under GC IV, which requires the preservation of children's cultural identity, and under CRC provisions on the right to identity, in order to be protected from militarized indoctrination. In June 2025, six new state-backed youth centers were inaugurated in the occupied Ukrainian city of Henichesk, demonstrating the export of this Russian infrastructure into occupied territory.²¹² These programs operate as pre-recruitment socialization and ideological vetting mechanisms, reinforcing CRC concerns about school-based militarization and, in temporarily occupied territories, amounting to prohibited propaganda and pressure under IHL.²¹³

OHCHR has affirmed that from June to September 2025, children in occupied areas of Ukraine were involved in *Zarnitsa 2.0*, a military-style competition supervised by Russian armed forces, where they handled weapons, operated drones, and participated in simulated combat.²¹⁴ During the same period, children were taken to Volgograd for the Government's Time of *Young Heroes* program, receiving training in tactical drone use and combat medicine.²¹⁵ From May to October 2025, children in occupied Sevastopol also took part in “drone battles” at a Russian Ministry of Defense facility.²¹⁶ In summer 2025, the Russian Federation integrated “patriotic education” into camps in the occupied territories, requiring programs to promote Russian values, patriotism, and loyalty to the State. Camps held patriotic celebrations, hosted lectures by Russian soldiers, and promoted Russian language and culture.²¹⁷ The Russian Government reported that 85,000 children from occupied regions attended. A 17-year-old who left the territory said that at a 2024 Crimean camp, children had to sing the Russian national anthem, take part in flag ceremonies, and were exposed to anti-Ukrainian narratives.²¹⁸

The War Child and Save Ukraine's report documents that 55% of all returned children were subjected to pro-Russian indoctrination, including compulsory patriotic rituals and ideological programming organized through school-based youth groups.²¹⁹ The report further highlights that 30% of surveyed children were sent to “camp” facilities, many of them operating in partnership with *Yunarmiya* or *Movement of the First* structures, where they were subjected to militarization, monitored communications, and threats of reassignment to different guardians if they resisted participation.²²⁰ Within this framework, the report details how Ukrainian children are drawn into a matrix of Russian youth formations: the *Yunarmiya* paramilitary movement for ages 8-17 (combat and fire training, marches, military-historical reenactments, propaganda events), the resurrected *Zarnitsa* military-sports games including shooting and simulated operations, the state-run *Movement of the First* subordinated to the Presidential Administration, weekly classes imposing the ideology of the “Russian world”, the graded OBZR course *Fundamentals of*

Safety and Protection of the Motherland involving drill and weapons training, the *Young Guard* wing of United Russia, and *Eaglets of Russia* for children aged 6-10 as early militarized preparation for joining, later on, different age groups in organizations as *Movement of the First* and *Yunarmiya*.²²¹

Crucially, participation in these structures is described as “essentially mandatory and strictly monitored”, with mass recruitment of first graders in places such as Melitopol often carried out without real parental consent or under duress.²²² The report adds qualitative detail from Save Ukraine interviews. One 15-year-old girl from Mariupol recounts Russian soldiers coming to school to organize “trial participation” in *Yunarmiya*: they delivered narratives about Donbas and the war, had pupils assemble and disassemble weapons and cartridges, and allowed them to shoot with training rifles. Another witness describes *Yunarmiya* participation becoming effectively obligatory from first grade, with intense psychological pressure and classmates digging trenches for Russian troops before signing military contracts at fifteen. A 14-year-old girl from Luhansk explains that the *Young Guard* at her school functioned “like a military school”, with automatic-rifle shooting, parades, and special uniforms; she and her peers “got the impression that schoolchildren were being prepared for war”, and many joined because membership brought extra exam points and was perceived as increasing the chances of avoiding conscription. A 16-year-old boy from Kherson describes the *Zarnitsa* exercises, including sapper tasks, obstacle courses, learning Russian military ranks, marching drills and rapid rifle assembly, all carried out in military uniforms.²²³

Альменда documents mass enrollment into these state-sponsored youth structures as a cornerstone of identity eradication. By the end of 2024, *the Movement of the First* had enrolled more than 120,400 children from Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Sevastopol, Crimea, and Kherson.²²⁴ *Yunarmiya* co-organizes induction ceremonies and serves as the next stage of “patriotic education”, integrating drill instruction, weapons familiarization, and career pathways with Rosgvardiya and other security services.²²⁵ On this record, youth-movement deployment functions as an occupation-administration tool aimed at identity replacement rather than child welfare.²²⁶

In response, in 2024, the EU, UK, Australia, Switzerland, and the United States (among others) sanctioned the All-Russian children's and youth movement *Movement of the First* and/or *Yunarmiya* recognizing its role in indoctrination and identity eradication in temporarily occupied territories.²²⁷

Taken together, these practices establish a coercive system of militarized youth engagement that systematically erodes Ukrainian identity and raise grave concerns of core protections under the IHRL, IHL and ICL. Under GC IV, propaganda or pressure to secure voluntary enlistment is prohibited; channeling occupied children through militarized movements toward Russian state service, thus, raises grave concerns. GC IV requires that education and care, where local institutions are lacking, be provided “as far as possible” by persons sharing the child's nationality, language, and religion, and that children be protected from propaganda intended to alienate them from their cultural identity.²²⁸

Box 7.

GENEVA ACADEMY'S MAPPING OF INTERNATIONAL LEGAL STANDARDS

IHRL: CRC Arts. 3, 4, 2, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 28, 29, 31, 38; ICCPR Arts. 2, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 26; ICESCR Arts. 2, 13, 15.

These provisions establish guarantees concerning non-discrimination, the child's identity and family environment, freedom of expression and thought, association and peaceful assembly, access to information from diverse sources, participation in cultural life, and education directed toward the child's overall development, including specific protections in the context of armed conflict. They require that measures affecting children, particularly in situations of vulnerability, be guided by the child's best interests and supported by effective State action. Accordingly, organized youth structures, school-based movements, and related activities that shape children's participation, expression, or exposure to particular ideological or military content may thus fall to be examined within the scope of these guarantees.

IHL: GC IV Arts. [24](#), [27](#), [49](#), [50](#), [51](#), [64](#), [147](#); AP I Arts. [74](#), [77](#), [78](#); HR Art. [43](#).

These provisions regulate the protection of children and other protected persons in situations of occupation, including respect for their person, honour, family life, and cultural and linguistic identity; the prohibition of forcible transfers or deportation; the possible grave breach of coercive channeling of protected children into paramilitary structures; the facilitation of tracing and family reunification; and the maintenance of public order and civil life by the occupying authority and the respect of the local laws. They also require that education and care be ensured as far as possible in the child's own national tradition and that children receive special protection against the effects of armed conflict. Policies or practices involving the organized movement of children, participation in occupation-linked programs, or exposure to military-oriented activities must thus be examined in light of these norms.

ICL: Rome Statute Arts. [6\(e\)](#), [7\(1\)\(h\)](#), [7\(1\)\(k\)](#), [8\(2\)\(a\)\(ii\)](#), [8\(2\)\(a\)\(vii\)](#), [8\(2\)\(b\)\(viii\)](#), [8\(2\)\(b\)\(xxvi\)](#); Genocide Convention Art. [II\(e\)](#).

*These provisions address different categories of international criminal law. As **war crimes**, the relevant framework includes prohibitions relating, inter alia, to unlawful deportation or transfer of protected persons, deportation or transfer of all or parts of the population of the occupied territory within or outside this territory, and to the conscription or enlistment of children, providing the lens through which the movement of children or their placement in militarized educational settings have to be examined. In addition, where the cumulative effect of transfer, coercive assimilation, militarized environments, and sustained pressure causes profound psychological harm to children - whose age and dependency heighten the impact of such measures - the resulting mental suffering may, depending on its level of severity, amount to torture or inhuman treatment in violation of human dignity. As **crimes against humanity**, the applicable norm concerns persecution on discriminatory grounds when committed as part of a wider course of conduct directed against a civilian population, offering the context for analyzing measures that affect children's identity, status or participation on protected grounds, or intentionally causing great suffering or serious injury to mental health; and as **genocide**, the relevant rule addresses the forcible transfer of children of a protected group when carried out with the intent to destroy that group in whole or in part, outlining the conceptual parameters for considering practices involving transfers or long-term placements within this legal framework.*

(for a provision-by-provision explanation, click on each article to access the Annex).

3. BEYOND RUSSIA: BELARUS'S PARALLEL ROLE

This final chapter extends the analysis beyond the Russian Federation by situating Belarus as both a “mirror state” and a “supporting state” within Russia's child-focused cognitive warfare architecture. As will be seen below, Belarus mirrors Russian practices domestically by replicating comparable systems of information control, educational manipulation, and militarized youth programming; at the same time, it operates as a supporting state by facilitating, hosting, and operationally enabling the transfer, re-education, and indoctrination of Ukrainian children.²²⁹

Open-source monitoring notes that the Kremlin's youth-indoctrination toolkit - *Yunarmiya*, *Avangard*, and the *Movement of the First* - is a portable model mirrored by allied structures in Russia's neighboring states, featuring cross-border programming and events that blend militarized leisure, loyalty rituals, and historical revisionism.²³⁰ In this sense, Belarus operates as a mirror state, replicating Russian-style patriotic-military youth structures and information controls within its own domestic framework. This supports the idea that analogous patriotic-military programming directed at minors, when coordinated with Russian narratives about Ukraine, could raise similar concerns under IHRL, IHL, and ICL.

Belarus represents the most direct extension of Russian-style information control and youth manipulation. Following the 2020 elections, President Aljaksandr Lukashenka intensified repression of independent media and digital freedoms, deploying IP-tracking, spyware, and mass prosecutions against journalists and civil society actors.²³¹ Children and youth are uniquely affected by restrictions on VPNs, surveillance of online classrooms, and proposals to ban foreign platforms such as Zoom, measures that mirror Moscow's attempts to monopolize educational content and curtail exposure to alternative narratives.²³² Much like Russia's “Sovereign Internet Law”, Belarus's cybersecurity crackdown centralizes control of internet infrastructure, enabling the state to monitor online activity and suppress dissent under the guise of countering extremism.²³³

This regime creates an information environment in which young people are denied pluralistic perspectives, violating freedom of expression, access to diverse information, and education aimed at developing critical thinking.²³⁴ Youth mobilization into pro-government organizations mirrors Russia's *Movement of the First*, while the closure of independent cultural institutions, publishing houses, and online platforms erases alternative cultural spaces for children. Pervasive self-censorship is as an invisible form of repression that corrodes children's cultural identity and limits intergenerational transmission of Belarusian heritage.²³⁵ Such strategies transform childhood itself into a site of loyalty production, not preserving CRC's right to identity and ICESCR's right to culture.

Beyond this mirroring function, Belarus also acts as a supporting state within the regional system of child transfer and re-education. It can be argued that Belarus functions as an operational hub in the broader network facilitating the relocation, containment, and ideological conditioning of Ukrainian children. By 2024, 13 re-education camps in Belarus hosted Ukrainian children; by 2025 the number rose to 18. These institutions, operated in partnership with the Alexei Talai Foundation and state security services, conducted “patriotic rehabilitation” sessions that included firearms training and Russian-anthem ceremonies.²³⁶ The same report records cooperation between Belarusian agencies and Russia's security apparatus in implementing “patriotic rehabilitation” programs.²³⁷

Therefore, Russia does not act alone: Yale HRL has documented Belarus's involvement, identifying 2,442 children transferred to at least 13 Belarusian facilities between 24 February 2022 and 30 October 2023, with parental consent not always obtained.²³⁸ 18 camps have been identified for purposes including indoctrination that hold Ukrainian children.²³⁹ Some Ukrainian children deported to Belarus have been sent to paramilitary-style youth camps run by the Belarusian Ministry of Emergency Situations,

where they were issued uniforms, took part in drills, and were exposed to military culture; Yale HRL has documented at least six such training events at Belarusian facilities housing Ukrainian children.²⁴⁰ Moreover, there are also serious contextual challenges to humanitarian neutrality, particularly following public admissions by the Belarus Red Cross regarding its involvement in the transfer of Ukrainian children to Belarus, reinforcing concerns about the risk of institutional capture, underscoring the need for heightened safeguards, transparency, and independent verification when engaging in child tracing, transfer, or reunification processes in this conflict.²⁴¹

RCHR further links Belarus to the transfer of orphans from Donetsk and Luhansk under the pretext of “medical evacuation”.²⁴² The Council of Europe 2025 reporting corroborates Belarus's role as a transit and control zone: due to the absence of direct crossings, families from temporarily occupied territories often travel through Russia and Belarus to reach Ukraine; only 501 people - including 66 children - were recorded using the Domanove (Volyn) route in Jan-Feb 2025 amid filtration and document-control risks.²⁴³

Overall, these developments indicate that Belarus functions as an integrated component of the wider system through which children are transferred, re-educated, and exposed to politically framed or militarized environments, reinforcing concerns about the protection of children's identity, family ties, cultural continuity, and access to impartial education under the relevant international legal frameworks. As a mirror state, Belarus reproduces Russian models of youth control and identity management; as a supporting state, it enables their extraterritorial operation. These constraints magnify the difficulty of family reunification and return for separated or forcibly transferred children, reinforcing the urgency of humanitarian access and child-tracing obligations under IHRL, IHL and ICL. It follows that this collaboration extends Russia's identity-eradication policy beyond its own territory and engages possible shared responsibility under the Geneva Conventions and the ILC's ARSIWA (aiding or assisting in an internationally wrongful act) or under the Rome Statute.

Box 8.

GENEVA ACADEMY'S MAPPING OF INTERNATIONAL LEGAL STANDARDS

Public international law (PIL) recognizes that responsibility may arise not only from direct conduct but also from aid or assistance that materially facilitates another actor's internationally wrongful acts. Under **Common Article 1 GCs** and **Art. 16 ARSIWA**, a State must not provide support that it knows would contribute to violations of IHL, including those relating to transfers of protected persons, identity-related measures, or the treatment of children in armed conflict. At the level of individual criminal accountability, under ICL, aiding and abetting requires a contribution that has a substantial effect and is provided with knowledge of the underlying offence, while participation under **Art. 25(e)-(d) Rome Statute** further covers assistance rendered with the intent to facilitate the crime, or a contribution made with knowledge of a group's criminal purpose. These principles offer the general framework for analyzing situations in which an actor, without exercising occupation powers, nevertheless cooperates in ways that may facilitate conduct regulated under IHRL, IHL, or ICL. Against this background, the following substantive norms indicate the specific guarantees and prohibitions potentially engaged by practices involving transfers, re-education initiatives, information-control systems, or organized youth programming affecting children.

IHRL: CRC Arts. 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 28, 29, 31, 38; ICCPR Arts. 2, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 26; ICESCR Arts. 2, 10, 13, 15.

These provisions elaborate guarantees relating to non-discrimination, the preservation of the child's identity and family environment, freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, protection of privacy, access to information from diverse sources, participation in cultural life, and education directed toward the child's full development, including safeguards relevant in situations of conflict or displacement; measures involving digital restrictions, organized youth programming, ideologically framed educational environments, or the placement of transferred children in settings affecting their cultural continuity may therefore be examined within the scope of these guarantees. They further require best-interest-based decision-making and effective State measures to ensure the realization of children's rights.

IHL: GC IV Arts. [24](#), [27](#), [49](#), [50](#), [51](#), [147](#); AP I Arts. [74](#), [77](#), [78](#).

These provisions regulate the protection of children affected by armed conflict, including respect for their person, honor, family ties, and cultural identity; the facilitation of tracing and family reunification; the prohibition of forcible transfers or deportations; and special guarantees for children's care and education. Where a state hosts, assists in, or cooperates with transfers, placements, or re-education initiatives linked to an occupying power, or where children's movement and identity are affected by cross-border arrangements, such practices may be analyzed in light of these norms.

ICL: Rome Statute Arts. [6\(e\)](#), [7\(1\)\(h\)](#), [7\(1\)\(k\)](#), [7\(1\)\(k\)](#), [8\(2\)\(a\)\(ii\)](#), [8\(2\)\(a\)\(vii\)](#), [8\(2\)\(b\)\(viii\)](#), [8\(2\)\(b\)\(xxvi\)](#); Genocide Convention Art. [II\(e\)](#).

*These provisions address distinct categories of ICL: as **crimes against humanity**, the relevant norms concern persecution on protected grounds and other inhumane acts committed as part of a widespread or systematic policy, providing a framework for considering conduct that affects children's identity, status, family relations, or mental integrity; as **war crimes**, the applicable prohibitions relate to unlawful deportation or transfer of protected persons, deportation or transfer of all or parts of the population of the occupied territory within or outside this territory, the conscription or enlistment of children in situations of armed conflict, while also encompassing torture or inhuman treatment where, as part of broader coercive practices, severe mental suffering is intentionally inflicted, taking into account the particular vulnerability of children; and as **genocide**, the pertinent rules concerns the forcible transfer of children of a protected group where carried out with the requisite intent, outlining the parameters for situating practices of transfer, prolonged placement, or identity alteration within this legal category.*

(for a provision-by-provision explanation, click on each article to access the Annex).

CONCLUSION

To conclude, Russia's use of dis-information, militarized education, youth mobilization, and digital repression against children - both within its own territory and in the temporarily occupied regions of Ukraine - has been described by observers as forming a coherent and state-directed system rather than a set of isolated practices. The collected evidence from UN bodies, NGOs, and independent researchers suggests the emergence of an integrated approach that shapes identities, loyalties, and developmental trajectories across multiple dimensions. Operating simultaneously along cultural, informational, educational, and administrative domains, these mechanisms reflect a strategic alignment of tools that are traditionally examined separately within international law. When considered together, it can be argued that these patterns raise profound concerns and may be understood as contributing to what some have termed the “weaponization of childhood”.

From a broader theoretical perspective, this working paper situates Russia's practices within the modern evolution of conflict, where cognitive warfare operates alongside kinetic force to consolidate territorial control and fracture collective identities. Children, 40 % of the population on average, are targeted because they are symbolically potent, psychologically malleable, and sociologically central to a nation's survival.²⁴⁴ By controlling what children learn, see, believe, and remember, this paper has illustrated how Russia seeks not merely to exercise authority over territory, but to reshape the demographic and political landscape over the long, but not so long term. In this sense, cognitive manipulation becomes a form of structural violence in occupation: an attack on the child's sense of self, identity, autonomy, and belonging, with psycho-social consequences that affect children's well-being and developmental trajectories, and an assault on the continuity of the Ukrainian nation.

The implications for the international legal order are profound. Existing treaty frameworks were drafted with an understanding of propaganda, militarization, and deportation that has not fully caught up with the integrated, hybrid model of state control we now observe. Therefore, the protection of children in modern conflict therefore requires a paradigm shift: one that understands digital and cognitive manipulation not as a peripheral concern or a “soft” rights violation, but as a direct threat to human-dignity and the stability of international law. As this paper has shown, protecting minors in contexts of cognitive warfare therefore requires not the creation of new legal instruments, but an interpretative updating of existing treaties - ensuring that their object and purpose are applied to contemporary forms of hybrid harm affecting children's identity, autonomy, and development. For this purpose, this working paper does more than document a pattern of practices: it has delineated the full legal framework under IHRL, IHL and ICL that these developments engage. The [Annex](#) provides a detailed interpretation of each relevant standard, ensuring that legal characterization is grounded in authoritative sources, jurisprudence, and remains distinct from factual description. This integrated-approach is essential for accountability, prevention, and child-focused policy development.

In particular, the findings reviewed in this paper indicate that these practices raise questions regarding their compatibility with the full *spectrum* of children's rights, including rights related to identity, family unity, education, information, cultural life, and privacy. When viewed against the relevant legal framework identified in this working paper - including rights and obligations under the CRC, ICESCR, ICCPR, GC IV, Hague Regulation IV, Genocide Convention, and the Rome Statute - these practices raise significant concerns regarding the protection of children in both peacetime and in occupied territories.

Within the Russian Federation, the analysis suggests that practices relating to information control, educational programming, and youth mobilization may affect a range of children's rights protected under international human rights law, including rights related to identity, education, expression, and intellectual development. These measures, which are implemented through domestic legal and institutional frameworks, appear to operate cumulatively and over extended periods of time. While formally justified

through national policies, their combined impact raises questions as to whether existing safeguards adequately protect children's autonomy, critical development, and freedom of thought. In the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, similar practices appear to operate within a materially different legal context. There, the restructuring of education, restrictions on access to Ukrainian language and information, the organization of youth activities with a militarized character, and limitations on digital communication may engage the specific obligations of an occupying power under IHL, in addition to applicable IHRL. International monitoring bodies have repeatedly emphasized that protections relating to children's identity, education, and cultural life constitute essential elements of the legal framework governing occupation. When viewed cumulatively, these practices raise concerns regarding their compatibility with the applicable legal standards under IHRL, IHL, and ICL, and warrant careful factual and legal assessment.

Moreover, the deportation and transfer of Ukrainian children - extensively documented by UN bodies, NGOs, Ukrainian authorities, and national jurisdictions - have been characterized a range of legal analyses, by the same bodies, as potentially meeting the elements of unlawful transfer under the Geneva Conventions and the Rome Statute. When considered alongside ideological “re-education”, expedited naturalization, placement in Russian families, and efforts to sever Ukrainian cultural identity, several commentators have suggested that aspects of this conduct may fall within the protective scope of Art. II(e) of the Genocide Convention for example, this requiring further factual determination and judicial assessment, particularly with respect to intent. Scholars have long noted that the destruction of a group can occur not only through physical annihilation, but through the transformation or suppression of its children's identity. The administrative, educational, psychological, and discursive patterns identified here resemble dynamics that the drafters of the Genocide Convention sought to prevent. Moreover, as shown in the regional analysis of the last chapter, these dynamics are also not confined to Russia or TOTs of Ukraine alone. Belarus's involvement in informational controls, youth programming, and the operation of facilities hosting transferred Ukrainian children illustrates how similar mechanisms can be replicated or supported beyond the primary territorial context, raising similar concerns under international law.

Finally, this working paper underscores the importance of a coordinated response. Accountability processes at the ICC must integrate evidence of dis-information and ideological conditioning as probative of intent. UN treaty bodies should articulate clearer standards on cognitive and digital protection in conflict. States and international organizations must build child-centered resilience strategies capable of countering authoritarian information ecosystems. And above all, the rapid establishment of a functioning, internationalized return mechanism for deported Ukrainian children is not simply a humanitarian imperative - it is a legal obligation. Therefore, the findings also inform a set of targeted recommendations addressed to international institutions, States, and child-protection actors, aimed at strengthening accountability, prevention, and child-centered responses to cognitive and informational harm in armed conflict. Russia's project of reshaping childhood through coercion, propaganda, and identity suppression strikes at the foundations of the international protection regime built after 1945. If the international community fails to respond decisively, it risks normalizing a model of warfare in which the minds of children become legitimate battlegrounds. Protecting children from such practices is therefore not only about upholding legal obligations: it is about defending the integrity of the human person, the continuity of cultural communities, and the credibility of international law in the face of modern hybrid conflict.

ANNEX

International human rights law (IHRL), international humanitarian law (IHL) and international criminal law (ICL) jointly establish robust protections for children's rights, in peacetime, in armed conflict, as well as in occupation. These frameworks overlap and reinforce one another, ensuring that children remain rights-holders even under conditions of military control or emergency. Upholding the rule of law ensures that children remain unequivocal rights-holders at all times. The table below provides a detailed overview of the instruments and treaty provisions referenced in *Chapter 2*, and *3*, presented in the boxes at the end of each sub-section on mechanisms affecting children's rights, together with the relevant interpretative guidance and corresponding scope of protection.²⁴⁵

Frame-work	Instrument	Arts.	Protections	Interpretive Guidance	Scope
IHRL	CRC The Russian Federation ratified it on 16 th August 1990. Belarus, on 1 st October 1990.	Art. 2	<i>Prohibits discrimination against children.</i>	<p>(CRC GC 5 § 12) “States must actively identify individual children and groups whose rights require special measures... Equal access does not mean identical treatment.”</p> <p>(CRC GC 14 § 41) “The right to non-discrimination requires proactive measures to ensure effective equal opportunities for all children.”</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) I-II; (C) I-II / Chapter 3 ↗</p>	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation
		Art. 3	<i>It requires that the child's best interests shall be a primary consideration in all actions and decision-making affecting them, with decisions made case-by-case according to the child's specific circumstances.</i>	<p>(CRC GC 5 § 12) “Article 3(1): the best interests of the child as a primary consideration in all actions concerning children... The principle requires active measures throughout Government, parliament and the judiciary. Every legislative, administrative and judicial body or institution is required to apply the best interests principle by systematically considering how children's rights and interests are or will be affected by their decisions and actions - by, for example, a proposed or existing law or policy or administrative action or court decision, including those which are not directly concerned with children, but indirectly affect children.”</p> <p>(CRC GC 14 §§ 26, 32, 36, 48, 55, 56) “ ‘public or private social welfare institutions’. These terms should not be narrowly construed or limited to social institutions <i>stricto sensu</i>, but should be understood to mean all institutions whose work and decisions impact on children and the realization of their rights. Such institutions include not only those related to economic, social and cultural rights (e.g. care, health, environment, education, business, leisure and play, etc.), but also institutions dealing with civil rights and freedoms (e.g. birth registration, protection against violence in all settings, etc.). Private social welfare institutions include private sector organizations - either for-profit or non-profit - which play a role in the provision of services that are critical to children's enjoyment of their rights, and which act on behalf of or alongside Government services as an alternative.”</p> <p>“The concept of the child's best interests is complex and its content must be determined on a case-by-case basis.... It should be adjusted and defined on an individual basis, according to the specific situation of the child or children concerned, taking into consideration their personal context, situation and needs. For individual decisions, the child's best interests must be assessed and determined in light of the specific circumstances of the particular child. For collective decisions - such as by the legislator -, the best interests of children in general must be assessed and determined in light of the circumstances of the particular group and/or children in general. In both cases, assessment and determination should be carried out with full respect for the rights contained in the Convention and its Optional Protocols.”</p> <p>“The words “shall be” place a strong legal obligation on States and mean that States may not exercise discretion as to whether children's best interests are to be assessed and ascribed the proper weight as a primary consideration in any action undertaken.”</p>	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation

			<p>“... these circumstances relate to the individual characteristics of the child or children concerned, such as, inter alia, age, sex, level of maturity, experience, belonging to a minority group, having a physical, sensory or intellectual disability, as well as the social and cultural context in which the child or children find themselves...”</p> <p><u>Child's Identity</u> “Children are not a homogeneous group and therefore diversity must be taken into account when assessing their best interests. The identity of the child includes characteristics such as sex, sexual orientation, national origin, religion and beliefs, cultural identity, personality... the expression of those needs depends on a wide range of personal, physical, social and cultural aspects, including their evolving capacities. The right of the child to preserve his or her identity is guaranteed by the Convention (art. 8) and must be respected and taken into consideration in the assessment of the child's best interests. Regarding religious and cultural identity, for example, when considering a foster home or placement for a child, due regard shall be paid to the desirability of continuity in a child's upbringing and to the child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background (art. 20, para. 3), and the decision-maker must take into consideration this specific context when assessing and determining the child's best interests. The same applies in cases of adoption, separation from or divorce of parents. Due consideration of the child's best interests implies that children have access to the culture (and language, if possible) of their country and family of origin, and the opportunity to access information about their biological family, in accordance with the legal and professional regulations of the given country (see art. 9, para. 4). Although preservation of religious and cultural values and traditions as part of the identity of the child must be taken into consideration, practices that are inconsistent or incompatible with the rights established in the Convention are not in the child's best interests. Cultural identity cannot excuse or justify the perpetuation by decision-makers and authorities of traditions and cultural values that deny the child or children the rights guaranteed by the Convention.”</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) I-II-III; (B) II; (C) I-II / Chapter 3 </p>	
		Art. 4	<p><i>Obligation of States to undertake all legislative, administrative, and other measures to implement children's rights.</i></p> <p>(CRC GC 5 § 12) “Effective implementation of the Convention requires active measures throughout Government, Parliament and the judiciary... Legislative, administrative and resource allocation measures must aim at the optimal development of all children.”</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) I-II-III; (B) II; (C) I-II / Chapter 3 </p>	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation
		Art. 8	<p><i>Protects name, nationality, family relations.</i></p> <p>(CRC GC 14 § 55) “Children are not a homogeneous group... The identity of the child includes characteristics such as sex, sexual orientation, national origin, religion and beliefs, cultural identity... The right of the child to preserve his or her identity is guaranteed...”</p> <p>(CRC GC 14 § 59) “The family is the fundamental unit of society... The right of the child to family life is protected under the Convention (art. 16)...”</p> <p>(CRC GC 14 § 60) “Preventing family separation and preserving family unity are important components of the child protection system...”</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) I-II-III; (B) II; (C) I-II / Chapter 3 </p>	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation
		Art. 9, 20(3)	<p><i>Right to family unity and culturally and linguistically appropriate care; continuity of identity in alternative care.</i></p> <p>(CRC GC 14 § 56) “Continuity in a child's upbringing and in his or her ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background must be respected.”</p> <p>(CRC GC 14 § 60) “Preventing family separation and preserving family unity are important components of the child-protection system.”</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) III; Chapter 3 </p>	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation

		Art. 12	<i>Right of the child to express views freely in all matters affecting them; views given due weight.</i>	<p>(CRC GC 5 § 12) “Every legislative, administrative and judicial body or institution is required to apply the best interests principle by systematically considering how children’s rights and interests are affected by their decisions... Opening government decision-making processes to children is a positive challenge.”</p> <p>(CRC GC 14 §§ 53-54) “Article 12 provides for the right of children to express their views in every decision that affects them... The fact that the child is very young or in a vulnerable situation does not deprive them of this right... Specific measures must ensure their participation and provide reasonable accommodation.”</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) I-II; (B) I-II; (C) I-II / Chapter 3 </p>	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation
		Art. 13	<i>Freedom of expression, access to information.</i>	<p>(CRC GC 25 § 53) “States parties should ensure that all children are informed about, and can easily find, diverse and good-quality information online...”</p> <p>(CRC GC 25 § 54) “States parties should protect children from harmful and untrustworthy content... recognizing children’s rights to information and freedom of expression...”</p> <p>(CRC GC 20 § 47) “Access to information encompasses all forms of media but particular attention needs to be given to the digital environment...”</p> <p>(HRC GC 34 § 43) “Any restrictions on freedom of expression must be provided by law and necessary... Blanket prohibitions are incompatible with article 19...”</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) I-II; (B) I-II; (C) I-II / Chapter 3 </p>	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation
		Art. 14	<i>Freedom of thought, conscience, religion.</i>	<p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) I-II; (B) I-II; (C) I-II / Chapter 3 </p>	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation
		Art. 15	<i>Freedom of association & peaceful assembly.</i>	<p>(CRC GC 20 § 24): States must respect adolescents’ participation rights. Restrictions must meet strict necessity/proportionality.</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) I-II / Chapter 3 </p>	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation
		Art. 16	<i>Protection from arbitrary interference with privacy/family.</i>	<p>(CRC GC 25 §§ 56- 61) “Content controls and school filtering systems must not restrict access to information beyond what is necessary... Children should be protected from digital surveillance and data breaches... Automated profiling must not manipulate or interfere with children’s ability to form opinions.”</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (B) I-II; Chapter 3 </p>	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation
		Art. 17	<i>Access to diverse information sources.</i>	<p>(CRC GC 25 §§ 52- 54) Children’s digital rights include access to plural, reliable sources.</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) I-II-III; (B) I-II; (C) I-II / Chapter 3 </p>	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation
		Art. 28	<i>Right to education.</i>	<p>(CRC GC 1 §§ 2, 9, to be read altogether with Article 29) “...the need for education to be child-centered, child-friendly and empowering...”</p> <p>“Consistent with the Convention’s emphasis on the importance of acting in the best interests of the child ... the message of child-centered education: that the key goal of education is the development of the individual child’s personality, talents and abilities, in recognition of the fact that every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities, and learning needs. Thus, the curriculum must be of direct relevance to the child’s social, cultural, environmental and economic context and to his or her present and future needs and take full account of the child’s evolving capacities; teaching methods should be tailored to the different needs of different children.”</p>	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation

			<p>(CRC GC 25 §§ 56, 58-60) “States parties should ensure that digital service providers comply with relevant guidelines, standards and codes and enforce lawful, necessary and proportionate content moderation rules. Content controls, school filtering systems and other safety-oriented technologies should not be used to restrict children's access to information in the digital environment; they should be used only to prevent the flow of harmful material to children. Content moderation and content controls should be balanced with the right to protection against violations of children's other rights, notably their rights to freedom of expression and privacy.”</p> <p>“Children's right to freedom of expression includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, using any media of their choice. Children reported that the digital environment offered significant scope to express their ideas, opinions and political views. For children in disadvantaged or vulnerable situations, technology-facilitated interaction with others who share their experiences can help them to express themselves.”</p> <p>“Any restrictions on children's right to freedom of expression in the digital environment, such as filters, including safety measures, should be lawful, necessary and proportionate. The rationale for such restrictions should be transparent and communicated to children in age-appropriate language. States parties should provide children with information and training opportunities on how to effectively exercise that right, in particular how to create and share digital content safely, while respecting the rights and dignity of others and not violating legislation, such as that relating to incitement to hatred and violence.”</p> <p>“When children express their political or other views and identities in the digital environment, they may attract criticism, hostility, threats or punishment. States parties should protect children from cyberaggression and threats, censorship, data breaches and digital surveillance. Children should not be prosecuted for expressing their opinions in the digital environment, unless they violate restrictions provided by criminal legislation which are compatible with article 13 of the Convention.”</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) I-II-III; (B) I-II; (C) I-II / Chapter 3 ↗</p>	
		Art. 29	<p><i>Education to foster rights, critical thinking, cultural identity.</i></p> <p>(CESCR GC 13 § 38) “Education must be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity... It must strengthen respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms...”</p> <p>(CESCR GC 21 § 26) “Children play a fundamental role as bearers and transmitters of cultural values... Education must be culturally appropriate and enable children to develop their personality and cultural identity...”</p> <p>(1958 ICRC Commentary GC IV Art. 24) “Education must, as far as possible, be entrusted to persons of the same cultural tradition as the parents... This protects children from ideological indoctrination and cultural erasure...”</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) I-II-III; (B) I-II; (C) I-II / Chapter 3 ↗</p>	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation
		Art. 31	<p><i>Right to rest, leisure, play, and participation in cultural and artistic life.</i></p> <p>(CRC GC 25 § 107) “Digital forms of culture, recreation and play should support and benefit children and reflect their cultural identities, languages and heritage... Participation in cultural life online contributes to identity and belonging.”</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) I-II; (B) I-II / Chapter 3 ↗</p>	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation
		Art. 38	<p><i>It requires States Parties to respect and to ensure respect for rules of international</i></p> <p>(1958 ICRC Commentary GC IV Art. 50) “The Occupying Power is forbidden to change the family or personal status of children, or their nationality”</p>	Armed Conflict and Occupation

			<i>humanitarian law applicable to them in armed conflicts which are relevant to the child’.</i>	Return to: Chapter 2 (A) II-III ; (B) II ; (C) I-II / Chapter 3	
		Art. 39	<i>It requires States Parties to ‘take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: ... armed conflicts’.</i>	Return to: Chapter 2 (A) III	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation
IHRL	ICCPR The Russian Federation ratified it on 16 th October 1973. Belarus, on 12 th November 1990.	Art. 2	<i>Guarantees non-discrimination.</i>	(HRC GC 18 § 1) States must eliminate discrimination in law and practice. Return to: Chapter 2 (A) I-II ; (C) I-II / Chapter 3	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation
		Art. 17	<i>Privacy/family protection.</i>	(HRC GC 16 § 10) “Even interference provided for by law should be reasonable in the particular circumstances... The gathering and holding of personal information must be regulated by law.” Return to: Chapter 2 (B) I-II / Chapter 3	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation
		Art. 18	<i>Freedom of thought, conscience and religion; protection from manipulation or coercion in belief.</i>	(HRC GC 22 § 5) “The freedom to manifest religion or belief may be subject only to limitations necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals, or the rights of others... No coercion impairing this freedom is permitted.” (CRC GC 25 § 62) “Automated systems may not be used to manipulate or influence children's beliefs or emotions in the digital environment.” Return to: Chapter 2 (A) I-II-III ; (B) I-II ; (C) I-II / Chapter 3	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation
		Art. 19	<i>Freedom of expression & info.</i>	(HRC GC 34 § 15) “States parties should take particular care to encourage an independent and diverse media.” (HRC GC 34 § 43) “Any restrictions must be provided by law and necessary... Blanket prohibitions are incompatible with article 19.” Return to: Chapter 2 (A) I-II ; (B) I-II ; (C) I-II / Chapter 3	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation
		Art. 20	<i>Prohibition of war propaganda and incitement to hatred.</i>	(HRC GC 11 § 2) “States must adopt legislative measures prohibiting propaganda for war and advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.” Return to: Chapter 2 (A) I-II-III ; (B) I-II ; (C) I-II / Chapter 3	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation
		Arts. 21-22	<i>Freedom of peaceful assembly & association.</i>	(HRC GC 37 § 96-97) Restrictions must be strictly necessary; blanket bans = impermissible. Return to: Chapter 2 (A) I-II ; (C) I-II / Chapter 3	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation
		Art. 24	<i>Right of every child to protection as a minor,</i>	(HRC GC 17 § 1) “Article 24 recognizes the right of every child, without discrimination, to such measures of protection as are required by his status as a minor.”	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation

			<i>without discrimination.</i>	Return to: Chapter 2 (A) I-II-III ; (B) I-II ; (C) I-II / Chapter 3	
		Art. 26	<i>Equality before the law and protection against discrimination on any ground.</i>	(HRC GC 18 § 1) “The principle of equality sometimes requires States to take affirmative action... to diminish or eliminate conditions which cause or help to perpetuate discrimination.” Return to: Chapter 2 (A) I-II-III ; (B) I-II / Chapter 3	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation
IHRL	ICESCR The Russian Federation ratified it on 16 th October 1973. Belarus, on 12 th November 1990.	Art. 2	<i>Obligation to ensure rights recognized in the Covenant without discrimination of any kind.</i>	(CESCR GC 20 § 8) “States parties must adopt measures, including affirmative action, to eliminate both formal and substantive discrimination.” Return to: Chapter 2 (A) I-II-III ; (B) I-II ; (C) I-II / Chapter 3	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation
		Art. 10	<i>Family as natural environment for children.</i>	Return to: Chapter 2 (A) III / Chapter 3	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation
		Art. 13	<i>Right to education for full development of human personality.</i>	(CESCR GC 13 § 38) “Education must be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity... It must strengthen respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.” (CRC GC 25 § 53) “States parties should ensure that all children are informed about, and can easily find, diverse and good-quality information online...” (CRC GC 25 § 54) “States parties should protect children from harmful and untrustworthy content... recognizing children's rights to information and freedom of expression...” (CRC GC 20 § 47) “Access to information encompasses all forms of media but particular attention needs to be given to the digital environment...” (HRC GC 34 § 43) “Any restrictions on freedom of expression must be provided by law and necessary... Blanket prohibitions are incompatible with article 19...” Return to: Chapter 2 (A) I-II-III ; (B) I-II ; (C) I-II / Chapter 3	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation
		Art. 15	<i>Right to participate in cultural life.</i>	(CESCR GC 21 §§ 6, 13) States must respect and protect cultural identity, encompassing language, beliefs, literature, customs, and traditions. Children are bearers and transmitters of cultural values; education must therefore be culturally appropriate, include human rights education, and enable children to develop their personality, cultural identity, and understanding of their own and others' traditions. Educational programs must respect the specificities of minorities and indigenous peoples, incorporate their history, knowledge, and values, and- where possible- be conducted in their own languages to ensure equal participation in both community and national life. (CESCR GC 21 §§ 26-27) “Education and cultural programs must respect cultural specificities and enable children to develop their personality and identity, incorporating the history, knowledge and languages of minorities and indigenous peoples.” Return to: Chapter 2 (A) I-II-III ; (B) I-II ; (C) I-II / Chapter 3	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation
IHL	GCS The Russian Federation ratified GCI-IV on 10 th May 1954. Belarus, on 3 ^d August 1954.	Art. 1	<i>Aiding and Assisting.</i>	“The High Contracting Parties undertake to respect and to ensure respect for the present Convention in all circumstances.”	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation

				Return to: Chapter 3 ↑	
IHL	GC IV See above.	Art. 24	<i>Special protections for children incl. relief & education.</i>	<p>(1958 ICRC Commentary §§ 1-2) Parties to a conflict must take proactive measures to ensure children's relief, care, and education. Education is understood broadly-moral, physical, and religious-and must be entrusted, as far as possible, to persons of the same cultural tradition as the parents, to exclude political or religious propaganda and preserve children's natural and cultural milieu. Evacuation to neutral countries is permissible only for humanitarian reasons, subject to Protecting Power consent, and the host State must guarantee children's maintenance, education, and religion in accordance with their cultural tradition.</p> <p>(2025 ICRC Commentary §§ 2075, 2079, 2081, 2086, 2090-2093) “Article 24(1) applies to ‘children under fifteen, who are orphaned or are separated from their families as a result of the war’... This category of children is particularly at risk... more likely to suffer violence, exploitation or abuse, including sexual violence and unlawful recruitment.”</p> <p>“Parties to a conflict are obligated to take the ‘necessary measures’ to ensure that the children referred to ‘are not left to their own resources, and that their maintenance, the exercise of their religion and their education are facilitated in all circumstances’.”</p> <p>“The obligation... does not require the Parties... to achieve the objectives solely through their own social protection systems. They may seek or accept external support.”</p> <p>“The notion of ‘maintenance’ encompasses the supply of what is necessary for the health and welfare of the child... including food, clothing, accommodation, appropriate care, education and health care... They may also need psychosocial support... Sport, play and other recreational activities are also essential... An assessment... must take into account their age, gender, health, cultural practices, disabilities and other grounds for non-adverse distinction.”</p> <p>“Education... can encompass various types and levels of programs... preschool, primary and secondary education, as well as technical and vocational education.”</p> <p>“Armed conflict puts education systems at risk... attacks on and violence against students, educational personnel and facilities... closure of schools... and the use of educational facilities for military purposes or child recruitment... Even when children are not prevented from attending school, the quality of education may be affected.”</p> <p>“For instance, military use of schools may result in increased risks of girls dropping out of school due to fear of sexual violence... Similarly, boys’ access to education may be at greater risk... of recruitment or targeting by armed forces or groups.”</p> <p>“Article 24(1) provides that the children's education ‘shall’, as far as possible, be entrusted to persons of a similar cultural tradition’. Children who are not in the care of their parents or other family members may be entrusted to caregivers from a different cultural background, especially when they belong to a minority in their own country or are received in a neutral State, as foreseen in Article 24(2). In such situations, the children may adapt to their new environment by learning the local language and assimilating the social norms of the community in which they are placed. The education they receive in this new context may thus contribute to further separating them from their own communities and make the prospect of family reintegration more difficult. For this reason, Parties to a conflict are obliged to take steps to ensure that the child's education is continued in a similar cultural tradition. Children must be protected from propaganda designed to alienate them from their cultural tradition.”</p> <p>“The obligation to consider the child's cultural background must be observed ‘as far as possible’ and is dependent on the circumstances of each case, such as the availability of appropriate structures and teachers.</p>	International Armed Conflict and Occupation

			<p>However, this obligation does not cease simply because it is more convenient to provide education in a different cultural tradition; good faith to continue education within a similar cultural tradition. Article 24(1) also makes clear that the child's new cultural environment does not need to exactly replicate the one they come from; it is sufficient if it is 'similar'. International courts have concluded that, at a minimum, the education environment must not discriminate against or suppress the child's cultural background. Lastly, while respect for cultural identity is important, this requirement should not prevent the child from interacting with their new environment, which is also essential for their development and well-being.”</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) II-III; (B) II; (C) II / Chapter 3 </p>	
		Art. 27	<p><i>Fundamental guarantees; respect for family honour, religious convictions, and customs.</i></p> <p>(1958 ICRC Commentary § 2) “Protected persons are entitled, in all circumstances, to respect for their persons, honour, family rights, religious convictions and practices, and their manners and customs.”</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) II-III; (B) II; (C) II / Chapter 3 </p>	International Armed Conflict and Occupation
		Art. 49	<p><i>Forbids forcible transfers/deportations.</i></p> <p>(1958 ICRC Commentary §§ 1-2) “The prohibition embodied in this paragraph is intended to forbid such hateful practices for all time... Evacuation may only occur when the safety of the population or imperative military reasons so demand... Those evacuated must be returned to their homes as soon as hostilities have ended...”</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) III; (C) II / Chapter 3 </p>	Occupation Only
		Art. 50	<p><i>Occupying power must facilitate education, respect culture.</i></p> <p>(1958 ICRC Commentary on 50(1)) “The Occupying Power must facilitate the proper functioning of all institutions devoted to the care and education of children...”</p> <p>(1958 ICRC Commentary §§ 288-289) “The Occupying Power is forbidden to change the family or personal status of children or their nationality... Education must respect cultural and linguistic identity...”</p> <p>(2025 ICRC Commentary §§ 3260-3282) “The Occupying Power must facilitate the proper functioning of all institutions devoted to the care and education of children... It is forbidden to change the family or personal status of children or their nationality... Education must respect cultural and linguistic identity.”</p> <p>“Article 50(1) establishes a clear and positive obligation... the Occupying Power is legally bound to take the measures necessary to achieve the proper working of institutions devoted to the care and education of children... The Occupying Power must not replace the existing welfare and education systems... must avoid impeding or interfering with their activities... must refrain from requisitioning staff, premises or equipment... Using schools or other educational structures for military purposes is incompatible... It may not impose discriminatory measures or new curricula, including military education or propaganda... change the language of instruction... or adversely alter the accreditation or operation of existing educational institutions. Furthermore, courts have held that it may not impose discriminatory measures or new curricula - including military education or propaganda - in educational institutions; change the language of instruction; prevent the transmission of data related to the care and education of children between relevant institutions; or adversely alter the accreditation or operation of existing educational institutions.”</p> <p>“A purely passive approach would not be compatible with Article 50(1) ... The Occupying Power must ‘facilitate’, meaning ‘make easy or easier’... it must actively support these institutions... take concrete steps...”</p> <p>“Article 50(3) applies to children who are orphaned or separated from their parents ‘as a result of the war’... including broader consequences of armed conflict... The protection is not extended to children deprived of their family environment for reasons unrelated to the conflict... However, more recently, the tendency is to recognize that all children who are not under</p>	Occupation Only

			<p>the care of their parents ‘for whatever reason and under whatever circumstances’ require the same level of protection, assistance and care.”</p> <p>“The Occupying Power ‘shall make arrangements’ for the ‘maintenance and education’ of the children concerned... the French text clarifies that it must ‘ensure’ (‘devra prendre les dispositions pour assurer’) that the children receive the requisite services... This obligation is triggered when local institutions are ‘inadequate for the purpose’... It is thus subsidiary... applying when there is no relative or friend who can provide for the child... and when local institutions have not fulfilled their duties despite the Occupying Power’s efforts to facilitate their proper working.”</p> <p>“Although the territory is under the effective control of foreign troops, the authorities of the occupied territory remain responsible in the first instance... It was considered an ‘excessive burden’ on the Occupying Power to have exclusive responsibility for such children.”</p> <p>“Children’s maintenance and education should be provided, wherever possible, ‘by persons of their own nationality, language and religion’. The children’s maintenance and education should be provided, wherever possible, ‘by persons of their own nationality, language and religion’. In temporarily occupied territories, where various ethnic or cultural groups may often coexist, children deprived of the care of their families or other guardians may be entrusted to caregivers with a different cultural background. In such situations, the children may adapt to their new environment by learning the local language and assimilating the social norms of the community in which they are placed. The education they receive in this new context may thus contribute to further separating them from their own communities, making the prospect of family reintegration more difficult. Occupying Powers must take steps to ensure continuity of education through persons who share the child’s nationality, language and religion... children must be protected from propaganda designed to alienate them from their background and cultural tradition.”</p> <p>“The obligation to consider the child’s cultural background must be observed ‘if possible’, and is dependent on the circumstances of each case, such as the availability of appropriate structures and teachers. However, this obligation does not cease simply because it is more convenient to provide maintenance or education through persons of a different nationality, language or religion; a good faith effort must be made to comply with this requirement. International courts have considered that, at a minimum, the education environment must not discriminate against or suppress the child’s nationality, language and religion or cultural background. Lastly, while respect for cultural identity, including nationality, language and religion, is important, this requirement should not prevent children from interacting with their new environment, which is also essential for their development and well-being.”</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) II-III; (B) II; (C) II / Chapter 3 </p>	
		Art. 51	<p><i>Forbids compelling children to serve occupying power.</i></p> <p>(1958 ICRC Commentary on Art. 51(1)) “No pressure or propaganda aiming at securing voluntary enlistment is permitted... Protected persons may not be compelled to undertake any work involving participation in military operations.”</p> <p>From the Article, it follows that the Occupying Power may not compel, or pressure protected persons-especially children- to serve in its armed or auxiliary forces. Propaganda or inducement to enlist is prohibited, and compulsory labour is restricted to limited, non-military purposes and only for persons over 18. All forms of militarization or ideological coercion of children under occupation are forbidden.</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) II-III; (B) II; (C) II / Chapter 3 </p>	Occupation Only
		Art. 64	<p><i>Occupier must respect local laws.</i></p> <p>(1958 ICRC Commentary § 2) Art. 64 GC IV states that the Occupying Power’s legislative power is limited to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Implementing provisions required by the Convention (e.g., health, food, child welfare). b) Maintaining public order and administration. 	Occupation Only

			<p>c) Enacting penal laws for its own security.</p> <p>The Occupying Power must respect existing laws and institutions. It cannot modify fundamental structures of the occupied territory, such as the organization of education or administration, except as absolutely required by its security or to comply with the Convention.</p> <p>(2025 ICRC Commentary § 2) “The Occupying Power may, however, subject the population of the occupied territory to provisions which are essential to enable the Occupying Power to fulfil its obligations under the present Convention, to maintain the orderly government of the territory, and to ensure the security of the Occupying Power, of the members and property of the occupying forces or administration, and likewise of the establishments and lines of communication used by them.”</p> <p>To map it out, the legal scholar Marco Sassòli suggests that the Occupying Power may legislate under Art. 64(2) (and also under HR Art. 43 below):²⁴⁶</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → to protect its security and that of its occupying forces → to implement its obligations under IHL, → to respect its IHRL obligations → to maintain public order and civil life → if explicitly authorized by the UN SC <p>Who enacts the legislations?²⁴⁷</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Only the military commander of the occupying force - the only lawful legislator and executor → The parliament or other bodies of the occupying power cannot do this. This is inferred from the heading of Section III of HR, “Military authority over the territory of the hostile State”. <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) II-III; (B) II; (C) II ↗</p>	
	Art. 147	<i>Penal Sanctions.</i>	<p>(1958 ICRC Commentary) Grave breaches carry criminal responsibility under IHL according to the penal legislation. “It was also thought advisable to draw up as a warning to possible offenders a clear list of crimes whose authors would be sought for in all countries.”</p> <p><u>Unlawful deportation or transfer</u> “In this particular case the coercion is exercised by the authorities and it is not, therefore, easy to deal with it by analogy with offences against ordinary law.”</p> <p><u>Inhuman treatment</u> “The aim of the Convention is certainly to grant civilians in enemy hands a protection which will preserve their human dignity and prevent them being brought down to the level of animals.” “Certain measures, for example, which might cut the civilian internees off completely from the outside world and in particular from their families, or which caused grave injury to their human dignity, could conceivably be considered as inhuman treatment.”</p> <p><u>Wilfully causing great suffering</u> “Since the Conventions do not specify that only physical suffering is meant, it can quite legitimately be held to cover moral suffering also.”</p> <p><u>Unlawful transfer</u> “Transfers are forbidden except in cases where the safety of the protected persons may make them absolutely necessary.”</p> <p>(2025 ICRC Commentary §§ 6626, 6640, 6693, 6687, 6695) “Article 147... contains an exhaustive list of the most serious offences, for which States undertake to provide effective penal sanctions and to either prosecute or extradite, regardless of their nationality, alleged offenders...” “...many of the grave breaches listed in Article 147 may be committed outside of hostilities, for instance in occupied territory in the absence of ongoing hostilities, or in the territory of a Party to the conflict.”</p> <p>“The following subjective factors relating to the particular victim have been used by courts and tribunals when assessing the severity of the conduct: ...the position of inferiority of the victim, the victim's age, the victim's sex and the victim's social, cultural and religious background.”</p>	International Armed Conflict and Occupation

				<p><u>Mental Suffering</u> “The material element of this grave breach is that the perpetrator inflicted severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, upon one or more protected persons.”</p> <p><u>Mental harm as Torture</u> “An act of torture does not need to cause a permanent injury or a physical injury, as mental harm is a recognized form of torture.”</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) II-III; (C) II / Chapter 3 </p>	
IHL	<p><u>Additional Protocol I</u> The Russian Federation ratified it on 29th September 1989. Belarus, on 29th October June 1989.</p>	Art. 74	<p><i>Reunion of Dispersed Families.</i></p>	<p>“The High Contracting Parties and the Parties to the conflict shall facilitate in every possible way the reunion of families dispersed as a result of armed conflicts and shall encourage in particular the work of the humanitarian organizations...”</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) III; (C) II / Chapter 3 </p>	International Armed Conflict, Occupation, and Beyond Termination of the Conflict. (see Art. 1, 3 AP I)
		Art. 77	<p><i>Enhanced child protection in conflict (care, education, no exploitation).</i></p>	<p>(CRC GC 25 § 121) “The digital environment can provide displaced or refugee children with access to life-saving information and enable contact with their families and access to education... States must ensure safe, secure and beneficial access.”</p> <p>(1987 ICRC Commentary § 3177) “Children shall be the object of special respect and shall be protected against any form of indecent assault... The care, education and reunification of children separated by conflict must be ensured.”</p> <p>(1987 ICRC Commentary § 3181) No derogation is permitted.</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) II-III; (B) II; (C) II / Chapter 3 </p>	International Armed Conflict, Occupation and Beyond Termination of the Conflict. (see Art. 1, 3 AP I)
		Art. 78	<p><i>Evacuation of children.</i></p>	<p>(1987 ICRC Commentary §§ 3200-3203) “Evacuation of children may take place only temporarily and with the consent of parents or guardians and the Protecting Power; ideological or permanent evacuation is prohibited.”</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) III; (C) II / Chapter 3 </p>	International Armed Conflict, Occupation and Beyond Termination of the Conflict. (see Art. 1, 3 AP I)
IHL	<p><u>Hague Regulation IV of 1907.</u> The Russian Federation ratified GCI-IV on 27th November 1909. Belarus, on 4th June 1962.</p>	Art. 43	<p><i>Applicable Legislation.</i></p>	<p>“The authority of the legitimate power having in fact passed into the hands of the occupant, the latter shall take all the measures in his power to restore, and ensure, as far as possible, public order and safety, while respecting, unless absolutely prevented, the laws in force in the country.”</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) II-III; (B) II; (C) II </p>	Occupation only
ICL	<p><u>Rome Statute</u> The Russian Federation has signed it on the 13th September 2000, but withdraw the signature the 16th November 2016. Belarus is not a State Party.²⁴⁸</p>	Art. 6(e)	<p><i>Genocide.</i></p>	<p>“For the purpose of this Statute, “genocide” means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:... (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”</p>	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation

				Return to: Chapter 2 (A) III ; (C) II / Chapter 3	
		Art. 7(1)(h)	<i>Crime Against Humanity.</i>	<p>“For the purpose of this Statute, "crime against humanity" means any of the following acts when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack:... (h) Persecution against any identifiable group or collectivity on political, racial, national, ethnic, cultural, religious, gender as defined in paragraph 3, or other grounds that are universally recognized as impermissible under international law, in connection with any act referred to in this paragraph or any crime within the jurisdiction of the Court.”</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) II-III; (B) II; (C) II / Chapter 3 </p>	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation
		Art. 7(1)(k)	<i>Crime Against Humanity.</i>	<p>“For the purpose of this Statute, "crime against humanity" means any of the following acts when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack: ... (k) Other inhumane acts of a similar character intentionally causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health.”</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) II-III; (B) II; (C) II / Chapter 3 </p>	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation
		Art. 8(2)(a)(ii)	<i>War Crime.</i>	<p>“For the purpose of this Statute, “war crimes” means: (a) Grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, namely, any of the following acts against persons or property protected under the provisions of the relevant Geneva Convention: ... (ii) Torture or inhuman treatment, including biological experiments.”</p> <p>(ICTY, <i>Kunarac</i> Appeals Chamber, (2002), §§ 142-148) The public official or other person acting in an official capacity is considered the <i>quid pluris</i> that elevates the crime to one of international concern. For torture as a war crime or CAH this is not necessary since there are other contextual elements that elevates the conduct to an international crime</p> <p>(ICTY, <i>Orić</i> Trial Judgment, (2006), § 352) "Regarding the <i>actus reus</i> of cruel treatment, the seriousness of the harm or injury must be assessed on a case-by-case basis, taking into account such factors as the severity of the alleged conduct, the nature of the act or omission, the context in which the conduct occurred, its duration and/or repetition, its physical and mental effects on the victim, and in some instances, the personal circumstances of the victim, including age, gender and health..."</p> <p>(ICTY, <i>Blaskić</i> Trial Chamber, (2000), §§ 66-187) “The category ‘inhuman treatment’... included not only acts such as torture and intentionally causing great suffering or inflicting serious injury to body, mind or health but also extended to other acts contravening the fundamental principle of humane treatment, in particular those which constitute an attack on human dignity.”</p> <p>(ECtHR, <i>Selmouni v France</i>, (2000), 29 EHRR on Art. 3 ECHR § 100) “The Court considers that this “severity” is, like the “minimum severity” required for the application of Article 3, in the nature of things, relative; it depends on all the circumstances of the case, such as the duration of the treatment, its physical or mental effects and, in some cases, the sex, age and state of health of the victim, etc”The Court emphasised the absolute nature of Article 3 and the requirement that treatment attain a minimum level of severity, including in respect of mental suffering inhumane or degrading treatment.”</p> <p>(ECtHR, <i>Bouyid v Belgium</i>, (2015), § 88) “Ill-treatment that attains such a minimum level of severity usually involves actual bodily injury or intense physical or mental suffering. However, even in the absence of these aspects, where treatment humiliates or debases an individual, showing a lack of respect for or diminishing his or her human dignity, or arouses feelings of fear, anguish or inferiority capable of breaking an individual's moral and physical resistance, it may be characterised as degrading and also fall within the prohibition set forth in Article 3”</p>	International Armed Conflict and Occupation

				<p>(Under ECtHR see also <i>Vasynkov v. Russia</i>, (2011) § 59; <i>Gäfgen</i>, (2010) § 89; <i>Svinarenko and Shadnev</i> (2014) § 114; and <i>Georgia v. Russia (I)</i> (2019) § 192)</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) II-III; (B) II; (C) II / Chapter 3 </p>	
		Art. 8(2)(a) (vii)	<i>War Crime.</i>	<p>“For the purpose of this Statute, “war crimes” means: (a) Grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, namely, any of the following acts against persons or property protected under the provisions of the relevant Geneva Convention: ... (vii) Unlawful deportation or transfer or unlawful confinement.”</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) III; (C) II / Chapter 3 </p>	International Armed Conflict and Occupation
		Art. 8(2)(b) (viii)	<i>War Crime.</i>	<p>“For the purpose of this Statute, “war crimes” means: (b) Other serious violations of the laws and customs applicable in international armed conflict, within the established framework of international law, namely, any of the following acts:... (viii) The transfer, directly or indirectly, by the Occupying Power of parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies, or the deportation or transfer of all or parts of the population of the occupied territory within or outside this territory.”</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) III; (C) II / Chapter 3 </p>	Occupation only
		Art. 8(2)(b) (xxvi)	<i>War Crime.</i>	<p>“For the purpose of this Statute, “war crimes” means: (b) Other serious violations of the laws and customs applicable in international armed conflict, within the established framework of international law, namely, any of the following acts: (xxvi) Conscription or enlisting children under the age of fifteen years into the national armed forces or using them to participate actively in hostilities.”</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) II-III; (C) II / Chapter 3 </p>	International Armed Conflict
		Art. 25(3)(c) (d)	<i>Modes of Individual Criminal Liability.</i>	<p>“In accordance with this Statute, a person shall be criminally responsible and liable for punishment for a crime within the jurisdiction of the Court if that person: (c) For the purpose of facilitating the commission of such a crime, aids, abets or otherwise assists in its commission or its attempted commission, including providing the means for its commission; (d) In any other way contributes to the commission or attempted commission of such a crime by a group of persons acting with a common purpose. Such contribution shall be intentional and shall either: (i) Be made with the aim of furthering the criminal activity or criminal purpose of the group, where such activity or purpose involves the commission of a crime within the jurisdiction of the Court; or (ii) Be made in the knowledge of the intention of the group to commit the crime.”</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 3 </p>	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation
ICL	<p>Genocide Convention The Russian Federation ratified it on 3d May 1954. Belarus, on 11th August 1954.</p>	Art. II (e)	<i>Genocide.</i>	<p>“In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”</p> <p>(Stockholm District Court, Yazidi Case B 3210-23, (2025), pp 186-202.) “As a general rule, the assessment of whether an act has been committed with a view to the total or partial destruction of an ethnic group may be made on the basis of the objective circumstances existing at the time of the act. A factor of key importance for this examination is whether there is a plan to annihilate the ethnic group and whether the act forms part of it. ... The injured parties have also lost much of their Yazidi culture and traditions. This is especially true of the children. For example, the children's language has been affected. Before captivity, they spoke only their mother tongue, Kurmanji. When Redacted F and Redacted I were released after several years in captivity, they could no longer speak Kurmanji, but only Arabic. They also had no knowledge of the Yazidi religion and culture. Redacted I has explained that at the end of her captivity she thought she was Muslim. Redacted C has also stated that at the end of his</p>	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation

			<p>imprisonment, although he was only seven years old, he had assumed that he was a Muslim.</p> <p>...</p> <p>The District Court has also highlighted the personal circumstances of the injured parties, such as the fact that seven of the nine injured parties were children, several of whom had been separated in different ways from both their parents. The District Court has also reported on the injured parties' well-being and psychological suffering and other effects of the traumas they experienced while in captivity. It has been established that their trauma is likely to be lifelong and involves extensive and long-term difficulties in living a normal life.</p> <p>...</p> <p>The survival of an ethnic group can also be threatened by children being taken away from the group to be raised in a foreign environment. In these cases, the existence of the ethnic group is jeopardized by the fact that this type of measure does not physically add new individuals, but also by preventing children belonging to the ethnic group from growing up with the cultural identity, language and traditions of the ethnic group. For these reasons, the transfer of a child is a specific act of genocide, which states that anyone who forcibly transfers a child under the age of eighteen from the ethnic group to another group is to be adjudged for genocide (Paragraph 1(1)(5) of the Act on punishment for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes).</p> <p>...</p> <p>L. I. has committed genocide by forcibly transferring the injured parties who were children of the Yazidi community to the group that sympathized with IS. In doing so, she has deliberately prevented them from growing up with the cultural identity, language, and traditions of the Yazidi community.</p> <p>...</p> <p>L. I. has shared the IS genocide aim. She has thus intended to destroy the Yazidi community completely or partially through enslavement, forced conversion and, as far as the children are concerned, that they would grow up within the group that sympathized with IS. L. I. 's actions thus form part of other similar acts committed in accordance with IS underlying strategy and ideology. The existence of the Yazidi community has been threatened by these. L. I. has thus committed genocide by subjecting the injured parties to severe suffering and by forcibly transferring children from the Yazidi community to the group that sympathized with IS.”</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 2 (A) III; (C) II / Chapter 3 </p>	
PIL	<p>Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts (ARSIWA) Customary Law.</p>	Art. 16	<p><i>Aid or Assistance in the Commission of an Internationally Wrongful Act.</i></p> <p>“A State which aids or assists another State in the commission of an internationally wrongful act by the latter is internationally responsible for doing so if: (a) that State does so with knowledge of the circumstances of the internationally wrongful act; and (b) the act would be internationally wrongful if committed by that State.”</p> <p>Return to: Chapter 3 </p>	Peacetime, Armed Conflict and Occupation

END NOTES

¹ Scholars have developed a classification system to differentiate misinformation from dis-information. The key distinction lies in intent: misinformation refers to false or misleading information shared without harmful purpose, whereas dis-information involves the intentional dissemination of deception, which is the focus of this working paper.; See also D Fallis, 'What is Disinformation?' (2015) 63(3) *Library Trends* 401; C Jack, 'Lexicon of Lies: Terms for Problematic Information' (Data & Society 2017).

² Regional Center for Human Rights, Регіональний центр прав ЛЮДИНИ, (RCHR) et al. *Way Home: Internal and External Dimension of Return, Rehabilitation and (Re)integration of Children Deported, Forcibly Transferred or Otherwise Separated from Their Families due to the Armed Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine* (2023).

³ Inter-Agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, *Toolkit on Unaccompanied and Separated Children* (International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2017).

⁴ Bring Kids Back UA, *Bring Kids Back UA: Initiative to Return Ukrainian Children Unlawfully Transferred by the Russian Federation*, available at: <https://www.bringkidsback.org.ua/> (accessed 19 December 2025).

⁵ Above n. 2.

⁶ Council of Europe (CoE), *Mapping study on children of Ukraine's access to education in Council of Europe member states* (2024) pp 12-22, 24-28.; Council of Europe, *Consultative Group on Ukraine (CGU): Mandate, Structure and Priority Areas* (Council of Europe, 2nd edn 2024), available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/cgu-priority-topics> (accessed 19 December 2025).

⁷ Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, *Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine "Resilience, Recovery and Reconstruction" 2023–2026* CM(2022)187-final (Council of Europe, 14 December 2022); Council of Europe, *Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine* established by Resolution CM/Res(2023)3 (Council of Europe 2023), available at: <https://www.rd4u.coe.int/en/> (accessed 19 December 2025).

⁸ United Nations Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS), *Module 5.30: Children and DDR* (United Nations 2006, revised); Uganda Broadcasting Corporation, *Excitement as Family Reunites After 11 Years of Separation* (13 December 2023) available at: <https://ubc.go.ug/2023/12/13/excitement-as-family-reunites-after-11-years-of-separation/> (accessed 19 December 2025); International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 'The Reunification of Unaccompanied Children Separated by the Rwandan Conflict' (1996) 36 *International Review of the Red Cross* 527 pp 351- 365; ICRC, *Humanitarian Action in Colombia* (ICRC Country Report, 2012) pp 46-47 ; UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 'Kosovo Crisis Update: Child Protection and Family Reunification' (UNHCR Situation Report, 1999); United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), *Kosovo Update: Weekly Kosovo Update, 18 June 1999* (ReliefWeb, 18 June 1999), available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/albania/weekly-kosovo-update-18-jun-1999> (accessed 19 December 2025).

⁹ International Criminal Court (ICC), 'Situation in Ukraine' (ICC-CPI), available at <https://www.icc-cpi.int/situations/ukraine> (accessed 19 December 2025).

¹⁰ UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework, Commentary to N.12* (HR/PUB/11/04, April 2011).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Council of Europe, *Manual for Professionals: Mental Health And Psycho-Social support For Children In Crisis And Emergency Situations* (Council of Europe 2025).

¹³ United Nations Human Rights Council (UN HRC), *Situation of human rights in the Russian Federation: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, Mariana Katzarova* (15 September 2025) UN Doc A/HRC/60/59 §§ 34-35.

¹⁴ Government of Ukraine, *Children of War* platform, available at: <https://childrenofwar.gov.ua/> (accessed 19 December 2025).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) (adopted 20 November 1989, entered into force 2 September 1990) 1577 UNTS 3; Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC Committee), *General Comment No 14: The right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration (art 3, para 1)* (2013) UN Doc CRC/C/GC/14.

¹⁷ *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War* (Fourth Geneva Convention) (adopted 12 August 1949, entered into force 21 October 1950) 75 UNTS 287; ICRC, *Commentary on the Fourth Geneva Convention* (ICRC, 1958).

¹⁸ ICRC, *Commentary on the Fourth Geneva Convention* (ICRC, 2025).

¹⁹ *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR) (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976) 999 UNTS 171.

²⁰ Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No 34: Article 19: Freedoms of Opinion and Expression* (12 September 2011) UN Doc CCPR/C/GC/34.

²¹ Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No 11: Prohibition of Propaganda for War and Inciting National, Racial or Religious Hatred (art 20)* (29 July 1983) UN Doc HRI/GEN/1/Rev.9

²² CRC Committee, *General Comment No 25 on Children's Rights in Relation to the Digital Environment* (2 March 2021) UN Doc CRC/C/GC/25.

²³ *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR) (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 3 January 1976) 993 UNTS 3; Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), *General Comment No 13: The Right to Education (art 13)* (8 December 1999) UN Doc E/C.12/1999/10.

²⁴ CESCR, *General Comment No 21: Right of Everyone to Take Part in Cultural Life (art 15(1)(a) ICESCR)* (21 December 2009) UN Doc E/C.12/GC/21.

²⁵ CESCR, *General Comment No 20: Non-discrimination in Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (art 2(2) ICESCR)* (2 July 2009) UN Doc E/C.12/GC/20.

²⁶ *Hague Convention (IV) Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land and its Annex: Regulations concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land* (adopted 18 October 1907, entered into force 26 January 1910) 205 CTS 277.

²⁷ ICRC, *Commentary on Additional Protocol I* (ICRC, 1987).

²⁸ Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict* (2014); *Safe Schools Declaration* (Oslo, 29 May 2015).

²⁹ ICRC, *Commentary on the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict* (ICRC, 2025).

³⁰ *Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Additional Protocol I)* (adopted 8 June 1977, entered into force 7 December 1978) 1125 UNTS 3; *Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Additional Protocol II)* (adopted 8 June 1977, entered into force 7 December 1978) 1125 UNTS 609.

³¹ Jean-Marie Henckaerts and Louise Doswald-Beck (eds), *Customary International Humanitarian Law, vol I: Rules* (ICRC and Cambridge University Press, 2005); *Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict* (adopted 14 May 1954, entered into force 7 August 1956) 249 UNTS 240.

³² *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court* (adopted 17 July 1998, entered into force 1 July 2002) 2187 UNTS 3.

³³ See [Annex](#) for more details; the prohibition of torture, cruel treatment and outrages upon personal dignity is also reflected under international humanitarian law in Common Article 3 to the Geneva Conventions.

³⁴ *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* (adopted 9 December 1948, entered into force 12 January 1951) 78 UNTS 277.

³⁵ See [Annex](#) for more details.

³⁶ For the purposes of this research, the suppression of dissent is not addressed; however, it constitutes a fundamental component of the overall issue and is further analysed in UN HRC, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, Mariana Katzarova* (2025) UN Doc A/HRC/60/59, Parts III, IV and VI.

³⁷ Council of Europe, *Manual for Professionals* (2025) Section 1.3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

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⁴⁰ АЛЬМЕНДА, *The Russian Federation's Policy on the Eradication of Children's Identity in the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine: 2024 Overview* (2025) pp 1-15, 17-18; АЛЬМЕНДА, *How Russia Erases Ukrainian Identity under the Guise of Combating Extremism* (2025) pp 4-6, 18; CRC Committee, *Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of the Russian Federation* (1 March 2024) UN Doc CRC/C/RUS/CO/6-7, §§ 39(b), 40(a)-(b); Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *The impact of the armed conflict and occupation on children's rights in Ukraine* (21 March 2025) pp 3, 13-18; UN HRC, *A/HRC/60/59*, §§ 64-66.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to acknowledge the invaluable feedback and comments of Paola Gaeta, Director of The Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, Erica Harper, Head of Research and Policy Studies, as well as key insights from Florence Foster, Senior Project Manager at the Academy, and a group of experts solicited during the peer-review process. Many thanks go to Sweden and Switzerland for the invaluable financial support for this project. This research is independent and does not necessarily reflect the position of the States. Last on the list, first in importance, thanks to *Adonai*.

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UNIVERSITÉ
DE GENÈVE

Villa Moynier
Rue de Lausanne 120B
CP 1063 - 1211 Geneva 1 - Switzerland

Phone: +41 (22) 908 44 83
Email: info@geneva-academy.ch
www.geneva-academy.ch

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