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Education under Occupation

Forced Russification of the School System in Occupied Ukrainian Territories



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Summary

At 8 a.m. on February 24, 2022, columns of Russian troops seized the periphery road around Kharkiv, the capital and largest city in Ukraine’s Kharkivska region. Russian forces never captured the city, but for the next six months they controlled a third of the vast region, some 8,500 square kilometers, where 260,000 students had been enrolled in primary and secondary schools. During that time, the occupying authorities worked to replace Ukraine’s education system with Russia’s, teaching the Russian official curriculum, in the Russian language. About 223,000 students remained after Ukrainian forces re-took much of the area in September and October 2022.

Russian forces have also occupied areas of the Khersonska, Zaporizka, Donetska and Luhanska regions of Ukraine. Russia has imposed its education system wholesale and banned Ukrainian education in occupied Ukrainian territory, in violation of international law—both the laws of armed conflict and international human rights law.

This report documents violations by the Russian occupying authorities in relation to education, both in formerly occupied areas of the Kharkivska region, and in areas of Khersonska, Zaporizka, Donetska and Luhanska regions that remain under Russian occupation. Human Rights Watch documented violations through research in Kharkivska region after it was de-occupied by Ukrainian forces in September 2022, and through interviews with teachers who had been displaced or escaped from areas currently under occupation. In total, Ukrainian experts estimate that one million school-age Ukrainian children are in Russian-occupied territory, 458,000 in Crimea alone. Data that the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science provided Human Rights Watch indicate that more than 62,400 children living in occupied areas continue to study in Ukrainian secondary education institutions remotely.

The report also documents the Ukrainian authorities’ problematic use of the offence of collaboration against Ukrainian education staff who worked under Russian occupation. The report examines the manner in which the Ukrainian government has used compulsory security screening known as “filtration,” as well as criminal prosecution and administrative sanctions against suspected collaborators.

Finally, the report addresses some of the other pressures that Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine has placed on the education system, such as barriers to online learning, the burgeoning need for mental health support for students and teachers, and the impact on students with disabilities.

Violations by Russian Authorities in Relation to Education

Russian occupying forces in Ukraine and federal authorities, including Russia’s education minister and other senior officials, have taken measures to suppress the Ukrainian language and curriculum and impose the Russian curriculum and Russian as the language of instruction in schools. These measures violate the laws of armed conflict, which prohibit an occupying power from making unnecessary changes to laws in the occupied territory, such as Ukraine’s 2017 Law on Education.

Ukrainian children under occupation are indoctrinated with the Kremlin’s anti-Ukrainian propaganda. They also receive military training as part of the school curriculum. The Russian school curriculum, which includes history textbooks that seek to justify Russia’s invasion and portrays Ukraine under its current government as a “neo-Nazi state,” and which strictly limits instruction in the Ukrainian language, also violates Ukrainian children’s right to an education that develops respect for the child’s “own cultural identity, language and values,” as well as the “national values” of the child’s country of origin.¹ Russia’s imposition of Russian education in the Russian language in occupied Ukrainian territory violates international human rights standards including the prohibition against propaganda for war, the child’s right to education in their mother-tongue, and parents’ right of choice regarding their children’s education. As the UN human rights office reported, the Russian authorities require secondary schools in occupied Ukrainian territory to report the names of students ages 18 and older, whom the Russian authorities deem eligible to be drafted into the Russian armed forces.

Any criticism of the invasion in schools is subject to retaliation by occupying authorities. Russian proxies in occupied Melitopol punished a student who spoke Ukrainian in school by driving him dozens of kilometers with a bag over his head to a remote area and abandoning him to walk back home alone. Occupying authorities threatened parents with

¹ Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 29 (1)(c).

fines, loss of custody of their children, and detention if they did not enroll their children in “Russian” schools or if their children studied the Ukrainian curriculum remotely. Some parents reportedly hid their children as a result.

While occupying authorities punished distance learning or teaching of the Ukrainian curriculum, teachers and parents described Russified schools as having very limited classes and hours of instruction, insufficient staff, and often no electricity. Some Ukrainian children from territories that Russia has occupied since its initial 2014 invasion of Ukraine have studied only under the Russian system and will need additional support to integrate and thrive in the Ukrainian system, according to Ukrainian civil society groups supporting education.

In Kharkivska region, where about 15,000 of the region’s 80,000 teachers were under occupation between March and September 2022, Russian occupying authorities used coercion, detention, ill-treatment, beatings, and electroshock torture to pressure Ukrainian teachers to work or to hand over students’ files and other school data. Occupying authorities continue to pressure Ukrainian teachers and parents elsewhere.

Ukrainian Use of Security Screening, Criminal Prosecution and Administrative Sanctions Against Suspected Collaborators

Following the Ukrainian army’s de-occupation of some of the occupied territories, the Ukrainian authorities accused some education staff of collaboration with the Russian occupying authorities and subjected them to a form of compulsory security screening known as “filtration,” as well as criminal prosecution and administrative sanctions by Ukrainian authorities.

On September 20, 2022, the Ministry of Education and Science issued guidance that teachers who collaborated should be fired, but without clearly specifying the acts or intentions that should be punished, Human Rights Watch found. Teachers’ salaries were often delayed as a result of screening and verification processes intended to prevent people suspected as collaborators from receiving payment.

The laws of war do not directly address wartime collaboration, but they prohibit occupying forces from exercising coercion against civilians who are not their own nationals,

anticipating occupying forces' efforts to do so. They also require the occupying power to facilitate the proper working of institutions dedicated to the education of children, with the cooperation of the national and local authorities. Given the context of occupation and responsibilities of teachers to the education of children, Human Rights Watch believes Ukrainian authorities should not penalize teachers in occupied territories solely for providing education to children under the Russian curriculum. Human Rights Watch notes that some of the subjects under the Russian curriculum, such as math and sciences, have no ideological component.

Ukrainian civil society groups, teachers, and the Ukrainian Education Ombudsperson have criticized Ukraine's 2022 anti-collaboration law for being unclear as to which acts are criminalized, and for not clarifying whether actions are criminal if they were coerced or otherwise did not reflect an intention to support Russia's occupation. Across Ukraine, from March 2022, when the law was adopted, to July 2023, just nine education staff were prosecuted for collaboration, mostly administrators who worked with the occupying authorities. However, in one case, for example, a group of teachers in Kharkivska region vigorously defended a colleague who was subjected to "filtration" and detained for three weeks by the Security Service of Ukraine before being released, arguing that his engagement with occupying authorities was motivated solely by the need to protect the teaching staff and the school.

Charges of collaboration should only be considered for those against whom there is evidence of aggravating actions constituting willful collaboration in a way that threatens Ukraine's security. In any case, international law requires that authorities ensure due process and fair trial rights in any criminal procedure, including due consideration to the defense of duress or coercive circumstances, and that any penalty must be proportionate. The authorities should review the broadly phrased definition of collaboration under the law and relevant sanctions to ensure the necessary human rights and due process safeguards are upheld.

Challenges to Educational Recovery in Liberated Territories

The Kharkivska military administration, which the Ukrainian government established as an emergency measure after the full-scale invasion, suspended in-person education in schools as a security measure against continuing Russian attacks after February 2022. Yet

Russian attacks on critical infrastructure, which destroyed or disabled electricity, phone and internet networks, made distance learning difficult or impossible to access for many children and teachers.

Children with disabilities were often unable to evacuate from areas that fell under occupation and were especially affected by the suspension of in-person education. In July 2023, the Kharkivska military administration decided to allow schools to re-open if they have bomb shelters that met government regulations.

Outside cities, students and teachers who experienced potentially traumatic events in many communities that fell under occupation have had virtually no access to mental health and psychosocial support. Ukraine is ramping up efforts to train 15,000 school psychologists to support students nationwide.

The full-scale invasion has put Ukraine's education system under enormous strain. Since then, Ukrainian national and local education authorities, with support from Ukrainian civil society and international donors, have taken innovative steps to provide education. These include efforts to ensure that online education with the Ukrainian state curriculum is available in Russia-occupied areas, such as extending a fully online "All-Ukrainian School," first established during the coronavirus pandemic, which now offers 10,000 video lessons covering the curriculum from grades 5 through 11. Schools have shown flexibility in enrolling displaced students and students who had lived under occupation for a time, even if they did not have the correct school records or were behind or out of sync in terms of curricula, but vast needs remain.

The Ukrainian authorities and foreign donors should continue to coordinate with Ukrainian civil society groups to find ways to keep children connected to learning under occupation or during displacement by Russian forces, and to help bring them back into the national education system as soon as possible.

Recommendations

To the Government of the Russian Federation:

- Respect obligations under international humanitarian law as an occupying power and:
 - Immediately cease attempts to Russify the education system and carry out political indoctrination in occupied territories of Ukraine;
 - Facilitate the education of children in occupied territories fully in line with Ukrainian curricula and Ukrainian law;
 - Ensure that education staff in occupied territories of Ukraine can exercise their duties and students can follow the Ukrainian curriculum, and hold to account occupation officials responsible for harassing, ill-treating, and putting undue pressure on Ukrainian education workers, students and parents.

To the Ukrainian Justice Ministry, Office of the Prosecutor General, Ministry of Education and Science, Ukrainian Parliament:

- Do not penalize teachers simply for providing education to children under the Russian curriculum in occupied territories;
- Consider revisions to the legislation on collaboration to clarify, as appropriate, that merely undertaking work in the education sphere will not be punished;
- Ensure that policies, measures and laws on collaboration, filtration processes, and administrative penalties like termination of employment and professional bans are implemented consistently with Ukraine's human rights obligations, including due process and fair trials, and relevant norms on occupation under international humanitarian law.

To the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science, regional military administration officials, and international donors:

- In consultation with Ukrainian and international civil society groups, teachers' unions, and humanitarian agencies:

- Support the safe and accessible reconstruction of schools damaged or destroyed during hostilities;
- Support students and teachers from educational facilities that were evacuated, damaged, or destroyed, to continue or re-enter learning and teaching;
- Develop programs to support families who are providing education to their children at home, often with minimal connectivity and technical capacities, particularly in previously occupied areas where devices may have been confiscated during occupation;
- Develop programs to support children who were educated under Russian occupying authorities to transition successfully to the Ukrainian school system;
- Expand support for education for children with disabilities who cannot be reached with distance learning;
- Continue to expand the roll-out of mental health and psychosocial support programs for students and teachers, while developing an evidence-based toolkit for school psychologists;
- Develop methods to enable teachers displaced from occupied territory to receive their salaries more promptly, or to find work at new schools.

Methodology

Human Rights Watch visited seven communities in Kharkivska region in November 2022, less than two months after Ukrainian forces de-occupied them, and interviewed 42 Ukrainian education officials, teachers, teachers' union representatives, and other school staff there, as well as Ukraine's Ombudsperson for Education, and a district military administration's head. Having no access to the areas still under occupation, we later interviewed by phone or in person four teachers and other education staff from occupied areas—in Mariupol, as well as in Zaporizka, Khersonska and Luhanska regions—who had evacuated to Ukrainian-controlled areas. We also interviewed staff from four Ukrainian civil society groups and three international humanitarian agencies specialized in education or mental health.

Our research included reviewing Russian history textbooks left behind in Ukrainian schools in 2022, as well as textbooks intended for use in the 2023-24 school year, and the new Russian secondary school history textbook launched in autumn 2023 in Russia and in Russia-occupied areas of Ukraine. We reviewed Ukrainian and Russian laws in the sphere of education, newspapers published by occupying authorities, publications in Russian government or pro-Kremlin media, and reports from UN and other humanitarian agencies and local and international news media. We sent letters to the Ukrainian government as well as the Russian government with our preliminary findings and questions. The Russian authorities did not reply. The Ukrainian authorities provided a written reply on June 12 and at time of writing, we are in dialogue with them regarding our research findings. The scope of this research is limited to primary and secondary schools, including vocational schools, and does not extend to either pre-primary or higher education.

I. Russia’s Unlawful Changes to Education in Occupied Ukrainian Territory

Russia’s education policies in occupied Ukrainian territory violate its obligations under the laws of war and human rights law. An occupying power is required to restore public order and services in the occupied territory, and in particular to facilitate the proper working of institutions dedicated to the education of children, but it must respect the laws in force in the territory before the occupation and is prohibited from imposing its own laws, including laws on education. Russia’s human rights obligations also extend to occupied territory, including the prohibition against propaganda for war in education and the denial of education in a child’s own language.

Russia’s Unlawful Takeover of Education in Occupied Ukrainian Territory

Russian authorities seek to impose complete control over education policies and schools in occupied areas in Ukraine, as if they were in Russian territory, contrary to the law of occupation. Russian occupying authorities also restrict access to education to Ukrainian students unless they submit to the annexationist policy of pressuring Ukrainians to obtain Russian passports.

In the Khersonska region, the occupying authority’s head of education, Mikhail Rodikov, stated on September 1, 2022 that students would “become educated ... citizens of their country, Russia,”² and the de facto authorities praised education “under the Russian flag.”³

² From 2015 to 2018, Rodikov had imposed the Russian educational system in Sevastopol, in occupied Crimea.

³ Telegram post from the account of the Russian occupation “Kherson Region Administration,” “Sergey Yeliseev congratulated Kherson residents on the beginning of the new academic year” (“Сергей Елисеев поздравил херсонцев с началом нового учебного года”), September 21, 2022, https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/3100 (accessed February 5, 2024). When Ukrainian forces launched a counter-offensive in Khersonska from September to November 2022, the occupation administration announced schools would go on “vacation” from October 6 to 21, when the children would be sent to “health resorts” in Crimea to “take part in the health programs of the Russian Federation,” see: Telegram post from the account of the Russian occupation “Kherson Region Administration” (“In schools and colleges of Khersonska oblast holidays are announced” (В школах и колледжах Херсонской области объявляются каникулы)), October 5, 2022, https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/3855, (accessed May 31, 2024). By October 11, some 2,000 children from Kherson and Zaporizhzhya had supposedly arrived at Yevpatoriya, in Crimea, see: Telegram post from the account of the Russian occupation “Kherson Region Administration,” October 11, 2022, https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/3991, (accessed May 31, 2024).

Occupying authorities have beaten school children who expressed peaceful opposition to the occupation. In Melitopol, Hanna Bout, a teacher at the Professional Agricultural Lyceum who was an awardee as one of the best teachers in Ukraine in 2021, said, “They changed the flags to Russia’s on February 25 [2022]. We protested against the occupation until March 18, when they beat demonstrators harshly. They beat a girl under 18 and broke her ribs for having a Ukrainian flag painted on her cheek.”⁴ Bout later escaped to western Ukraine.⁵

Russia requires Ukrainians living in occupied territory to acquire Russian passports by July 1, 2024, or else they will be considered foreign nationals, contrary to the international law prohibition on forcing inhabitants of occupied territory to swear allegiance to the hostile power.⁶ Some schools in occupied Ukrainian territory have reportedly sent messages to parents that a copy of at least one parent’s Russian passport is required for their child to enroll.⁷ Similar restrictions have been documented in areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine occupied by Russian forces since 2014, where local de facto authorities have required families to obtain Russian passports or passports issued by the so-called Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) and Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) as a condition of access to education.⁸

Even before the sham referendums on annexation that were held in late September 2022, representatives of the so-called DNR and LNR participated in a conference of Russia’s regional education ministers in Russia in May 2022.⁹

⁴ Human Rights Watch videocall interview with Hanna Bout, teacher of Melitopol Professional Agricultural Lyceum, Kyiv, December 13, 2022.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Hague Convention (IV) Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land and Its Annex: Regulations Concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land, October 18, 1907, art. 45; “Russia Threatens Ukrainians Who Refuse Russian Citizenship,” Human Rights Watch news release, May 16, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/16/russia-threatens-ukrainians-who-refuse-russian-citizenship>.

⁷ Yale School of Public Health, Conflict Observatory, *Forced Passportization in Russia-Occupied Areas of Ukraine*, August 2, 2023, p. 18, <https://hub.conflictobservatory.org/portal/sharing/rest/content/items/e280a7eeb7bf4dc588ed50ee655b9858/data> (accessed February 2, 2024).

⁸ See for example, “Donetsk residents are concerned: Children without a ‘passport’ of the ‘DPR’ may not be issued educational documents” (“Дончане обеспокоены: Детям без «паспорта» «ДНР» могут не выдать документы об образовании”), Don Press, April 29, 2021, https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/3991 (accessed March 26, 2024).

⁹ “LNR and DNR education ministers took part in Russia-wide meeting of regional education ministers” (“Министры образования ЛНР и ДНР приняли участие в общероссийском совещании региональных министров образования”), Russian Ministry of Education press release 5141, May 2022, <https://edu.gov.ru/press/5141/ministry-obrazovaniya-lnr-i-dnr-prinyali-uchastie-vo-vserossiyskom-soveshchaniy-regionalnyh-ministrov-obrazovaniya>, (accessed May 30, 2024).

By the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Russian school-oversight agency (Rosobrnadzor) had accredited 40 schools, colleges, and universities in the so-called DNR and LNR, which use the Russian curriculum and Russian as the language of instruction.¹⁰ From February to July 2022, the agency accredited an additional seven schools and a college in newly occupied areas of Ukraine.¹¹

In at least one district of Kharkiv region, teachers in 2022 signed employment contracts not with the local occupying authorities, but directly with a department of the Russian federal government,¹² although it is not clear whether this has been the arrangement in all occupied areas at all times.¹³ The occupying authorities' imposition of the Russian education system included prohibiting the Ukrainian curriculum and requiring Ukrainian teachers to be re-certified to teach the Russian curriculum through training in Russia or in occupied Crimea. In Borova, local occupying authorities told teachers that travel arrangements would be made for them to receive accreditation in occupied Crimea or Russia's Belgorod region, but ultimately this did not happen due to "constant hostilities," teachers said.¹⁴ In Shevchenkove, "a busload of teachers" went to Russia for recertification courses, which others refused despite pressure from "the so-called 'acting school director.'"¹⁵ Re-certification of teachers from Mariupol who agreed to teach under occupying authorities was organized in St. Petersburg, a teacher said.¹⁶ In Kherson, the occupying authorities announced in June 2022 that school directors and teachers would

¹⁰ Russian Education Federal Portal, "The issuance of certificates of Russian state accreditation to education organizations of Zaporizka and Kharkiv regions continues" ("Продолжается выдача свидетельств о российской государственной аккредитации образовательным организациям Запорожской и Харьковской областей"), July 26, 2022, <https://archive.is/01nEo> (accessed February 2, 2024); Federal Service for Supervision in the Field of Education and Science, "Rosobrnadzor presented certificate of state accreditation to several educational institutions in the liberated territories" ("Рособрнадзор вручил свидетельства о государственной аккредитации нескольким учебным заведениям на освобожденных территориях"), July 26, 2022, <https://archive.ph/1gzNa> (accessed February 2, 2024).

¹¹ "Five educational organizations in Zaporizka and Kharkivska regions received certificates of Russian state accreditation" ("Пять образовательных организаций Запорожской и Харьковской областей получили свидетельства о российской государственной аккредитации"), Russian Ministry of Education news release, July 26, 2022, <https://archive.is/15piK> (accessed February 5, 2024).

¹² Human Rights Watch group interview with Lyudmila Viktorivna, deputy school director, Vasily Andreyevich, physical education teacher, and Svitlana Leonidivna, Ukrainian language and literature teacher, Borova School No. 1, November 5, 2022.

¹³ In earlier phases of occupation before 2022, in Donetsk and Luhansk regions and in Crimea, that control appears to have been delegated to local de-facto authorities.

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Lyudmila Viktorivna, deputy school director, as part of a group interview with two other teachers, Borova School No. 1, November 5, 2022.

¹⁵ Human Rights Watch group interview with five teachers and district education staff, Shevchenkove, November 6, 2022.

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Yaroslav, history teacher from Mariupol, Kyiv, November 1, 2022.

travel to Crimea for re-training under the Russian curriculum and several local schools received Russian accreditation before de-occupation of the city in autumn 2022.¹⁷

In total, 1,300 schools were opened under the Russian system in Ukraine in 2022, according to Russia’s education minister Sergei Kravtsov.¹⁸ In December 2022, Kravtsov said 36,000 teachers were working in Russian-run schools.¹⁹

Beginning in April 2022, the occupying authorities in Kharkivska region held meetings to recruit Ukrainian teachers, where they described their educational plans, and portrayed the switch to the Russian curriculum and other changes as inevitable.²⁰ At a meeting in Borova, “they said if they didn’t get enough [Ukrainian] teachers [to agree], they would bring teachers from Russia,” and that “Russia is going to be here for a long time,” teachers recalled.²¹ Only “four or five” out of dozens of teachers agreed to teach under the Russian system, but the occupying authorities later brought another 15 teachers from the Donbas region, teachers said.²² In Shevchenkove, the occupying authorities said “that if local teachers refused to work, well, Russia is big, they will bring new teachers,” recalled education staff.²³ The education staff who spoke to Human Rights Watch attended the meetings to learn about the occupying authorities’ plans, but all refused to teach.

In December 2022, Russia’s then-deputy minister of science and higher education, Grigory Gurov, said at a youth scientists’ congress that over 6000 teachers in the annexed territories of Ukraine had been re-certified to teach the official Russian curriculum.²⁴ In

¹⁷ See for example: June 17, 2022, https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/2364 (accessed March 20, 2024).

¹⁸ Russian Ministry of Education, “The Minister of Education spoke about what the coming school year will be like” (“Министр просвещения рассказал о том, каким будет наступающий учебный год”), August 31, 2022, <https://archive.is/CxniG> (accessed April 3, 2024).

¹⁹ Russian Ministry of Education, “Interview with Minister of Education of Russia Sergei Kravtsov with ‘Russia 24’ television station” (“Интервью Министра просвещения России Сергея Кравцова телеканалу «Россия 24»”), December 21, 2022, <https://archive.is/tvGcZ> (accessed April 3, 2024).

²⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Tetiana, mathematics teacher, Lyceum No. 3, Iziium, November 3, 2022.

²¹ Human Rights Watch group interview with Lyudmila Viktorivna, deputy school director, Vasily Andreyevich, physical education teacher, and Svitlana Leonidivna, Ukrainian language and literature teacher, Borova School No. 1, November 5, 2022.

²² Ibid.

²³ Human Rights Watch group interview with five teachers and district education staff, Shevchenkove, November 6, 2022.

²⁴ Maria Agranovich, “Ministry of Education and Science: From January 2023, teachers from other regions will come to schools and universities in new territories of the Russian Federation” (“Минобрнауки: С января 2023 года в школы и вузы новых территорий РФ приедут учителя из других регионов”), Rossiyskaya Gazeta, December 1, 2022, <https://rg.ru/2022/12/01/minobrnauki-s-ianvaria-2023-goda-v-shkoly-i-vuzy-novyh-territorij-rf-priedut-uchitelia-iz-drugih-regionov.html>, (accessed March 14, 2024).

February 2023, the Russian state education watchdog, Rosobrnadzor, stated that educational facilities in the four so-called “new Russian regions” (i.e., in the occupied territories of Ukraine) were being issued temporary licenses allowing them to operate as part of Russia’s education system for another two years.²⁵ In November 2023, the deputy head of Russia’s Security Council, Dmitry Medvedev, said at a meeting with a leading Kremlin-sponsored youth organization that educational institutions in the annexed territories should be staffed with Russian “patriots.”²⁶ In January 2024, Russia’s minister of education reported to President Putin that the integration of schools in the four so-called “new Russian regions” (i.e., in the occupied territories of Ukraine) into Russia’s education system should be completed within two years.²⁷

Propaganda for War and Military Training in Russian-Controlled Ukrainian Schools

Russian authorities have introduced textbooks and lessons in schools in occupied areas of Ukraine that falsify history to justify Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the authorities have also introduced military training, and require secondary schools to send them lists of students aged 18 and older who are eligible for conscription into the Russian armed forces.²⁸ International law prohibits propaganda for war in education and pressure to enlist the occupied population into the occupying army.²⁹

In 2022, schools in Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine, including those Human Rights Watch visited in Kharkivska, received the same history, mathematics, and other textbooks that were taught in Russia. In the 2023-24 school year, schools in Russian-occupied areas, like schools in Russia, are using a new 11th grade history textbook, covering the years from

²⁵ “Schools and universities in new regions will receive temporary licenses from Rosobrnadzor, February 17, 2023, Interfax.ru, <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/886717>, (accessed March 24, 2024).

²⁶ “Medvedev said that teachers in new regions should be patriots,” RIA Novosti, November 16, 2023 <https://ria.ru/20231116/uchitelya-1909876571.html>, (accessed April 2, 2024).

²⁷ Anya Kulikova, “Minister Kravtsov reported to the president on the integration of education in new regions” (“Министр Кравцов доложил президенту об интеграции образования в новых регионах”), Rупosters.ru, January 15, 2024, <https://ruposters.ru/news/15-01-2024/ministr-kravtsov-dolozhil-prezidentu-integratsii-obrazovaniya-novih-regionah>, (accessed April 2, 2024).

²⁸ OHCHR, “Human Rights Situation During the Russian occupation of Territory of Ukraine and Its Aftermath, 24 February 2022 – 31 December 2023,” March 20, 2024, <https://ukraine.un.org/en/264057-human-rights-situation-during-russian-occupation-territory-ukraine-and-its-aftermath>, para. 126, (accessed April 2, 2024).

²⁹ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, December 16, 1966, GA Res. 2200 (XXI), art. 20(1-2); Geneva Convention IV (1949), art. 51.

1945 to the present. Launched by the Russian education ministry,³⁰ the textbook claims that Ukrainian statehood and language do not exist and includes maps that misrepresent parts of Ukraine as though they were part of Russia, following the sham annexations of these regions.³¹

The textbook severely distorts the popular “Maidan” uprising against then-president Yanukovich’s rejection of a political and trade agreement with the European Union, followed by deadly repression of protesters, and Russia’s subsequent invasion of Ukraine and occupation of the Crimea and parts of the Donbas in 2014.³² The uprising led to an overhaul of Ukraine’s political system after Yanukovich fled to Russia. The textbook falsely claims “Ukrainian nationalists with direct support of the West” staged “a bloody military coup” to overthrow the government. It repeats a fabricated narrative that Ukrainian authorities launched a violent crackdown on citizens opposed to the new government, and Russian speakers in Ukraine in general, and designated residents of Donbass who did not renounce their Russian identity as “terrorists.” The textbook further falsely claims that this is what led to the war in the east of the country and the emergence of the so-called Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) and Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) whose “independence” Russia recognized in 2020, before unlawfully incorporating them in 2022.³³ It also falsely claims that “practically the entire population of Crimea” wanted to be “reunited” with Russia and wholeheartedly welcomed the annexation.³⁴

³⁰ Katia Patin, “The Kremlin revises a textbook to dictate future understanding of Russian history,” Coda, August 14, 2023, <https://www.codastory.com/rewriting-history/kremlin-texbook-ukraine/> (accessed February 2, 2024).

³¹ “Fictitious Annexation Follows ‘Voting’ At Gunpoint,” Human Rights Watch news release, September 30, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/09/30/fictitious-annexation-follows-voting-gunpoint>.

³² Russian History Textbook for Grade 11, page 398 (at the time of writing, the textbook was not publicly available online but Human Rights Watch obtained a copy for the purposes of this report). Also see: Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2015* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2015), Ukraine chapter, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015/country-chapters/ukraine>.

³³ Russian History Textbook for Grade 11, page 396.

³⁴ Russian History Textbook for Grade 11, page 398; also see: Human Rights Watch, *Rights in Retreat: Abuses in Crimea*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2014), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/11/17/rights-retreat/abuses-crimea>.

ОБРАЩЕНИЕ ПРЕЗИДЕНТА РОССИЙСКОЙ ФЕДЕРАЦИИ В. В. ПУТИНА К ФЕДЕРАЛЬНОМУ СОБРАНИЮ. 18 МАРТА 2014 г.

16 марта в Крыму состоялся референдум, он прошёл в полном соответствии с демократическими процедурами и международно-правовыми нормами. В голосовании приняло участие более 82 процентов избирателей. Более 96 процентов высказалось за воссоединение с Россией. Цифры предельно убедительные.

Чтобы понять, почему был сделан именно такой выбор, достаточно знать историю Крыма, знать, что значила и значит Россия для Крыма и Крым для России.

В Крыму буквально всё пронизано нашей общей историей и гордостью. Здесь древний Херсонес, где принял крещение святой князь Владимир. Его духовный подвиг — обращение к православию — предопределил общую культурную, ценностную, цивилизационную основу, которая объединяет народы России, Украины и Белоруссии. В Крыму — могилы русских солдат, мужеством которых Крым в 1783 году был взят под Российскую державу. Крым — это Севастополь, город-легенда, город великой судьбы, город-крепость и Родина русского черноморского военного флота. Крым — это Балаклава и Керчь, Малахов курган и Сапун-гора. Каждое из этих мест свято для нас, это символы русской воинской славы и невиданной доблести.

Крым — это и уникальный сплав культур и традиций разных народов. И этим он так похож на большую Россию, где в течение веков не исчез, не растворился ни один этнос. Русские и украинцы, крымские татары и представители других народов жили и трудились рядом на крымской земле, сохраняя свою самобытность, традиции, язык и веру.

1. Каковы причины воссоединения Крыма с Россией? 2. О каких исторических событиях напоминает Президент в своём обращении? Какие исторические события связаны с географическими названиями, упомянутыми в обращении?

Думаем, сравниваем, размышляем

1. Почему граждане России единодушно поддержали воссоединение Крыма и Севастополя с Россией? 2. Какое событие истории России 2012—2020 гг. представляется вам наиболее значимым? Аргументируйте свою точку зрения. 3. Подготовьте сообщение об одном из современных российских спортсменов.

A page from a Russian secondary school history textbook left behind in a school in Borova, Kharkivska region, photographed in November 2022. The text glorifies the “return of Crimea,” which Russia has occupied since 2014. © 2022 Human Rights Watch

Its final chapter addresses the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, calling it a “Special Military Operation,” as the Russian government does not acknowledge it as a war.³⁵ It includes sections with such titles as “Ukrainian neo-Nazism,” “The return of Crimea [to Russia],” and “Ukraine, a neo-Nazi state.” The textbook includes the Kremlin’s propaganda about the full-scale invasion of 2022 as necessary to protect “Russian civilization” from destruction by Kyiv and NATO and prevent a tragedy similar in scope to the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union.

The authors falsely claim that Russian forces do their utmost to protect civilians and do not under any circumstances attack “residential areas” while alleging that Ukrainian forces routinely use “their own citizens... as a human shield.”

Detailed reports by Human Rights Watch, the United Nations, and reputable international think-tanks refute these claims.³⁶ Russia initially denied but later acknowledged its invasion of Ukraine in 2014, which independent analysts have found used false claims of Ukrainian repression of Russian-speaking citizens as a pretext. Russia's occupation of Crimea involved the persecution of Crimean Tatars and pro-Ukraine activists, the harassment and failure to stem abuses against these groups by pro-Russian paramilitary forces, and other abuses.³⁷ Russia’s so-called annexation of areas of Ukraine is void under international law and involved coercion of the occupied population by Russian and proxy forces to vote.³⁸ Human Rights Watch and other groups have documented scores of Russian attacks, such as attacks on aid convoys and on fleeing civilians, indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks, and attacks using cluster munitions on populated areas.³⁹

³⁵ Elena Mukhametshina, “Starting from September 2023, high school students will be taught why the military operation began” (Старшеклассникам с сентября 2023 года будут объяснять, почему началась военная операция), *Vedomosti*, July 19, 2023, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/society/articles/2023/07/19/985928-starsheklassnikam-budut-obyasnyat-pochemu-nachalas-voennaya-operatsiya>, (accessed February 2, 2024).

³⁶ For more information about Ukraine-related false claims and myths spread by Russian propagandists, see, for example: Atlantic Council, *Narrative Warfare: How the Kremlin and Russian news outlets justified a war of aggression against Ukraine*, (Washington, D.C.: AC, 2023), <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Narrative-Warfare-Final.pdf>, (accessed on April 11, 2024).

³⁷ Human Rights Watch, *Rights in Retreat: Abuses in Crimea*.

³⁸ “Fictitious Annexation Follows ‘Voting’ At Gunpoint,” Human Rights Watch news release, September 30, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/09/30/fictitious-annexation-follows-voting-gunpoint>.

³⁹ See for example: Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2023* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2023), Ukraine chapter, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/ukraine>.

In the 2024-25 school year, Russia’s education ministry will also introduce compulsory lessons for 15- to 18-year-olds in occupied Ukrainian territories and in Russia, “Fundamentals of Security and Defense of the Motherland,” using another new textbook that includes false claims, such as that after 2014 “Russian books were burned” in Ukraine, “the Russian language [was] banned... [and] ‘Russian blood’ cocktails were served in restaurants,” the BBC reported.⁴⁰ These distorted narratives are consistent with the disinformation that Russian authorities have presented to the Russian public about Ukraine’s education system.⁴¹ A March 2022 news conference organized by Russia’s education ministry and the ruling United Russia Party, for instance, alleged that Ukrainian textbooks teach “Russophobia” and display a “Nazi approach to history and education,” claims that Russia’s education minister, Sergei Kravtsov, repeated in December 2022.⁴²

In occupied territories, for instance, in Mariupol, Vladimir Putin’s portraits, his “patriotic” quotes, and portraits of Russian “heroes of the Special Military Operation” have been exhibited in schools, where children are required to sing Russia’s national anthem.⁴³ Occupation school officials have instructed Ukrainian children to write letters of support and admiration to Russian soldiers, who occupy parts of their country, according to Ukrainian government as well as reports by international and Ukrainian media.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Maria Korenyuk, “Ukraine war: Russia schoolbook urges teenagers to join the army,” BBC, March 14, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-68550459> (accessed March 16, 2024).

⁴¹ The Russian Minister of Education stated that Ukrainian textbooks teach Ukrainian “children to hate Russia,” after a government investigation analysed the textbooks in March 2022; Viktoria Polyakova and Lyubov Stavtseva, “The Ministry of Education announced plans to introduce the study of history from the first grade” (“Минпросвещения сообщило о планах ввести изучение истории с первого класса”), April 22, 2022, RBC.ru, <https://www.rbc.ru/society/19/04/2022/625e622f9a794705cddcaa4e> (accessed February 2, 2024).

⁴² “Materials for the press-conference ‘Ukrainian textbooks as an element of hate propaganda’” (“Материалы к пресс-конференции «Украинские учебники как элемент пропаганды ненависти»), United Russia Party, “March 30, 2022, <https://er.ru/pages/analiz> (accessed February 3, 2024).

⁴³ See, for example: Bogdan Skavron, “A school in occupied Mariupol was cynically “decorated” with Putin quotes: photo” (“Школу в окупированном Мариуполе цинично “украшили” цитатами Путина: фото”), TSN.Ukraine, August 17, 2023, <https://tsn.ua/ru/ukrayina/shkolu-v-okkupirovannom-mariupole-cinichno-ukrasili-citatami-putina-foto-2392612.html>, (accessed May 29, 2024).

⁴⁴ “The enemy forces Ukrainian children to write letters to the occupiers” (“Ворог примушує українських дітей писати листи окупантам”), Center of National Resistance news release, November 28, 2023, <https://sprotyv.mod.gov.ua/vorog-prymushuye-ukrayinskyh-ditej-pysaty-lysty-okupantam/> (accessed February 3, 2024); also see: Nataliya Vasilyeva and Inna Varenysia, “How Russia is brainwashing Ukrainian children to ‘use as weapon,’” The Telegraph, July 18, 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2023/07/18/abducted-ukraine-children-brainwash-russia-trained-weapons/>; Olha Hlushchenko, “Children forced to write letters to Russian invaders in occupied Tokmak,” Ukrainska Pravda, March 1, 2023, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2023/03/1/7391456/> (accessed April 11, 2024).

Ukrainian children in areas under Russian occupation have received military training in schools.⁴⁵ A teacher who escaped from occupied Mariupol in 2022 and remains in contact with former students said that occupying authorities had pressured them to enroll in Mariupol’s School No. 41, which taught a “paramilitary classes” including the use of different types of weapons.⁴⁶ During the 2023-24 school year, secondary schools in Russian occupied Ukraine have reportedly trained male students in the use of assault rifles and hand grenades.⁴⁷ Schools and summer camps also subjected children as young as six, including girls, to military training and extensive propaganda, according to a report on Ukrainian families’ efforts to bring back children whom Russian authorities had forcibly transferred to other parts of occupied Ukrainian territory, and to an open-source study that identified 6,000 Ukrainian children whom Russian authorities had forcibly transferred or deported to Russia.⁴⁸

The Russian government has allocated 46 billion rubles (US\$512.4 million) to fund “patriotic education” in 2024, including 270 million rubles (\$3 million) for Youth Army, an organization established by Russia’s Defense Ministry that prepares children to join the military, disseminates anti-Ukrainian propaganda, and is active in occupied Ukrainian territories as well as in Russia.⁴⁹ According to a UN report published in March 2024, Russian authorities also inducted Ukrainian children in Zaporizhzhia into the “Youth

⁴⁵ Telegram post from the account of Tavria, Tavria (Kherson regional news, Telegram channel), “The youth of the Kherson region mastered the skills of shooting military weapons” (“Молодёжь Херсонской области освоила навыки стрельбы из боевого оружия”), December 14, 2022, https://t.me/tavria_kherson/3199 (accessed February 4, 2024).

⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Yaroslav, history teacher from Mariupol, Kyiv, November 1, 2022.

⁴⁷ “In Photos: Russian High Schoolers Undergo Basic Military, First Aid Training,” The Moscow Times, April 7, 2023, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/04/07/in-photos-russian-high-schoolers-undergo-basic-military-and-first-aid-training-a80751> (accessed February 4, 2024).

⁴⁸ Amanda Bailly, “Ukrainian Women Brave War and Borders to Save their Kids,” Long Road Magazine, June 13, 2023, <https://www.longroadmag.com/ukrainian-women-brave-war-and-borders-to-save-their-kids/>. See also Yale School of Public Health, Conflict Observatory, *Forced Passportization in Russia-Occupied Areas of Ukraine*, (New Haven, :Yale HRL 2023), p. 18, <https://hub.conflictobservatory.org/portal/sharing/rest/content/items/97f919ccfe524d31a241b53ca44076b8/data>, (accessed February 2, 2024).

⁴⁹ See Anna Conkling, “Kids in Occupied Ukraine Forced to Join Russian War Effort,” Daily Beast, December 2, 2023, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/kids-in-occupied-ukraine-forced-to-join-russian-war-effort>, (accessed May 29, 2024); “Funding for projects on patriotic education will reach **₽46 billion**,” RBC, **October 9, 2023**, <https://www.rbc.ru/economics/09/10/2023/651ee6869a79477e012d174?ref=dron.media>, (accessed May 29, 2024); Bashir Kitachayev, “In 2024 the Kremlin will allocate more than 45 billion Rubles to support “patriotic” projects” (“Финансирование проектов по патриотическому воспитанию достигнет **₽46 млрд**”), Dron Media, October, 2023, <https://dron.media/v-2024-ghodu-krieml-vydielit-na-poddierzhku-patriotichieskikh-proiektov-bolieie-45-milliardov-rubliei/> (accessed May 29, 2024).

South” movement where they participate in “maintaining public order” and “interact directly” with frontline Russian soldiers, according to an occupation official.⁵⁰

By March 2022, shortly after the full-scale invasion, Russian schools launched “Lessons about Things that Matter.”⁵¹ These weekly sessions, during which the Russian Education Ministry instructs teachers to appeal to their students’ “patriotism,” are taught “in every school in the country,” which Russia defines as including the supposedly annexed regions of Ukraine.⁵² In 2024, a Russian deputy education minister stated that the sessions “seek to develop pupils’ values towards Russia, its attitudes, history, environment, and great culture.”⁵³ Although the content of such sessions varies, in the days after the full-scale invasion, schools in Moscow region received instructions to emphasize, among other things, the propaganda reflected in the new history textbook, including that Russia is conducting a “special peacekeeping operation” to stop a “nightmare of genocide” against “millions” of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers in the Donetska and Luhanska regions of Ukraine; and that the “operation” was also necessary to protect Russia from attack by the West. The weekly sessions are not part of formal curriculum but students who wish to opt out, and their parents, risk pressure from school officials.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ OHCHR, “Human Rights Situation During the Russian occupation of Territory of Ukraine and Its Aftermath, 24 February 2022 – 31 December 2023, March 2024,” March 20, 2024, <https://ukraine.un.org/en/264057-human-rights-situation-during-russian-occupation-territory-ukraine-and-its-aftermath>, para. 135, (accessed April 2, 2024).

⁵¹ “Russia Instructs Teachers to Spread Disinformation About Ukraine,” Human Rights Watch news release, March 4, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/04/russia-instructs-teachers-spread-disinformation-about-ukraine>.

⁵² “Experts of the Committee on the Rights of the Child Commend the Russian Federation on the Reduction in Child Mortality Rates, Ask about Propaganda in Schools and the Impact of the War in Ukraine on Children,” The UN Information Service at Geneva meeting summary, January 23, 2024, <https://www.ungeneva.org/en/news-media/meeting-summary/2024/01/examinant-le-rapport-de-la-federation-de-russie-les-experts-du> (accessed March 12, 2024).

⁵³ Human Rights Treaty Bodies, “2769th Meeting, 95th Session, Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC),” video, *UN Web TV* January 23, 2024, <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1y/k1yipyizas> (accessed February 2, 2024).

⁵⁴ See for example: Anastasia Nikushina, “Talking about important things” at school: what kind of classes are they, how will they be held and is attendance required” (“«Разговоры о важном» в школе: что это за занятия, как они будут проходить и обязательно ли посещение”) Mel, September 2, 2022, <https://mel.fm/zhizn/razbor/4095316-razgovory-o-vazhnom-v-shkole-cto-eto-za-zanyatiya-kak-oni-budut-prokhodit-i-obyazatelno-li-poseshch>, (accessed March 29, 2024); Infourok, “A lesson in courage on the topic of ‘Heroes of the SVO’” (“Урок мужества на тему “Герои СВО””), undated, <https://infourok.ru/urok-muzhestva-na-temu-geroi-svo-6510686.html>, (accessed March 26, 2024).

Imposition of Russian Language of Instruction and Russian Curriculum, and Denial of Mother-Tongue Education

The Russian authorities' unlawful changes to the education system in areas of Ukraine occupied after February 2022 reflect, on an accelerated timescale, the changes imposed by Russian proxy authorities after 2014 in the so-called DNR and LNR and in Crimea.⁵⁵ In Horlivka, a city near Donetsk, for example, Russian proxy authorities continued to use Ukrainian school books “for several years” after 2014 before completely switching to the Russian curriculum, according to a local education expert.⁵⁶

Nonetheless, the impact of the changes imposed in occupied territory after 2014 were drastic. The number of students in classes with Ukrainian as the language of instruction in Crimea plummeted from 13,000 students in 2014 to 300 in 2017, within three years of Russia's occupation of the peninsula.⁵⁷ In January 2024, a Russian deputy education minister stated that Ukrainian is the language of instruction in only two schools in Crimea.⁵⁸

Announcements by Russian authorities and their proxies initially indicated a gradual approach to changes in the language of instruction that would, at least to a certain extent, take into account the wishes of the occupied population. At a meeting of local education staff in Borova, in Kharkivska region, occupation officials who identified themselves as “the representatives of the military district educational administration” said in May 2022 that there would be a transitional period of several months, during which it would be permitted to teach in Ukrainian while introducing the Russian curriculum.⁵⁹ On August 1,

⁵⁵ See “‘LPR’ removed the Ukrainian language from the school curriculum and attributed it to the parents’ decision” (“‘ЛНР’ убрала из школьной программы украинский язык и выдала это за решение родителей”), *RealGazeta*, June 4, 2020, <https://realgazeta.com.ua/ukrainskiy-yazyk-ubrali-04-06/>, (accessed March 20, 2024); and Nikita Kovalenko and Andrey Rezchikov, “Donbass and Crimea are forgetting the Ukrainian language” (“Донбасс и Крым забывают украинский язык”) *Vsglad*, June 7, 2017, <https://vz.ru/world/2017/6/7/286098.html>, (accessed March 20, 2024). In 2014, the so-called DNR authorities offered teachers in Mariupol promotions if they joined a school system under DNR control. “The ratio was around 70 percent were for Ukraine, 30 percent were pro-DNR. But in 2015 they were pushed out of Mariupol.” Human Rights Watch interview with Yaroslav, history teacher from Mariupol, Kyiv, November 1, 2022.

⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch group interview with Yaroslava Mozghova, director, Osvitoria Hub, Kyiv, November 1, 2022.

⁵⁷ Yulia Gorbunova (Human Rights Watch), “Crimea: ‘Not Our Home Anymore,’” commentary, *Kyiv Post*, May 3, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/05/03/crimea-not-our-home-anymore>.

⁵⁸ Human Rights Treaty Bodies, “2769th Meeting, 95th Session, Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC),” video, *UN Web TV* January 23, 2024, <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1y/k1ypyiyzas> (accessed February 2, 2024).

⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch group interview with Lyudmila Viktorivna, deputy school director, Vasiliy Andreyevich, physical education teacher, and Svitlana Leonidivna, Ukrainian language and literature teacher, Borova School No. 1, November 5, 2022.

2022, Russia’s deputy education minister said that all Ukrainian schools under occupation would follow the Russian curriculum, but could use the Ukrainian language to teach.⁶⁰

Despite these promises, the occupying authorities did not permit a “transition period” to the use of Russian as the language of instruction in Ukrainian schools. In Shevchenkove, a municipality in Kharkivska region, a delegation from Russia informed local teachers in June 2022 that “if parents write a request, there might be one hour of Ukrainian language [instruction] per week. But it’s not going to be like LNR and DNR where they started with a transition period. Here it would be all Russian language,” teachers who attended the meeting told Human Rights Watch.⁶¹ Prior to the occupation, schools in Kharkivska taught primarily in Ukrainian, with children having the option of classes in Russian or other languages.

On August 12, Russia’s Education Ministry stated that the language of instruction in occupied Ukraine would be Russian, with schools outside the “DNR” and “LNR” given the option of teaching classes in Ukrainian only as a “native language” or as an “optional” language for a few hours per week.⁶² In late August and early September, the authorities in occupied areas of the Zaporizka and Khersonska regions decided that schools would teach at most three hours of Ukrainian language per week.⁶³

The occupying authorities have subjected some children who spoke Ukrainian in schools to ill-treatment. A teacher from Melitopol who remains in contact with the family of a former student, who is under 18, told Human Rights Watch that occupying authorities “put a bag on [the boy’s] head for speaking Ukrainian and dumped him thirty kilometers

⁶⁰ “Children from the LNR and DNR will be able to be taught in Ukrainian, the Education Ministry announced” (“Детей из ДНР и ЛНР смогут учить на украинском языке, заявило Минпросвещения”), RIANovosti, August 1, 2022, <https://ria.ru/20220801/obuchenie-1806464672.html> (accessed March 17, 2024).

⁶¹ Human Rights Watch group interview with five teachers and district education staff, Shevchenkove, November 6, 2022.

⁶² Russian Ministry of Education, “More than 30,000 children from Donbass and liberated territories vacationed in Russia this summer,” August 12, 2022, <https://archive.ph/fCigR> (accessed March 18, 2024).

⁶³ Telegram post from the account of the [Occupation] Administration of Zaporozhye [sic] Region, “Schools in Zaporizka region are completing renovations before the new school year” (“В школах Запорожской области заканчивают ремонт перед новым учебным годом”) August 29, 2022, https://t.me/zap_admin/127, (accessed March 20, 2024); “Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar will be studied in the Kherson region in native language lessons” (“Украинский и крымско-татарский будут изучать в Херсонской области на уроках родного языка”) TASS, September 1, 2022, <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/15617755>, (accessed March 20, 2024); see also Telegram post from the account of the [Occupation] Administration of Kherson Region, September 1, 2022, https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/3103 (accessed March 20, 2024).

outside the city.”⁶⁴ Amnesty International reported in December 2023 that “informants have been appointed [by occupying authorities] from among school students whose task is to identify and report on those children who speak Ukrainian,” and that the authorities threatened offenders with being removed from their families and that their parents would be punished by the de-facto authorities.⁶⁵

Before the start of the school year in September 2022, Russia’s Education Ministry reportedly shipped 5 million Russian textbooks to Ukraine, and Russian regional authorities sent another 2.5 million textbooks.⁶⁶ Teachers from several regular Ukrainian schools confirmed to Human Rights Watch that Russian textbooks had arrived during the occupation.⁶⁷

Teachers said that in addition to imposing Russian textbooks, occupying authorities also confiscated and destroyed Ukrainian school materials.

In Borova, in Kharkivska region, Russian authorities delivered Russian textbooks to schools for the scheduled start of the school year, September 1, 2022, and held a meeting for students on September 2, “but they couldn’t give out the books because there was heavy shelling, and then the school year was delayed to October 1, and then it was the hostilities,” a teacher said, referring to the Ukrainian counteroffensive.⁶⁸ Before retreating with Russian forces, occupying authorities “burned some of the Ukrainian books, and took others. We are giving the [Ukrainian textbooks] that were left behind to our students and also to kids from other villages,” a teacher said.⁶⁹ When Human Rights Watch researchers

⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch videocall interview with Hanna Bout, teacher of Melitopol Professional Agricultural Lyceum, Kyiv, December 13, 2022.

⁶⁵ Amnesty International, *Ukraine: Children’s Education Is One More Casualty of Russian Aggression*, (AI, 2023) <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/EUR5075082023ENGLISH.pdf> (accessed April 2, 2024).

⁶⁶ Russian Ministry of Education, “Minister of Education Sergei Kravtsov – about new schools, education system and young teachers” (“Министр просвещения Сергей Кравцов - про новые школы, систему воспитания и молодых учителей”), August 31, 2022, <https://archive.is/3oeTF> (accessed April 10, 2024).

⁶⁷ Staff at a vocational school in Iziium, however, said the occupying authorities had never sent books or lesson plans, before the area was de-occupied. Human Rights Watch group interview with six staff and director, Regional Center for Vocational Studies, State Educational Facility of Iziium, November 3, 2022.

⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch group interview with Lyudmila Viktorivna, deputy school director, Vasiliy Andreyevich, physical education teacher, and Svitlana Leonidivna, Ukrainian language and literature teacher, Borova School No. 1, November 5, 2022.

⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Lyudmila V., during group interview with two other teachers, Borova School No. 1, November 5, 2022.

visited the Borova school in November 2022, the teachers showed packs of Russian textbooks, which still remained on the premises.

The textbooks, including in social sciences, were regular textbooks used in Russian schools, grades 1 to 11. A high school history textbook included a section glorifying the occupation of Crimea. Human Rights Watch obtained copies of two documents, which state that in the Balakliya district of Kharkivska region, a special commission of school employees working with the occupying authorities had inventoried and seized Ukrainian textbooks, and other materials from the Yakovenkove school and School No. 3 in Balakliya, the district center.



Russian schoolbooks left behind at a Ukrainian school in Borova, Kharkivska region, November 5, 2022. Occupying education authorities fled a Ukrainian counter-offensive that retook the area before they could impose the Russian curriculum in September 2022. © 2022 Human Rights Watch

Torture and Coercion of Teachers

Initially, in the spring and summer of 2022, occupying authorities tried to recruit teachers with promises of pay and humanitarian aid, teachers said. Occupying authorities in Shevchenkove and Borova promised to pay teachers 20,000 rubles (US\$200) or more per month, teachers said, which was consistent with copies of written orders Russian forces left behind when they retreated.⁷⁰ But teachers whom Human Rights Watch spoke to in Kharkivska region were not aware of any cases in which the occupying authorities actually paid teachers' salaries before the Ukrainian counteroffensive forced Russian troops to retreat.⁷¹

However, teachers also described pressure, threats, arbitrary detention, and torture by the occupying authorities to make them participate in or support the establishment of the Russian education system. The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) also documented 13 cases where Russian and occupation officials arbitrarily detained, tortured or otherwise ill-treated, or threatened with violence Ukrainian school administrators and teachers who refused to teach under the Russian system, as of December 2023.⁷² In a particularly disturbing case, “a school director in Kherson region was arbitrarily detained twice (for a total of 40 days), during which he was punched and kicked to pressure him into cooperating.”⁷³ In a few cases Human Rights Watch documented, occupying authorities expelled, to Ukrainian-held territory, educators who refused to collaborate.

Attacks on and mistreatment of civilians violate the laws of war, and may, for example in the case of torture, constitute war crimes. The injuring and abduction of teachers and education staff falls within the UN framework of attacks on education, one of six grave violations against children in armed conflict.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch group interview with three teachers at Borova School No. 1, November 5, 2022; and group interview with five teachers and district education staff in Shevchenkove, November 6, 2022.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² OHCHR, “Human Rights Situation During the Russian Occupation of Territory of Ukraine and Its Aftermath, 24 February 2022 – 31 December 2023, March 2024,” March 20, 2024, <https://ukraine.un.org/en/264057-human-rights-situation-during-russian-occupation-territory-ukraine-and-its-aftermath>, paras. 93-94, (accessed April 2, 2024).

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, “Protect Schools and Hospitals: Guidance Note on Security Council Resolution 1998,” May 2014, <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/publications/AttackonSchoolsHospitals.pdf>, pp. 10-11, (accessed March 20, 2024).



Graffiti found in an elementary school classroom in Iziium, which Russian forces occupied before fleeing a Ukrainian counter-offensive, November 3, 2022. The word *Занято*, “occupied,” is misspelled with a “Z,” a symbol of support for Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. © 2022 Human Rights Watch

Russian forces occupied the city of Iziium in mid-March 2022 and “did a kind of filtration, so people told them who were the teachers at the schools,” Tetiana, a math teacher and teachers’ union representative recalled.⁷⁵ The head of the occupation education department came with soldiers to Tetiana’s home: “If a guy with an AK-47 comes to your house and asks you to come to school, it’s complicated [to refuse]. But I refused.”⁷⁶

Lyudmila, a deputy school director from Borova, said that while the area was occupied in 2022, “Russian FSB [Federal Security Service officers] came to [my home] and [repeatedly] asked me ‘Why aren’t you coming to work for us, what are you waiting for?’”⁷⁷ Occupation officials warned that school workers who did not promptly agree to work would be barred

⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Tetiana, mathematics teacher, Lyceum No 3, Iziium, November 3, 2022.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch group interview with Lyudmila, deputy school director, Vasiliy, physical education teacher, and Svitlana, Ukrainian language and literature teacher, Borova School No. 1, November 5, 2022.

from education jobs in the future. “There was psychological pressure—you will lose your jobs, you will have no possibility to work. They were scaring us,” Lyudmila said.

Galina, director of a kindergarten in Yakovenkove village in Balakliya district, said occupation officials decided to re-open one kindergarten in the area, and to convert the kindergarten where Galina worked into a hospice for older people.⁷⁸ In late July or early August 2022, armed occupation officials came to her home and ordered her to show them the kindergarten. Then on August 18, “a Niva [4x4 vehicle] was waiting for me.” Armed men who “said they were the people’s militia [working for the occupying administration]” accused her of taking away kindergarten computers. Galina had told her colleagues to take the computers home, and she had also hidden students’ files. The men took her to their office, where another man put a bag on her head and drove her to what she learned was the FSB office that Russian authorities had established in the Balakliya district police station. She overheard an official say she was due to be interrogated by “Tourist,” an agent’s nom de guerre. She was taken to a basement room and detained with a local school director who had been detained the previous day and a woman who had worked for a local Ukrainian government agency.⁷⁹

The next day, occupying authorities expelled the three women, but first ordered them to record a compromising video because, Galina said, “They wanted to blackmail us. They didn’t publish it, but they were going to use it maybe if we were on the news [after leaving the occupied area].” A Russian officer told them, “I’m turning on the phone, and you must repeat what you hear” into a video camera, Galina recalled. “The woman on the phone said she hates the Ukrainian security forces and loves the Russian Federation. All three of us had to repeat this. They recorded me four times because they didn’t like the way I said it.”

Russian officials then ordered the women to cross the front lines to the Ukrainian-controlled side. Galina’s husband picked her up in their car; authorities allowed him to bring their dog but not his own mother. The school director was not allowed to take her husband with her. They were escorted to the Russian frontline where an FSB official told them, “You can’t return. We will shoot you.” They drove for five kilometers through the line

⁷⁸ Previously, social workers had cared for people at home, Galina said. Human Rights Watch group interview with three teachers and the district director of education, Balakliya, November 7, 2022.

⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Galina, Yakovenkove village kindergarten director, Balakliya, November 7, 2022.

of contact on a road “with fallen trees, and full of craters. It was hot. I could smell dead human bodies.” They reached the first Ukrainian checkpoint as shelling began nearby. “I plugged my ears with cloth so it wouldn’t be so loud. We were flying [driving very fast] to the next [Ukrainian] checkpoint,” Galina said. She returned home after Ukrainian forces retook Balakliya; her husband’s mother survived.⁸⁰

According to a media report, Lidiya Tilna, a teacher from the village of Ivanivka, some 100 km north of Balakliya, was detained for 19 days during the occupation in 2022, and was beaten by Russian interrogators for refusing to set up a school under occupying authorities.⁸¹ The director of a civil society organization described the case of a teacher she knew in Khersonska region “whose son was kidnapped [during the summer of 2022] and he was threatened that he needs to work with Russia if he wants to see his son again.”⁸² When the child, under age 18, was returned, the family escaped to Ukrainian-controlled territory.

In Balakliya, the occupation “mayor” sent his car to bring Inna Mandryka, acting principal of School No. 5, from her home to his office before the school year was due to start in September 2022. He told her, “‘You’re going to be the principal’. I said, ‘No I’m not,’ and he said, ‘You don’t know me very well. You are going to be the principal.’” She refused.⁸³ In Shevchenkove, a teacher who later escaped to Ukrainian-controlled territory said, “men came to my home and ordered me to report to their director. He said that if I did not agree to start the school year, I’d go to ‘the basement’ for two days.”⁸⁴ In the village of Vasylenkove, a physical education teacher said armed occupying authorities “came to [my home] and put a pistol on my table and said, ‘My friend, why didn’t you tell us your wife is the school principal?’”⁸⁵ He replied that his wife had left for Kharkiv; they were both eventually able to escape.

⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch group interview with teachers and department of education staff, Balakliya, November 7, 2022.

⁸¹ Zhanna Bezpiatchuk and Sofia Bettiza, “Ukraine war: Tortured for refusing to teach in Russian,” BBC News, October 1, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-63037713>, (accessed August 22, 2023).

⁸² Human Rights Watch interview with Yaroslava Mozghova, director, Osvitoria Hub, Kyiv, November 1, 2022.

⁸³ Human Rights Watch interview with Inna Mandryka, Balakliya School No 5, November 7, 2022.

⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch group interview with five teachers and district education staff, Shevchenkove, November 6, 2022.

⁸⁵ The Russian plan was to convert a local kindergarten into a school, because Russian forces had used the village’s school as a base and ammunition depot, which blew up when Ukrainian forces shelled it in May. Human Rights Watch interview with school staff in Vasylenkove, November 6, 2022.

Vitaliy Chernov, the school director in the village of Borivske, described how Russian security officers tortured him for refusing to hand over information about his school.⁸⁶ Chernov told Human Rights Watch that he hid the school’s computers and files, but on September 2, 2022— “my wedding anniversary,” he recalled—he saw “six men in balaclavas shoving my son into the house.” They demanded Chernov turn over “all the school documents,” confiscated his laptop and other devices, and took him to Kupiansk, where he was detained for three days in the local detention center’s small holding yard, open to the sky. On the third day, he was taken inside, where an FSB officer attached electric terminals to Chernov’s pinkie fingers and electro-shocked him for 30 minutes, a torture method known as “the telephone,” he learned.⁸⁷ Chernov said,

He repeatedly asked about the missing documents from the school, and I said I did not know what happened. He then said that if I wanted to go home, I needed to give them “some meaningful information” – if not about the documents, then about people from Borivske who served in the Ukrainian army or bad-mouthed Russia or had hidden weapons. I kept saying that I wasn’t very social, did not get out much... “Do you have anything else to share with us?” He sounded exasperated and that’s when I was hit with the first jolt of electricity.⁸⁸

Before ordering the guards to take Chernov away, the interrogator threatened, “Unless you start talking, we’ll be giving you these treatments till the end of the special military operation.” The guards moved Chernov to an overcrowded cell inside the building. He stayed there overnight and for three more days and was tortured again on the second day of his confinement in that cell, according to Chernov.⁸⁹ While fleeing shelling from the Ukrainian counter-offensive the Russian guards abandoned the detainees, who remained locked in their cells. Men in one cell managed to break out from the window and helped Chernov and others to escape.

⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Vitaliy Chernov, school director, Borivske, November 6, 2022.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.



Vitaliy Chernov, a Ukrainian school principal, photographed in his home on November 6, 2022. Russian forces detained, ill-treated and tortured Chernov, including with electric shocks, when he refused to provide occupying authorities with school records. © 2022 Human Rights Watch



Russian occupying authorities detained Ukrainians, including education staff, in this outdoor cell at the police station in Kupiansk, Kharkivska region, photographed on November 7, 2022. © 2022 Human Rights Watch

Penalties for Participating in Online Ukrainian Education in Occupied Territory

Russian authorities and their proxies harass and retaliate against teachers for involvement in Ukrainian remote learning programs. Nonetheless, at the start of the 2023-24 school year, roughly 80,000 Ukrainian children in Russian-occupied areas were exercising their rights and studying the Ukrainian curriculum online, at risk of retaliation against them and their families by occupying authorities.⁹⁰

Occupying authorities require Ukrainian children to attend school in person and warn parents that their children must not attend Ukrainian schools online, said Alina, an English teacher from Rubizhne, Luhanska region.⁹¹ In one case in the Zaporizka region, a student messaged their Ukrainian teacher that occupying authorities “found out that I was studying [the Ukrainian curriculum online] and took my father away, so I have to stop,” according to a humanitarian education official.⁹² “They are going house to house, to confirm kids are in Russian schools,” the official said. The UN reported that Russian authorities detained a teacher in Zaporizka region for two days for teaching the Ukrainian curriculum online, threatened to torture her and harm her father, pressured her to sign a pledge she would not teach, and stated that they were monitoring her IT devices when they released her.⁹³

In Mariupol, the occupying authorities “check that each child goes to school and doesn’t attend online Ukrainian school. Home schooling is not allowed. They check if you send your kid to Ukrainian school online on the weekend, and you could lose custody [if you do],” said Yaroslava Mozghova, who heads a Ukrainian civil society group that supports online education.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Vitaly Shevchenko, “Ukraine war: Back to school under Russian attacks,” BBC monitoring, August 31, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-66668091>, (accessed September 3, 2023). In a June 2024 letter to Human Rights Watch, the Ministry of Education and Science stated that 62,436 children were “obtaining education in temporarily occupied territories [remotely with Ukrainian] general secondary education institutions.” Letter from Andriy Stashkiv, deputy minister, Ministry of Education and Science, to Human Rights Watch, June 12, 2024, on file with Human Rights Watch.

⁹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Alina, in Kyiv, November 2, 2022.

⁹² Human Rights Watch videocall interview with Margaryta Rymarenko, Save the Children, Education Cluster, November 1, 2022.

⁹³ OHCHR, “Human Rights Situation During the Russian Occupation of Territory of Ukraine and Its Aftermath, 24 February 2022 – 31 December 2023, March 2024,” March 20, 2024, <https://ukraine.un.org/en/264057-human-rights-situation-during-russian-occupation-territory-ukraine-and-its-aftermath>, para. 126, (accessed April 2, 2024).

⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Yaroslava Mozghova, director, Osvitoria Hub, Kyiv, November 1, 2022.

A teacher in Melitopol was detained by occupying authorities for attending an online Ukrainian program for educational leaders, Mozghova said.⁹⁵ In Melitopol, if a child does not attend Russian school, their family risks a 40,000 ruble [US\$402] fine “or threats to take away their children,” said Hanna Bout, a vocational school teacher who escaped.⁹⁶ According to Bout’s contacts in Melitopol, occupying authorities “are going around schools, forcing pupils to delete their online classroom accounts where [Ukrainian school] videos were posted and homework was submitted. Some officials forced them to write a note saying, ‘I resigned from Ukrainian school, and I will go to Russian school.’”

Bout knows a first-grade teacher whom occupying authorities interrogated “because she was teaching the Ukrainian curriculum online.” She said the authorities confiscated the teacher’s computer and phone after the interrogation. Bout also knew of two families whose children attended Ukrainian classes online and were fearful they would be found out.⁹⁷ One of the two families “didn’t go outside with [their school-age daughter] for eight months because they were so scared of checkpoints where [the occupying authorities] might force the child to go to a Russian school or search their phone and find messages about the [Ukrainian] school.⁹⁸”

Ukrainian education staff continued to work in occupied territories despite the risks. During the summer of 2022, Inna, a deputy school director in then-occupied Balakliya, worked secretly in her basement to create the school work plan that was necessary to begin the school year, and which could be used for remote learning.⁹⁹ She uploaded the plan onto her phone, in order to send it to her school director who was in Ukrainian-controlled territory, but Inna had no connectivity in Balakliya’s outskirt district called Lageria. She rode her bicycle through Russian checkpoints to the city, where she could climb to the top floor of a nine-story building to get a connection, she said.

The Russians at the checkpoints, they were checking you. The documents were on my phone so I had to hide my phone in my undies. They were

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch videocall interview with Hanna Bout, teacher of Melitopol Professional Agricultural Lyceum, Kyiv, December 13, 2022.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Inna as part of a group interview with two other teachers and the district director of education, Balakliya, November 7, 2022.

frisking me. If they found out, I would be taken to “the basement.” I managed to send the documents to the principal, and the school started the new year.¹⁰⁰

In areas that are still occupied, it may not be possible to study the Ukrainian curriculum, even when Ukrainian educators are willing to risk persecution for teaching it and even when children have devices and connectivity. Russian occupying authorities in Mariupol, for example, had blocked internet access to Ukrainian online learning platforms, according to a teacher whose former students who were still there.¹⁰¹

A Ukrainian teacher who escaped from an occupied area of the Zaporizka region and continues to teach online classes for children there, told a news website that her students had to avoid detection by occupying authorities.¹⁰² One student barely left his home in six months, while another boy left home with a backpack each school-day, as if he were going to Russian school, but actually went to a relative’s house to study the Ukrainian curriculum online, the teacher said.¹⁰³ A 5th grade student received psychosocial support for “a nervous breakdown” in the second semester of the 2022-23 school year after a Russian teacher discovered he was studying the Ukrainian curriculum online and informed the occupying police authorities.¹⁰⁴

Coercion of Parents with School-Age Children

Occupying authorities have imposed penalties on parents who failed to send their children to Russian-controlled schools, even if their children were participating in the Ukrainian education available online, which is, in any case, prohibited. In Balakliya, the occupying authorities created neighborhood “street committees” (*ulichkom*), and designated people to act as the interface between residents and the authorities, teachers said.¹⁰⁵ These committees were instructed to inform parents that families who failed to send their

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Yaroslav, history teacher from Mariupol, Kyiv, November 1, 2022.

¹⁰² Anastasiya Vorobyova, “How Ukrainian teachers secretly teach our children in the occupation” (“Як українські вчителі підпільно навчають наших дітей в окупації”), ZN,UA, October 23, 2023, <https://zn.ua/ukr/amp/EDUCATION/jak-ukrajinski-vchiteli-pidpilno-navchajut-nashikh-ditej-v-okupatsiji.html>, (accessed January 2, 2024).

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Human Rights Watch group interview with three teachers and the district director of education, Balakliya, November 7, 2022.

children to “Russian school” would suffer consequences. “In some cases, they came to each house, and said either you apply for the schools, or we will take your children to [the Russian city of] Belgorod [to be schooled there],” a teacher said. “They were spreading rumors to scare people.”¹⁰⁶

In Zaporizka region, an education expert from ZMINA—a Ukrainian non-governmental human rights group—identified five cases in Berdiansk, where occupying authorities imposed fines on parents who failed to send their children to schools, even though they were participating in education at home.¹⁰⁷ Occupying authorities detained a man from a village near Nova Kakhovka, in Khersonska region, in October 2022 because he had not put his daughter in Russian school, Amnesty International reported.¹⁰⁸ According to the report, he was detained for six days, and said, “they only beat me for one day.”

Hanna Bout, the vocational school teacher from Melitopol who escaped to Kyiv and remained in contact with her former colleagues, said, “One [former colleague] got an SMS saying, “If you don’t send your kids [to school], we will force you to join the Russian army.”¹⁰⁹

Olha, a teacher in Shevchenkove, recalled that occupying authorities offered parents with school-age children free school backpacks as well as one-time payments of 10,000 rubles (\$100) to enroll their children, but also threatened them.¹¹⁰ Some parents told her they were warned by de facto authorities, “if you do not send your kids to the school, the kids will be sent to an orphanage.”¹¹¹ A teacher from an occupied area of Zaporizka region told a Ukrainian news website that occupying authorities offered to pay 4,000 rubles (\$44) per month to families whose children attended Russian schools, while students who studied

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ “Delay-action Weapon: How Russia Uses Education Against Ukrainian Children,” ZMINA conference, April 7, 2023, <https://zmina.ua/en/event-en/delay-action-weapon-how-russia-uses-education-against-ukrainian-children/> (accessed June 3, 2024).

¹⁰⁸ “Ukraine/Russia: New history textbook is a blatant attempt to unlawfully indoctrinate school children in Russia and Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories,” Amnesty International news release, September 1, 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/09/ukraine-russia-new-history-textbook-is-a-blatant-attempt-to-unlawfully-indoctrinate-school-children-in-russia-and-russian-occupied-ukrainian-territories/> (accessed September 3, 2023).

¹⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch videocall interview with Hanna Bout, teacher of Melitopol Professional Agricultural Lyceum, Kyiv, December 13, 2022.

¹¹⁰ Human Rights Watch group interview with five teachers and district education staff, Shevchenkove, November 6, 2022.

¹¹¹ Human Rights Watch with Olha, former principal of Semeniska gymnasium, during group interview with five teachers and education staff in Shevchenkove, November 6, 2022.

the Ukrainian curriculum online at home were afraid of being reported to the occupying authorities.¹¹²

Reports indicate that Ukrainian parents continue to face coercion related to their children’s education from occupying authorities. In occupied Tokmak, for example, parents were reportedly pressured to “demand” access to Russian schools for their children at the start of the 2023 school year.¹¹³ The UN also reported cases in Zaporizka and Khersonska regions where Russian authorities threatened parents their children would be taken away if they were not sent to Russian schools, and that Russian forces checked mobile phones for Ukrainian online education apps.¹¹⁴

Interrupted Education During Occupation

During the 2022-23 school year, many children living under Russian occupation received little or no education from Russian authorities, even as those authorities prohibited Ukrainian schooling. In Melitopol, which had five vocational schools before the occupation, Russian authorities set up one vocational facility, at School No. 16, a teacher who escaped to western Ukraine said.¹¹⁵ Only two of the 70 teachers at her former school agreed to work under the occupying authorities, “so the physical education teachers were teaching five subjects” in late 2022.¹¹⁶

In Shevchenkove there were 1,600 students at 11 schools before the full-scale invasion but, according to records left behind when Russian forces retreated in September 2022, only 60 children were enrolled in “Russian” schools and, even so, according to local

¹¹² Anastasia Vorobyova, “How Ukrainian teachers secretly teach our children in the occupation” (“Як українські вчителі підпільно навчають наших дітей в окупації”), ZN,UA, October 23, 2023, <https://zn.ua/ukr/amp/EDUCATION/jak-ukrajinski-vchiteli-pidpilno-navchajut-nashikh-ditej-v-okupatsiji.html>, (accessed January 2, 2024).

¹¹³ “Russians at TOT Zaporizka began to squeeze the Ukrainian language out of the school curriculum, allegedly in response to residents’ complaints,” Center for Investigative Journalism news release, September 26, 2023, <https://investigator.org.ua/ua/news-2/258857/>, (accessed May 29, 2024).

¹¹⁴ OHCHR, “Human Rights Situation During the Russian Occupation of Territory of Ukraine and Its Aftermath, 24 February 2022 – 31 December 2023, March 2024,” March 20, 2024, <https://ukraine.un.org/en/264057-human-rights-situation-during-russian-occupation-territory-ukraine-and-its-aftermath>, para. 134, (accessed April 2, 2024).

¹¹⁵ Human Rights Watch videocall interview with Hanna Bout, teacher of Melitopol Professional Agricultural Lyceum, Kyiv, December 13, 2022.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

teachers, there were not enough staff to run classes.¹¹⁷ “They opened the school, with the Russian national anthem, on September 1, but it was just a show, [to make it appear] as if something was working,” one teacher said.¹¹⁸

In Rubizhne, in Luhanska oblast, Russian occupying authorities re-opened just one of 11 schools for the 2022-2023 school year, according to Alina, an English teacher who had escaped to Kyiv.¹¹⁹ The school had no water, electricity, or internet, and was holding classes once a week, she said. Alina and her colleagues had seen videos on social media of the newly appointed school director praising the Russian authorities:

In one video, Russian soldiers are bringing desks and chairs to the school, and she is saying, “Glory to God, they brought us furniture!” We were so upset when we saw that. We [the school, previously] had laptops, furniture, everything. Now, you only have broken windows, and you’re happy with some desks?¹²⁰

In total, Ukrainian experts estimated in April 2023 that there were one million school-age Ukrainian children in Russian-occupied territory.¹²¹ A far smaller number of students were registered for the 2022-23 school year, according to Russian claims: 160,000 in so-called DNR, 105,000 students in so-called LNR, 18,000 in the then-occupied territory of Khersonska region, and 16,000 in the then-occupied territory of Kharkivska region.¹²² Even

¹¹⁷ The occupying authorities had converted Shevchenkivksi and Novomykolayivska high schools (*lyceums*) to regular schools, where the 60 children were enrolled. Human Rights Watch group interview with five teachers in Shevchenkove, November 6, 2022.

¹¹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Olha, a teacher, as part of a group interview with four other teachers in Shevchenkove, November 6, 2022.

¹¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Alina, English teacher, from Rybizhne, in Kyiv, November 2, 2022.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ “Delay-action Weapon: How Russia Uses Education Against Ukrainian Children,” ZMINA conference, April 7, 2023, <https://zmina.ua/en/event-en/delay-action-weapon-how-russia-uses-education-against-ukrainian-children/>, (accessed May 29, 2024). Also, based on the information provided by the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science to Human Rights Watch, more than 62,400 Ukrainian children living in occupied areas continue to study in Ukrainian secondary education institutions remotely. Letter from Andriy Stashkiv, deputy minister, Ministry of Education and Science, to Human Rights Watch, June 12, 2024, on file with Human Rights Watch.

¹²² See, respectively: “The DNR was told of the preparedness of schools and Universities for the new academic year,” (“В ДНР рассказали о готовности школ и вузов к новому учебному году”), TASS August 23, 2022, <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/15542887>, (accessed March 24, 2024); “Schools of the DNR and LNR begin education on September 1 with a mixed format” (“Школы ДНР и ЛНР 1 сентября начнут обучение в смешанном формате”), TASS,

these figures may have been exaggerated, as Russian officials apparently sought to project the image of a rapid, large-scale, successful take-over of education in newly occupied Ukrainian territory. In Khersonska region, the occupying authorities stated on August 5, 2022 that 645 teachers had “volunteered” to work and would teach 10,740 students.¹²³ By September 1, Russian media and occupation officials claimed that 800 teachers had already been re-certified to teach the Russian curriculum and that 18,000 students had begun the school year.¹²⁴

Ukrainian authorities planning to re-establish education in formerly occupied territory may need to develop programs to assess and provide lessons tailored not only to children who have been subjected to the Russian education system, but also to children who had little access to any learning at all under occupation.

August 25, 2022, <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/15558081>, (accessed March 24, 2024); Telegram post from Kherson occupation authority Telegram channel, September 1, 2022, https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/3103, (accessed March 24, 2024); and “In Kharkiv schools the Russian language will return and will keep Ukrainian” (“В харьковские школы вернут русский язык и сохраняют украинский”), RIA Novosti, August 29, 2022, <https://ria.ru/20220829/shkoly-1812989184.html>, (accessed March 24, 2024).

¹²³ “Since August 1st, schools of the Kherson region began with enrollment of students for in-person education” (“С 01 августа школы Херсонской области начали набор учащихся для обучения на очной основе”), Kherson.Life, August 8, 2022, <https://kherson.life/kherson/s-01-avgusta-shkoly-hersonskoj-oblasti-nachali-nabor-uchashih-sya-dlya-obucheniya-na-ochnoj-osnove/> (accessed March 23, 2024).

¹²⁴ Telegram post from the account of TASS on September 1, 2022, https://t.me/tass_agency/153342, (accessed March 23, 2024); Telegram post from the Kherson occupation authority Telegram channel, “Children of Kherson Oblast went to school on September 1st” (“Дети Херсонской области пошли в школу 1 сентября”), September 1, 2022, https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/3099, (accessed March 23, 2024).

II. Collaboration in the Sphere of Education

As noted, a small minority of Ukrainian education staff in Kharkivska region agreed to work with the occupying authorities. Several teachers told Human Rights Watch about individual staff in their respective schools who had worked with the occupying authorities and then fled to Russia when Ukrainian forces liberated the area.¹²⁵ In Iziium, the head of the local teachers' union estimated that 30 out of the pre-2022-invasion total of roughly 700 teachers, at nine schools, were later suspected of having worked with the occupying authorities.¹²⁶ At one school in Kupiansk, 81 out of 82 teachers worked with the occupation, by far the highest proportion in Kharkivska region, according to the head of education for the region.¹²⁷

However, Human Rights Watch identified concerns that Ukrainian authorities' efforts to punish collaborators in the education sphere have not always conformed to the requirements of international law.

Ukraine's Filtration and Prosecution of Education Staff

In early March 2022, Ukraine established the crime of wartime collaboration, through amendments to the Criminal Code.¹²⁸ The amendments include prohibitions of actions "aimed at implementing the education standards of the aggressor state in educational institutions," as well as "propaganda in educational institutions [...] to facilitate the armed aggression against Ukraine, [the] establishment and consolidation of the temporary occupation ..., [or] avoidance of responsibility for the armed aggression against Ukraine by

¹²⁵ These include the occupation-appointed director of School No. 11 in Iziium and the district education directors in Kupiansk and in Balakliya. The latter official took 25 children to a "summer camp" in Gelendzhik, in Russia, only half of whom were returned to their families. Human Rights Watch interviews with school staff in Iziium, November 3, 2022, Balakliya, November 7, 2022, and Kharkiv, Nov 4, 2022.

¹²⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Tetiana, mathematics teacher, Lyceum No 3, Iziium, November 3, 2022.

¹²⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Oleksiy Litvinov, Head of the Education Department of Kharkivska Regional Military Administration, Kharkiv, November 4, 2022.

¹²⁸ The laws also ban collaborators from holding public office. See Library of Congress, "Ukraine: New Laws Criminalize Collaboration with an Aggressor State," (April 4, 2022), <https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2022-04-04/ukraine-new-laws-criminalize-collaboration-with-an-aggressor-state/>, (accessed May 29, 2024).

the aggressor state.” Penalties range from two years of community service to three years in prison and a 10 to 15-year ban on holding positions in the sphere of public education.¹²⁹

According to the data collected by the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine and shared with Human Rights Watch, as of March 15, 2024, Ukrainian courts had issued 1,168 verdicts in criminal cases related to charges of “collaboration activities” under Criminal Code article 111-1.¹³⁰ Of this total, guilty verdicts were issued against 35 school headmasters or their deputies, university administration employees, and employees of “educational departments” in occupied territory, for “the implementation of education standards of the Russian Federation” or “propaganda in educational facilities.”¹³¹ In about half of these cases, the defendants were convicted in absentia. All were banned from holding certain positions, and most were sentenced to from 1 to 10 years imprisonment.¹³²

The head of the Kharkivska Regional Department of Education told Human Rights Watch that according to guidance from the Ministry of Education and Science, which is not available in the public domain, the law applies to school workers in three cases: “if they started teaching the Russian curriculum, if they participated in trainings on Russian territory or any trainings held by the Russians, or if they signed an agreement to go to work with the occupying powers.”¹³³

However, a letter the Ministry of Education and Science sent to heads of educational institutions and district and regional administrations in September 2022, which Human Rights Watch later obtained, spells out a broader, harsher approach. The letter warns educational workers that “treason and cooperation with the occupiers are criminal offenses

¹²⁹ Law of Ukraine No. 2108-IX, March 3, 2022, Criminal Code Art. 111-1(3); the English translation is from ZMINA et al., *Criminal Liability for Collaborationism: analysis of current legislation, practice of its application, and proposals for amendments*, (Kyiv: ZMINA 2022), https://zmina.ua/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/12/zvit_zmina_eng-1.pdf (accessed September 1, 2023).

¹³⁰ Data provided to Human Rights Watch by the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission on Ukraine, based on its analysis of information available at the public Unified Registry of Court Decisions of Ukraine. For further details, see, for example, OHCHR, “Human Rights Situation During the Russian Occupation of Territory of Ukraine and Its Aftermath, 24 February 2022 – 31 December 2023,” March 20, 2024, <https://ukraine.un.org/en/264057-human-rights-situation-during-russian-occupation-territory-ukraine-and-its-aftermath>, para. 126, (accessed April 2, 2024).

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Human Rights Watch interview with Oleksiy Litvinov, head of the Education Department of Kharkivska Regional Military Administration, Kharkiv, November 4, 2022.

and result in severe punishment.”¹³⁴ The letter emphasizes that working in any managerial, teaching or research position under the occupying authorities is “categorically unacceptable.” While “the scale and consequences of such behavior” will be considered by a court of law when determining the severity of punishment in individual cases, the letter states, “the blatant nature of the crime is beyond doubt” with regard to these actions.

The letter specifies elements of collaboration, including “participation in the educational process under the occupying power” and “implementation of the education standards of the aggressor state.” It states that allegations of such actions must be confirmed by factual evidence, documented by an official investigation. The letter refers to Methodological Guidelines by the National Agency for Prevention of Corruption regarding identifying collaboration. However, the guidelines, which Human Rights Watch reviewed, approach collaboration as a broad offense, without establishing specific thresholds that would have to be met for an action to be considered an offense.¹³⁵

Ukrainian law enforcement authorities also appear to take a broad approach to defining and prosecuting collaboration, including as it regards teachers and professors who allegedly justified the Russian invasion or shared pro-Russian propaganda with students.¹³⁶ In Zhytomyr, according to a person working on the humanitarian education response, there was “one case of a teacher who was prosecuted for collaboration for ‘promoting Russian narratives’.”¹³⁷ In several cases, courts have taken into account the

¹³⁴ Letter No 1/10976-22, dated September 20, 2022, and signed by Ukraine’s then -Minister of Education Serhiy Shkarlet was not available in public domain at the time Human Rights Watch’s interlocutors referred to it during interviews. Later, Human Rights Watch obtained a copy of the letter. At the time of writing, the letter can be accessed in public domain, not on the ministry’s website but at: Letter from Serhiy Shkarlet, minister of education and science of Ukraine to Heads of professional institutions pre-university, higher education of all forms property and spheres of management, Departments (management) of education and of Kyiv city and regional sciences military (military-civilian) administrations, September 20, 2022, https://dnu.dp.ua/docs/Lyst_MON_Kolaboracia.pdf (accessed September 18, 2023).

¹³⁵ The Guidelines are available on the Agency’s website: National Agency for Prevention of Corruption, “Guidelines regarding the work on identifying the facts of collaboration activity,” May 2022, https://nazk.gov.ua/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/6717955817698632004_.pdf, (accessed May 29, 2024).

¹³⁶ Polina Gorlach, “In Kyiv, a university teacher justified Russia’s invasion: she faces three years behind bars” (“У Києві викладачка вишу виправдовувала вторгнення Росії: їй загрожує три роки за ґратами”) *Suspilne*, August 30, 2023, <https://suspilne.media/562193-u-kievi-suditimut-universitetsku-vikladacku-za-vipravdanna-rosijskoi-agresii/> (accessed August 30, 2023); Security Service of Ukraine, “SSU detains two pro-Russian agitators, one of whom is a former teacher of Kyiv lyceum,” July 21, 2023, <https://ssu.gov.ua/en/novyny/sbu-zatrymala-dvokh-prorosiiskikh-ahitatoriv-odyn-iz-yakych-ye-kolyshnim-uchytelem-kyivskoho-litseiu> (accessed April 3, 2023).

¹³⁷ Human Rights Watch videocall with Margaryta Rymarenko, Save the Children, Education Cluster, November 1, 2022.

repentance of people who pled guilty and banned them from holding public office for 10 or 13 years, but did not sentence them to prison.¹³⁸

Between May 2022 and August 2023, Human Rights Watch tabulated 293 prosecutions under the law, of which just 9 involved education staff.¹³⁹ Their sentences ranged from fines, up to five years imprisonment and, in all of the recorded cases, bans from working in the sphere of education for 10 to 15 years. All of the convicted persons were heads or deputy heads of educational facilities or those who worked in education departments under occupying authorities. The accusations included organizing education under occupation, implementing the Russian curriculum, and indoctrination in pro-Russian propaganda.

In one case, for example, a teacher was sentenced to a fine, three years imprisonment and a 15-year ban on working in education for assuming, under occupation, the role of acting director of a lyceum. The court's verdict held that she was not coerced into accepting the role, but it did not provide a reasoned justification for dismissing her claims at trial that she felt threatened by the Russian military and felt she had no choice but to take the position to protect the children. In only three of the nine cases was the accused physically present in the courtroom, two of whom pled guilty for reduced sentences; four others were tried in absentia and two were tried via videoconference.

Ukrainian civil society groups raised concerns of double jeopardy (multiple prosecutions for the same offense), disproportionate penalties, and penalties for acts that do not demonstrate support for Russia's war efforts against Ukraine.¹⁴⁰ Ukraine's Education Ombudsperson told Human Rights Watch that the law should more clearly distinguish

¹³⁸ Olga Zhuravel, "Ukraine: How Collaborators Are Being Tried in the Dnipropetrovsk Region," JusticeInfo.net, January 3, 2023, <https://www.justiceinfo.net/en/111767-ukraine-collaborators-tried-dnipropetrovsk.html> (accessed August 2, 2023).

¹³⁹ The cases are on file with Human Rights Watch. Many more criminal cases had been opened. See Oleh Savychuk, "Deoccupied and occupied. How the Government works with liberated territories and what is allowed on the temporarily occupied territories," Centre of United Actions analysis, February 1, 2023, <https://centreua.org/en/analysis/deoccupied-and-occupied-how-the-government-works-with-liberated-territories-and-what-is-allowed-on-the-temporarily-occupied-territories/>, (accessed March 20, 2024). By November 2022, Ukrainian authorities had prosecuted roughly 1,350 people for collaboration.

¹⁴⁰ *Criminal Liability for Collaborationism: analysis of current legislation, practice of its application, and proposals for amendments*, Zmina et al., and see Igor Burduga, "The problems with Ukraine's wartime collaboration law," openDemocracy, August 16, 2023, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/ukraine-kherson-wartime-collaboration-law-problems-amendments/> (accessed September 2, 2023).

between “when people did this voluntarily and when they did it under pressure.”¹⁴¹ His office “received many questions from teachers” about the collaboration legislation, “and I can only advise them to collect evidence of the pressure they might have been under by the occupier.”

As described in a previous section, occupying authorities in some cases used threats and violence to coerce educators to work in schools. Some teachers also worked under occupation in order to obtain basic necessities. A teacher from a vocational school in Iziium said:

We had absolutely nothing for two months [March and April 2022]. People were killed while gardening in their yards to grow food. My neighbor was killed by a cluster bomb. There was no bread. We collected rainwater to wash in. I think the Russians did it on purpose, to make people go and work to receive food. In the second half of May they started giving us food for cleaning [the school], but with desperately long delays.¹⁴²

Teachers from Kharkivska and Luhanska regions said Russian authorities provided humanitarian aid, consisting of one cup of rice, one cup of flour, canned tuna and canned meat, for cleaning up schools that troops had used as barracks and for moving dead bodies and digging graves.¹⁴³

The anti-collaboration legislation also fails to distinguish between teachers who agreed to teach subjects like “physics and mathematics” that are “not ideological,” as opposed to “history, taught in the Russian manner,” Ukraine’s Education Ombudsperson said.¹⁴⁴ The ombudsperson was aware of false accusations of collaboration that “leads to violations of [teachers’] rights.”

¹⁴¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Serhiy Gorbachov, education ombudsperson of Ukraine, Kyiv, November 9, 2022. All citations and other information in this paragraph are from this interview.

¹⁴² Human Rights Watch group interview with six staff and director, Regional Center for Vocational Studies, State Educational Facility of Iziium, November 3, 2022.

¹⁴³ Human Rights Watch interviews with Irina, daytime guard at School No. 11, Iziium, November 3, 2022; group interview with teachers and education staff, Shevchenkove, November 6, 2022; and with Alina, English teacher, from Rybizhne, in Kyiv, November 2, 2022.

¹⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Serhiy Gorbachov, education ombudsperson of Ukraine, Kyiv, November 9, 2022. All citations and other information in this paragraph are from this interview.

The head of the Kharkiv regional teachers' union said she believed that “teachers who had no other option, who were at gunpoint, will not be in trouble.”¹⁴⁵ A Mariupol university rector who had fled the city similarly said that only teachers “who joined the occupying power of their own free will, and promoted the Russian educational system, will be prosecuted.”¹⁴⁶

However, staff from a vocational institute in Kharkivska region said a colleague who “did not do anything against Ukraine” but whose motives for collaborating with occupying authorities were pragmatic, had been detained for three weeks for “filtration” when Ukraine re-established control over these territories.¹⁴⁷ When their area fell under occupation, the institute’s staff had voted for this colleague to be acting director “in order for him to represent us in relation to the occupying authorities, to prevent looting, and control the process so we could receive humanitarian aid.” Russian authorities sent him to Belgorod, in Russia, where he was “taken to different vocational schools and given teaching materials,” which were not used, staff members said. Teachers in Borova said that six teachers had agreed in writing to work with the occupying authorities. They also went through Ukrainian SBU filtration and were later released.¹⁴⁸

Filtration is a compulsory security screening, the use of which is strictly limited as an exceptional measure of last resort under international law. The laws of war do not directly address wartime collaboration, but do require the occupying power to facilitate the proper working of institutions dedicated to the education of children, *with the co-operation of the national and local authorities*.¹⁴⁹ The law on occupation also prohibits occupying forces from exercising coercion against civilians who are not their own nationals, anticipating occupation forces’ efforts to do so.¹⁵⁰ The Ukrainian authorities should not penalize teachers in occupied territories solely for providing education to children under the Russian curriculum, and should ensure that the policies, measures and laws on collaboration, filtration procedures, and administrative punishments are implemented in a

¹⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Lydia Dulub, Head of Teachers’ Union for Kharkiv region, Kharkiv, Nov 4, 2022.

¹⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch Interview with Mykola Trofymenko, rector, Mariupol State University, Kyiv, October 31, 2022.

¹⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch group interview with six staff and director, Regional Center for Vocational Studies, State Educational Facility of Izium, November 3, 2022.

¹⁴⁸ Teachers signed contracts not with the local occupying authorities, but with a department of the Russian federal government. Human Rights Watch group interview with Lyudmila Viktorivna, deputy school director, Vasily Andreyevich, physical education teacher, and Svitlana Leonidivna, Ukrainian language and literature teacher, Borova School No. 1, November 5, 2022.

¹⁴⁹ Geneva Convention IV, art. 50 (emphasis added).

¹⁵⁰ Geneva Convention IV, art. 31.

manner consistent with Ukraine’s due process and fair trial obligations under international human rights law.

Charges of collaboration should be considered only for those against whom there is evidence of aggravating actions constituting willful collaboration in a way that threatens Ukraine’s security. The authorities should review the broadly phrased definition of collaboration under the law and relevant sanctions to ensure the necessary human rights and due process safeguards are upheld.

Administrative Measures by Ukrainian Education Officials

Ukrainian education officials have also taken administrative measures against suspected collaborators under their legal authority to decide staffing and termination policies and to fire teachers for serious violations of ethical norms.¹⁵¹ The September 2022 education ministry letter states that any education staff member “who has defiled himself with collaboration activities should be immediately dismissed” for “committing an immoral offense” under article 41 of the Labor Code.¹⁵² The letter does not raise the issue of coercion. In fact, it affirms that teachers who collaborated must be fired even if they managed “to simultaneously fulfill the duties of distance education to Ukrainian students.” The letter stated that while courts of law will determine the severity of criminal punishment, “the blatant nature of the crime is beyond doubt.”

In Borivske, a school principal said that he knew of only one teacher—one of the schools’ former students—who agreed to teach under the occupation.¹⁵³ The Ukrainian SBU closed its investigation against her “because she had not signed anything,” but the teacher resigned after the education ministry notified her she would be fired, he said.

Education officials also screen teachers who resumed working in de-occupied areas before paying their salaries, “so some teachers will receive their salary retroactively, some might

¹⁵¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Serhiy Gorbachov, education ombudsperson of Ukraine, Kyiv, November 9, 2022. The ombudsperson pointed to article 19 of Ukraine’s constitution, and the Labor Code of Ukraine.

¹⁵² On file with Human Rights Watch, and available at: Letter from Serhiy Shkarlet, minister of education and science of Ukraine to Heads of professional institutions pre-university, higher education of all forms property and spheres of management, Departments (management) of education and of Kyiv city and regional sciences military (military-civilian) administrations, February 17, 2022, https://dnu.dp.ua/docs/Lyst_MON_Kolaboracia.pdf (accessed September 18, 2023).

¹⁵³ Human Rights Watch interview with Vitaliy Chernov, school director, Borivske, November 6, 2022.

not,” the teachers’ union head said.¹⁵⁴ Yulia, a school director from Vasylenkove, said her staff received their July 2022 salary in November, 2022 because “they said they were checking the lists for collaborators.”¹⁵⁵ The head of the Kharkivska regional education department, Oleksiy Litvinov, described the process as “complicated and bureaucratic, but necessary to exclude collaborators.”¹⁵⁶

The screening process starts with each school director sending a list of staff members at their school who should be paid to the district-level administration, which verifies that there are no collaborators on the lists drawn up by the authorities. This first step can be delayed due to staff shortages in local administrations following occupation.¹⁵⁷ The district then sends the verified list to the regional administration, which requires the regional head of the education department to verify the list again. “We verify lists twice a day,” Oleksiy Litvinov said. “But there’s no electricity, and they have to send me this list online.” Finally, the regional administration sends the list to the government’s financial bodies, which transfer the funds.¹⁵⁸

Any administrative penalties that Ukraine imposes on teachers who worked for the occupying authorities should be consistent with the principles of legality, necessity, non-discrimination, and proportionality, as well as fair trial standards and effective remedies.¹⁵⁹ The UN committee of experts that oversees implementation by states of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights has stated that the Covenant’s prohibition of “any propaganda for war and any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence ... [is] fully compatible with the right of freedom of expression ... the exercise of which carries with it special duties and responsibilities.”¹⁶⁰ Ukraine has, in any case, entered a derogation to

¹⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Lydia Dulub, Head of Teachers’ Union for Kharkiv region, Kharkiv, Nov 4, 2022

¹⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch group interview with Yulia and other school staff in Vasylenkove, November 6, 2022.

¹⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Oleksiy Litvinov, Head of the Education Department of Kharkivska Regional Military Administration, Kharkiv, November 4, 2022.

¹⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Oleksiy Litvinov, Head of the Education Department of Kharkivska Regional Military Administration, Kharkiv, November 4, 2022.

¹⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Oleksiy Litvinov, Head of the Education Department of Kharkivska Regional Military Administration, Kharkiv, November 4, 2022.

¹⁵⁹ *Id.*, para 170.

¹⁶⁰ UN Committee on Civil and Political Rights, “Prohibition of propaganda for war and inciting national, racial or religious hatred,” General Comment No. 11, The Right to Freedom of Expression, 29/07/1983, para. 2, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Opinion/CCPRGeneralCommentNo11.pdf>, (accessed September 21, 2023).

full implementation of standards on freedom of expression under international law, along with other derogations, citing the Russian invasion.¹⁶¹

Enforcing the wartime restriction on pro-Russian expression by firing a teacher, as opposed to a fine, or requiring an apology or guarantee of non-repetition, after the situation in their area has returned to Ukrainian government control, should be assessed for its necessity and proportionality. Ukraine should also ensure that measures intended to prevent payment of salaries to teachers accused of collaboration are consistent with other policies about salary payment while a teacher is under suspicion of a disciplinary infraction. Such measures should also be necessary, proportional in terms of the number of teachers affected by delayed salaries, and the accused should have the opportunity to mount an effective defense and appeal.

¹⁶¹ The Council of Europe assessed Ukraine's derogations since 2015, as updated after the full-scale invasion of 2022, including from Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Council of Europe "Legal Analysis of the derogation made by Ukraine under Article 15 of the European Convention of Human Rights and Article 4 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights," November 2022, Figure 3, p. 20, <https://rm.coe.int/legal-analysis-of-the-derogation-made-by-ukraine-under-article-15-of-t/1680aa8e2c> (accessed September 16, 2023).

III. Ukrainian Efforts to Provide Education After the Full-Scale Invasion

The war and occupation of parts of the country has forced Ukrainian education authorities and educators to adapt. For example, at the end of the 2021-22 academic year, Ukraine's Ministry of Education and Science automatically advanced all Ukrainian students to the next grade level.¹⁶² In 2022-23, the ministry did not advance students in schools in occupied territory that were following the Russian curriculum to the next grade level, as Ukrainian authorities had designated those schools as "non-functional."¹⁶³

Among the positive examples of innovation aimed at improving access to education in Ukraine, the education ministry, working with civil society, has promoted online learning, with online textbooks, to reach children whose schools were closed for security concerns, particularly if staff and students would have had insufficient time to reach bomb shelters during air raid alerts, and to reach children across front-lines and in occupied territories.¹⁶⁴ In Lvivska region, the ministry established a school that exclusively offers distance learning classes; at least 450 of the 1,000 students enrolled are from areas under occupation, a humanitarian education expert said.¹⁶⁵

During COVID-19, in coordination with the Ministry of Education and Science, the Osvitoria Hub, a civil society initiative, developed a non-formal distance-learning module, "All Ukrainian School."¹⁶⁶ The platform proved to be effective during the war, having more than 10,000 video lessons for all classes from grades 5 to 11, the director said,¹⁶⁷ and grades 1 to 4 are in development at the time of writing.¹⁶⁸ UNESCO donated 50,000 Chromebook

¹⁶² Human Rights Watch video call with Margaryta Rymarenko, Save the Children, Education Cluster, November 1, 2022.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Letter from Andriy Stashkiv, deputy minister, Ministry of Education and Science, to Human Rights Watch, June 12, 2024, on file with Human Rights Watch.

¹⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch video call with Margaryta Rymarenko, Save the Children, Education Cluster, November 1, 2022.

¹⁶⁶ Osvitoria, "The All-Ukrainian Online School," <https://osvitoria.org/en/the-all-ukrainian-online-school/>, (accessed March 24, 2024).

¹⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Yaroslava Mozghova, director, Osvitoria Hub, Kyiv, November 1, 2022.

¹⁶⁸ "Ukraine: 50,000 computers donated to teachers by Google and UNESCO," UNESCO press release, October 5, 2022, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/ukraine-50000-computers-provided-teachers-google-and-unesco?hub=66116> (accessed August 31, 2023).

computers to teachers nationwide.¹⁶⁹ Students across Ukraine received 10,000 tablets and laptop computers, with another 10,000 devices donated to newly de-occupied areas of Khersonska and Kharkivska regions in 2023 from Korea and the EU.¹⁷⁰

Ukraine's Ministry of Education and Science has emphasized that among the aims of the online education program "is to ensure proper conditions for obtaining education in territories not controlled by Ukraine." Data that the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science provided Human Rights Watch indicate that 62,436 children living in occupied areas continue to study in Ukrainian secondary education institutions remotely.¹⁷¹ Reaching children in occupied areas with online education remains particularly challenging, however, as Russian authorities and their proxies moved to cut off all non-Russian telecommunications providers in those areas following on the occupation. Russian occupying authorities in Mariupol blocked internet access to Ukrainian online learning platforms, according to a teacher whose former students were still there.¹⁷² As a result, local residents had no choice but to acquire Russian or so-called DNR SIM-cards, the use of which makes it impossible for them to access Ukrainian websites. As Stas Prybytko, head of mobile broadband development in Ukraine's Ministry of Digital Transformation, said in an interview to the *New York Times* in August 2022, "The first thing that an occupier does when they come to Ukrainian territory is cut off the networks."¹⁷³ Instead of following the Ukrainian curriculum online, children in occupied territories are mainly limited to receiving and filing assignments with teachers on Viber or Telegram messengers, which are both accessible via Russian providers or so-called DNR's Phoenix.¹⁷⁴

To ensure access to education for internally displaced children, the ministry has simplified the enrollment procedure and introduced flexible timing for the determination of final grades

¹⁶⁹ "UNICEF reboots online learning for children," UNICEF article, May 8, 2023, <https://www.unicef.org/ukraine/en/stories/online-learning-for-schoolchildren> (accessed August 30, 2023).

¹⁷⁰ Delegation of the European Union to Ukraine, "Ukrainian children received 10,000 devices from UNICEF thanks to EU and Korean financing," April 27, 2023, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/ukraine/ukrainian-schoolchildren-received-10000-devices-unicef-thanks-eu-and-korean_en (accessed August 30, 2023).

¹⁷¹ Letter from Andriy Stashkiv, deputy minister, Ministry of Education and Science, to Human Rights Watch, June 12, 2024, on file with Human Rights Watch.

¹⁷² Human Rights Watch interview with Yaroslav, history teacher from Mariupol, Kyiv, November 1, 2022.

¹⁷³ Adam Satariano, "How Russia Took Over Ukraine's Internet in Occupied Territories," *New York Times*, August 9, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/08/09/technology/ukraine-internet-russia-censorship.html>, (accessed April 17, 2024).

¹⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch interviews with Ukrainian teachers and persons still based in occupied areas of Ukraine.

and have emphasized the possibility of using pass/fail grading.¹⁷⁵ The education ministry also simplified university entrance examinations and held them online, on multiple days, with 187,000 test-takers from Ukraine and among Ukrainian refugees across Europe.¹⁷⁶ A teacher from Iziium said her 11th grade students were now “in Ireland, Israel, Germany, the Netherlands, and Canada, and they took the test.”¹⁷⁷ In Melitopol, a woman managed to smuggle diplomas that were printed in Zaporizhzhia into occupied territory for students there who had graduated in the Ukrainian curriculum.¹⁷⁸ A school in Shevchenkove finished the school year using the Ukrainian curriculum via distance learning, and students who evacuated to Ukrainian-controlled territory received certificates.¹⁷⁹

Under Ukrainian law, citizens in Russian occupied territory have the right to pursue their education in other parts of Ukraine, for which the state will pay and provide accommodation in dormitories.¹⁸⁰ The occupying authorities in Kharkivska region destroyed students’ files in some schools before retreating,¹⁸¹ but teachers said that students who escaped without identification documents or school records had been able to enroll in schools in Ukrainian-controlled territory.¹⁸² In a positive move, a law passed by Ukraine’s parliament and signed by the president in 2023, which came into effect on March 24, 2024, allows for the evaluation and certification of education received under the occupying authorities after 2014.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁵ Letter from Andriy Stashkiv, deputy minister, Ministry of Education and Science, to Human Rights Watch, June 12, 2024, on file with Human Rights Watch.

¹⁷⁶ Mikhailo Zagorodniy, “(Non)Problematic ZNO 2022: how the testing was done and whether the results were inflated,” *Ukrainska Pravda Life*, August 12, 2022, <https://life.pravda.com.ua/society/2022/08/12/249974/>, (accessed August 30, 2023); see also Tatiana Zhurzhenko, “Education under Fire: The Ukrainian School System under Occupation,” Center for East European and International Studies spotlight, September 7, 2022, <https://www.zois-berlin.de/en/publications/zois-spotlight/education-under-fire-the-ukrainian-school-system-under-occupation> (accessed August 28, 2023).

¹⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Tetiana, mathematics teacher, Lyceum No 3, Iziium, November 3, 2022.

¹⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch videocall interview with Hanna Bout, from Melitopol, December 14, 2022, Kyiv.

¹⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch group interview with teachers and district education staff in Shevchenkove, November 6, 2022.

¹⁸⁰ “On Amendments to the Law of Ukraine On Ensuring Civil Rights and Freedoms, and the Legal Regime on the Temporarily Occupied Territory of Ukraine Relating to the Place of Temporary Residence and the Right to Education,” No. 1635-VII, August 12, 2014, cited by Right to Education Initiative, *Legal Factsheet: The Right to Education In Ukraine*, (Right to Education Initiative, 2020), p. 8, https://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/RTE_Legal_Factsheet_Ukraine_2020_En.pdf (accessed September 2, 2023).

¹⁸¹ Human Rights Watch group interview with teachers and education department staff in Balakliya, November 7, 2022.

¹⁸² Human Rights Watch interview with Alina, English teacher, from Rybizhne, in Kyiv, November 2, 2022.

¹⁸³ “On amendments to some laws of Ukraine regarding recognition of the results of training of persons who lived in the temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine” (“Про внесення змін до деяких законів України щодо визнання результатів навчання осіб, які проживали на тимчасово окупованій території України”), 2023, No. 134, Ст. 784, Document 3482-IX, Ukraine Rada, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3482-20#Text>, (accessed April 11, 2024). See also Polina Gorchach, “In

Ukrainian civil society and education officials have raised concerns about filling gaps in the education of children who attended school in Russian-occupied areas. The head of the Kharkivska Regional Department of Education described regional efforts to reintegrate students from de-occupied territories in schools, including children who received Russian school certificates or who had begun classes under the Russian curriculum.¹⁸⁴ After Ukraine’s counter-offensive, education staff “went around all the apartments where there are children and got the phone number of those families so we could help enroll the children in the schools that are functioning,” he said. In addition, students from de-occupied areas were “added to the categories of students who receive privileges in entering higher education—they don’t have to submit certain examinations, and they receive an extra 50 points” on their applications.¹⁸⁵

A Ukrainian civil society education expert noted that Ukraine should further proceed with these efforts by establishing special lessons or programs to support children who had been enrolled in the Russian education system, to prevent them from “falling into the gap between the [Russian and Ukrainian] curricula.”¹⁸⁶

Ukraine’s education ombudsperson pointed out that Ukrainian and Russian curricula on math and sciences are very close, and the only areas of concern are Ukrainian language, literature, history, and social sciences. “We help the kids who return [from occupied territories or who lived through occupation]. Each school will come up with its own program to help them catch up,” he said.¹⁸⁷

Ukraine, it is proposed to recognize education obtained in the occupied territories: the Council has previously supported the draft law” (“В Україні пропонують визнавати освіту, здобуту на окупованих територіях: Рада попередньо підтримала законопроект”), *Suspilne*, August 23, 2023, <https://suspilne.media/557195-projti-atestaciu-sob-viznali-rezultati-navcanna-na-tot-verhovna-rada-pidtrimala-zakonoproekt/>, (accessed April 11, 2024); and “Education-2024: the conditions under which the results of training of persons who lived in the TOT will be recognized in Ukraine” (“Освіта-2024: за яких умов в Україні визнають результати навчання осіб, які проживали на TOT”), *New Voice*, March 25, 2024, <https://nv.ua/ukr/ukraine/events/osvita-v-okupaciji-2024-za-yakih-umov-jiji-viznayut-i-koli-ne-viznayut-novini-ukrajini-50404161.html> (accessed April 11, 2024).

¹⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Oleksiy Litvinov, head of the Education Department of Kharkivska Regional Military Administration, Kharkiv, November 4, 2022.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Yaroslava Mozghova, director, *Osvitoria Hub*, Kyiv, November 1, 2022.

¹⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Serhiy Gorbachov, education ombudsperson of Ukraine, Kyiv, November 9, 2022. The ombudsperson pointed to article 19 of Ukraine’s constitution, and the Labor Code of Ukraine.

Difficulties Accessing Distance Learning

The UN reported in August 2023 that one-third of school children in Ukraine are learning in-person, one-third third receive a mix of in-person and online teaching, and one-third are learning remotely.¹⁸⁸ In the mixed or hybrid model, children attend in-person during alternate weeks, if their schools have bomb shelters.¹⁸⁹ The decision whether or not to suspend in-person schooling is taken at the regional level.¹⁹⁰ In Kharkivska region, regional defense staff decided on August 15, 2022 that all educational facilities would offer distance learning, the regional education department head said:

We are unable to guarantee that children will be able to evacuate to shelters. The flying time of missiles from Belgorod is less than one minute and artillery is even less. It is irresponsible to send children for in-person learning. [...] But of course, teachers depend on having internet connectivity, which is a problem in all the de-occupied areas. In addition, the enemy is shelling critical infrastructure including power plants and electrical substations.¹⁹¹

Kharkivska region suffered 17 percent of all damage to telecommunications in Ukraine during the first year of the full-scale invasion.¹⁹² More than a month after de-occupation, the head of the Kupiansk district military administration said only one sector in the district had internet connectivity and could offer distance learning.¹⁹³ In August 2023, Ukraine evacuated residents of the city of Kupiansk, including 600 children, due to renewed Russian attacks.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁸ “Ukraine: Widespread learning loss continues due to war, COVID-19,” United Nations news release, August 29, 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/08/1140157> (accessed August 30, 2023).

¹⁸⁹ Hanna Arhirova, “It’s joy mixed with sorrow as Ukrainian children go back to school in the midst of war,” Associated Press, September 1, 2023,

¹⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch video group call with staff at UNESCO and Teach 4 Ukraine, November 7, 2022.

¹⁹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Oleksiy Litvinov, Head of the Education Department of Kharkivska Regional Military Administration, Kharkiv, November 4, 2022.

¹⁹² World Bank, “Ukraine Rapid Damage Needs Assessment February 2022-February 2023, p. 95, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099184503212328877/pdf/P1801740d1177f03coab180057556615497.pdf> (accessed August 30, 2023).

¹⁹³ Human Rights Watch interview with the head of the Ukrainian military administration for Kupiansk, Andrei Kanashevitch, November 7, 2022.

¹⁹⁴ “Ukraine orders evacuation of northeastern city of Kupiansk [sic] as Russia claims advances,” CNN, August 10, 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/08/10/europe/kupiansk-ukraine-evacuation-russia-intl/index.html> (accessed August 27, 2023).

Across the country, Russian attacks on Ukraine’s energy infrastructure have reduced power generation capacity from 37 to 19 Gigawatts and destroyed half of the high voltage transformers in Ukrainian-controlled territory.¹⁹⁵ Without adequate electricity or connectivity, in some de-occupied areas the only available instruction is from “parents who are teaching the kids at home,” a humanitarian education expert said.¹⁹⁶ In Balakliya, Russian forces forced internet providers to shut down access to Ukrainian sites in June 2022, an education official said.¹⁹⁷ In de-occupied Iziium, one school was teaching 700 students entirely online, but shortened classes to 25 minutes each in three-hour shifts due to rolling electricity blackouts.¹⁹⁸

After February 24, 2022, schools in Kharkivska region were closed for regular in-person classes, but staff at some schools volunteered to provide time-limited “consultations” with students “to help them catch up,” an education administrator said. “If children can download the [lessons], they come to us at school and we explain [the lessons]. They come for part of the day, twice a week. We come every day.”¹⁹⁹ The regional head of education opposed volunteer initiatives that used school premises for short periods, due to the grave security concern of Russian attacks hitting the schools.²⁰⁰ Yet such initiatives, if implemented with due precautions, may be a child’s best way to stay connected to learning. Ukrainian authorities could work more closely with teachers to identify and support safe methods of supplementing distance learning in private homes, one teacher suggested. “We’d go house to house to teach if we could,” a principal said.²⁰¹

“Often families who fled occupation do not have any devices [for online study], and sometimes there are four kids per mobile phone,” a humanitarian education staffer noted.²⁰² Children in upper grades may be particularly affected by the lack of devices. In

¹⁹⁵ As of summer 2023. Tim Lister, Olga Voitovych and Christian Edwards, “UNDP energy damage assessment for Ukraine reveals continued vulnerabilities,” June 2023, <https://www.undp.org/ukraine/press-releases/undp-energy-damage-assessment-ukraine-reveals-continued-vulnerabilities> (accessed August 30, 2023).

¹⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch videocall interview with Margaryta Rymarenko, Save the Children, Education Cluster, November 1, 2022.

¹⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch group interview with teachers and education department staff, Balakliye, November 7, 2022.

¹⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Tetiana, mathematics teacher, Lyceum No 3, Iziium, November 3, 2022.

¹⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with education administrator, November 5, village in Kharkivska region.

²⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Oleksiy Litvinov, Head of the Education Department of Kharkivska Regional Military Administration, Kharkiv, November 4, 2022.

²⁰¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Yulia, school director, Vasilenskoye, November 6, 2022.

²⁰² Human Rights Watch video group call with staff at UNESCO and Teach 4 Ukraine, November 7, 2022.

Izium, a school guard with two school-age children described two months after de-occupation, “[T]he teachers give assignments and we do our best to teach them at home. With [my] younger child we can at least do something, but for the older one, you need a laptop. He can’t set up the virtual classroom on his phone.”²⁰³

Obstacles to Distance Learning for Children with Disabilities

Displaced children with disabilities can continue education in their original school online.²⁰⁴ However, even in cases where children have devices and there is connectivity in their area, distance learning can prove inaccessible for children with disabilities. Anna, a teacher, said that the inclusive center where she worked with 30 children with disabilities had stopped classes due to the invasion, but distance learning was wholly ineffective. Parents repeatedly asked Ukrainian authorities to open regular schools on an inclusive basis but were rebuffed due to security concerns about Russian attacks.²⁰⁵

There are 17 community-based centers to support children with disabilities in Kharkiv city, but for children with disabilities in outlying communities, as of November 2022, only one bus and three expert staff were available.²⁰⁶ The educational impact of the Russian invasion was disproportionate for children with disabilities, Anna said, because few of them could escape to areas with accessible schools. Out of 70 children with disabilities in the district she knew of, only seven had been evacuated or were able to escape before the occupation, because “for kids with autism, cerebral palsy, it was too difficult to transfer them.”²⁰⁷

To enroll displaced children with disabilities in a new school, their parents first need to present a certificate of registration as internally displaced, and the child must undergo a “comprehensive psychological and pedagogical assessment of the child's development.”²⁰⁸ Nonetheless, Ukrainian authorities have taken steps to improve access to education for

²⁰³ Human Rights Watch interview with Irina, daytime guard at School No. 11, Izium, November 3, 2022.

²⁰⁴ Letter from Andriy Stashkiv, deputy minister, Ministry of Education and Science, to Human Rights Watch, June 12, 2024, on file with Human Rights Watch.

²⁰⁵ Human Rights Watch interviews, November 2022.

²⁰⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Oleksiy Litvinov, Head of the Education Department of Kharkivska Regional Military Administration, Kharkiv, November 4, 2022.

²⁰⁷ Human Rights Watch group interview with five teachers and district education staff, Shevchenkove, November 6, 2022.

²⁰⁸ Letter from Andriy Stashkiv, deputy minister, Ministry of Education and Science, to Human Rights Watch, June 12, 2024, on file with Human Rights Watch.

children with disabilities, such as abolishing limits on the number of children with “special educational needs” in an inclusive class or group, and prohibiting schools from refusing to organize inclusive education.²⁰⁹ With government support, including from the education ministry, UNICEF and the Dzherelo Children’s Rehabilitation Center in Kyiv launched a project to support families with children with disabilities, focusing on children displaced by the war, although the program was not operating in the Kharkivska region.²¹⁰ As the League of the Strong and European Disability Forum reported in November 2023, newly-created facilities for displaced children and host communities still have very limited accessible resources for children with disabilities. The report recommends urgently developing “community-based services for children with disabilities, including educational and psychological support services,” and regular monitoring of children’s access to education, among other steps, because distance learning does not meet the needs of many children with disabilities.²¹¹

Obstacles to Accessing Salaries for Displaced Teachers

In Kharkivska region, about 15,000 teachers did not receive their regular salaries while living under occupation, which lasted for more than six months, the regional teacher’s union director said.²¹² A teacher’s union representative from Iziium said that her own Ukrainian teaching record stated, “the labor agreement is paused during the occupation,” before her contract was reinstated in October 2022.²¹³ Many of the 630 requests that Ukraine’s education ombudsman had received from teachers in occupied or de-occupied territories from late February to early November 2022, were about salaries, obtaining the documents needed to teach, and further employment, he said.²¹⁴

²⁰⁹ Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, “On Amendments to the Procedures Approved by the Resolutions of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine #530 of April 10, 2019, and #957 of September 15, 2021,” Resolution No. 483, April 26, 2022, Ukraine’s Legislation at Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/4832022-%D0%BF#Text_2, (accessed May 15, 2023).

²¹⁰ See UNICEF, “Caring for a child with disabilities and seeking support?,” <https://www.unicef.org/ukraine/support-for-families-children-disabilities>, (accessed April 18, 2024). The project operates in the Lvivska, Zakarpatska, Ivano-Frankivska, Chernivetska, Ternopil, Rivne, and Volyn regions.

²¹¹ League of the Strong, European Disability Forum, *The Impact of the war in Ukraine on the rights of persons with disabilities: Monitoring report*, (Kyiv: OPD/EDF, November 2023,) pp. 99-100, https://ls.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Monitoring_Report_Eng.pdf (accessed April 18, 2024).

²¹² Human Rights Watch interview with Lydia Dulub, Head of Teachers’ Union for Kharkiv region, Kharkiv, November 4, 2022.

²¹³ Human Rights Watch interview with Tetiana, mathematics teacher, Lyceum No 3, Iziium, November 3, 2022.

²¹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Serhiy Gorbachov, education ombudsperson of Ukraine, Kyiv, November 9, 2022.

Teachers who escaped to Ukraine-controlled territory received their salaries if they or their colleagues were able to flee occupied territory with the required documents and re-register the school in Ukrainian-controlled territory, such that their schools were able to function online using the Ukrainian system, teachers said.²¹⁵ This is not the case if the school director works with the occupying authorities; one teacher said his old school “doesn’t exist anymore” for this reason.²¹⁶ Children who escaped to Ukrainian-controlled territory could attend classes in other schools while remaining enrolled in their original schools.²¹⁷ The director of a school in Iziium that was destroyed in the fighting said that the school’s students were all “transferred to other schools for online learning.”²¹⁸

For schoolteachers to be paid, ordinarily their schools must have access to certain documents and electronic data, such as labor books and electronic keys and signatures. Whether or not these documents and equipment were evacuated during the first days of the full-scale Russian invasion often determined whether or not teachers could be paid, teachers said.²¹⁹ In Balakliya, education officials escaped to Ukrainian-controlled territory with their “labor books, laptops and equipment, so we could re-start the education process,” an official said.²²⁰ But Alina, a teacher from Luhanska region, said that she and her colleagues were not paid because they had escaped “without any documents, and the accountants at the school didn’t take any servers with them.”²²¹

Some teachers whose schools could not be re-opened were hired by other schools in Ukrainian-controlled territory.²²² Some said they needed to obtain an “IDP document, as proof of having relocated to [Ukrainian] government-controlled areas,” which could be difficult for people who fled without identification documents.²²³

²¹⁵ Teachers explained that schools had to be registered in a Ukrainian-controlled area to function online, which was possible if the principal or the chief accountant had moved to that area with the relevant school documents and signatures. Human Rights Watch interviews with education staff, Iziium, November 3; and national education cluster staff, online, November 1, 2022.

²¹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Yaroslav, history teacher from Mariupol, Kyiv, November 1, 2022.

²¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with teachers and department of education staff, Balakliye, November 7, 2022.

²¹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Yulia Petrivna, school director, Vasylenkove, November 6, 2022.

²¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Hanna Bout, from Melitopol, December 14, 2022, Kyiv, by videocall.

²²⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with teachers and department of education staff, Balakliye, November 7, 2022.

²²¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Alina, English teacher, from Rybzhne, in Kyiv, November 2, 2022.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Human Rights Watch interview with Yaroslav, history teacher from Mariupol, Kyiv, November 1, 2022.

The education ministry stated in April 2022 that teachers displaced from occupied territory to Ukrainian-controlled areas who did not find work should be paid two-thirds of their salaries.²²⁴ However, due to the war, Ukraine’s decentralized system of government presents complications to paying the salaries of teachers who are from areas of Ukraine that are occupied and who have not been put on the payroll of another school in Ukrainian-controlled areas. Teachers’ salaries must also be approved by local administrations, and Ukraine suspended many local administrations in Kharkivska region while they were under Russian occupation.²²⁵ These local administrations were re-constituted, but their heads must be approved by the president of Ukraine, a slow process, the regional teachers’ union representative said.²²⁶

A third issue, according to Ukraine’s education ombudsman, is that after Ukraine introduced martial law in response to the full-scale invasion, some local administrations had sought to reduce their expenditures by pressuring teachers to sign requests to go on unpaid leave and threatening to dismiss them if they refused, and that in addition, directors’ and teachers’ contracts were not being renewed without justification.²²⁷ “This is a question of knowing your rights” under the Labor Code, he said.²²⁸ The ombudsman cited as a positive example the city of Kherson, “where they paid the full salary of teachers [even during occupation], according to the position of the city’s education administration.”

²²⁴ Ministry of Education, “On the remuneration of employees of educational institutions,” (“Про оплату праці працівників закладів освіти”), April 25, 2022, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1h4L4iq9oKtDMlec5bteiO4pZNdgyTZ5S/view>, (accessed January 29, 2024).

²²⁵ As well, all teachers’ salaries were reduced due to the impact of the war, but some more than others. Under martial law, the annual education budget for 2022 was reduced by 10 percent from July 1, 2022. As a result, schoolteachers’ salaries were cut by 17 percent during the second half of the calendar year. But schoolteachers are paid from the state budget, while kindergarten and vocational teachers’ salaries are paid from the budgets of local Ukrainian authorities. In places like Izium, “there was no money in the local budgets” after de-occupation, a local teachers’ union representative said. “If one teacher receives money, and not another, it could cause problems.” Human Rights Watch interview with Serhiy Gorbachov, education ombudsperson of Ukraine, Kyiv, November 9, 2022. The ombudsperson pointed to article 19 of Ukraine’s constitution, and the Labor Code of Ukraine. Human Rights watch interview, Tetiana, mathematics teacher, Lyceum No 3, Izium, Nov 3

²²⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Lydia Dulub, Head of Teachers’ Union for Kharkiv region, Kharkiv, November 4, 2022.

²²⁷ See also Education Ombudsman of Ukraine, “The educational ombudsman appeals to authorities at all levels to eliminate violations of rights regarding the payment of wages to employees of educational institutions” (“Освітній омбудсмен звертається до органів влади усіх рівнів – усунути порушення прав щодо виплати заробітної плати працівникам закладів освіти”), June 20, 2022, <https://eo.gov.ua/osvitniy-ombudsmen-zvertaietsia-do-orhaniv-vlady-usikh-rivniv-usunuty-porushennia-prav-shchodo-vyplaty-zarobitnoi-platy-pratsivnykam-zakladiv-osvity/2022/06/20/>, (accessed January 28, 2024).

²²⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Serhiy Gorbachov, education ombudsperson of Ukraine, Kyiv, November 9, 2022. The ombudsperson pointed to article 19 of Ukraine’s constitution, and the Labor Code of Ukraine.

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

According to UNESCO, by 2023, “26 percent of Ukrainian teenagers have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. 75 percent of schoolchildren have experienced stress. 54 percent of Ukrainian teachers are professionally “burned out.””²²⁹ From February 2022 to February 2024, UNICEF reported that children in frontline cities have had to shelter from attacks in basements, metro stations, or other bomb shelters for up to 5,000 hours during air raid alerts, or nearly seven months in total.²³⁰ The Ukrainian government’s plan to provide mental health and psychosocial support to students and teachers notes that before the full-scale invasion, 35 percent of schools lacked the staff to provide psychosocial services.²³¹

Teachers and students from areas occupied by Russian forces told Human Rights Watch about particularly devastating experiences, highlighting the need for vastly scaled up mental health and psychosocial support services.

Staff from a vocational institution in Iziium said a Russian airstrike nearby killed a student, Lisa, and seven members of her family, whose remains were buried together “in a bag, in a common grave.”²³² A teacher said an attack in Mariupol killed two of his students along with “their entire family” at their home.²³³ The teacher sheltered in his school, Lyceum No. 14, which was shelled “from the first day” by Russian forces, and then fled to School No. 12, until it was taken over by Russian forces. “I think I’m mentally changed. I think some part of me died,” he said. In Iziium, 600 local residents, including 52 children, sheltered at a vocational institution during freezing temperatures and heavy shelling without electricity or water; Russian forces entered and detained three men, who were later found hanged in

²²⁹ UNESCO, “Ukraine: First UNESCO workshop on school mental health,” July 27, 2023, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/ukraine-first-unesco-workshop-school-mental-health> (accessed August 22, 2023).

²³⁰ “Ukraine two years: Children in frontline areas forced to spend up to 5,000 hours – equivalent to nearly 7 months – sheltering underground,” UNICEF press release, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/ukraine-two-years-children-frontline-areas-forced-spend-5000-hours-equivalent-nearly>, (accessed March 22, 2024).

²³¹ See “Ukrainian Prioritized Multisectoral Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Actions During and After the War: An Operational Roadmap,” Ukrainian multiagency report, December 5, 2022, “Education,” pp. 27-28, https://mms.gov.ua/storage/app/sites/16/Molodizhna_polityka/Zdorovui%20sposib%20gitty/%Do%BF%D1%81%Do%B8%D1%85%20%Do%B7%Do%B4%202.pdf (accessed August 28, 2023).

²³² Human Rights Watch group interview with six staff and director, Regional Center for Vocational Studies, State Educational Facility of Iziium, November 3, 2022.

²³³ Human Rights Watch interview with Yaroslav, history teacher from Mariupol, in Kyiv, November 1, 2022.

their homes.²³⁴ At a vocational institution in Shevchenkove, the occupation administration assigned dormitories where 10 to 15 students were still living as quarters for Russian troops, according to a teacher who showed Human Rights Watch a phone message from parents stating that soldiers had hit, beaten, or harassed their children.²³⁵

Ukraine's education ombudsman pointed out that the Education Ministry requires one psychologist per school with more than 300 students in a village, or more than 700 students in a city.²³⁶ But amidst the war in late 2022, teachers and parents said that the need for mental health support far outweighed availability. A vocational teacher in Izium said the local hospital could not offer psychosocial support.²³⁷ A mother in Izium said that her 8-year-old son "is afraid every time there's a plane in the sky, or even if something falls off the table," but no mental health support was available.²³⁸ The only mental health support for children in the de-occupied communities of Kharkivska region that Human Rights Watch visited in late 2022 was provided by a single mobile team from Médecins Sans Frontières. By May 2023, MSF had provided 2,000 individual counselling sessions in Kharkivska region, although this figure included Kharkiv city, which had not been occupied.²³⁹ By February 2024, the group had provided 26,000 counselling sessions across the country.²⁴⁰

A consultant working on mental health in the education sector said, "Teachers need small groups, a safe space to talk to colleagues, and expert support from psychologists who know teachers' needs."²⁴¹ The consultant argued the need for "a validated, evidence-based toolkit for school psychologists."²⁴² National education ministry guidelines

²³⁴ Human Rights Watch group interview with six staff and director, Regional Center for Vocational Studies, State Educational Facility of Izium, November 3, 2022.

²³⁵ Human Rights Watch group interview with five teachers and district education staff, Shevchenkove, November 6, 2022.

²³⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Serhiy Gorbachov, education ombudsperson, Kyiv, November 9, 2022. Education Ministry order, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z0930-17#Text>. See also <https://oblikbudget.com.ua/news/63464-u-shkolakh-zbilshat-kilkist-praktichnikh-psikhologiv-ta-sotsialnikh-pedagogiv>.

²³⁷ Human Rights Watch group interview with six staff and director, Regional Center for Vocational Studies, State Educational Facility of Izium, November 3, 2022.

²³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Irina Sakatam, daytime guard at School No. 11, Izium, November 3, 2022.

²³⁹ "One year of emergency healthcare in war-torn Kharkiv," Médecins Sans Frontières project update, May 8, 2023, <https://www.msf.org/ukraine-emergency-response-kharkiv-year-providing-healthcare>, (accessed August 27, 2023).

²⁴⁰ "Rebuilding lives damaged by the relentless war in Ukraine," Médecins Sans Frontières project update, February 22, 2024, <https://www.msf.org/rebuilding-lives-damaged-relentless-war-ukraine> (accessed April 1, 2024).

²⁴¹ Human Rights Watch video group call with staff at UNESCO and Teach 4 Ukraine, November 7, 2022.

²⁴² Ibid.

“recommend teachers begin the working day with a ‘psychological minute’ but [teachers need] training on how to provide this,” a teacher said in 2022.²⁴³ By mid-2023, Ukraine’s education ministry had approved occupational standards for school psychologists and was working to implement supervision for school psychologists.²⁴⁴

Ukrainian volunteer and government initiatives have tried to fill the gap. The State University of Mariupol, which relocated to Kyiv, opened a “humanitarian hub” in June 2022 that provides, in addition to aid, free psychological sessions. However, the psychologist is available for only three days every three weeks. “We have waiting lists,” the university rector said.²⁴⁵

The office of the First Lady, Olena Zelenska, initiated a nationwide mental health reform process at the beginning of the full-scale invasion.²⁴⁶ In 2023, the initiative assessed existing practices, conducting a survey of 4,500 school psychologists, and plans to train 15,000 school psychologists nationwide.²⁴⁷ In March 2024, with support from UNICEF, Ukraine opened two centers in Kharkivska region to provide mental health support and counselling to families.²⁴⁸

²⁴³ Human Rights Watch Interview with Alina, English teacher, from Rybzhne, in Kyiv, November 2, 2022.

²⁴⁴ “Mental health for Ukraine project,” MH4U project description, May 2023, p. 2, https://www.gfa-group.de/news/650860/MH4U_May_2023_two_pager.pdf, (accessed March 22, 2024); EuroPsy.eu, European Certificate of Psychology, “National Requirements Ukraine,” May 5, 2023, <https://www.europsy.eu/national-requirements-ukraine> (accessed March 22, 2024).

²⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch Interview with Mykola Trofymenko, rector, Mariupol State University, Kyiv, October 31, 2022.

²⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch video group call with staff at UNESCO and Teach 4 Ukraine, November 7, 2022.

²⁴⁷ “Ukraine: First UNESCO workshop on school mental health,” UNESCO article, July 27, 2023, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/ukraine-first-unesco-workshop-school-mental-health> (accessed August 22, 2023); “Ukraine: 15,000 school psychologists trained by UNESCO to support learners and teachers,” United Nations press release, August 23, 2023, <https://ukraine.un.org/en/243047-ukraine-15000-school-psychologists-trained-unesco-support-learners-and-teachers> (accessed August 31, 2023). See also “Ukrainian Prioritized Multisectoral Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Actions During and After the War: An Operational Roadmap,” December 5, 2022, “Education,” pp. 27-28, https://mms.gov.ua/storage/app/sites/16/Molodizhna_polityka/Zdorovui%20sposib%20gitty/%D1%81%D0%B8%D1%85%20%D0%B7%D0%B4%20.pdf (accessed August 28, 2023).

²⁴⁸ “Resilience Centers set up to support families in the Kharkiv region,” UNICEF news note, March 20, 2024, <https://www.unicef.org/ukraine/en/notes/resilience-centres-set-up-to-support-families>, (accessed April 3, 2024).

IV. International Law, Education, and Occupation

Russia's wholesale imposition of its own education system in occupied Ukrainian territory and its banning of Ukrainian education in areas under their control violate both international and relevant domestic laws.

The laws of armed conflict require an occupying power to facilitate the education of children and strictly limit the occupying power's authority to impose changes on curricula and language of instruction. The occupying power must respect, "unless absolutely prevented, the laws in force in the country,"²⁴⁹ and is obliged to restore and ensure public order and safety and to uphold its human rights obligations toward the population in the occupied territory.²⁵⁰ With regard to education, the occupying power, therefore, may not "tamper with educational materials, syllabi, curriculum, etc.," as a legal scholar notes, except insofar as necessary to remove educational materials that promote hatred and intolerance.²⁵¹

Ukraine's 2017 law on education, among its other provisions, guarantees education in the Ukrainian language.²⁵² Russia has limited instruction in the Ukrainian language in the areas it occupies to a few hours per week at most.²⁵³ On January 31, 2024, the International Court of Justice found that Russia's "legislative and other practices ... with regard to school education in the Ukrainian language in Crimea," after occupying that territory in 2014,

²⁴⁹ Hague Regulations Concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land (1907), art. 43.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, see also Geneva Convention IV (1949), arts. 29, 47.

²⁵¹ Horowitz, Jonathan T., *Yearbook of International Humanitarian Law*, Vol. 7 (2004), "The Right to Education in Occupied Territories: Making More Room for Human Rights in Occupation Law," 2006, pp. 233-281.

²⁵² Law on Education, No. 2145-VIII, 2017, art. 7, <https://mon.gov.ua/ua/npa/law-education>, (accessed May 29, 2024), The Council of Europe's Vienna Commission has raised concerns that Ukrainian laws provide more limited rights to native Russian-speakers to study in Russian, than to native speakers of other languages. Council of Europe, Venice Commission, "Opinion on the Provisions of the Law on Education of 5 September 2017 which Concern the Use of the State Language and Minority and Other Languages in Education," December 11, 2017, [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2017\)030-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2017)030-e), (accessed May 29, 2024); Venice Commission, "Opinion on the Law on Supporting the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language," 6-7 December 2019, [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2019\)032-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2019)032-e), (accessed May 29, 2024).

²⁵³ Russian officials stated to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in January 2024 that 92 schools in Crimea offer classes in the Ukrainian language. "Experts of the Committee on the Rights of the Child Commend the Russian Federation on the Reduction in Child Mortality Rates, Ask about Propaganda in Schools and the Impact of the War in Ukraine on Children," UN OHCHR treaty bodies news release, January 24, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2024/01/experts-committee-rights-child-commend-russian-federation-reduction-child-mortality>, (accessed May 29, 2024).

“constitutes a pattern of racial discrimination” under the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.²⁵⁴

Ukraine’s law on education also guarantees education in the first languages of students who are members of one of the “indigenous people of Ukraine,” such as Crimean Tatars.²⁵⁵ The Council of Europe reported in 2023 that following the Russian occupation that began on the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, Crimean Tatar students do not have access to instruction in their native language, but only to study it as a subject or an extracurricular activity, with “insufficient availability, quantity and quality of education” in the language.²⁵⁶

Russia’s international human rights obligation to ensure that education is “directed to ... the development of respect for the child’s ... cultural identity, language and values” extends to the territory it occupies in Ukraine.²⁵⁷ Russia is also prohibited from denying a child “the right ... to use his or her own language.”²⁵⁸ A UN expert has found that children “have better academic results and will stay in school longer” when they are educated in their own language.²⁵⁹ Evidence also shows that early learning is most effective in the child’s mother tongue, and that children who learn in their mother-tongue in the first years of education build richer language and social skills.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁴ International Court of Justice, Application of the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism and of the International Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination (*Ukraine v Russian Federation*), Summary of the Judgment, pp. 27, 29, January 31, 2024, <https://www.icj-cij.org/case/166> (accessed February 3, 2024).

²⁵⁵ Law on Education No. 2145-VIII, 2017, art. 7, <https://mon.gov.ua/ua/npa/law-education>.

The Venice Commission has also raised concerns that Ukrainian laws provide more limited rights to native Russian-speakers to study in Russian, than to native speakers of other languages. Council of Europe, Venice Commission, “Opinion on the Provisions of the Law on Education of 5 September 2017 which Concern the Use of the State Language and Minority and Other Languages in Education,” 11 December 2017,

[https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2017\)030-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2017)030-e), (accessed May 29, 2024); Venice Commission, “Opinion on the Law on Supporting the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language,” 6-7 December 2019, [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2019\)032-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2019)032-e), (accessed May 29, 2024).

²⁵⁶ Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, “Crimean Tatars’ struggle for human rights,” April 18, 2023.

²⁵⁷ Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 29(c).

²⁵⁸ Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 30.

²⁵⁹ “States must teach indigenous and minority children in their own language – UN expert,” UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights press release, March 11, 2020, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2020/03/states-must-teach-indigenous-and-minority-children-their-own-language-un?LangID=E&NewsID=25705> (accessed March 23, 2024).

²⁶⁰ See Human Rights Watch, *China’s “Bilingual Education” Policy in Tibet: Tibetan-Medium Schooling Under Threat*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, March 4, 2020), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/03/05/chinas-bilingual-education-policy-tibet/tibetan-medium-schooling-under-threat>, p. 51, footnote 134.

The laws of armed conflict require that “the Occupying Power shall, with the cooperation of the national and local authorities, facilitate the proper working of all institutions devoted to the care and education of children.”²⁶¹ For example, the UN General Assembly has condemned Israel’s closure of educational institutions and prohibition of Syrian textbooks in the occupied Golan Heights as violations of the Geneva Conventions.²⁶² Education for orphans and separated children must be facilitated “in all circumstances” and, as far as possible, “be entrusted to persons of a similar cultural tradition”.²⁶³ The International Committee of the Red Cross explains this rule was established in order “to exclude any religious or political propaganda designed to wean children from their natural milieu; for that would cause additional suffering to human beings already grievously stricken by the loss of their parents.”²⁶⁴

As a state party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Russia is obliged to respect “the liberty of parents to choose for their children schools, other than those established by the public authorities, which ... ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.”²⁶⁵

Russia-administered schools in occupied Ukrainian territory provide children with military training. However, in a situation of occupation, the occupying power is prohibited from “pressure or propaganda which aims at securing voluntary enlistment” of the native population of the occupied territory.²⁶⁶

As a state party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Russia is obliged to provide education directed to prepare the child “for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of

²⁶¹ Geneva Convention IV, art. 50. If children are “interned,” the occupying power must “ensure” their education. Geneva Convention IV, art. 94.

²⁶² United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 41/63 (1986), <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/192463?ln=fr&v=pdf>, (accessed May 29, 2024), para. D(10).

²⁶³ Geneva Convention IV, art. 24.

²⁶⁴ International Committee of the Red Cross, “Article 24 – Measures relating to child welfare,” Commentary to Geneva Convention IV, art. 24, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gciv-1949/article-24#:~:text=Article%2024%20%2D%20Measures%20relating%20to%20child%20welfare,-The%20Parties%20to&text=The%20Parties%20to%20the%20conflict%20shall%20facilitate%20the%20reception%20of,sted%20in%20the%20first%20paragraph>, (accessed May 29, 2024).

²⁶⁵ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, (ICESCR), adopted December 16, 1966, G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 49, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 993 U.N.T.S. 3, entered into force January 3, 1976, art. 13(3). See also the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), art. 26.

²⁶⁶ Geneva Convention IV, art. 51.

understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin.”²⁶⁷ The Committee on the Rights of the Child elaborated that “educational programs [should] be conducted in ways that promote mutual understanding, peace and tolerance, and that help to prevent violence and conflict,” including education about international humanitarian law.²⁶⁸

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights requires states to prohibit by law “any propaganda for war” and “any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.”²⁶⁹ Under the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Russia “shall not permit public authorities or public institutions, national or local, to promote or incite racial discrimination,” including discrimination on the basis of national origin.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁷ Convention on the Rights of the Child, art 29.1(d).

²⁶⁸ Committee on the Rights of the Child, “General Comment 1: The Aims of Education,” CRC/GC/2001/1, 17 April 2001, para. 16, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/resources/educators/human-rights-education-training/general-comment-no-1-aims-education-article-29-2001>.

²⁶⁹ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, General Assembly resolution 2200 (XXI) (December 16, 1966), [https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_2200A\(XXI\)_civil.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_2200A(XXI)_civil.pdf), (accessed May 29, 2024), art. 20(1-2).

²⁷⁰ Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, article 4(c).

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This report was researched and authored by Bill Van Esveld, associate Children’s Rights Division director, and Tanya Lokshina, associate Europe and Central Asia director. Kseniya Kvitka, assistant Ukraine researcher assisted with on-site and desk research.

The report was edited by Bede Sheppard, deputy Children’s Rights Division director, Rachel Denber, deputy Europe and Central Asia director, and Yulia Gorbunova, senior Ukraine researcher. Aisling Reidy, senior legal advisor, carried out legal review and contributed to legal analysis. Tom Porteous, deputy program director, provided program review. Karolina Kozik, Disability Rights division assistant researcher, and Belkis Wille, Crisis, Conflict and Arms division associate director, also reviewed the report, and Aleksandr Lokhmutov, Europe and Central Asia division research assistant, provided desk research.

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(left) A propaganda poster which reads “Russia is Our Motherland” in Russian left behind by occupying authorities in a school in Borova, Ukraine’s Kharkivska region. Photo taken November 2022. © 2022 Human Rights Watch

(front cover) Russian textbooks delivered by the occupying authorities to a school in Borova, Ukraine’s Kharkivska region. Photo taken November 2022. © 2022 Human Rights Watch

Education under Occupation

Forced Russification of the School System in Occupied Ukrainian Territories

This report documents violations of international law, including the laws of war, by the Russian authorities in relation to the right to education in formerly occupied areas of Ukraine’s Kharkivska region, and other regions that remain under Russian occupation. Russian occupying forces in Ukraine and federal authorities have taken measures to suppress the Ukrainian language and curriculum and impose the Russian curriculum and Russian as the language of instruction in schools. These measures violate the laws of armed conflict, which prohibit an occupying power from making unnecessary changes to laws in the occupied territory. Ukrainian children under occupation are indoctrinated in the Kremlin’s anti-Ukrainian propaganda, such as with history textbooks that portray Ukraine under its current government as a “neo-Nazi state”, and they receive military training as part of the school curriculum. Occupying authorities also retaliated against school workers in occupied territories, through threats, detention and even torture, if they refused to implement the imposed Russian curriculum.

The report also documents the Ukrainian authorities’ problematic use of the offence of “collaboration” against Ukrainian education staff who worked under Russian occupation and addresses pressures that Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine has placed on the education system, such as barriers to online learning, the burgeoning need for mental health support for students and teachers, and the impact on students with disabilities.

Human Rights Watch calls on the Russian government to cease all measures to Russify education system and carry out political indoctrination in occupied territories of Ukraine. Russian authorities should facilitate the education of children in occupied territories fully in line with Ukrainian curricula and laws. Human Rights Watch calls on the Ukrainian government to ensure that no one is charged with collaboration solely for teaching, and that all investigations and prosecutions for collaboration respect international human rights and humanitarian law including on due process and fair trials. Ukrainian authorities and foreign donors should work with Ukrainian civil society groups to find ways to keep children connected to learning under occupation or during displacement by Russian forces.