

YOUR MUM STAYS, AND YOU WILL COME WITH US

CASES OF THE SEPARATION
OF UKRAINIAN CHILDREN FROM
THEIR PARENTS BY RUSSIAN AUTHORITIES
WHEN THEY UNDERWENT
THE FILTRATION PROCEDURE

*Based on the materials
gathered by field researchers
of The Reckoning Project*

KYIV, 2026

A woman and a child are walking away from the viewer on a road. The woman is pushing a stroller and carrying a bag. The child is holding her hand. In the background, there is a roadblock with a red and white striped barrier. A soldier in a dark uniform and hooded jacket stands near the barrier, holding a rifle. To the right, a Russian flag is flying on a pole. The road is paved and has a white line. The background is a dark teal color.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report, prepared by the Research Laboratory of The Reckoning Project (TRP), documents and analyzes the practice of the forcible separation of Ukrainian children from their parents or guardians during Russian “filtration” measures — a procedure of coercive screening of civilians conducted by Russian security forces in occupied territories to identify “disloyal” citizens. These procedures are often accompanied by unlawful detention, torture, and forced displacement. The main objective of this study is to draw attention to the magnitude of psychological harm inflicted on children, as well as identifying the Russian Federation’s systematic instrumentalization of Ukrainian children as “resources.”

Key conclusions of the study:

Systematic practice of separating children from their parents/guardians: This qualitative study is based on 18 testimonies describing incidents that occurred between February and October 2022 in areas of active hostilities and/or in occupied territories. The documented separations are typically linked to the filtration process, carried out by Russian military, law enforcement, and the broader administrative structures in occupied territories.

Instrumentalization of children: The analysis reveals a common pattern: Occupying authorities never attempted to locate the children’s relatives in Ukrainian-controlled territory. Instead, they immediately sought to alienate children from their state to “integrate” them into Russian society — by issuing Russian passports, preparing them for adoption, or placing them in social care institutions. This confirms an instrumental approach aimed at the demographic transformation and political erasures of the occupied territories.

Traumatic experience for children: Forced separation in the context of the ongoing hostilities and occupation constitutes a multi-layered, traumatic experience. These processes are likely the cause of significant and long-term psychological harm, manifested in adjustment disorders and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among the population sampled. The consequences of this harm manifests in, among others, excessive anxiety, distrust of adults, fear of punishment, cognitive impairments, manifestations of regressive behavior, as well as destructive, self-blaming thoughts.

Transformation of filtration measures: The filtration system introduced by the Russian authorities has transformed into a more structured and efficient repressive mechanism. The actors involved in managing the filtration process have changed (a more active role is now played by the Rosgvardia and the Military Police of the Russian Federation), and the criteria to assess whether an individual is “disloyal” have expanded. The expansion of such a definition is critical, as being branded “a disloyal person” may result in, not only restrictions on crossing borders, but also persecution. Moreover, institutionalized forms of control have been introduced:

- **Temporary Accommodation Centers (TACs)**, which are used as points for filtration, forced passportization, and subsequent deportation.
- **Mandatory filtration at Sheremetyevo Airport** for Ukrainian citizens, which has become the only entry route to the Russian Federation, during which individuals are subjected to harsh interrogations by the FSB and face the risk of unlawful detention.

Key recommendations

- **To Ukrainian authorities:** Identify children separated during the filtration process as a separate category requiring enhanced care, and introduce programs for socio-psychological rehabilitation. Develop a detailed instruction/memo for citizens leaving occupied territories regarding possible risks and recommended actions in the event of a separation.
- **To the authorities of the Russian Federation:** Immediately cease the practice of forcible separation of children and hold those responsible for the violations of the rights of children and civilians accountable.
- **To judicial bodies and international organizations:** Consider Temporary Accommodation Centers (TACs) as an integral part of Russia's systematic policy of forced displacement and deportation, and launch an investigation into the reported cases of abuse by occupying authorities related to filtration procedures.
- **To non-governmental human rights and service organizations:** document cases of child separation and advocate for an end to this practice.

METHODOLOGY

This report is based on 18 testimonies from Ukrainian witnesses and survivors containing descriptions of the separation of children from their parents or guardians that happened during their attempts to leave the occupied territories or areas of active combat zones. The testimonies were collected by TRP researchers between June 2022 and August 2024. All documented events took place during the initial phase of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, in the period when frontlines were actively moving. The timeline of these events ranges from February to October 2022.

Additional data was obtained from other sources, including interviews with professional witnesses, credible reports from NGOs and other entities, as well as other public sources.

Establishing any quantitative parameter for this study would be premature, as the conflict is still ongoing and the final number of affected individuals has yet to be determined. This study therefore focuses on the qualitative dimension. Particular attention has been given to the typological analysis of similar cases. The comparison to similar cases helps identify overarching patterns in the conduct of Russian occupation authorities in the occupied territories. As this study shows, these patterns suggest that practices in the occupied territories are shaped by deliberate policies of the Russian Federation's leadership.

The objective of this research is to raise awareness about the psychological harm caused to children by their forcible separation from their parents, which occurred in an already extremely hazardous setup. Not only did these children have to leave behind their home, belongings, relatives, friends, and familiar surroundings to evacuate into uncertainty, they were also facing all the dangers inherent to living and migrating in a zone of active combat.

The scope of this study limits itself to the effects and dynamics of separations which occurred in the context of the filtration process. Other reported cases of separation, such as those resulting from occupational forces deceived or coerced parents or guardians to send children to summer or military camps, among others, are not treated.. These cases have been extensively documented elsewhere, in reports done by NGOs and other entities.

This report does not conduct a legal assessment of such practices either. Although International Humanitarian Law (IHL) in particular the 4th Geneva Convention and Additional Protocols I and II aims to protect children from being separated from their families, some of the described incidents might not constitute violations of IHL. This, far from diminishing the gravity of such practices, makes the problem even more acute - children who have suffered from the described acts cannot be recognised as survivors of atrocity crimes today, nor can they benefit from the support mechanisms that this categorization implies, and which they urgently need.

What is clear from our study is that the separations were conducted by either Russian soldiers, other law-enforcement, or the administrative personnel of the respective Occupation's administration. Given the systematic and large-scale nature of filtration in the occupied territories, as well as

the number of war crimes committed in the course of Russian filtration measures, this particular method of separation received the greatest attention in the study.

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About The Reckoning Project

The Reckoning Project (TRP) is a U.S.-registered nonprofit founded in 2022 by acclaimed war reporter and human rights monitor Janine di Giovanni and disinformation expert and academic Peter Pomerantsev. Our mission is to document atrocity crimes and grave human rights abuses, and to ensure that this evidence is translated into both legal accountability and public awareness. TRP's methodology combines legal rigor with journalistic storytelling, training and equipping local reporters and practitioners to collect evidence that meets courtroom standards while also shaping the public record.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

According to the norms of IHL, children¹ are a particularly vulnerable category of the population in situations of armed conflict. The Fourth Geneva Convention and other regulatory documents guarantee children special protection. Despite this, in the war that Russia is waging against Ukraine, children are being killed, maimed, subjected to indoctrination and various forms of exploitation, and openly prepared for service in the armed forces of the occupier. Russian authorities have, and continue to deliberately abduct Ukrainian children from orphanages, other childcare institutions, and hospitals, to then transfer them to Russia, for adoption.² There are also well-documented instances of the forcible separation of children from their parents or guardians during the so-called ‘filtration’ process.³

Another known practice is the forcible separation of children from their parents or guardians during the so-called filtration process.

Filtration is a system of coercive measures introduced by the Russian Federation in the occupied territory of Ukraine that consists of various forms of screening of the civilian population to determine their “loyalty” to Ukraine and, accordingly, their perceived threat to the Russian Federation. This process, which does not have a separate legal definition, includes document checks, searches, interrogations and, in cases of perceived “disloyalty,” isolation or imprisonment, and has been used by the occupying authorities for the forced displacement and deportation of civilians.

1 This report uses the terms “child” and “children” as defined in Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: a child is any person under 18 years of age.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14623528.2023.2228085>

2 European Parliament. *Joint Motion for a Resolution on Human Rights Violations in the Context of the Forced Deportation of Ukrainian Civilians to and the Forced Adoption of Ukrainian Children in Russia*, B9-0388/2022, B9-0390/2022, B9-0399/2022, B9-0402/2022, B9-0407/2022, 14 September 2022.
<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/>

3 Filtration — TRP uses this term to refer to a system of coercive measures introduced by the Russian Federation that consists of various forms of screening of the civilian population to determine their potential threat to the Russian Federation’s effective control over the occupied territory of Ukraine. This process, which does not have a separate legal definition, includes checks of documents and devices, searches, interrogations, and other measures. If signs of disloyalty to the occupation authorities are identified, or indicators of what may be described as “Ukrainianness,” citizens are often barred from entering the occupied territory as the simplest measure. However, they are also deported, isolated, subjected to torture, and unlawfully imprisoned for long periods.

IHL generally seeks to protect children from separation from their families or relatives.⁴ The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR) documented credible reports of such separations when the adult accompanying the child failed to “pass” the filtration process.⁵

Researchers of The Reckoning Project independently documented cases of this practice at This filtration points– nodes of extensive network established by Russians in the first weeks of the full-scale invasion and through which all civilians attempting to leave areas of active combat or the occupied territory must pass.

The systematic nature of the filtration practice has also been documented in reports by Human Rights Watch (HRW),⁶ and Amnesty International.⁷ In these reports, survivors testified that their “evacuation” often took place under coercion or in situations where no alternative route to Ukraine-controlled territory existed.

Researchers identified up to 20 locations — most often repurposed schools, sports halls, administrative buildings, or police stations — where filtration processes were carried out in early 2022 in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, and in the Belarussian cities of Narovlya and Mazyr.⁸

The Filtration process was divided into several stages and consisted of various checks to assess the loyalty of an individual to Ukraine and subsequently isolate (often imprison) those whom the Russian authorities deemed potential threat to the occupying forces.

Preliminary filtration measures: During the first stage, Russian security forces search civilians leaving occupied territories or returning to their residence to go through checkpoints. During these searches, Russian security forces checked documents, phones, and personal belongings, at times searching the homes or vehicles of civilians. Based on these searches, security forces would decide whether or not to send civilians from the checkpoint to a filtration point.

Filtration points and camps. These sites were located in either the occupied areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions or the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. Initially, only those crossing checkpoints were taken to filtration sites. Later, Russian security forces took people to these locations by force. Once there, the screening process could last anywhere from several hours to several weeks. Civilians were subject to the inspection of their phones and messaging applications, fingerprinting, body searches, inspection of personal belongings, and personal interviews in which Russian security forces would often psychologically pressure them.

4 Commentary of 1987 to Additional Protocol I, paras. 3211, 3226.

5 Official Journal of the European Union, C 125, 5 April 2023, “Official Journal of the European Union — Information and Notices,” European Parliament resolutions and associated texts.
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:C:2023:125:TOC>

6 «We Had No Choice: “Filtration” and the Crime of Forcibly Transferring Ukrainian Civilians to Russia», *Human Rights Watch*, September 1, 2022.
<https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/09/01/we-had-no-choice/filtration-and-crime-forcibly-transferring-ukrainian-civilians>

7 “LIKE A PRISON CONVOY: RUSSIA’S UNLAWFUL TRANSFER AND ABUSE OF CIVILIANS IN UKRAINE DURING FILTRATION,” May 2022, *Amnesty International*.
<https://www.amnesty.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/eur5061362022english.pdf>

8 Edward Wong, “The U.S. State Department and Yale Identify 21 Detention Sites in Russian-Controlled Territory,” *New York Times*, August 25, 2022.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/26/world/europe/the-us-state-department-and-yale-identify-21-detention-sites-in-russian-controlled-territory.html>

Pre-trial detention centers and colonies. Individuals who did not “pass” the screening process were sent by Russian forces to places of detention. There, civilians were — almost without exception — subjected to harsh interrogations, in which they were usually tortured. Such facilities exist both in the occupied territory and in the Russian Federation.⁹ Typically, all those detained through this filtration process were later condemned under false pretenses on the basis of so-called “terrorism articles.”

It should be noted that filtration measures were actively carried out in the context of a larger-scale policy of forced displacement¹⁰ and deportation¹¹ of civilians introduced by Russia in the occupied territory of Ukraine. During its implementation, thousands of Ukrainian children were left without adult supervision for some time or were forcibly separated from their relatives by Russian soldiers, occupation authorities, or the so-called Guardianship and Custody bodies. Documented testimonies given by people who experienced such practices said that Belarus was also involved in this process.

9 Filtration System and the Separation of Children from Parents in Ukraine (Prepared for the OSCE Human Dimension Conference), *Media Initiative for Human Rights (MIHR)*, October 2023.
https://mipl.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/osce_filtration_ukr_web.pdf

10 In this context, “displacement” refers to the forced and unlawful transfer of Ukrainian children by Russian state authorities within the Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine.
<https://www.diakonia.se/ihl/resources/international-humanitarian-law/ihl-displacement/>

11 The term “deportation” means a state’s unilateral act of forcibly removing a person from their home country. Here, it refers to children who have been illegally taken from Ukraine to the internationally recognized territory of Russia.
https://casebook.icrc.org/a_to_z/glossary/deportation

DOCUMENTED CASES OF CHILDREN BEING SEPARATED FROM THEIR PARENTS OR GUARDIANS

Incident 1: On 18 March 2022, at a checkpoint in the village of Manhush in Donetsk region, Russian soldiers detained a volunteer who was evacuating civilians. In the car with him were 17 children who, due to the hostilities, were unable to return home from a sanatorium in besieged Mariupol.¹² Among them were six children from one foster family, three of whom had a disability.

TRP spoke with the foster mother of these children. She said that the children were first placed in a temporary accommodation facility in Manhush. The next day, the advisor to the head of the "DPR" on children's rights, took the children from Manhush and transported them to the clinical tuberculosis hospital in the city of Donetsk. There, the children were placed in wards together with adults, including people with tuberculosis. The children's mother repeatedly contacted Ukrainian law enforcement authorities, social services, and the leadership of the "DPR" demanding that the children be returned. However, the occupation guardianship authorities in Donetsk denied her request, citing bureaucratic obstacles that the mother had not cleared. During this time, the aforementioned advisor prepared "DPR" documents for the children to be taken to Russia and be given to "new guardians." The family was only able to reunite on 24 June 2022.

Incident 2: On 7 April 2022, soldiers of the "DPR" entered the bomb shelter of Mariupol City Hospital No. 4 and announced a forced evacuation of the civilians who were there. Among the people in the basement was a father and his three minor children. Those in the shelter were taken east toward Novoazovsk. During document checks at a filtration post in the village of Bezimenne, Russian forces noticed that the father's

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Nina Nazarova, "I Brought the Kids Back Safe and Alive': How Six Children Survived in Mariupol, Got Stuck in the 'DPR' and Ended Up in Europe," *BBC News Ukraine*, July 18, 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-62164267>

military ID listed his registration with a military unit. The man had previously served under contract in the Lviv region. He was ordered to place his children on a bus with someone who would take care of them and to remain behind. He was then taken away for an interrogation while the children were taken to the central hospital in the city of Novoazovsk. From the hospital, the minors were first transferred to an orphanage in Donetsk. In May, they were deported along with other children to the "Polyany" children's sanatorium in the Russian Federation. The minors were to be placed in foster families. The children's father remained imprisoned for 45 days, including time in Olenivka colony. The family was able to reunite on 19 June 2022.

Incident 3: In early April 2022, when the Illich Steel and Iron Works plant in Mariupol was surrounded by Russian soldiers, a wounded minor and his mother were on the plant together, alongside Ukrainian soldiers and civilians. After the plant was captured, on 12 April, both were taken to a filtration camp in the village of Bezimenne. The woman did not have her documents with her, so she was taken for interrogation to a tent. The boy has not seen his mother since then. The minor was taken by two representatives of the "Novoazovsk children's services." He was first transported to a hospital in Novoazovsk and later to a hospital in Donetsk, from where he called his grandmother. She was able to take her grandson only in June 2022 and later evacuated him from occupied Donetsk.

Incident 4: In mid-March 2022, a minor boy left Mariupol with the consent of his mother, accompanied by her friend. During the evacuation through the filtration point in the village of Bezimenne, Russian soldiers separated the boy from the adult accompanying him, citing the absence of any documents confirming the adult's right to accompany the minor. The boy was interrogated several times alone. During the interrogations he was subjected to intense psychological pressure, which included threats and humiliation, as well as other attempts against his human dignity. Initially, those threatening and humiliating him were soldiers of the "DPR" from the filtration point. Later, the psychological pressure was carried out by representatives of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation in a hospital in Donetsk, from where he was subsequently taken. According to the boy, a pistol was pointed at his head while he was at the filtration point, and he was forced to sign a document stating that he had allegedly been left without parents. In the second half of March, the boy's mother arrived in Donetsk with her documentation and managed to take him home.

Incident 5: Witnesses reported seeing, in the filtration camp in Bezimenne, a woman who did not pass the filtration procedure being placed in a vehicle while her child was placed in another; they were subsequently transported to different locations.

Incident 6: On 26 March 2022, Russian soldiers detained two civilian brothers at a checkpoint in the village of Khocheva in Kyiv region, one of whom was a minor with a disability. After the document checks and the interrogations, they were accused of being involved in

sabotage activities. Threatening them with weapons, the soldiers forced them into an armored personnel carrier and took them to Chornobyl. There, the minor and his brother were interrogated, tortured, kicked and beaten with electric shocks.

That same night Russian soldiers transported the brothers to the city of Narovlya in Belarus, where they were separated. Belarusian border guards transferred the minor to the Mazyr orphanage, while his older brother was transferred as a civilian hostage to a prison in the Russian Federation. The boys' mother learned where her minor son was only three days later, when he managed to contact her. The younger boy was able to reunite with his mother on 22 April 2022. As of the publication of this report, the brother remains in captivity.

Incident 7: In October 2022, a woman leaving the occupied village of Chervonyi Maiak agreed to accompany the 8-year-old daughter of her neighbors and take the girl to her mother, who was in another settlement. At a checkpoint in the city of Kakhovka, they were denied passage because the woman did not have documents confirming her right to accompany the minor. The woman decided to continue her journey, leaving the child at the checkpoint. An occupation administration representative from Beryslav, sent the girl to a camp in Crimea, without the consent of the father or mother, where the minor remained until February 2023. Only then was her mother finally able to retrieve her with the help of volunteers.

Incident 8: On 25 September 2022, near the city of Kupiansk-Vuzlovyi, an evacuation convoy of civilians came under shelling. Among those in the convoy was a boy who managed to survive the shelling, although wounded. His mother was killed in the attack. Russian soldiers took the boy and transported him to a hospital in occupied Luhansk.

The boy's father, who was in Kharkiv, learned about the incident from a Russian television news broadcast, when journalists interviewed his wounded son. The father's acquaintances in the occupied city reported that the boy was about to be transferred to an orphanage in the Russian Federation. In October 2022 the boy's grandmother arrived at the hospital where he remained. Both of them were later transported to a sanatorium in the city of Yeysk in Russia. On 28 October they managed to leave Russia.

Incident 9: On 20 March 2022 in Mariupol, a mother and her son came under artillery fire. The woman died from her injuries, and Russian soldiers transported the boy to the occupied territory in the city of Novoazovsk and later to a hospital in Donetsk.

In Donetsk, a local official, became interested in the boy and began preparing new documents for him, so that he may be deported to Russia. The boy's relatives managed to obtain guardianship rights for the boy's grandmother, after which they were able to reunite and later return him to territory controlled by Ukraine.

Incident 10: Before 24 February 2022, a woman and her two minor children lived in the occupied village of Davydiv Brid, in the region of Kherson. In April–May 2022, the intensity of hostilities and searches conducted by Russian soldiers increased. During this period, Russian soldiers arrived at her home and, despite her objections, transported her and her three children to the city of Beryslav in Kherson region.

There, a representative of the occupation authorities, accompanied by armed Russian soldiers, separated her 13-year-old son from his mother. The boy was later transferred to an orphanage in the city of Pechory in the Russian Federation.

Their separation lasted 11 months. In July 2023 the mother travelled to the Russian Federation, arrived at the orphanage, and secured the return of her son.

Incident 11: During their deportation from Mariupol in March 2022, two siblings aged 14 and 9 were separated. The boy was deported together with his grandmother, while the girl was deported separately; their mother found her in the Russian Federation only several months later. The family was able to reunite in June 2022.

Incident 12: On 29 March 2022, two families with close ties decided to evacuate from the village of Velyka Oleksandrivka in the Kherson region. Both families included minors. During their journey they had to pass through numerous Russian checkpoints. Soldiers checked the passengers' documents, inspected their vehicles, and interrogated everyone about the purpose of their travel and their family ties. Eventually, the families reached the city of Bryansk in the Russian Federation, where they were lodged in the dormitories of a local university. The two families received temporary asylum permits on the condition that they accept Russian citizenship. On 24 November 2022, two members of these families were arrested, one of the children, a minor boy, was sent to an orphanage in the village of Pochep. The director of the institution obstructed the attempts of the boy's grandmother to return the child to Ukraine.

Incident 13: In 2017 a man was deported from occupied Crimea because of his Ukrainian citizenship and his advocacy for human rights. After being deported, his wife joined him for a period of time, but shortly after, they banned her from visiting him. The couple's two minor children remain in Crimea. The occupation authorities placed the children under the guardianship of a relative without the consent of either parent. The family remains separated, and the parents have no means of seeing or communicating with their children.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES FOR CHILDREN WHO WERE SEPARATED FROM THEIR PARENTS

THEORY

The children who were under occupation or living near the main theatres of the hostilities, and had to go through the filtration process on their way to Ukrainian-controlled territories, were continuously exposed to traumatic events. This resulted in a multilayered traumatic experience. The loss of relatives, pressure, intimidation, the need to leave their home — if it hadn't been destroyed by shelling — and the separation from their parents during inspections at checkpoints have left a significant mark on the children's mental state. However, it is possible to distinguish the consequences and effects of the trauma caused by the filtration process on a child's mental health from those of other traumatic events experienced by the children surveyed, as a result of the war.

The violent separation of children is one of the most complex traumatic experiences. The events that have the strongest traumatic impact on a child's psyche are those that occur during sensitive developmental periods and which are sudden, and intense in nature. At first, children usually experience an adjustment disorder — depressed mood, sleep disturbances, and social maladaptation.

These effects undoubtedly have a negative impact on a child's health, and their consequences may be significant and long-lasting. Later, children may experience negative changes in their mental state and develop post-traumatic stress disorder.

Below are the ways in which the effects of traumatic experiences may manifest.

Emotional state of the child

Children develop a fear of making mistakes. They expect punishment or condemnation for any "wrong" action or incorrect answer and are afraid to express their emotions. Fear seems to paralyze traumatized children when they are asked questions or asked to make a choice. They may repeatedly ask whether their answer was correct, and or copy the answers of others during group

work. They may constantly worry about their relatives and obsessively imagine that something bad will happen — replaying in their minds situations of separation and trying to find an explanation as to why it happened specifically to them.

For a long time, they may remain in a state of shock and denial of the situation. Moments of Denial and shock may alternate with feelings of deep sadness, similar to that experienced by those with a depressive condition: a lowered emotional background, apathy, and a lack of interest in things that previously brought them pleasure.

The so-called “Timm Thaler effect,” or the “sold laugh effect” (an inability to experience spontaneity and joy), may appear. This comparison emerged during bibliotherapy with traumatized children who tried to find parallels or comparisons for the emotional state that troubled them.

Social sphere (relationships and communication)

Children may show distrust when communicating with adults, especially when they are asked about personal information and their experiences. Every adult that communicates with the child during the process of their rehabilitation (whether social or psychological), may be perceived as a source of danger. Trust can be formed, but only through prolonged and psychologically appropriate interactions, done in an appropriate setting and keeping in mind existing triggers, the manner in which questions are asked, and respecting the child’s physical boundaries.

Their secure bond with a loving adult is disrupted. The foundation for the development of a healthy personality is a continuous physical and emotional connection between the child and an adult. Filtration procedures represent a violent rupture in this process. As a result, children may experience excessive anxiety and may be unable to calm down even in situations when the danger has passed. This is because traumatic memories are constantly invoked when elements of the traumatic experience reappear, even outside of the context of the source of trauma. An anxious attachment pattern may form, which later manifests in an inability to achieve autonomy even in adulthood (difficulty protecting personal psychological boundaries, striving either for complete emotional fusion with others or, conversely, becoming emotionally detached).

Practice and observation show that those children possessing a transitional object — something that reminds them of their loved ones such as a toy given to them by their relatives or clothing associated with close ones — during the time of separation, fared better than those that did not. However, situations of retraumatization may occur if something happens to this reminder object, i.e.: if it is lost or damaged. In such cases, children seem to return to the moment of separation and experience the same emotions again.

Physiological condition

Changes in appetite may occur (either refusal to eat or compulsive overeating).

Sleep disturbances are also noticeable (nightmares with recurring plots about parents being taken away or children searching for them, frequent awakenings), which greatly exhaust the child’s psyche.

Neurological symptoms may appear — tics, stuttering, enuresis (in children this is a manifestation of regression, which may recur even in adulthood in response to traumatic experiences similar to those experienced in childhood, such as separation or loneliness).

Muscle tension, freezing and avoidance reactions, physical tension, panic attacks, and other reactions may occur when something reminds the child of past experiences (military uniforms, weapons, specific vehicles, for example those with tinted windows). Such children may have unexpected triggers — for example, during a game involving cautious movement with objects, an association with a minefield could arise, which may have frightened them during evacuation.

Cognitive functions

Traumatic events affect memory — children most vividly remember situations of danger, filtration, and separation. They may slow to learn and remember new information.

The focus of their attention shifts toward evaluating and scanning people and the new environment for possible dangers. Therefore, children may appear confused and helpless, especially if objects, premises, or people in their field of vision remind them in any way of dangers associated with their experience.

Because most of the child's resources are directed toward overcoming anxiety and constantly monitoring the situation, selective perception of information may occur.

Destructive thoughts and self-blame may appear: "It's my fault that this happened," "I am bad because this happened to me."

Overall, the continuity of the child's life narrative is disrupted. Traumatic memory seems to divide the child's experience into traumatic episodes: what existed before the separation from loved ones and what came after. As a result, children may become afraid to dream or make plans, and seem to freeze and anticipate new dangers.

Another feature of this trauma is that the impact of separation from relatives during filtration may be latent and manifest later.

However, a general characteristic of children who experienced filtration and evacuation from occupation is a sense of the loss of safety. An appropriate comparison is the metaphor from Khaled Hosseini's book "The Kite Runner": children return in their memories to a period of carefree and protected childhood and may perceive new experiences with anxiety throughout their lives.

CASE STUDIES

In her psychotherapeutic practice, the author of this chapter has had direct experience working with children who went through filtration, as well as with their parents. Her observations confirm the theoretical conclusions and illustrate the need for long-term psychological support and continuous screening of mental health conditions in such children.

Below are several episodes describing Ukrainians' experiences of Russian filtration and how these experiences manifest themselves several years after the traumatic events.

Incident 14: A 14-year-old teenage girl was leaving the occupation with her family. During the filtration process, which occurred within the Russian Federation, near the settlement of Kolotilivka, she was forced, together with her parents, to wait outside from 5 a.m. to 4 p.m. in March weather. A female customs officer in military uniform forced the victim to strip down to the waist. The officer also ordered her to remove her underwear. All of this took place in the presence of other people, including male members of the Russian security forces.

Her mother remembers: "It was very cold and frightening. They were undressing their underage daughter, and they were also groping her, and laughter could be heard all around. The girl was shaking from the cold and the fear".

After this incident, the girl experienced anxiety and heightened vigilance, feelings of seemingly sudden and unprovoked shame, and refused to participate in activities. Noticeable symptoms of PTSD were observed, including physical reactions to triggers such as unfamiliar people, touch in crowded places, and enclosed spaces, or a fear of losing relatives, and a heightened expectation of danger.

Incident 15: A teenager from the Zaporizhzhia region planned to leave the occupied territory before reaching adulthood. He hired a carrier and travelled through the territory of the Russian Federation. He went through filtration near Rostov-on-Don, where he spent three hours. The carrier asked him to tell a cover story, that he was travelling to his aunt in Russia. Although he followed the carrier's advice the boy was forced to admit that he was actually travelling to his aunt in Ukraine after the screening. During the process, Russian representatives spoke to him in a rude tone and exerted psychological pressure. "They said they could take you somewhere you don't want to go."

At present, the survivor shows symptoms of trauma — he often dreams about shellings and his home. The consequences of the experience include heightened vigilance and fear of inspections and military uniforms. Any unfamiliar environment may cause him a strong physical reaction and he now has difficulties adapting to new situations

Incident 16: A 14-year-old teenager left the occupied part of the Zaporizhzhia region together with his mother and sister in the summer of 2022. During filtration, the mother and sister were allowed to pass, but the boy was detained. The reason given for his detention was that he was male. As a result, the survivor was forced to return with his grandmother and grandfather, who remained under occupation.

It took a long time to return the teenager to Ukraine-controlled territory. The teenager had to go through Moscow and Minsk, with the support of Qatar and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

After the difficult journey, the survivor developed a strong fear of inspections and experienced panic attacks when seeing soldiers, uniforms, or weapons. Physical

reactions, such as tremors, appeared. The boy became very withdrawn and silent. He developed a fear of being photographed and of using social media, as well as fear of people. Overall, symptoms of PTSD were observed (reactions to sounds, flashbacks).

Incident 17: A teenager from the Kharkiv region underwent filtration at the age of 13 in the summer of 2022. He recalls that it was a “green corridor” through Pechenihiy, and that he was travelling with his grandmother while his mother remained under occupation (after liberation she later died from a missile strike in the village of Hroza). During this time they were under the aim of Russian soldiers. Only by crossing the Pechenihiy dam did they manage to leave the occupation. However, they later came under shelling.

He experienced maladaptation, fear of water, and fear of unfamiliar people. For a long time he was unable to express emotions, had slowed speech, and developed fear of soldiers and of heights.

Incident 18: We conclude the description of these incidents with a case that encompasses a complex set of crimes and vividly illustrates the typical behavior of Russian soldiers towards the civilian populations in the occupied territory, as well as the extent of psychological trauma that a child may experience.

A 12-year-old girl lived with her mother and her older relatives in the Beryslav district of the Kherson region. She witnessed Russian soldiers coming to their home three times to take her mother away for interrogation. The last time, the girl’s mother was taken captive and held for about two months. After her release, the mother attempted to take the child out of the occupation. She was unsuccessful. The girl feared being separated from her mother again and experienced fear and panic.

They were able to leave their district only after the settlement was liberated by Ukrainian forces.

While in captivity, the mother was subjected to torture. The longterm effects of the torture, combined with a lack of appropriate diagnosis and rehabilitation, caused the mother to die three years after her imprisonment.

Currently, the girl experiences sharp changes in her psycho-emotional state and experiences strong physical reactions (nausea and weakness) in stressful situations. She is withdrawn and distrustful of adults and avoids speaking about her mother. She often recalls the road in front of their house where Russian soldiers appeared and remembers the unsuccessful attempts to escape.

The child is afraid to remain alone and experiences survivor’s guilt: she believes that if it had not been for her, her mother could have left and saved herself from captivity.

One of the typical states the child experiences is frustration — even when there are no real obstacles, they appear in her imagination. This is accompanied by excessive caution and the constant expectation of danger, as well as a state of “playing dead” or freezing. Signs of regressive behavior are also present. The cause lies in the failed attempts to leave occupation and the impact of witnessing her mother being taken captive.

HOW AND WHERE FILTRATION IS HAPPENING NOW

Transformation of filtration measures

In 2023, the Russian system of filtration and filtration measures in the occupied territory underwent significant changes. This is primarily related to the restructuring of Russian security agencies and personnel changes in the administrations of occupied territories. For example, the structures of the "MGB" in the "LPR" and "DPR" were reorganized and integrated into the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation, while the state "security services in Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions" became regional departments of the Federal Security Service. The Russian National Guard also began to play an active role, along with newly created units of the military (occupation) police of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation. Citizens of the Russian Federation were appointed to these structures, after which they resumed and intensified filtration checks.¹³

The Russian National Guard is involved in carrying out filtration measures and controls at internal checkpoints. There, civilians may be detained for up to 30–40 hours for screening. The primary focus of filtration has shifted toward citizens with a pro-Ukrainian position.

Units of the military (occupation) police of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation are also involved in these procedures and track individuals connected to the Armed Forces or law enforcement bodies of Ukraine. Those detained are transferred to the control of the Federal Penitentiary Service of the Russian Federation.

Overall, filtration measures during this period changed in two key aspects:

- Expanded screening criteria: particular attention is paid to Ukrainians who refuse to obtain Russian passports and to individuals considered "spies," "traitors," or "terrorists" by the occupation authorities.
- Increased repression: systematic unlawful detentions of civilians due to their pro-Ukrainian position.

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In the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, filtration procedures targeting the local population have intensified and changed, *Public organization Eastern Human Rights Group*.
<http://www.vpg.net.ua/fullread/635>

Filtration in Sheremetyevo

At present, citizens of Ukraine (with Ukrainian passports) can enter the Russian Federation or the occupied territory only through Sheremetyevo airport. There, civilians must hand their personal devices for a thorough inspection and are interrogated by officers of the border service of the Federal Security Service. It is known that, in 2024, at least four Ukrainian citizens died while waiting for filtration.¹⁴ According to Russian media reports, the following actions may serve as grounds for denying entry:

1. Participation in activities directed against the Russian Federation, its state institutions, or its army, including anti-Russian posts on social media, media publications, participation in anti-Russian protests in EU countries, participation in the Anti-Terrorist Operation, financial transfers to the Armed Forces of Ukraine, etc.
2. Long-term residence in Russia without obtaining citizenship, which is interpreted as a disrespectful attitude toward Russian citizenship.
3. Open demonstration of material interests (for example, re-registering property or obtaining a Russian passport for the purpose of selling property in the occupied territory).¹⁵
4. Providing false information, cleaning phones, or attempts to conceal close relatives connected with public service, the Security Service of Ukraine, or the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

The rules for undergoing filtration in Sheremetyevo are constantly changing: entry may be denied even because a phone does not contain the MAX messenger app or patriotic Russian content.¹⁶

Evacuation routes from occupation

It is currently possible to evacuate from the occupied territory through the humanitarian corridor of "Mokransky — Domanove", in the Volyn region. Children under 16 may leave only when accompanied by their parents, while young people aged 16 to 18 must have a mandatory authorization issued by local "notaries" permitting independent travel.¹⁷

Crossing the border from the temporarily occupied territory of Donetsk and Luhansk regions and undergoing filtration by private car, bus, or with the help of a carrier is possible through the following checkpoints:

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- 14 "At Sheremetyevo International Airport, four citizens of Ukraine have already died in 2024," *Public organization Eastern Human Rights Group*.
<http://www.vpg.net.ua/fullread/689>
 - 15 "Thousands of Ukrainians flee to Russia: how the Federal Security Service filters out those who secretly oppose the Russian Federation," *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, July 29, 2024.
<https://www.kp.ru/daily/27613.5/4964611/>
 - 16 "Filtration measures have been tightened at Sheremetyevo International Airport. What could be grounds for being denied entry?," *0629.com.ua*, December 12, 2025.
<https://www.0629.com.ua/news/4041145/v-aeroportu-seremetevo-posililisa-filtracijni-zahodi-so-moze-stati-pricinou-vidmovi-u-vizdi>
 - 17 "How residents of Melitopol can leave the occupation in 2026 — routes, costs, documents (Screenshots)," *RIA Pivden*, February 6, 2026.
[https://ria-m.tv/ua/news/398479/yak-meshkantsyam-melitopolya-u-2026-mu-rotsi-viihati-z-okupatsii-marshruti-vartist-dokumenty-\(skryni\).html](https://ria-m.tv/ua/news/398479/yak-meshkantsyam-melitopolya-u-2026-mu-rotsi-viihati-z-okupatsii-marshruti-vartist-dokumenty-(skryni).html)

- Izvaryne, Voznesenivka — Chervonopartyzansk, Dovzhanske (Luhansk region)
- Marynivka, Novoazovsk, Ulianivske — Shramko (Donetsk region)

The longest lines occur at the following checkpoints:

- “Izvaryne — Donetsk”
- “Chervonopartyzansk — Gukovo”
- “Dolzhanskyi — Novoshakhtinsk.”¹⁸

Temporary accommodation centers as an instrument of filtration and deportation

The Russian Federation systematically uses so-called “temporary accommodation centers”(TAC) in the occupied territory of Ukraine as a tool of forced evacuation, filtration, and the subsequent deportation of the civilian population. The occupation authorities officially present the transfer of Ukrainians to these centers as “humanitarian assistance” or “evacuations from the combat zone.” Unofficially, being transferred to TACs implies screening procedures to assess one’s “loyalty,” prolonged periods of isolation, and a change in the legal status of Ukrainian citizens (forced passportization).¹⁹

For example, on 17 February 2026, the occupation “Ministry of Emergency Situations” in the Zaporizhzhia region reported the arrival of 160 residents from the recently occupied settlements in the Donetsk, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia regions at a temporary accommodation center. Earlier, on 4 February, the occupation governor of the occupied part of Zaporizhzhia region, Yevhen Balytskyi, announced the opening of such centers and reported the arrival of residents from frontline settlements, including Pokrovsk and Myrnohrad.

Balytskyi also noted that “volunteers,” “psychologists,” and specialists assisting with “document processing” were working in these centers. Similar wording was already used in 2022, during the mass filtration of Ukrainian civilians, particularly in Mariupol and surrounding areas: civilians were detained, interrogated about their political views and their connections with Ukrainian defense forces. Their phones, social media, and documents were checked. Upon completing this inspection, some were deported to the territory of the Russian Federation or forcibly transferred to sites further away from Ukraine-controlled territories.

Together, these mechanisms constitute, not only a humanitarian crisis, but also an instrument of long-term demographic and political transformation of the occupied territory. They correspond to the characteristics of forced displacement and deportation of civilians, which are prohibited under IHL, including the Fourth Geneva Convention.

18 Justyna Luhanska, “What the ‘Border’ between Luhansk, Donetsk, and Russia Looks Like,” *Trybun*, March 2, 2025. <https://tribun.com.ua/uk/118505-u-merezhi-pokazali-jakij-vigljad-mae-kordon-mizh-luganskom-donetskom-ta-rosiejju>

19 Russian Occupation Update, February 19, 2026, *Report of ISW*. <https://understandingwar.org/research/russia-ukraine/russian-occupation-update-february-19-2026/>

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The analysis of the documented incidents reveals a general pattern in the Russian Federation's treatment of Ukrainian children as a resource. If a child is left without care — in the context of this research, this is due to their forced separation from their parents or guardians during filtration — Russian occupation authorities immediately attempt to alienate the child from their state to assimilate them into Russian society. In none of the documented cases did the occupiers attempt to locate the child's relatives or transfer the child to guardianship authorities in territory controlled by the Government of Ukraine. Instead, they prepared the child for the future of a Russian citizen — issuing a Russian passport, preparing the child for adoption by Russian families, or placing them in social care institutions.

Such treatment of children's rights is not a new phenomenon for the Russian government. It confirms the persistence of a pathological regime, instrumentalizing childhood as a means of demographic transformation and the erasure of a political identity, inherited from the punitive state policies of the Soviet Union. In the USSR, the children of victims of political repression, deportees, and dissidents were separated from their families and placed in special institutions and camps for their "re-education" so they may form a new worldview.²⁰ Of course, the Soviet and contemporary Russian models cannot be equated, yet they share one common goal: to cleanse the occupied territory of civilians with pro-Ukrainian views and to intimidate those considered disloyal or potentially dangerous to the occupation regime.

As for the psychological consequences of separation for a child, the situations described make it clear that the mental harm caused by filtration may be very significant. The circumstances of filtration themselves are sufficiently traumatic. The extreme vulnerability of children who are forced to undergo filtration is caused not only by their prior experiences of living under occupation or in areas of active hostilities. An additional traumatic factor is the need to leave one's home, personal belongings, friends, and familiar life and moving into uncertainty. When the only support a child can rely on is a close relative, forcibly separating that child from this person leads to consequences that may take years to address.

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Roman Podkur, "'Dytyachyi HULAG' v konteksti polityky derzhavnoho teroru (1937-1939 rr.)," ("The 'Children's Gulag' in the Context of the Policy of State Terror (1937-1939),"), *Ukraina Moderna*, July 18, 2015. <https://uamoderna.com/md/podkur-children-in-gulag/>

The continued occupation of Ukrainian territory allowed Russia in 2023-2024 to transform the filtration system and turn it into a more structured and, insofar as repression is its intended goal, more effective mechanism. The actors involved in this process have also changed — the Russian National Guard and the Military Police of the Russian Federation now play an active role.

The criteria of “disloyalty” have also expanded. The risk of failing filtration and ending up in detention now applies, not only to people with openly anti-Russian views, but also to those who show even minimal signs of belonging to the Ukrainian nation.

The places where filtration measures take place have also become institutionalized. Checkpoints and hastily converted school gyms or police stations have been replaced by Temporary Accommodation Centers. These centers are presented as facilities providing assistance and care, although in reality, they function as points for screening loyalty and as places from which many Ukrainians are transferred into Russia’s repressive system.

All of these mechanisms confirm the overall instrumental approach of the Russian Federation toward the civilian population, aimed at the demographic and political transformation of the occupied territory and the forced integration of Ukrainian citizens, including children, into Russian society.

Recommendations

To the authorities of Ukraine

- Recognize children who were separated from their parents during filtration as a category requiring additional care due to the severe trauma caused by this experience. Introduce programs of social and psychological rehabilitation for such children.
- Develop and distribute detailed guidelines for citizens who are forced to undergo filtration procedures when entering or leaving territory occupied by Russia. These guidelines should outline the risks of such procedures, the dangers posed to children by their separation from their parents, and they must provide practical instructions on what to do in such situations. This may include preparing a notarized authorization in advance, authorizing relatives or a trusted person to accompany the child in the case that the legal guardian is detained. These guidelines should also include the creation of a hotline through which citizens can report plans to enter or leave the occupied territory, allowing authorities to monitor such movements and respond promptly to cases in which Ukrainian citizens are detained during filtration.

To the authorities of the Russian Federation

- Immediately cease the practice of forcibly separating children from their parents or guardians during filtration measures.
- Hold accountable those responsible for violations of the rights of children and civilians during filtration.

To judicial bodies dealing with international crimes

- Consider Temporary Accommodation Centers as an integral part of the systematic policy of forced displacement, filtration, and deportation.
- Investigate the cases of abuse, torture, and deaths of Ukrainian citizens during filtration procedures described in this report.

To non-governmental human rights and service organizations

- Support the documentation of cases of separation and instrumentalization of children.
- Advocate for the cessation of such practices at the national and international levels.