

Monitoring Report

“Universal Soldier”

or Education as the Weapon of Russia
in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine

For January-June 2026



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Contents

Introduction	4
Methodology	9
Limitations	9
Abbreviations	10
I. New Russian Policies and Practices in the TOT	11
1.1. Shaping a State-Controlled Historical Consciousness	11
1.2. Recruitment of Higher Education Students into the Russian Federation’s Newly Established Unmanned Systems Forces	14
1.3. The Year of Preschool Education: Expanding Ideological Influence over Preschool Children	19
1.4. Strengthening the Information Isolation of Children and Young People	23
II. Continuation and Intensification of Previously Introduced Russian Practices	26
2.1. Intensification of the Militarisation of Children and Young People	26
2.2. Ideological Indoctrination and Militarisation of the Educational Environment	32
2.3. Institutionalisation of Behavioural Monitoring of Children	36
2.4. Forced Passportisation of Children and Institutional Control over Children Deprived of Parental Care	37
2.5. Russification and the Replacement of Ukrainian Identity	39
Conclusions	41

Introduction

Following the onset of the temporary occupation of Ukrainian territories, the Russian Federation (hereinafter, the RF) established comprehensive control over all spheres of life in the occupied territories and, through the occupation administrations it created, has systematically imposed its own political, cultural, religious, and educational narratives. Particular attention has been directed towards children and young people. Through formal and non-formal education, youth movements, leisure activities, and cultural events, the occupation authorities are deliberately eroding the Ukrainian identity of minors and preparing them to serve the aggressor state.

This report covers the monitoring period from January to June 2026 and continues the systematic documentation of Russian practices affecting children and young people in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. It records both new practices introduced or significantly expanded during the reporting period and the intensification of previously documented trends. The information presented in this report is intended to document crimes committed by the Russian Federation and to counter the disinformation it disseminates.

Monitoring of open sources during the reporting period indicates a qualitative shift in the RF's policy towards children and young people in the TOT: from a collection of parallel practices to a unified, legally codified, and institutionally supported system aimed at shaping a “new generation of Russians” in the occupied territories of Ukraine.

Among the key developments are a systematic campaign to recruit university students into the newly established Unmanned Systems Forces of the RF, the introduction of the Russian-controlled MAX messaging platform as a mandatory communication tool alongside the blocking of VPN services, the adoption of the Concept of Historical Education, and the extension of ideological programmes to the preschool level as part of the proclaimed Year of Preschool Education.

The nature, scale, and systematic implementation of these measures demonstrate a deliberate state policy of assimilating and Russifying Ukrainian children and preparing them for service in the armed forces of the aggressor state, in gross violation of international humanitarian law.

Scale of the Impact. Owing to restricted access to statistical information, it is impossible to determine the exact number of Ukrainian children living in the temporarily occupied territories. The figures presented below are based on open-source information and official statistics published by the RF and the occupation administrations. According to these sources, at least **582,600** children were enrolled in schools in the TOT during the 2025–2026 academic year.¹

2 3 4 5 6

In June 2026, the following numbers of students **graduated from Year 11** in the TOT: Zaporizhzhia Region – 2,783 graduates;⁷ Kherson Region – 1,785;⁸ Donetsk Region – 9,892;⁹ Luhansk Region – 6,758;¹⁰ AR of Crimea – 6,733;¹¹ City of Sevastopol – 1,984.¹²

A significant proportion of these children are involved in organisations and programmes through which the occupation authorities exert ideological and militaristic influence, including:

▶ **The *Eaglets of Russia* programme**, established in 2021, engages children from the first year of primary school in activities promoting Russification and militaristic values and serves as the first stage in progression to membership of the *Movement of the First* and the *Young Army*.¹³ The programme involves more than 4 million children aged 7–10, while the *Eaglet Preschoolers* program extends participation to children from the age of 5.¹⁴

Number of participating children from the TOT:

- **AR of Crimea:** 63,211 children enrolled since 2021.¹⁵

1 <https://monm.rk.gov.ru/structure/3748b454-d262-48b3-b605-85cf93fadbbc>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/7ceMR>

2 <https://t.me/maksimkrivonos/2999>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/rregH>

3 <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/document/8000202512260037>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/UwBQe>

4 <https://t.me/minobrlnr/18096>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/gbnN>

5 <https://zo.gov.ru/docs/show/2261>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/fBc9N>

6 <https://gov.khogov.ru/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2025/12/186-pp-25.pdf>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/eHJlq>

7 <https://t.me/BalitskyEV/8481>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/ReFbT>

8 <https://tavrta.tv/tv/programms/kherson-live/v-hersonskoj-oblasti-v-2026-godu-vypuskayutsya-4213-shkolnikov/>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/fmmft>

9 https://t.me/minobrnauki_dnr/41339, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/1dBVH>

10 <https://www.lugansk.kp.ru/daily/2777875/5255635/>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/UnBD4>

11 <https://c-pravda.ru/news/2026-05-26/vot-i-zavershilysya-uchebnyji-god?ysclid=mpzi6l1tfa651770441>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/kMB7Q>

12 https://vk.com/wall-177557250_34579, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/9jkOd>

13 The name of the movement in Russian is “Yunarmiya”, also widely referred to as the “Youth Army”

14 <https://бuddyвдвижении.пф/news/boleee-1-150-000-chetveroklassnikov-stali-vypusknikami-programmy-oryata-rossii-v-2026-godu/>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/STtXG>

15 <https://sur.li/wahajd>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/k3ebf>, <https://rk.gov.ru/structure/47de85ff-e732-4b1e-bf26-e5691e54c60e>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/Dwvpjn>

- **City of Sevastopol:** more than 16,500 children enrolled since 2021.¹⁶
- **Kherson Region:** at least 5,700 children enrolled since 2023.¹⁷
- **Zaporizhzhia Region:** more than 10,000 children enrolled since 2023.¹⁸
- **Donetsk Region:** more than 20,500 children enrolled since 2023.¹⁹
- **Luhansk Region:** more than 20,000 children enrolled since 2023.²⁰

▶ **The Movement of the First** is the RF's largest children's and youth organisation. It was established in 2022 at the initiative of Vladimir Putin.²¹ According to official Russian figures, the movement has more than 15 million²² members aged 6 to 25, of whom approximately 595,000²³ are in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

The rate of expansion demonstrates the rapid and deliberate growth of the movement across the TOT:

- **AR of Crimea:** from more than 12,000 members in 2023²⁴ to 184,787 as of 2026;²⁵
- **City of Sevastopol:** from nearly 3,000 in 2023²⁶ to approximately 32,103 as of 2026;²⁷
- **Kherson Region:** from nearly 600 children in 2023²⁸ to approximately 9,257 as of 2026;²⁹

16 https://vk.com/wall-177557250_34611, archive <https://archive.ph/3QPOA>

17 <https://t.me/depobrherson/4504>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/2o7Pb>

18 <https://zo.gov.ru/docs/show/2261>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/fBc9N>

19 <https://t.me/LarisaTolstykina/3161>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/ERfy4>

20 <https://www.lugansk.kp.ru/daily/27610.5/4936641/?ysclid=m4wj4b9pmy349519880>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/e59iq>

21 <https://www.spb.kp.ru/daily/27395.5/4590329/>, archive <https://archive.ph/j9xpr>

22 <https://xn--90acagbhgpca7c8c7f.xn--p1ai/>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/ajch6>

23 <https://xn--90acagbhgpca7c8c7f.xn--p1ai/regional-offices/>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/2Oytq>

24 <https://rk.gov.ru/articles/37a61136-20f7-44dd-a66e-bec38f658919>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/CrsMR>

25 https://xn--90acagbhgpca7c8c7f.xn--p1ai/regional-offices/regionalnoe-otdelenie-respubliki-krym_47/, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/4gES0>

26 https://vesti92.ru/2023/06/02/v-sevastopole-startoval-festival-dvizhenija-pervyh.html?ysclid=lp7do1m5_5e916598672, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/SEpZg>

27 https://xn--90acagbhgpca7c8c7f.xn--p1ai/regional-offices/regionalnoe-otdelenie-goroda-sevastopolya_4/, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/bgyTv>

28 <https://www.herson.kp.ru/daily/27500/4759762/?ysclid=lozob7a44i162118080>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/53niE>

29 https://xn--90acagbhgpca7c8c7f.xn--p1ai/regional-offices/regionalnoe-otdelenie-hersonskoy-oblasti_71/, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/KyN0m>

- **Zaporizhzhia Region:** from approximately 1,200 children in 2023³⁰ to 25,119 as of 2026;³¹
- **Donetsk Region:** from 16,000 members in 2024³² to 232,436 as of 2026;³³
- **Luhansk Region:** from more than 21,500 members in 2024³⁴ to 111,203 as of 2026.³⁵

▶ **The Young Army**, established in 2016 at the initiative of the then Minister of Defence of the RF, Sergei Shoigu, for children aged 8 to 18, has more than 2 million members,³⁶ including over 49,000 children from the TOT of Ukraine.

The movement has expanded across the TOT as follows:

- **AR of Crimea:** from 1,500 members in 2017 to 18,389;³⁷
- **City of Sevastopol:** from 40 members in 2016 to more than 17,000;³⁸
- **Zaporizhzhia Region:** approximately 413 members;³⁹
- **Kherson Region:** more than 250 members;⁴⁰
- **Donetsk Region:** from 77 members in 2019⁴¹ to nearly 7,000;⁴²
- **Luhansk Region:** from 100 members in 2019⁴³ to more than 6,000.⁴⁴

30 https://vk.com/wall-218359825_29, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/1Dv4S>

31 https://xn--90acagbhqpc7c8c7f.xn--p1ai/regional-offices/regionalnoe-otdelenie-zaporozhskoy-oblasti_22/, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/Ann1A>

32 https://vk.com/video-76988535_456242217?t=1h33m6s, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/YVuVO>

33 https://xn--90acagbhqpc7c8c7f.xn--p1ai/regional-offices/regionalnoe-otdelenie-doneckoy-narodnoy-respubliki_21/, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/tbthg>

34 <https://lugansk.bezformata.com/listnews/podvel-itogi-raboti-dvizheniya/133832424/>, archive <https://archive.ph/UDbh8>

35 https://xn--90acagbhqpc7c8c7f.xn--p1ai/regional-offices/regionalnoe-otdelenie-luganskoy-narodnoy-respubliki_70/, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/Toume>

36 <https://yunarmy.ru/>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/3uBVI>

37 <https://surl.li/cxhixn>, archive <https://archive.ph/k3ebf>

38 https://a4.news/gorod/v_sevastopole_v_den_geroev_otechestva_kadety-naximovcy_vchtupiliv_ryady_dvizheniya_yunarmiya, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/YYQOB>

39 https://zone.ws/news/dvizhenie-pervyh-zaporozhskoy-oblasti-obedinilo-pochti-14-tys.-uchastnikov/?utm_source=yxnews&utm_medium=desktop&utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fden.ru%2Fnews%2Fby%2Fstory%2F32cb0988-4f00-5458-85d2-73080e695f66, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/8P59f>

40 <https://t.me/YunarmiaHerson/907>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/4Ljic>

41 <https://dan-news.ru/defence/pervye-77-uchastnikov-dvizheniya-molodaya-gvardiya-yunarmiyaprisyagnuli-na-vernost-narodu-dnr-v-donecke/?ysclid=m4v3rhxisx977140271>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/cFmfu>

42 https://vk.com/wall-32205256_1976796, archive <https://archive.ph/HoFPE>

43 <https://gorod-lugansk.com/2019/06/26/gorodskoy-shtab-yunarmii-v-2019-m-sformirovan-v-stolice.html>, archive <https://archive.ph/VjWou>

44 https://t.me/glava_lnr_info/3713, archive <https://archive.ph/F2neO>

The actions documented during the monitoring period may be considered violations of:

- **Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, which provides that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial and religious groups;
- **Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**, which recognises the right to education;
- **Articles 18, 19 and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights**, which guarantee the rights to freedom of thought and freedom of expression and prohibit any propaganda for war;
- **Articles 29, 30, 38 and 39 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**, which provide that education shall be directed to the development of the child’s personality, respect for the child’s national, cultural and linguistic identity, and the provision of special protection for children affected by armed conflict;
- **Article 43 of the Hague Regulations of 1907**, which requires the occupying power to maintain the existing legal and institutional order in the occupied territory and prohibits the arbitrary transformation of its institutions.
- **Articles 50 and 51 of the Fourth Geneva Convention**, which require the occupying power to ensure the proper functioning of the education system in the interests of children, prohibit the enrolment of children in organisations under its control, and prohibit any coercion, pressure or propaganda intended to secure the voluntary enlistment of protected persons into the armed forces or auxiliary forces of the occupying power.

Furthermore, according to the findings of the experts appointed under the **OSCE Moscow Mechanism (9 July 2026)**,⁴⁵ the systematic use of education to promote Russification, impose a Russian identity, justify armed aggression, and prepare Ukrainian children for service in the Russian armed forces may constitute not only violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, but also **evidence of international crimes**, including war crimes and crimes against humanity in the form of persecution on national grounds.

Methodology

Monitoring period: 1 January to 30 June 2026.

Geographical scope: the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, and the city of Sevastopol.

Areas of research: the militarisation of children and young people in the occupied territories; indoctrination and the eradication of Ukrainian identity; the involvement of minors in activities supporting the RF's armed aggression against Ukraine; the recruitment of young people into the armed forces of the RF; and the dismantling of Ukraine's education system.

Sources of information: This report is based on information obtained from publicly available sources, including official communications of the Ukrainian authorities; reports and publications by civil society organisations; publicly accessible sources from the temporarily occupied territories, including the official websites and social media pages of the occupation administrations and the so-called “ministries of education”; publications by local media outlets in the TOT; information published on social media, particularly VKontakte, which has become virtually the only available source for a significant proportion of information from the occupied territories; official statistical data of the RF; and internal documents of the Ministry of Defence of the RF that have entered the public domain.

Limitations

Information and reports that could not be independently verified as of the date of publication of this report have not been included.

Abbreviations

AR of Crimea — Autonomous Republic of Crimea.

FPV drone — a First Person View (FPV) unmanned aerial vehicle used as a strike drone.

FSB — Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (using the internationally recognised abbreviation derived from the Russian acronym ФСБ).

RF — Russian Federation.

SMCR — *Spiritual and Moral Culture of Russia* (school subject).

SMO — “Special Military Operation”, the term used by the Russian authorities to refer to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The corresponding Russian abbreviation is СВО (transliterated as SVO).

so-called DPR — the so-called *Donetsk People’s Republic*, referring to the part of Donetsk Region temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation.

so-called LPR — the so-called *Luhansk People’s Republic*, referring to the part of Luhansk Region temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation.

TOT — temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

UAV — unmanned aerial vehicle.

USF — Unmanned Systems Forces.

I. New Russian Policies and Practices in the TOT

1.1. Shaping a State-Controlled Historical Consciousness

On 15 April 2026, the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation approved the *Concept of Historical Education in Educational Institutions*, a policy document defining the content, methodology, and implementation plan for measures aimed at shaping the “historical consciousness” of learners for the period 2025 to 2030.⁴⁶ The Concept covers all levels of education, from preschool to higher education institutions. It forms part of a broader system of ideological control over education and is being directly implemented in the TOT of Ukraine.

The stated objective of the Concept is to establish “worldview sovereignty” through the promotion of “traditional Russian spiritual and moral values”. In practice, this entails standardising pupils’ worldview in accordance with the ideological framework defined by the RF. The Concept officially identifies the following methodological principles:

- “Russia-centredness”, portraying Russia as a civilisation-state with a unique historical mission;
- “Countering historical falsification”, rejecting any historical narratives that contradict the official interpretation of history promoted by the Russian authorities;
- “Protecting historical sovereignty”, used to justify the exclusion from the education system of any educational content that has not been approved by the RF.

⁴⁶ https://ds16-krasnokamensk-r76.gosweb.gosuslugi.ru/netcat_files/19/8/Kontseptsiya_istoricheskogo_prosvescheniya_2026.pdf, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/4vK8F>

The expected outcome of implementing the Concept is explicitly defined as “maintaining and strengthening a unified Russian civic identity” and “fostering a younger generation of Russian citizens with a strong sense of patriotism”.

These provisions are consistent with the Strategy of the State National Policy of the Russian Federation through 2036, approved by Presidential Decree No. 858 of 25 November 2025. The Strategy establishes a quantitative target for state policy: by 2036, at least **95 per cent** of the population of the RF, including residents of the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, **should identify themselves as “Russians”**.⁴⁷ Historical education thus becomes one of the principal instruments for implementing the RF’s policy of assimilation. For children in the TOT, this translates into the deliberate displacement of Ukrainian national and cultural identity under the guise of introducing a unified system of educational standards.

The Concept explicitly includes participants in the so-called “Special Military Operation” among the “Heroes of the Fatherland”, whose study is designated as mandatory alongside that of veterans of the Second World War. Its implementation plan provides for the systematic involvement of participants and veterans of the so-called SMO in extracurricular historical education activities, the incorporation of support for military personnel into pupils’ volunteering and community projects, and the organisation of annual thematic lessons on the “heroism” of participants in the Second World War and the so-called SMO, reaching more than 50,000 children.⁴⁸

In this way, Russia’s armed aggression against Ukraine is incorporated into the official historical narrative as a continuation of the struggle to “defend the Fatherland”, while the ongoing war is presented to children as a historically inevitable and heroic stage in the development of the Russian state. The implementation of this policy in the temporarily occupied territories is particularly revealing. According to Larisa Tolstykina, a representative of the occupation administration of Donetsk Region, by the first half of 2026, **622 veterans of the so-called SMO** had already been employed as teachers in schools in the occupied part of the region.⁴⁹

At the same time, the Concept provides for the establishment of a centralised digital platform, “Historical Education in Schools”, and an Expert Council based at the Moscow Pedagogical State University, authorised to monitor educational materials and identify so-called “historical falsifications”. In practice, this establishes a mechanism for centralised state control over educational content,

47 <https://www.garant.ru/products/ipo/prime/doc/413034563/>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/3Glgm>

48 https://ds16-krasnodarsk-r76.gosweb.gosuslugi.ru/netcat_files/19/8/Kontseptsiya_istoricheskogo_prosvescheniya_2026.pdf, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/4vK8F>

49 <https://dan-news.ru/obschestvo/tolstykina-rasskazala-skolko-veteranov-svo-prepodajut-v-shkolah/>, archive <https://archive.ph/hST6X>

enabling the removal of alternative interpretations of historical events and the systematic restriction of pupils’ access to Ukrainian and international sources of information. This policy complements the technical information isolation imposed on children in the TOT, as described in Section 1.4 of this report.

Alongside tightening control over the content of education, the RF is also strengthening institutional control over children themselves.⁵⁰ The implementation of the Concept is taking place in parallel with the expansion of legal mechanisms for state supervision of minors. The Federal Law “On the Fundamentals of the System for the Prevention of Offences in the Russian Federation” (No. 182-FZ, as amended on 25 May 2026),⁵¹ which also applies in the TOT of Ukraine, broadens the scope of preventive state oversight of children. This creates a legal basis for applying preventive measures to individuals whose views or behaviour do not conform to the ideological standards imposed by the state.

These changes assumed particular significance in 2026, when the list of the law’s principal areas of preventive activity was expanded. For the first time, it included **“military service”** and **“the protection of historical memory and the prevention of any diminution of the significance of the people’s achievement in defending the Fatherland”**. In this way, Russian legislation formally integrates the promotion of the “correct” historical worldview and a positive attitude towards military service into the system of state supervision.⁵²

A distinctive feature of Federal Law No. 182-FZ is that it treats prevention not merely as a response to offences that have already been committed, but as a system for the early identification of individuals considered to be at risk of “anti-social behaviour” and the application of individual preventive measures to them. This system involves educational authorities, the police, commissions on juvenile affairs, guardianship authorities, social services, and other public institutions engaged in the continuous exchange of information. Moreover, intervention may be triggered not only by specific unlawful acts, but also by any circumstances that authorised officials consider indicative of a potential risk of future offending. In practice, this approach effectively legitimises continuous state monitoring of children under the guise of crime prevention.

The implementation of these provisions is supported through the activities of the so-called interagency commissions for the prevention of offences and commissions on juvenile affairs, which operate across all the TOTs. Among other issues, these commissions have considered the prevention of extremism among minors, the organisation of patriotic education, the monitoring of children’s be-

⁵⁰ For further information on persecution carried out on the pretext of combating extremism, see the report “[How Russia Erases Ukrainian Identity under the Guise of Combating Extremism](#)”.

⁵¹ https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_199976/, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/YGTDh>

⁵² https://vk.com/@ncpti_rnd-dokumenty-po-profilaktike-federalnyi-zakon-182-fz-ob-osnovah, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/uwFaB>

haviour, and cooperation between educational institutions and law enforcement agencies.^{53 54}

Taken together with legislation on countering “extremism”,⁵⁵ the practice of placing children on the register of “terrorists and extremists”, and the new historical education programmes, this system forms a comprehensive mechanism of state surveillance. Educational institutions no longer perform an exclusively educational function and are becoming increasingly integrated into the system of control. In practice, teachers, school administrations, and social pedagogues are assigned the role of identifying children with “undesirable” views, reporting the relevant information to the competent authorities, and subsequently monitoring those children through individual preventive measures. For children in the temporarily occupied territories, this means that expressions of Ukrainian identity, criticism of the Russian occupation, or even refusal to participate in propaganda activities may be treated not as an exercise of freedom of thought or expression, but as grounds for state intervention, placement under preventive supervision, and subsequent persecution.

1.2. Recruitment of Higher Education Students into the Russian Federation’s Newly Established Unmanned Systems Forces

Since the beginning of 2026, the RF has shifted from the systematic militarisation of young people in the TOT to a coordinated recruitment campaign targeting the newly established Unmanned Systems Forces (hereinafter, the USF),⁵⁶ a separate branch of the armed forces created in late 2025. An internal assignment issued by the Ministry of Defence of the RF for “conducting advertising and recruitment activities to attract citizens to military service under contract for the staffing of the Unmanned Systems Forces” (a document marked “For Official Use Only”) confirms that the recruitment of university students is not an isolated phenomenon but an officially planned source of personnel for this new military branch.⁵⁷

53 <https://mariupol-news.ru/society/2026/02/26/137423.html>, archive <https://archive.ph/mw8Ed>

54 https://vk.com/wall-145460148_215043, archive <https://archive.ph/kBOQn>

55 For more detail see the report “[How Russia Erases Ukrainian Identity under the Guise of Combating Extremism](#)”.

56 <https://www.dw.com/ru/v-rossii-sozdany-vojska-bespilotnyh-sistem/a-74710018>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/QU4YK>

57 <https://static.istories.media/uploaded/documents/ac333f06981042608a86176365578e51.pdf>, archive <https://archive.ph/zLwsz>

According to this Ministry of Defence document, the RF plans to establish seven independent brigades, fifteen regiments, seventy battalions, one division, twelve “Rubikon” detachments, twelve heavy UAV companies, and twelve ground robotic systems companies within the USF during 2026. The planned total strength is **78,800 personnel**, including **58,000 reservists**, among whom **students enrolled in military training centres, as well as students of civilian higher education institutions and colleges**, are explicitly identified as a source of recruitment. The document also sets out a number of official recruitment incentives, including the granting of academic leave to students who sign contracts with the USF. In practice, this is promoted through the misleading narrative of “a one-year contract as an academic leave”. The list of priority recruitment targets specifically includes **esports players, aeromodelling enthusiasts, programmers, and individuals with an interest in computer games**.⁵⁸

Recruitment campaigns encouraging students to sign contracts with the USF are also being actively conducted in educational institutions across the TOT.

For example, an investigative report produced as part of the *Donbas Realities* project⁵⁹ documented recruitment campaigns in **at least thirteen educational institutions** across the occupied parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, ranging from technical universities to colleges. All of these institutions have been transferred to the Russian educational system and continue to operate in the TOT under the control of the occupation authorities.

In the TOT of Donetsk Region:

- Donetsk National Technical University,
- Donbas National Academy of Civil Engineering and Architecture,
- Donetsk Institute of Railway Transport,
- Pryazovskiy State Technical University (Mariupol),
- Donetsk University of Economics and Trade named after Tugan-Baranovsky,
- Automobile and Road Institute (Horlivka),
- Colleges of the Donbas Agrarian Academy,
- Donbas State Technical University (Alchevsk).

In the TOT of Luhansk Region:

- Luhansk State University named after V. Dahl,
- Luhansk State Pedagogical University (formerly Taras Shevchenko Luhansk National University),

⁵⁸ <https://static.istories.media/uploaded/documents/ac333f06981042608a86176365578e51.pdf>, archive <https://archive.ph/zLwsz>

⁵⁹ <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/donetsk-lugansk-viyska-bezpilotnykh-system-rosii/33746022.html>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/GrqRL>

- Luhansk College of Construction, Economics and Law,
- Luhansk College of Automotive Service named after A. Hizai,
- Luhansk College of Fashion and Hairdressing.

Students do not need to seek out recruiters in order to respond to these contract offers, as recruitment officers are stationed directly within educational institutions. For example, recruitment activities at Luhansk State University named after V. Dahl⁶⁰ are led by Lieutenant Colonel **Dmitry Yakovlev**, Deputy Head of the university’s Military Training Centre. At the Donetsk Institute of Railway Transport,⁶¹ recruitment presentations were conducted by the so-called Military Commissar for three districts of Donetsk, Lieutenant Colonel **Aleksandr Voronin**, a former participant in Russia’s war against Ukraine since 2014.⁶²

Recruitment is also promoted through organised events and meetings with students. For example, in March 2026:

- ▶ At the Luhansk College of Automotive Service named after A. Hizai (TOT of Luhansk Region), representatives of the Contract Military Service Selection Centre for the USF presented students with what they described as a “special contract scheme”.⁶³



The photos show representatives of the Contract Military Service Selection Centre for the USF conducting a recruitment event with students at the Luhansk College of Automotive Service named after A. Hizai while holding UAVs, together with recruitment leaflets distributed during the event. TOT of Luhansk Region, March 2026. Source – https://vk.com/wall-107732386_2051, archive <https://archive.ph/Ns2tC>, https://vk.com/wall-107732386_2117, archive <https://archive.ph/7rQXw>

60 An educational institution operating in the TOT under Russian educational standards on the premises and infrastructure of East Ukrainian National University named after Volodymyr Dahl, which was relocated to territory under the control of the Government of Ukraine following the beginning of the occupation in 2014.

61 An educational institution that was not relocated to Government-controlled Ukraine and continued operating in the TOT under Russian educational standards.

62 <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/donetsk-lugansk-viyska-bezpylotnykh-system-rosii/33746022.html>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/GrqrL>

63 https://vk.com/wall-107732386_2117, archive <https://archive.ph/7rQXw>

- ▶ At the Dniprorudne Industrial College (TOT of Zaporizhzhia Region), representatives of the Military Commissariat and the Contract Military Service Selection Centre held a recruitment meeting with students, presenting what they described as the “prospects of military service”.⁶⁴



The photo shows representatives of the Military Commissariat and the Contract Military Service Selection Centre conducting a recruitment meeting with students at the Dniprorudne Industrial College. TOT of Zaporizhzhia Region, March 2026. Source - https://vk.com/wall-220002647_654 archive <https://archive.ph/nN1OD>

The effectiveness of the recruitment campaign in the TOT is demonstrated by documented cases of students from educational institutions signing contracts with the RF's USF. The identities of some of these students were published by the *I Want to Live* project. These include the brothers **Andrii** and **Artem Fedoruk** from the **TOT of Zaporizhzhia Region**, both students at the Dniprorudne Industrial College, as well as students from:⁶⁵

- **TOT of the AR of Crimea**, including the Saky College of Technology, Simferopol College of Service Industries and Design, Kerch State Maritime Technological University, Chapaivka Agrotechnological College named after I. Shatilov, Crimean Federal University named after V. Vernadsky, and the Simferopol Polytechnic College;
- **TOT of Luhansk Region**, including Luhansk State University named after Dahl, the Luhansk College of Information Technology and Entrepreneurship, the Luhansk College of Architecture and Construction, the Krasnyi Luch College of Mining and Industry, and the College of the Luhansk State Academy of Culture and Arts named after M. Matusovsky;

⁶⁴ https://vk.com/wall-220002647_654, archive <https://archive.ph/nN1OD>

⁶⁵ The institutions listed below operate in the TOT under Russian educational standards.

- **TOT of Donetsk Region**, including the Mariupol Electromechanical College.⁶⁶

It is also noteworthy that the USF have established an extensive network of training centres across the TOT:

- **TOT of Donetsk Region**: Republican Centre for Unmanned Systems named after V. Zhoga, operated by the Regional Public Organisation of the “Donetsk People’s Republic”; “Akhmat” Training Centre; “Drakon” Training Centre; “DV-Vetra” Training Centre of the Central Group of Forces (*presumed*); “Bu-revestnik” Special Forces Centre.
- **TOT of Luhansk Region**: “Anratsyt” Training Centre; “Akhmat” Training Centre; “Berkut” Training Centre; “Sky Warrior” Training Centre.
- **TOT of Zaporizhzhia Region**: “University-235” Training Centre.
- **City of Sevastopol**: “Altyn” Training Centre; “Alsu” Training Centre.

Moreover, educational institutions in the TOT of Crimea are being used as training sites for specialists serving in the RF’s USF. These include the Crimean Engineering and Pedagogical University named after Fevzi Yakubov and the Simferopol College of Radio Electronics.⁶⁷

According to Russian media reports, representatives of Russian ministries are exerting systematic pressure on educational institutions. In particular, university rectors have reportedly been instructed to ensure that **at least 2 per cent** of their students sign contracts with the Ministry of Defence of the RF.⁶⁸

The misleading nature of the promises of “safe service” under the so-called “special contract” is demonstrated by documented cases of recruited students being killed within the first months after completing their studies. These include two students from Buryatia (RF), who were killed while fighting in Russia’s war against Ukraine in April and May 2026.⁶⁹

Taken together, these findings indicate that the **Ministry of Defence of the RF** has transformed the TOT into both a **source of military personnel and a training base** for operators of the RF’s **USF**. At the same time, educational institutions have been turned into instruments for the early identification and recruitment of young people under the guise of academic guarantees that, in practice, are not honoured.

66 https://x.com/hochuzhit_com/status/2065325422657560652, archive <https://archive.ph/tuDio>

67 <https://static.istories.media/uploaded/documents/ac333f06981042608a86176365578e51.pdf>, archive <https://archive.ph/zLwsz>

68 <https://meduza.io/feature/2026/06/08/kazhdoe-vremya-diktuet-svoi-usloviya>, archive <https://archive.ph/LaXUL>

69 <https://istories.media/news/2026/06/12/vtoroy-zaverbovannyi-v-operatori-bpla-student-iz-buryatii-pogib-na-voyne/>, archive <https://archive.ph/Mxeia>

1.3. The Year of Preschool Education: Expanding Ideological Influence over Preschool Children

One of the defining trends of 2026 has been the further extension of the RF’s state policy of shaping Russian identity and preparing children for future service in the Armed Forces of the RF into the sphere of preschool education. As a result, kindergartens are becoming increasingly integrated into a unified system of ideological influence that systematically encompasses every stage of children’s education and upbringing in the temporarily occupied territories.

More than 171,000 children in the TOT are enrolled in the preschool education system and are effectively subjected to systematic ideological influence from an early age through kindergartens, educational programmes, and state-sponsored patriotic movements.⁷⁰

The Ministry of Education of the RF declared 2026 the Year of Preschool Education.⁷¹ This flagship initiative provides for the concentration of state resources on the preschool sector and the introduction of new programmes that are mandatory across all regions of the RF, including the TOT.

Among these is the **“Kind Games”** programme, an adaptation of the school-based “Conversations about Important Things” initiative. It is designed to instil in children aged 3 to 7 concepts such as the “greater and lesser homeland”, the “Heroes of the Fatherland”, and military service as a civic duty.

At the end of 2025, the programme was piloted,⁷² including in the TOT of Donetsk,⁷³ Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia Regions.⁷⁴ In early 2026, the Institute for the Study of Childhood, Family and Upbringing, which operates under the Ministry of Education of the RF, published methodological guidance for the implementation of the “Kind Games” programme in kindergartens. The guidance focuses on topics including “love for the Motherland, knowledge of Russia’s history and respect for its culture, and the development of concepts of citizenship and civic responsibility”.⁷⁵ In accordance with these guidelines, when introducing the topic “The Peoples of Russia”, preschool teachers are instructed to tell children:

70 For a more detailed analysis, see the article [Influencing the Youngest: How the Occupation Authorities in the TOT Shape Russian Identity among Preschool Children](#).

71 <https://edu.gov.ru/press/10922/2026-god-obyavlen-godom-doshkolnogo-obrazovaniya/>, archive <https://archive.ph/2A4ac>

72 <https://xn--8Qadrabb4aegksdjbafk0u.xn--p1ai/dobrye-igry/>, archive <https://archive.ph/xeuCT>

73 <https://mariupol-news.ru/society/2025/08/04/120537.html>, archive <https://archive.ph/9o5Az>

74 <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/24817587>, archive <https://archive.ph/9o5Az>

75 <https://институтвоспитания.рф/dobrye-igry/>, archive <https://archive.ph/xeuCT>

“There are many of us, and we are all different, but we are united by our love for our Motherland, Russia. To defend our Motherland, we are ready to stand together”. It is also noteworthy that Ukrainians are absent from the list of the peoples of Russia.⁷⁶

From 1 September 2026, the programme will become mandatory for all pre-school institutions across the Russian Federation, including the TOT.

5-7 лет

Народы России

Цель беседы

Воспитывать уважительное отношение к нашей многонациональной Родине — России, государственным символам. Познакомить с государственным праздником «День народного единства», с содержанием праздника, с традициями празднования, памятными местами, героями поступками героев Отечества. Обогащать представления детей о малой родине.

Ценности:
Родина, гражданственность, патриотизм, историческая память и преемственность поколений, дружба.

Основные понятия, личности, факты

Народ, единство, дружба, праздник, Россия, страна, флаг, герб, Кузьма Минин, Дмитрий Пожарский, народы России (русские, татары, башкиры, чуваш), коренные народы (региональный компонент).

ВЗРОСЛЫЙ — РЕБЕНОК (познаём вместе)
Вводная часть в беседу
4 ноября мы отмечаем День народного единства.

Россия — родина для людей разных национальностей, поэтому ее называют многонациональной.

Карточки

- Россия — многонациональная страна
- Флаг России
- Герб России
- Памятник Кузьме Минину и Дмитрию Пожарскому
- Дружба народов
- Русские
- Татары
- Башкиры
- Чуваш
- Коренные народы региона (региональный компонент)

Вывод

Россия имеет свои отличительные знаки: государственные символы (флаг, герб, гимн) и государственный язык, у нас это — русский язык. Нам много, мы все разные, но нас объединяет любовь к нашей Родине — стране России. Для защиты нашей родины мы готовы объединиться. Как много лет назад Минин и Пожарский собрали народное ополчение и вместе освободили Москву от врагов. Вместе мы единый народ и великая сила!

Image shows the page from the methodological guidance on the topic “The Peoples of Russia”. Source: – <https://институтвоспитания.рф/dobrye-igrы/>, archive <https://archive.ph/xеUCT>

Translation of a page of teaching materials on the topic “Peoples of Russia”

Ages 5–7

The Peoples of Russia

Purpose of the discussion

To foster a respectful attitude towards our multinational Motherland, Russia, and its state symbols. To introduce children to the public holiday **National Unity Day**, its significance, traditions of celebration, memorial sites, and prominent figures regarded as Heroes of the Motherland. To broaden children’s understanding of their local homeland.

Values: Motherland, Citizenship, Patriotism, Historical memory and continuity between generations, Friendship

Key concepts, people, and facts

People, Unity, Friendship, Holiday, Russia, Country, Flag, Coat of arms, Kuzma Minin, Dmitry Pozharsky, Peoples of Russia (Russians, Tatars, Bashkirs, Chuvash), Indigenous peoples (*regional component*)

ADULT–CHILD (learning together)

Introduction to the discussion

On 4 November we celebrate National Unity Day.

⁷⁶ <https://www.agents.media/vlasti-tiho-pereimenovali-razgovory-o-vazhnom-v-detskih-sadah-teper-kurs-nazyvaetsya-dobrye-igrы/>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/g5ikU>

Russia is the homeland of people of many nationalities; therefore, it is described as a multinational country.

Teaching cards

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russia is a multinational country • Flag of Russia • Coat of arms of Russia • Monument to Kuzma Minin and Dmitry Pozharsky • Friendship of peoples | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russians • Tatars • Bashkirs • Chuvash • Indigenous peoples of the region (<i>regional component</i>) |
|--|---|

Conclusion

Russia has its own distinctive attributes: state symbols (the flag, coat of arms, and anthem) and a state language, which is Russian. We are all different, but we are united by our love for our Motherland, Russia. To defend our Motherland, we are ready to unite. Just as Minin and Pozharsky gathered a people's militia and together liberated Moscow from its enemies, together we are one people and a great power.

Against the backdrop of the federal *Year of Preschool Education* initiative and the adoption of regional implementation plans,⁷⁷ the TOT have also seen an expansion of specific forms of ideological engagement targeting preschool children.

In April 2026, a primary branch of the Movement of the First was ceremonially opened at *Lastivka* Kindergarten No. 3 in occupied Berdiansk (TOT of Zaporizhzhia Region).⁷⁸ This was the first documented case of preschool children being enrolled in the movement in the TOT of Zaporizhzhia Region.

In May 2026, *Berezka* Kindergarten in the TOT of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea held a themed event marking Border Guard Day of the RF, during which Russian border guards spoke to children about the “defence of the Motherland’s borders”.⁷⁹ The following month, another induction ceremony was held in Bakhchysarai District, where preschool children were admitted to the ideologically oriented “Eaglets of Russia – Preschoolers” programme.⁸⁰

In June 2026, celebrations marking Russia Day extended to kindergartens in the TOT of Donetsk Region, where preschool children took part in themed events featuring Russian state symbols and “patriotic” songs.⁸¹ During the

77 <https://mon.zo.gov.ru/docs/download/240>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/7IK9U>

78 https://t.me/mypervie_zp/7208, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/aiaXS>

79 https://vk.com/wall-148027165_13064, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/OS53e>

80 https://vk.com/wall-214910068_224797, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/xaK3l>

81 https://vk.com/wall-76988535_52019, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/HnMsv>

same month, the TOT of Luhansk Region saw the publication of the illustrated educational booklet “The Patriot’s Alphabet: Luhansk Region from A to Z”, intended for preschool and primary school children. The publication promotes the perception of the occupied region as an integral part of the Russian Federation.⁸²



The image shows the cover of the booklet “The Patriot’s Alphabet: Luhansk Region from A to Z”. Source: – <https://lug-info.ru/news/sbornik-dlja-detej-azbuka-patriota-luganschina-ot-a-do-ja-prezentovan-v-luganske/>, archive <https://archive.ph/11kzj>

A further trend observed in 2026 is the extension of the cadet component to the preschool level. In March 2026, the so-called Ministry of Education of the Republic of Crimea announced the implementation of the “**Kadetiki**” (“Little Cadets”) preschool cadet training project at a combined school and kindergarten in Simferopol (TOT of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea). The project was proposed by the so-called Council under the Ministry of Education of Crimea, with the participation of representatives of schools operating cadet classes. In practice, the project is designed to cultivate loyalty to Russia among preschool children under the guise of “patriotism”, instil “disciplined behaviour”, and prepare them for subsequent enrolment in cadet classes in general education schools.⁸³

82 https://vk.com/wall-200586587_19464, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/1clFG>

83 https://vk.com/wall569927041_3952, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/9tXVw>



The photo shows children from the Simferopol School–Kindergarten participating in the “Kadetiki” (“Little Cadets”) project together with representatives of the Ministry of Emergency Situations of the RF. February 2026, TOT of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. Source - https://vk.com/wall569927041_3952, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/9tXVw>

Thus, the designation of 2026 as the Year of Preschool Education provides an additional policy framework for the introduction of new practices in the TOT. The new federal programmes extend ideological influence to children below school age, effectively transforming kindergartens into the first stage of a system designed to cultivate a “pan-Russian identity”.

1.4. Strengthening the Information Isolation of Children and Young People

In addition to direct ideological influence, the occupation authorities in the TOT are creating an isolated digital environment through technical means, progressively restricting access to sources of information outside the media space controlled by the RF.

At the time of drafting this report, free access to the social media platforms Instagram, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter) has been blocked across all TOT. Access to these platforms is possible only through the use of circumvention tools. Since March–April 2026, the occupation authorities have also begun

actively restricting access to the Telegram messaging platform, one of the few remaining channels through which residents of the occupied territories could communicate with Ukraine and obtain information about developments in government-controlled areas of Ukraine.⁸⁴ However, Telegram has not been blocked entirely. The occupation authorities continue to operate their own Telegram channels while simultaneously compelling all subordinate institutions, including educational establishments, youth movements, and state bodies, to migrate to the Russian state-controlled **messaging platform MAX**.⁸⁵

Developed by Russian specialists, MAX is effectively controlled by the Russian security services. Cybersecurity experts have found that the application collects users’ geolocation data, contact lists, IP addresses, and information about their activity across social media platforms, with this data being transmitted to Russian state authorities. One of the grounds for the Council of the European Union imposing sanctions on 13 July 2026 against VK and the legal entity operating the MAX messaging platform (“Communication Platform”) was the finding that the development of MAX had been carried out under the control of the FSB of the RF. The Council’s decision also states that VK company transferred user data to the Russian authorities.⁸⁶

Residents of the occupied territories have reported cases of pressure from employers following the installation of the application. In one documented case, an employee was summoned by her supervisor to discuss her activities outside working hours after installing MAX. This incident illustrates concerns that MAX is being used as a tool of digital surveillance.⁸⁷

In the TOT of Donetsk Region (including town of Makiivka), educational institutions have reportedly been instructed by the occupation authorities to submit reports on the number of teachers and students connected to MAX.⁸⁸ In the TOT of Luhansk Region, occupation-controlled education authorities announce competitions and youth projects exclusively through the MAX messaging platform.⁸⁹

The compulsory use of MAX is also acquiring a socio-economic dimension. For example, in the TOT of Luhansk Region, large families are required to confirm their entitlement to social benefits using QR codes generated exclusively through the MAX application on the basis of a so-called “Digital ID”. This requirement applies to access to social services, subsidised public transport, and other benefits.⁹⁰

84 <https://szru.gov.ua/news-media/news/chynovnyky-rf-boyatsya-vlasnoho-mesendzhera-i-kupuyut-okremi-telefon-y-dlya-ax>, archive <https://archive.ph/IU6xu>

85 <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/novyny-pryazovya-tsyfrovyi-kontrol-okupatsiyi-vpn-max/33546234.html>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/FPPW>

86 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:L_202601708

87 <https://zlamavka.com/9-sentyabrya-2025-okkupyrovannaya-hersonskaya-oblast-ukrayna/>, archive <https://archive.ph/qqaTq>

88 https://t.me/sprotyv_official/8302, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/7S4Rq>

89 <https://t.me/minobrn/20110>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/SvBtZ>

90 https://t.me/sfr_lnr/4846, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/KI7pL>

In practice, access to social entitlements is made conditional upon the installation of an application controlled by the Russian security services.

In addition, the RF exercises control over the internet infrastructure. Only internet service providers controlled by Russia operate in the TOT, and they employ the so-called Technical Means for Countering Threats (TMCT), a technical system that enables the selective blocking of internet traffic. The latest step in this process has been the blocking of VPN services, which until recently remained the only means of accessing blocked Ukrainian and international websites, as well as online learning services. At the same time, Article 13.53 of the Code of Administrative Offences of the RF, introduced in September 2025, establishes administrative liability for the “intentional search for extremist materials” on the internet, including through the use of VPNs or other circumvention tools. The offence is punishable by a fine of up to 5,000 roubles.⁹¹

Under these conditions, the internet in the TOT is effectively transformed into a closed network providing access only to Russian and pro-Russian online resources. Children and young people who remain in the temporarily occupied territories are placed in an information vacuum, significantly undermining their ability to preserve their Ukrainian identity. At the same time, their digital environment is subject to continuous surveillance by the Russian security services, creating additional risks of persecution on the basis of their pro-Ukrainian views or their contacts with government-controlled areas of Ukraine.

91https://sozd.duma.gov.ru/bill/755710-8#bh_histras, archive <https://archive.ph/n4W4O>

II. Continuation and Intensification of Previously Introduced Russian Practices

2.1. Intensification of the Militarisation of Children and Young People

The militarisation of children and young people in the TOT not only continued during the first half of 2026, but also expanded in scale.

One of the principal platforms for the militarisation of children is the VOIN (Warrior) Centre.⁹²

In May 2026, at a conference in Moscow, the Centre’s leadership presented a report on its activities, according to which:

- more than 120,000 children and young people have completed training at the Centre since 2022, including over 5,500 from the occupied territories;
- the Centre operates 21 regional branches, including branches in all TOT regions;
- 288 instructors who are veterans of the so-called “SMO” are expected to be recruited as trainers.⁹³

Since 2026, the **VOIN Centre** has also replaced its single 72-hour “Time of Young Heroes” programme with a system of 14 specialised training programmes

92 For further information on this centre, see the article [Warriors for the Russian regime. How Russia militarises Ukrainian children from the temporarily occupied territories](#)

93 <https://edu.gov.ru/press/11208/>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/7nViU>

covering **FPV drone operation, tactical and firearms training, sniper training, assault tactics, reconnaissance, and survival.**⁹⁴



The photo shows participants in the VOIN Centre. Source: – <https://t.me/crvsp2023/11198>, archive <https://archive.ph/jUA8c>

At the same time, the VOIN Centre launched the “Shoulder to Shoulder” programme, a 12-week course organised along military platoon structures for adolescents aged 14–17, covering combat medicine and tactical training.⁹⁵ Notably, as part of the same programme, participants from the Zaporizhzhia branch (TOT of Zaporizhzhia Region) compiled “guides to the region’s military glory”, describing combat tactics adapted to the local terrain.⁹⁶ At the same time, they conducted masterclasses for children at the Melitopol Centre for Social and Psychological Rehabilitation, thereby deliberately extending these activities to socially vulnerable children living in institutional care.⁹⁷

The involvement of children in militarisation under the guise of military-patriotic games has continued. In 2026, the third season of **Zarnitsa 2.0** is being conducted in six stages (qualifying, municipal, zonal, regional, district, and the all-Russian final). In addition to the *Movement of the First and Young Army*, the *VOIN Centre for Military and Sports Training* has been added to the list of organisers. During the monitoring period, the qualifying, municipal, zonal, and regional stages of the competition were held **across all TOT**:

- **Donetsk Region:** At the Olimp Stadium in occupied Shakhtarsk, 120 schoolchildren competed in the roles of UAV operators, assault troops, combat engineers, and military correspondents.⁹⁸ A further 110 children participated in the militarised competition in occupied Mariupol.⁹⁹

94 <https://t.me/crvsp2023/11198>, archive <https://archive.ph/jUA8c>

95 https://t.me/crvsp_zo/1930, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/mUCZw>

96 https://t.me/crvsp_zo/1761, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/dNgVH>

97 https://t.me/crvsp_zo/1815, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/sFRfV>

98 <https://surl.li/nnjoeg>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/CCDwC>

99 https://t.me/mypervie_dnr/13305, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/8wrWf>



The images show screenshots from a video of the Zarnitsa 2.0 competition in occupied Mariupol (TOT of Donetsk Region). May 2026. Source - https://t.me/mypervie_dnr/13305, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/8wrW1>

- **Luhansk Region:** The competition was held at the Military Training Centre of Luhansk State University, with the participation of representatives of the 3rd Combined Arms Army of the Russian Federation. Three hundred children qualified for the regional stage of the competition, where they competed in drill, tactical medicine, CBRN defence,¹⁰⁰ and survival skills.¹⁰¹
- **Zaporizhzhia Region:** In occupied Melitopol and Berdiansk, 360 school pupils and college students took part in the municipal stage of the competition.^{102 103}

100 CBRN defence – chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear defence

101 <https://t.me/mypervielnr/16044>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/dQtK1>

102 <https://t.me/BalitskyEV/8019>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/QtBkH>

103 <https://www.mk-zap.ru/social/2026/05/06/na-zaporozhe-podveli-itogi-municipalnykh-etapov-igr-zarnica-20.html>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/OoAwX>

- **Kherson Region:** The municipal stage involved 319 participants in 29 teams, competing in rifle assembly and disassembly, UAV operation, and other military skills.^{104 105} The participants were trained by Rosgvardiya instructors.¹⁰⁶
- **Crimea:** 250 participants qualified for the regional stage of the competition. This year, a separate “UAV Operator” category was introduced for the first time, covering both **reconnaissance and strike drones**.¹⁰⁷
- **Sevastopol:** At Patriot Park in occupied Sevastopol, children from 15 educational institutions competed in the regional stage of the competition in marksmanship, tactical medicine, and UAV operation.¹⁰⁸



The photo shows a participant in the Zarnitsa 2.0 competition operating a UAV. May 2026, TOT of Sevastopol. Source - https://t.me/sev_yunarmiya/3643, archive <https://archive.ph/cbBxu>

In June, the winners of the regional stages advanced to the district-level competition in Volgograd (RF), where they competed in individual military specialisations, including commander, combat engineer, assault troop, UAV operator, and combat medic, as well as in team disciplines such as tactical medicine, firearms training, CBRN defence, and survival skills. The programme also included a “Final Battle” event for participants in the intermediate age category.¹⁰⁹

A distinct trend in the militarisation of children and young people during the first half of 2026 was the expansion of UAV training. Instruction in

104 <https://t.me/mypervie84/14192>, apxib <https://archive.ph/wip/pqsnNb>

105 https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/39071, apxib <https://archive.ph/wip/93vd2>

106 <https://t.me/mypervie84/14238>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/FOjTV>

107 https://vk.com/wall-195779511_10077, archive <https://archive.ph/Gaxwz>

108 https://t.me/sev_yunarmiya/3643, archive <https://archive.ph/cbBxu>

109 <https://crvp.ru/news/pobediteli-regionalnyh-etapov-zarnitsy-20-poborjutsja-za-vyhod-v-final-na-okruzh>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/yCKHs>

drone operation has become increasingly integrated into both curricular and extracurricular activities across all **TOT**, under the guise of **“technical creativity”** and the development of **“civilian skills”**. The following are just a few examples documented during the monitoring period:

TOT of the AR of Crimea: A practical training event for secondary vocational education (SVE) students was held at the “Shershen” (Hornet) UAV Operator Training Centre. The programme included independent drone flights, simulator training, and tactical medicine, and was conducted as part of the “Personnel Reserve of UAV Operators of the Republic of Crimea” project, implemented on the instructions of the so-called head of Crimea, Sergey Aksyonov.¹¹⁰ Participants were selected through the “Unmanned Technologies” programme offered at colleges in Simferopol and Yevpatoria. Notably, the programme explicitly provides for the “involvement of general education school students” with the aim of creating a “continuous educational pathway from school to an in-demand profession”.¹¹¹ In practice, this means that the training of UAV operators is intended to begin at school age.



The photo shows SVE students receiving practical UAV operation training at the “Shershen” UAV Operator Training Centre. April 2026, TOT of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. Source – https://vk.com/wall-148027165_12601, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/JF2VT>

In addition, at the *Artek* centre, Technodinamika (a subsidiary of the “Rostec” State Corporation) launched drone operation courses for schoolchildren aged 13–17 as part of the “First Altitude” educational track.¹¹² “Rostec” is subject to international sanctions for financing and supporting the military-industrial complex of the RF.¹¹³ It is also noteworthy that a 3D printing laboratory funded by Artek manufactures components for combat drones and tactical equipment for the Russian armed forces.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ https://vk.com/wall-148027165_12601, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/JF2VT>

¹¹¹ <https://t.me/minobrKrima/15859>, archive <https://archive.ph/LWCTq>

¹¹² <https://sur.li/lhhdqe>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/Gv8Pj>

¹¹³ <https://war-sanctions.gur.gov.ua/roster?kc%5Bh%5D=4664&kc%5Bsearch%5D=>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/rrUkw>

¹¹⁴ <https://www.herson.kp.ru/online/news/6951454/>, archive <https://archive.ph/RiQ7l>

TOT of Kherson Region: At the Patriot Centre, schoolchildren and adolescents participate in practical training sessions on FPV drone operation.¹¹⁵

In addition to organised military-patriotic games, the occupation authorities conduct camps with an explicitly combat-oriented programme. The “SHTORM-Crimea” camp, held in occupied Bakhchysarai (TOT of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea) in April 2026, brought together 120 schoolchildren and university students, including participants from the TOT of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the TOT of Kherson Region, for a 10-day programme that included FPV drone operation, live-fire weapons training, tactical medicine, parachute jumps, and career guidance sessions with representatives of the FSB, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), the Investigative Committee, and other security agencies. The programme also included specialised training courses designed to prepare recruits for OMON units, reconnaissance units, and the Unmanned Forces.¹¹⁶

Beyond direct military training, the occupation authorities continue to involve children in providing material support to the Russian armed forces. For example, in schools in occupied Simferopol, pupils are forced to weave camouflage nets for the Russian military under the threat of punishment,¹¹⁷ while more than 200 children at the Artek branch in Berdiansk (TOT of Zaporizhzhia Region) assembled hygiene kits for Russian soldiers.¹¹⁸ At the same time, “Lessons of Courage” featuring serving and former members of the Russian armed forces continue to be conducted in schools across all TOT.^{119 120 121 122}

Thus, the militarisation of children and young people in the TOT during the first half of 2026 not only continued the previously documented practices of involving children in militarised organisations, games, and camps, but also assumed new forms. These include the establishment of an extensive network of combat training centres and programmes, as well as the deliberate integration of UAV operation training into the education system. This complements the recruitment system for the RF’s USF described above by preparing potential recruits from school age.

115 <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/27186769>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/u7Oy7>

116 <https://crimea24tv.ru/content/120-shkolnikov-i-studentov-iz-raznikh-reg/>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/K2HkM>

117 <https://inijir.org/shkolnyie-klassyi-kak-masterskie-dlya-voynyi-v-kryimu-uchenikov-zastavlyayut-plesti-maskirovochnyie-setki-dlya-nuid-okkupatsionnoy-armii-26-03-2026/>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/bXSSZ>

118 https://t.me/mypervie_zp/7468, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/l5LVz>

119 https://vk.com/wall-9400288_548033, archive <https://archive.ph/mQmzl>

120 <https://t.me/mypervie84/11672>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/aTspc>

121 <https://t.me/mypervie84/11498>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/khpvr>

122 <https://t.me/YugMolodoj/32271>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/FrmNF>

2.2. Ideological Indoctrination and Militarisation of the Educational Environment

The ideological reshaping of education in the TOT began during the first months of the occupation and has evolved through successive layers of policy measures. Monitoring of the situation in the TOT during the first half of 2026 indicates a qualitative shift: ideological influence through education and the involvement of veterans of the so-called “SMO” in work with children have ceased to be isolated practices and have become systematic measures embedded in the regulatory framework.

During the 2025–2026 academic year, the subject “Spiritual and Moral Culture of Russia” (SMCR) was introduced on a pilot basis, including in the TOT of the AR of Crimea and Sevastopol.¹²³ Its stated purpose is to shape children’s worldview on the basis of “traditional values” and to foster ideological loyalty to the state. By Order No. 808 of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation, dated 10 November 2025 and registered with the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation on 11 February 2026, the subject was granted the status of a mandatory component of the school curriculum.¹²⁴ The subject will be introduced in phases, beginning with Grade 5 in the 2026–2027 academic year, and extending to Grades 6 and 7 in the 2027–2028 academic year.¹²⁵ The compulsory introduction of the subject will also apply to all TOT, as has already been confirmed by representatives of the occupation authorities. For the course, 83 “heroes” have been selected, including participants in the so-called “SMO”, about whom documentary films will be produced.¹²⁶ Notably, the introduction of SMCR is accompanied by a reduction in instructional time allocated to foreign language teaching.¹²⁷ As a result, this ideological subject displaces not only academic content but also one of the principal means through which children can communicate with the world beyond Russia.

The Russian Federation began the practice of standardising textbooks according to its own educational standards as early as 2025. Since 2026, however, this standardisation has expanded beyond the “History of Russia” course. In June, the Government of the Russian Federation officially announced the de-

¹²³ For further details, see the report [Russia’s Policy of Eradicating the Identity of Children in the TOT of Ukraine: Results for 2025](#)

¹²⁴ <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/document/0001202602120006>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/BFyhX>

¹²⁵ <https://edu.gov.ru/press/t1077/aleksandr-bugaev-s-1-sentyabrya-nachnetsya-poetapnoe-vvedenie-predmeta-duhovno-nravstvennaya-kultura-rossii/>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/IW48u>

¹²⁶ <https://melitopolnews.ru/society/2026/06/25/136458.html>, archive <https://archive.ph/cHLVW>

¹²⁷ <https://t.me/minobrn/19749>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/RhHYQ>

velopment of unified state textbooks on regional history for the TOT, entitled “The History of Donbas and Novorossiia”.¹²⁸



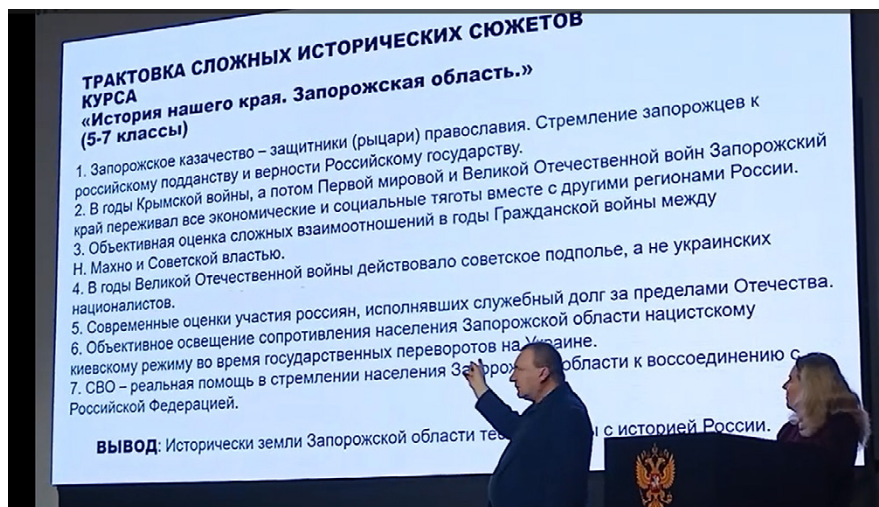
The image shows a screenshot of the covers of the “The History of Donbas and Novorossiia” and “History of Russia” textbooks presented at the World Congress of History Teachers. June 2026, Moscow. Source – https://m.vkvideo.ru/video-49388814_456342750, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/gfmm5>.

At the time of drafting this report, the “History of Donbas and Novorossiia” textbooks had not been made publicly available. As a result, it is not yet possible to conduct a reliable analysis of their content. During the monitoring period, however, an educational seminar was held for teachers in the TOT of Zaporizhzhia Region on the implementation of the “History of Our Region: Zaporizhzhia Region” module for Grades 5–7.¹²⁹ At the seminar, historian V. Gnedashev presented the course content in detail and instructed teachers on approaches to teaching “complex historical topics”. An analysis of the curriculum presented at the seminar indicates that it is intended to serve as a key instrument for rewriting local and regional history. For example, the course places prominent Ukrainian Cossack figures, including Ivan Sirko and Petro Kalnyshevsky, within a Russian imperial narrative alongside Grigory Potemkin and Mikhail Vorontsov as “developers of Novorossiia”. It also omits the Holodomor, characterises the 2022 invasion as “reunification”, and explicitly describes the Armed Forces of Ukraine as “terrorist groups”.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ https://t.me/government_rus/30581, archive <https://archive.ph/PvFlx>

¹²⁹ <https://t.me/obrzp/38444> archive <https://archive.ph/lWxZi>

¹³⁰ <https://rutube.ru/video/8fd9494b2b3b16739799e7635e2f3dc4/?r=wd>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/HNLx6>



The image shows a screenshot from a video of a teacher training seminar in the TOT of Zaporizhzhia Region on the implementation of the History of Our Region: Zaporizhzhia Region module. The slide presents official guidance on teaching “complex historical topics,” including the portrayal of the 2022 invasion as “reunification”. February 2026, TOT of Zaporizhzhia Region. Source: <https://rutube.ru/vid-eo/8fd9494b2b3b16739799e7635e2f3dc4/?r=wd>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/HNLx6>

Another new measure introduced by the occupation authorities is the introduction of a mandatory oral history examination for Grade 9 pupils beginning in the 2027–2028 academic year.¹³¹ Given the standardised content of textbooks and the Concept of Historical Enlightenment described in Section 1.3, the examination is designed not so much to assess historical knowledge as to verify students’ assimilation of the state’s ideological narrative.

At the same time, the military component of the general school curriculum is being further strengthened. The Minister of Education of the Russian Federation, Sergey Kravtsov, announced that **from 1 September 2026, the proportion of basic military training within the Fundamentals of Security and Defence of the Fatherland course for Grades 6–11 will increase from 20% to 50% of instructional time.** The revised curriculum also includes the **study of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs)** and compulsory field training exercises.¹³² As a result, more than half of the instructional time allocated to a subject formally presented as a “security” course will now be devoted to direct military training for schoolchildren.

¹³¹ <https://edu.gov.ru/press/11140/sergey-kravcov-s-2027-28-uchebnogo-goda-budet-vveden-obyazatelnyy-ustnyy-ekzamen-po-istorii-dlya-vypusknikov-9-h-klassov/>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/tBkDQ>

¹³² https://t.me/government_rus/30627, archive <https://archive.ph/YQqrq>

A further notable development is the **integration of veterans of the so-called “SMO” into the educational environment**. Whereas in 2022–2023 meetings between participants in the so-called “SMO” and schoolchildren were largely limited to one-off “Lessons of Courage”, from 2024 onwards, particularly following the launch of the “Time of Heroes” personnel programme, this practice became systematic. During the first half of 2026, it evolved further through the employment of former servicemen as teachers in educational institutions and their regular involvement in the educational process.

At the personnel policy level, the key instrument is the presidential “Time of Heroes” initiative, a federal programme that retrain veterans of the so-called “SMO” for employment in public sector positions, including in education. The programme is implemented through regional counterparts across all TOT: “Heroes of Luhansk Region” – the fourth and final training module was completed in June 2026, after which participants were expected to transition to “practical work” in the region;¹³³ “Heroes of Crimea” – certificates were presented in the presence of the so-called Head of Crimea, Sergey Aksyonov, programme participants subsequently visited Artek and held meetings with children;¹³⁴ “Heroes of Zaporizhzhia Region” – the second and third training modules, held in Berdiansk, focused on regional governance, including the management of the education sector;¹³⁵ ¹³⁶ “Heroes of Kherson Region” – veterans held meetings with students at colleges.¹³⁷ The *Young Army* chief personally reported the programme’s “successes” to Vladimir Putin.¹³⁸

At the extracurricular level, regular meetings with veterans of combat units have become an established practice. A notable example was documented in the TOT of Donetsk Region, where, as part of the “I Serve the Fatherland” campaign, schoolchildren met with a so-called veteran of the assault company of the 105th Regiment, whose unit participated in the capture of Mariupol. During the meeting, he spoke to children in Mariupol about “teamwork on the front line” and “cohesion in critical situations”.¹³⁹ In occupied Crimea, “Lessons of Courage” at Artek were conducted by veterans of combat units that participated in the so-called “SMO”.¹⁴⁰

Taken together, these practices constitute a self-reinforcing system. Standardised textbooks eliminate alternative historical perspectives; new compulsory subjects establish the ideological foundation; the mandatory oral history examination verifies students’ assimilation of that narrative; and the direct transmis-

133 https://vk.com/wall-200586587_19976, archive <https://archive.ph/X4mDB>
 134 https://artek.org/news/medianews_2026_05_25_2, archive <https://archive.ph/hilC4>
 135 <https://t.me/bmvabrzo/9041>, archive <https://archive.ph/3XLV3>
 136 <https://news-zp.ru/society/2026/07/01/673444.html>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/qXhtD>
 137 <https://t.me/depobrherson/16963>, archive <https://archive.ph/OdB6e>
 138 <https://t.me/yunarmya/15260>, archive <https://archive.ph/DBwTS>
 139 <https://t.me/mariupol24tv/126142>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/yG7qt>
 140 https://artek.org/news/medianews_2026_05_21, archive <https://archive.ph/Zpeay>

sion of “combat experience” and militarised values is entrusted to former servicemen, who are no longer merely invited speakers but increasingly become full-time teachers and mentors within the education system.

2.3. Institutionalisation of Behavioural Monitoring of Children

Beginning with the 2025–2026 academic year, the Russian Federation launched a pilot programme introducing a new system for assessing pupils’ behaviour in schools. Officially presented as an “educational tool”, the system is scheduled to become mandatory in all schools across the RF, including the TOT, from the 2027–2028 academic year.

During the first year of the pilot, the programme was implemented in 89 schools across seven regions, including the so-called “LPR”. In total, approximately 40,000 pupils in Grades 1–8 participated in the pilot programme.¹⁴¹ Following its completion, a uniform three-tier behavioural assessment model was adopted, under which pupils’ behaviour is classified as “exemplary”, “acceptable”, or “unacceptable” on the basis of four criteria: discipline, social interaction, personal qualities, and engagement in learning. The corresponding amendments were incorporated into Order No. 115 of the Ministry of Education of the RF, which was registered with the Ministry of Justice of the RF on 29 May 2026.¹⁴² The Order also establishes a formal procedure for removing a pupil from the classroom. If a pupil fails to respond to a teacher’s warning, a member of the school administration is called to decide whether the pupil should be removed from the lesson and to conduct a “preventive conversation”.¹⁴³

During the 2026–2027 academic year, the pilot programme is being significantly expanded to include **10 schools in each of the Russian Federation’s 89 regions**, including all the **TOT**.¹⁴⁴ Valentina Lavryk, a representative of the occupation Ministry of Education of Crimea, publicly presented the initiative as an “important educational measure” that would help “develop children’s understanding of social norms and rules of behaviour”.¹⁴⁵

141 <https://www.pnp.ru/social/ocenki-za-povedenie-i-edinye-uchebniki-chto-izmenitsya-v-rossiyskikh-shkolakh.html>, archive <https://archive.ph/XZXin>

142 <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/document/0001202605300016?index=1>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/nkyDn>

143 <https://www.pnp.ru/social/ocenki-za-povedenie-i-edinye-uchebniki-chto-izmenitsya-v-rossiyskikh-shkolakh.html>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/XZXin>

144 <https://dan-news.ru/science/v-rossiyskikh-shkolakh-v-sleduiuschem-godu-budut-stavit-ocenki-za-povedenie/>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/EK4KO>

145 <https://crimea24tv.ru/content/desyat-krimskikh-shkol-nachnut-ocenivat/>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/WujWB>

Official rhetoric presents the system as a means of “protecting the honour and dignity of teachers” and promoting discipline. In the TOT, however, where the criteria for “exemplary” and “unacceptable” behaviour are determined by the occupation authorities, and where “personal qualities” and “social interaction” are assessed by collaborating teachers, the system assumes a fundamentally different function. It creates a formalised mechanism for identifying and sanctioning any behaviour that deviates from the imposed ideological norms, including a child’s pro-Ukrainian views or unwillingness to participate in “patriotic” activities. Combined with the preventive commissions described in Section 1.1, the behavioural assessment system constitutes an additional layer of institutional control over children in the TOT.

2.4. Forced Passportisation of Children and Institutional Control over Children Deprived of Parental Care

The practice of ceremonially presenting RF passports to children in the TOT has evolved into a systematic public ritual intended to legitimise the occupation and to make it de facto more difficult for children to return to the Ukrainian legal framework. In May 2026, a ceremonial presentation of first RF passports was held at Artek, attended by the Minister of Education of the RF, Sergey Kravtsov.¹⁴⁶



The photo shows Sergey Kravtsov with minors during the ceremonial presentation of Russian Federation passports. May 2026, TOT of the AR of Crimea. Source - https://artek.org/news/medianews_2026_05_26_4, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/OjpnC>

In June 2026, a similar ceremony was held in occupied Sevastopol, where school leavers received their first Russian passports during Sevastopol’s City Day celebrations.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ https://artek.org/news/medianews_2026_05_26_4, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/OjpnC>

¹⁴⁷ https://vk.com/wall-30716644_39685, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/uqKHC>



The photo shows minors who were issued Russian Federation passports. June 2026, TOT of Sevastopol. Source – https://vk.com/wall-30716644_39685, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/uqKHC>

In Berdiansk (the TOT of Zaporizhzhia Region), the first RF passports were publicly presented to members of the local school branch of the *Movement of the First*.¹⁴⁸

Passportisation is reinforced through a systematic mechanism of coercion, as access to social benefits, healthcare, and educational services is made directly conditional upon possession of a RF passport, both by the child and by their parents. In practice, this means that refusing passportisation effectively amounts to forfeiting access to basic social guarantees. Since 20 January 2026, an additional requirement has been introduced: **children under the age of 14 must possess a RF international passport to cross the border**.¹⁴⁹ This further entrenches children within the Russian legal framework and makes it significantly more difficult for them to leave the occupied territory without the consent of the occupation authorities.

Children deprived of parental care remain a particularly vulnerable category. In June 2026, Inna Shvenk, the so-called Commissioner for Children’s Rights of the occupation “LPR”, stated that **since the beginning of 2026, 24 children had been placed with families in other regions of the RF under guardianship or through adoption**.¹⁵⁰

This contradicts the long-standing public position of Maria Lvova-Belova, who has consistently maintained that there has been no systematic adoption of Ukrainian children and has instead emphasised their “reunification with families”. This position is also reflected in the latest Bulletin of the Presidential Commissioner for Children’s Rights of the RF.¹⁵¹

148 https://t.me/mypervie_zp/7391, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/XluNt>

149 <https://t.me/malvovabelova/6182>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/9t2s0>

150 <https://lug-info.ru/comments/detskij-ombudsmen-lnr-inna-shvenk-v-respublike-dejstvuet-semesberegajuschij>, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/hri4U>

151 <https://deti.gov.ru/uploads/magic/ru-RU/Document-O-436-src-1778137046.1843.pdf>, archive <https://archive.ph/7u7cq>

Forced passportisation in the **TOT** is therefore not merely an administrative procedure but a deliberate instrument of the legal alienation of children from Ukraine. Through public ceremonies, it operates symbolically; by linking access to social rights to RF citizenship, it operates economically; and by requiring a RF international passport for border crossings, it operates physically by restricting children’s freedom of movement. For children deprived of parental care, these mechanisms are particularly difficult to reverse. Cases of children being placed with Russian families accompanied by changes to their names, together with public statements by occupation officials acknowledging adoptions that contradict the RF’s official position, indicate the existence of a concealed practice whose true scale exceeds what the occupying authorities officially admit.

2.5. Russification and the Replacement of Ukrainian Identity

The displacement of Ukrainian identity in the TOT is carried out through two parallel mechanisms: mass public events linked to RF state holidays, and organised educational and ideological programmes that impose on children a historical narrative aligned with the interests of the RF.



The photo shows participants during a Russia Day event. June 2026, TOT of Sevastopol.
Source – https://vk.com/wall-101503754_29188, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/1RkKA>

The celebration of RF state holidays in the TOT is not spontaneous. It is organised by the occupation authorities through educational institutions and youth movements and constitutes a compulsory element of both school and extra-curricular life. In June 2026, Russia Day was celebrated in the “Russia – My History” historical parks across all TOT, with schoolchildren required to participate in themed activities.¹⁵² Youth centres in occupied Sevastopol organised

celebrations for teenagers, during which participants painted matryoshka dolls and canvases, created an “interactive map of Russia”, and wrote “letters to the Russia of the future”. The event concluded with an informal musical gathering entitled “The Soul of Russia”.¹⁵³ Schools across all TOT subsequently reported on the implementation of the corresponding activities.

Another systematic practice is the organised transfer of children from all TOT to the New Chersonesus museum and temple complex in occupied Sevastopol, which effectively serves as an ideological centre promoting “Russian spirituality and statehood”. The programme is implemented on the personal instructions of Vladimir Putin and under the patronage of the Ministry of Education of the RF and the Crimean Metropolitanate of the Russian Orthodox Church. In 2025, more than **1,000 schoolchildren** from the occupied parts of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions visited the complex as part of the “We Are Together” and “Chersonesus for Children projects”.¹⁵⁴ In 2026, the programme was expanded. Under the “Children of Crimea in New Chersonesus” project alone, more than **10,000 schoolchildren** from Crimea are expected to participate,¹⁵⁵ while the overall programme across all TOT is planned to reach at least **1,000 children from the “reunified regions”**, with priority given to the children of participants in the so-called “SMO” and activists of the *Movement of the First*.¹⁵⁶ The programme includes guided tours of the “Museums of Crimea and Novorossiia”, discussions with Orthodox priests, and themed evening events aimed at promoting the perception of Crimea and Sevastopol as an integral part of Russia and as the “cradle of Russian statehood”.

Sergey Kravtsov, the Minister of Education of the RF, described the programme as one that “has proven its effectiveness” in “developing a deep understanding of historical heritage”, thereby explicitly acknowledging its ideological rather than purely educational purpose.¹⁵⁷

Taken together, these practices demonstrate that the Russification of children in the TOT is pursued simultaneously through the saturation of school and extracurricular life with RF state holidays and through the organised physical transfer of children to symbolic centres of “Russian identity”. Collectively, these measures create a self-contained value system from which Ukrainian cultural and national identity is systematically excluded.

153 https://vk.com/wall-101503754_29188, archive <https://archive.ph/wip/1RkKA>

154 <https://nts-tv.com/news/v-sevastopole-realizuyut-proekt-dlya-shkolnikov-iz-56963/>, archive <https://archive.ph/HYHvA>

155 https://vk.com/wall-119494456_10182, archive <https://archive.ph/1SwzN>

156 https://vk.com/wall-215245628_3059, archive <https://archive.ph/BZKMg>

157 <https://crimea-eparhia.ru/176711.html>, archive <https://archive.ph/obygE>

Conclusions

Monitoring of the situation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine during the first half of 2026 indicates a qualitative shift in Russia's policy towards children and young people: from a collection of parallel practices to a unified, normatively codified and institutionally supported system designed to create a “new generation of Russians” in the TOT.

This system operates simultaneously at several levels. **At the level of physical mobilisation**, it functions through the recruitment of university students into the Unmanned Systems Forces, militarised camps, military games, and UAV training programmes introduced from school age and even in preschool education. **At the level of ideological influence**, it relies on compulsory subjects (including SMCR and the Fundamentals of Security and Defence of the Fatherland course, with 50% of instructional time devoted to military training), standardised regional history textbooks, the Concept of Historical Enlightenment, and programmes such as “Kind Games” for the youngest children. **At the level of information isolation**, it operates through the blocking of messaging platforms, the forced transition to the security service-controlled MAX messenger, and criminal liability for the use of VPN services. **At the level of legal and administrative coercion**, it is implemented through passportisation, making access to social guarantees conditional on RF citizenship, and behavioural assessments based on ideological criteria, transforming schools into an integral component of the state surveillance system.

A defining feature of 2026 is that the majority of the documented practices have now been formally codified at the federal level of the RF and de facto extended to the TOT through the automatic application of Russian legislation in the occupied territories. This demonstrates that these measures are not isolated initiatives but elements of a deliberate state policy, implemented through a vertically integrated system of governance extending from federal ministries to the occupation authorities exercising local administrative functions.

Two groups of children require particular attention as being especially vulnerable: **preschool and younger school-age children**, who are subjected to ideological indoctrination before their critical-thinking skills have fully developed, and **children deprived of parental care**, for whom placement with Russian families and the effective impossibility of return may have irreversible consequences. A further alarming trend is the systematic recruitment of university students into combat units under the guise of academic guarantees that are not honoured in practice.

Taken together, the documented practices indicate potential violations of Article 50 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits an occupying power

from altering the education system to promote its own ideology; Article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which guarantees a child's right to an education that respects their cultural identity; and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, insofar as it concerns the forcible transfer of children and the deliberate alteration of their identity. These findings warrant the urgent attention of international human rights and accountability mechanisms and should be systematically documented as evidence to support future efforts to hold those responsible for the design and implementation of these policies accountable.

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