

## GCKN RUNNING ESTIMATE

September 2022 — Update 7



### In the Previous Running Estimate...

- Seventy-six percent (76%) of Russia’s population—mostly older generations—continued to support the Kremlin’s “special military operation” in Ukraine as of July. This is an insignificant change from the previous month and remains part of a longer-term decline.
- The Kremlin’s actions in Crimea and Donbas in 2014 spurred Ukraine’s defense reform and broad public support that bolster its fight against Russia today, though its troops are not without substantive challenges of their own.
- Ukrainian troop morale remains high but has begun to fluctuate as the war drags through its 6th month and casualties mount. To sustain a longer war with Russia, Ukraine is seeking to balance fighting with economic stabilization.

### This Running Estimate...

- Russian domestic support for the war held at 76% through late August, while those “paying close attention to the war” dropped to 51% and overall “concern about the war” fell to 74%. *Ongoing public responses to Russia’s recent mobilization already foreshadow a substantive drop in domestic support for the war.*
- Ukrainian patriotism, including use of the Ukrainian language (even among native Russian speakers), has soared since the Russian invasion, and a whole of society resistance movement has grown in Russian-occupied areas.
- The majority of Ukrainian refugees in Europe plan to return, but most will do so only under the condition that the Russian threat is resolved permanently. Meanwhile, the Kremlin is orchestrating a “Russification” strategy in the occupied regions of Ukraine.

## DOMESTIC RUSSIAN PERCEPTIONS

**Russian President Vladimir Putin’s 21 September announcement of the mobilization of 300,000 Reservists, alongside the enactment of harsher wartime laws, has awakened a broader cross section of Russia’s populace to the Ukrainian problem and will almost certainly weaken the level of public support for the war.** Following the mobilization announcement, protests erupted in multiple Russian cities and have continued intermittently. Police have arrested roughly 2,000 protesters, many of whom subsequently received mobilization notices.<sup>1</sup> At least 17 Russian military recruiting and administrative offices were

set on fire in the five days after mobilization was announced, including in Saint Petersburg, Nizhniy Novgorod, Central Russia, Siberia, the Far East, the Volgograd Oblast and near the Mongolian border. Approximately 54 related sites have been targeted by arson since the invasion.<sup>2</sup>

- Cars have lined up at border crossing points into Finland, the Baltic States, and Kazakhstan. Many flights out of Russia have sold out, with ticket prices soaring multiple times higher than usual, according to Google analytics. All direct flights to Armenia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyz-



stan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Georgia were fully booked within a short period following the mobilization announcement.<sup>3</sup>

- Associates of jailed Russian opposition leader Alexander Navalny and the youth Vesna (“spring”) movement called on Russians to protest, encouraged setting fire to recruiting stations,<sup>4</sup> and pledged to support those evading the draft.<sup>5</sup>
- The 7th Levada Center national survey on the Russia-Ukraine conflict<sup>6</sup> showed that domestic Russian support for the war in August did not change from July’s 76% level, although the percentage of people who “definitely support” the war had declined slightly from 48% in July to 46% in August. The share of older Russians (>55 years) who support the war increased slightly from 84% in July to 85% in August. The level of support from 18–24-year-olds increased from 57% in July to 65% in August. Overall, Russians were split on the decision to continue (48%) or end the war (44%).<sup>7</sup> ***Russia’s partial mobilization targets the very demographic which has least supported the war—the Gen Z and Millennials—portending a downward turn in overall domestic support.***

#### RUSSIA’S 21 SEPTEMBER “PARTIAL MOBILIZATION”<sup>8</sup>

- First military mobilization since World War II
- As many as 300,000 Reservists, but this can be revised upward
- Reservist pool is estimated at 2 million, with only 10% who have continued training
- Call-up notices and reporting requirements are already well underway
- Some may be exempt: students, parents with four or more small children, workers in crucial industry operations and caregivers, among others.

***The Russian populace’s “attention to” and “concern” over the war were beginning to normalize when Ukraine conducted its counter-offensive and Moscow announced a partial mobilization—both of which prompted incipient levels of Russian public dissent.*** According to the Levada Center,<sup>9</sup> domestic Russian “attention to” the war in Ukraine continued to decline (March 64%, June 55%, July 56%, August 51%). Respondents >55 years were the most supportive of the war and have been paying the most attention (69%), whereas 18–24-year-olds were the least supportive and have been paying the least attention to the war (28%).<sup>10</sup>

- Domestic Russian “concern” about the war dropped from 81% in July to 74% in August. Specifically, older respondents’ (>55 years) concern dropped from 91% in July to 87% in August, while younger respondents’ concern dropped from 70% in July to 53% in August. ***This likely stems in part from Putin’s ongoing crackdown on war critics and suppressing of information to normalize the war;<sup>11</sup> however, the public’s preoccupation with the increasingly challenging socioeconomic situation has also played a role.***<sup>12</sup>
- Worsening socioeconomic conditions,<sup>13</sup> coinciding with Ukraine’s recent battlefield successes,<sup>14</sup> and the first largely noticeable effects of Western sanctions<sup>15</sup> have emboldened Putin critics ahead of the 2024 national elections.<sup>16</sup> Russian data indicates Western sanctions have produced significant disruptions in manufacturing, services, imports, employment, and consumer prices.<sup>17</sup> Moscow has taken extraordinary measures to obscure information on these effects to prevent public backlash, including failing to publish data on foreign trade, oil and gas production, banking, and spending, according to press.<sup>18</sup>
- Ukraine’s recent counteroffensive displaced Russian forces from territories held since February,<sup>19</sup> once again thwarted Russian expectations of a near-term victory, devastated Russian command and control, and managed to change the war dynamics in favor of Ukraine.<sup>20</sup> These losses, alongside worsening economic conditions, impelled as many as 100 elected officials across Russia—including municipal lawmakers from 18 districts in Moscow and St. Petersburg—to sign a 12 September petition demanding Putin’s resignation, according to press. ***This unusual public defiance from elected officials amid outrage from war supporters signifies increasing public frustration with Russia’s war effort.***<sup>21</sup>

## RUSSIAN LAWMAKERS APPROVE TOUGHER PUNISHMENT FOR CRIMES DURING MOBILIZATION<sup>22</sup>

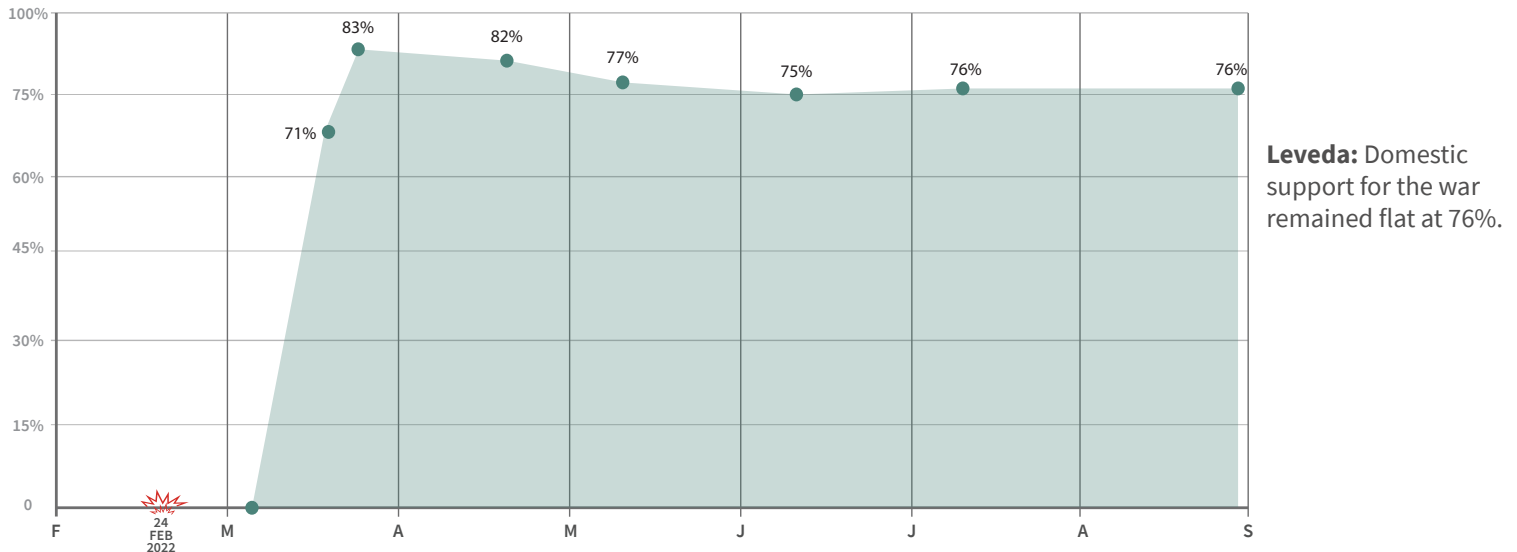
### Key Changes include:

- **WHEN:** During mobilization, martial law, wartime, armed conflict and other combat activities
- **PUNISHMENTS:**
  - » **Violating terms of a state defense order contract:** 10 years in prison
  - » **Failure to fulfill the requirements under the contract:** up to 8 years
  - » **Voluntary surrender:** 3 to 10 years
  - » **Looting:** up to 15 years
  - » **Desertion:** 15 years
  - » **Failure to obey commanding officer during martial law, wartime, armed conflict or combat operations, as well as refusal to participate in military or hostilities:** 2 to 3 years
  - » **Evasion by simulating illness:** 5 to 15 years
  - » **Violation of the rules of combat duty:** 5 to 10 years
  - » **Negligent or dishonest treatment:** up to 5 years
  - » **Destruction or damage of military property:** Fine of up to 200,000 rubles (\$3,430), loss of wages up to 18 months, arrest for up to 6 months, detention in a disciplinary military unit for up to 2 years, or imprisonment for up to 2 years.
  - » **Loss of military property during mobilization or wartime:** up to 7 years



Source: Mediazona and other media, Data as of 25 September, <https://twitter.com/mediazzona/status/1574078370312327171>. (translated)

# Domestic Russian Perceptions of the "Special Military Operation" (Before the Recent Partial Mobilization)



\*It is important to note that Russian opinion polls are immediately instrumentalized by the Kremlin, repeated by the Russian media, and used to claim that the invasion is supported by the Russian public and conducted in its name.

Figure 1. Domestic Russian Perceptions of the "Special Military Operation" public opinion polls, GCKN.

## POLLING SNAPSHOT (From Before Partial Mobilization Announcement)

### Russia:

- Support for the "special military operation" remained flat at 76%.
- Russians split on whether to continue the war (48%) or end the war (44%).
- Attention to the war in Ukraine declined from 64% in March to 51% in August.
- Concern about the war declined from 81% in July to 74% in August. Older respondents are the most concerned (87%), while younger respondents are the least concerned (53%).

### Ukraine:

- 94% of UKR Residents Identify as Ukrainian: a 100% increase since 2021.
- Nearly 90% Ukrainians will not accept territorial concessions to Russia as a condition to end the war; opposition to territorial concession is strongest in the west (87%) and center (86%), and among Ukrainian-speaking Ukrainians (88%) and bilingual Ukrainians (88%).
- Ukrainian Language Surging: 80% in UKR speak, are transitioning to, or demand to be spoken to in Ukrainian.





# RUSSIAN INVASION STRENGTHENS UKRAINIAN IDENTITY

“Do you still think you can intimidate, break us?”  
“Didn’t [you] understand who we are? What we stand for?”

—Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy  
to Russian President Vladimir Putin<sup>23</sup>

**Russia’s existential threat to Ukraine has only solidified Ukrainian identity and patriotism, and will likely intensify and transform Ukrainian anti-Russian resistance into a stronger, longer-term persistence.** Ukraine is a pluralistic country, composed of Christians, Jews, Muslims, Ukrainian-speakers, Russian-speakers, and those who are multilingual. While areas of Russian support exist, especially in the east, Russia’s invasion has actually strengthened Ukrainian nationalism across the country.<sup>24</sup> According to this year’s annual, nationwide pre-Independence Day poll by Rating<sup>a</sup>, 94% of respondents now identify as citizens of Ukraine.<sup>25</sup>

- In eastern Ukraine, citizens who were neutral towards Russia or even pro-Russian prior to the 24 February Russian invasion have become more patriotic about their Ukrainian identity, even to the point of joining the fight against Russia, according to press.<sup>26</sup> This “changing [of] shoes in mid-air”,<sup>b</sup> due to Russia’s threat to Ukrainians’ way of life, has largely consolidated Ukrainian identity and patriotism, according to the same report.<sup>27</sup>
- New sociological research indicates Ukrainian residents have increased their use of the Ukrainian language—as

opposed to Russian or other languages—since the invasion. Eighty percent of citizens have either switched or are switching to speaking Ukrainian, or demand that others speak with them in Ukrainian, according to Ukraine’s language ombudsman.<sup>28</sup> Many native Russian-speakers in eastern Ukraine have since given up their birth language and adopted Ukrainian, according to press.<sup>29</sup> This is corroborated by an annual Ratings poll indicating that the Ukrainian language increased by 3% from April to July, while the use of Russian decreased by nearly 50% during that same period.<sup>30</sup>

- Russia’s effort to issue passports in occupied areas is failing, with few applications under the Kremlin’s May “simplified registration” system, according to Ukrainian press.<sup>31</sup> For example, less than 1% of the pre-invasion population of Berdyansk accepted Russian passports as of the end of August,<sup>32</sup> despite Russian threats to limit food and social benefits to those without a Russian passport in occupied areas. As of late August, the EU will not recognize Russian passports issued in the occupied areas of Ukraine.<sup>33</sup>

a Ukraine’s Independence Day holiday is 24 August, commemorating its 1991 declaration of independence.

b “Changing shoes in mid-air” is the colloquial Ukrainian equivalent of the English expression to “bend with the prevailing wind.”

## WHOLE OF SOCIETY RESISTANCE FUELS UKRAINE MILITARY’S PERSISTENCE

**Ukraine’s diverse resistance activities in Russian-occupied areas—which has forced some Russian elements to redeploy from front lines to rear areas—is boosting the will to fight among the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU).** In March, Kiev publicized a website encouraging popular resistance to Russia’s invasion. Soon after, supporters began acts of resistance against Russia, starting with protests. These eventually evolved to assassinations, bombings, sabotage, hacking, intelligence gathering, doxing collaborators, information warfare, protest art, and work slowdowns or stoppages.<sup>34</sup>

- Ukrainians in the occupied territories track and report Russian government officials and troop movements as

well as identify and target perceived Ukrainian collaborators.<sup>35</sup> This is consistent with research showing nearly 70% of Ukrainians want Russian collaborators punished.<sup>36</sup> Targeted assassinations and other resistance activities—including cyber exploitation of Russian military and civilian networks—have softened some of Russia’s control and informed precision strikes against its forces. This has intermittently forced Russian elements to redeploy forces into occupied territories for anti-guerrilla operations.<sup>37</sup>

- Ukrainian groups have used art as a form of resistance against Russia, particularly since the siege and occupation of Kherson, according to press. One such group, “Residency

in Occupation”, was formed in Kherson in the tradition of the “kher-art” movement. It uses irony, sarcasm, and audaciousness, depicting the precariousness of post-invasion life, to challenge and resist the Russian occupation.<sup>38</sup>

- Ukraine’s early September counterattacks displaced Russians from positions they had occupied since March, recapturing more than 1,000 square miles of territory,

according to Western press. ***AFU and Ukrainian resistance together are exploiting Russia’s military fissures, its often poor and inflexible leadership, low troop morale, logistics/hardware maintenance issues, and its troops who have dispersed due to Ukraine guerilla operations and threats of counteroffensives.***<sup>39</sup>

## UKRAINIAN RESILIENCE DESPITE DISPLACEMENT

***Ukrainian refugees in Europe have absorbed the shocks of short-term displacement and, in many cases, watched from afar their Ukraine communities become destroyed; nevertheless, most are standing by for an opportunity to return home as soon as possible.*** Ukraine’s pre-war population was roughly 44 million.<sup>40</sup> As of 2 September, approximately 7 million Ukrainian refugees were recorded across Europe, including 3.9 million who registered for temporary protection or similar national protection schemes.<sup>41</sup> The worsening security conditions in eastern and southern Ukraine likely displaced an additional 330,000 people over the past month and prompted authorities to extend mandatory evacuations to parts of Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, and Zaporizhia oblasts.<sup>42</sup> Most displaced Ukrainians dispersed into Europe after 2-3 weeks of fighting (52%), with women constituting the vast majority (93%) of refugees.<sup>43</sup> Some Ukrainians are returning home, but estimates vary on the number.<sup>44</sup>

- Poland (40%), Germany (13%), and the Czech Republic (5%) are the European countries with the highest number of Ukrainian refugees, according to early polls from an international research organization. Networks of friends and relatives (55%), proximity to Ukraine (32%), oppor-

tunities for work (15%), and the availability of social benefits (14%) were the primary determinants of Ukrainian dispersion to European countries, and critical for bolstering Ukrainian adaptation.<sup>45</sup> The majority of Ukrainian refugees (89%) plan to return to Ukraine; however, 67% plan to remain in Europe if the war drags on. While the first number suggests resilience in the face of Russian aggression, the second indicates that a quick resolution of the war is a key factor in refugees’ willingness to return to Ukraine. Most Ukrainians seek to legitimize their status while in Europe, with 68% having the status of temporary protection designation.<sup>46</sup>

- A small number of Ukrainian refugees (3%) do not plan to return to Ukraine when the war ends, suggesting the war may have acted as a catalyst but is not the main reason for migration. Instead, the pre-war plan to migrate (54%) is the most important predictor of migration for this group, who are mostly under 35 years of age and speak one or more foreign languages (64%). Forty-seven percent of displaced schoolchildren intend to study abroad, according to the same report.<sup>47</sup>

### UKRAINIAN RESILIENCE DESPITE WAR FATIGUE

Despite deepening hostilities between Russia and Ukraine, and the worsening security and humanitarian environment in Ukraine’s east and south, most Ukrainians (84%) including those living in Russia-occupied regions will not accept territorial concessions to Russia as a condition to end the war, according to the Kyiv International School of Sociology (KISS).

As of May, opposition to territorial concession was strongest in the west (87%) and center (86%) but weakest in the east (77%). Similarly, opposition to concessions was strongest among Ukrainian-speaking Ukrainians (88%) and bilingual Ukrainians (85%) but weakest among Russian-speaking Ukrainians (68%).

The survey results suggest that despite increasing Ukrainian war fatigue, including apprehension about the worsening economic situation, Ukrainians remain resilient against Russian aggression. This is likely bolstered by continuing European support.

*SOURCE: Hrushetskyi, A. 2022. "Dynamics of readiness for territorial concessions for the earliest possible end to the war: Results of a telephone survey conducted on July 6-20, 2022." Kyiv International Institute of Sociology.*

# “RUSSIFICATION”

**Russian “filtration” camps are part of a systemic plan for the “Russification” of the occupied regions of Ukraine, and are intended to consolidate control and ease annexation into the Russian Federation.** Russians have used filtration camps to identify and mitigate threats to Russian control of occupied areas, prepare for referenda on joining the Russian Federation, and acquire recruits for the Russian war effort. Russia operates up to 21 filtration camps in eastern Ukraine and western Russia to process, register, interrogate, and detain Ukrainian POWs and citizens from occupied regions, and to determine their loyalty to Ukraine.

- Some Ukrainian citizens in Russian-occupied territories voluntarily go to the filtration centers, as Ukrainians have no rights in occupied Ukraine or in Russia without a “filtration pass.” Others suspected of pro-Ukrainian sentiments are forcibly sent to the camps.<sup>48</sup>
- Ukrainians who pass a security threat assessment after being subjected to a lengthy interrogation—which reportedly can include torture, starvation, and other forms of coercion—are released or are sent to Russia where many of the men are forced to join the Russian military and then are sent back to Ukraine to fight.<sup>49</sup>
- Mothers sent to Russia are often separated from their children who are sent to orphanages, according to an interview with a volunteer who helps deported Ukrainians return home. Others are sent to Russia for further screening or detained based on their pro-Ukrainian sentiment or association with the Ukrainian government, security forces, or other civil groups, in a modern form of the Soviet gulag system. According to the Institute for the Study of War, President Vladimir Putin ordered the Federal Agency for Nationalities to create “adaptation centers” to enculturate “migrants” to Russian traditions, customs, and laws for the purpose of assimilation.<sup>50</sup> The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) estimates that by 25 June approximately 1.7 million Ukrainians had been sent to Russia through the filtration camp system.<sup>51</sup>

**The human terrain mapping and loyalty screening in these filtration camps likely aided Russia’s September annexation referenda in the Russian-occupied Ukrainian regions of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia.** Ukrainians in occupied territories must pass a Russian security assessment conducted in a filtration camp to have any rights in the occupied areas or to/through Russia; those who did not pass were reportedly unable to participate in the late September referenda.<sup>52</sup>

- According to the Russian Embassy in Washington, D.C., filtration camps operate as checkpoints for persons leaving the combat zone, guarding against “bandits and fascists” entering Russia or “safe regions” (i.e., occupied zones). The Embassy claims that Russians do not impede Ukrainian civilians, but actually house and feed them.<sup>53</sup>
- Russian documents reportedly obtained by Ukrainian officials show that Russian forces planned for filtration camps and resettlement of Ukrainians across the Russian Federation weeks prior to the invasion.<sup>54</sup> Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov claimed—as early as May—that since 24 February approximately 1 million Ukrainians had been moved to Russia at their request for safety reasons.<sup>55</sup>

## COUNTER-MEASURES TO RUSSIAN TROOP WAR WEARINESS

The Kremlin has employed the Wagner group, a Private Military Company, to crack down on Russian troops in Ukraine who refuse to fight, including forcing them to join the mercenary organization. Russian soldiers and family members claim that Wagner mercenaries run “makeshift camps in the occupied Luhansk region where troops who try to leave the war are being held against their will” and are subjected to intimidation and violence to coerce them back into the fight. In some cases, Russian soldiers refusing to fight are forced to join Wagner, while others are suspected to have been executed as intransigent and as further coercion—*pour encourager les autres*. According to one Russian soldier, “We found out that this place was called a ‘center for psychological support for military personnel,’ but in reality it was just recruitment for Wagner.”<sup>56</sup>

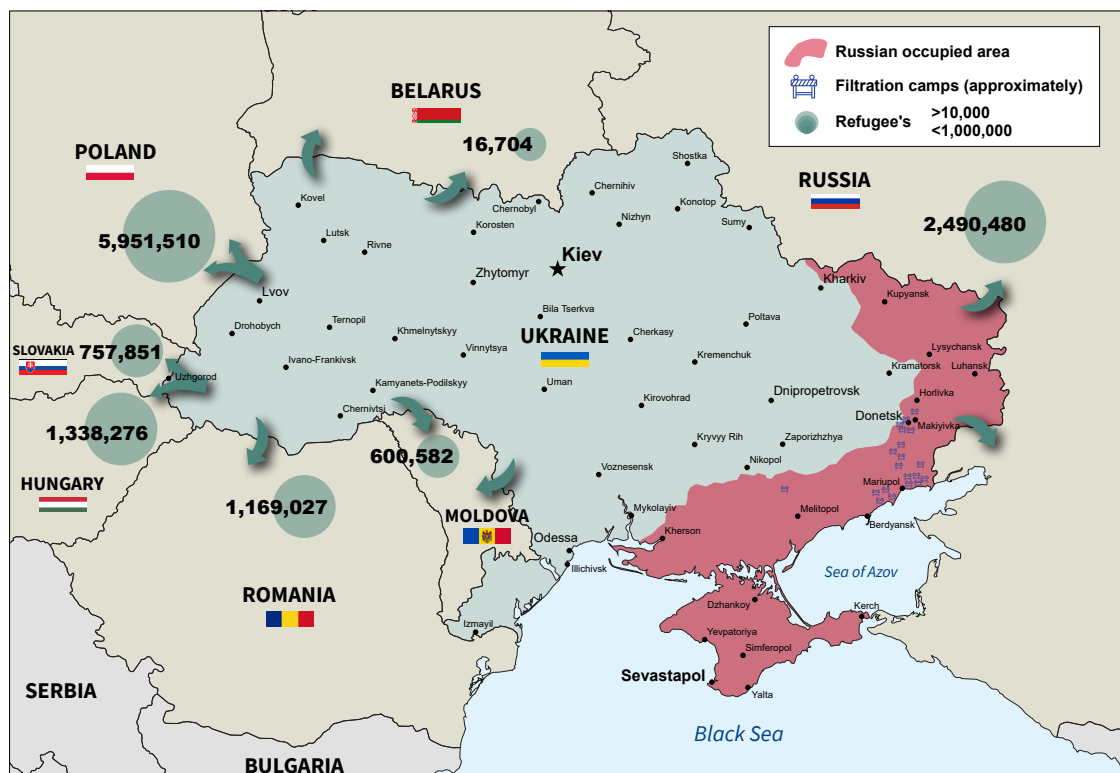
- Ukrainian POWs are often held within or in close proximity to filtration camps, where they undergo the same process as civilians, but are rarely released unless they are part of a prisoner exchange. Some POWs are deported to remote areas of the Russian Federation; others, including foreign-born soldiers, face ‘trials’ by Russian-backed separatists. The fates of others are unknown.

**Russia is attempting to erase Ukrainian identity by “Russifying” Ukrainian children.** Ukraine’s human rights ombudsman Lyudmila Denisova claimed that over 200,000 children including roughly 2,000 orphans, were deported from eastern and southern Ukraine to Russia, between the initial invasion and early May.<sup>57</sup> Another report from May credits the Russian Ministry of Defense with claiming that it had sent nearly 200,000 children to Russia.<sup>58</sup> However, in August, Daria Herasymchuk, advisor to the [Ukrainian] President’s Commissioner for Children’s Rights and Child Rehabilitation, stated that at least 5,754 children were forcibly displaced or deported in the first six months of the war. In the same article, Ukrinform reported that the Russian government declared it has “displaced and deported at least 450,000 children to Russian territory.”<sup>59</sup> **While the exact number is debatable, thousands of Ukrainian children have been relocated from Ukraine to Russia since the 24 February invasion.**

- Russian officials report that over 1,000 Ukrainian children deported to Russia have been placed for adoption across Siberia, and 300 more are being processed for adoption. In previous reports, the Children’s Ombudsman of the Russian Federation, Maria Lvova-Belova, claimed that Ukrainian orphans sent to Russia for adoption already had Russian citizenship. The citizenship status of the 1,000 children that are the subject of the August report is not clear, but Ukrainian government officials immediately demanded their return, indicating they are likely Ukrainian

citizens.<sup>60</sup> However, in May, Putin signed a decree allowing “guardians” or “organizations” to claim Russian citizenship for “orphans, children left without parental care, as well as disabled persons who have Ukrainian citizenship” in the Russian-occupied regions of Ukraine.<sup>61</sup>

- In addition to the cultural immersion of living as part of a Russian family, the Russian government created summer camps specifically for Ukrainian children so that they might “improve” their Russian skills, according to an announcement by the Russian Commissioner for Children’s Rights.<sup>62</sup>
- The Russian Ministry of Enlightenment has begun to “Russify” the schools in their “liberated territories” (i.e., Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine) by transitioning them to a Russian curriculum using only Russian language, prohibiting Ukrainian language, destroying books on Ukrainian history and literature, and replacing them with Russian textbooks. Ukrainian identity is discredited in the classroom by claiming a common Russian heritage. Moreover, the Ukrainian government is denounced as fascist, while the achievements of Putin are touted. Remote learning is prohibited and Ukrainian parents who withhold their children from in-person learning are threatened with the loss of parental rights. Russian educators and their families have been relocated to Ukraine to replace anti-Russian Ukrainian educators who are sent to filtration camps for re-training and threatened with deportation.<sup>63</sup>



Sources: Kaveh Khoshnood and Raymond, Nathaniel A., et al., “System of Filtration: Mapping Russia’s Detention Operations in Donetsk Oblast,” 25 August 2022. Humanitarian Research Lab at Yale School of Public Health; New Haven; Operational Data Portal: Ukraine Refugee Situation, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>



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# ENDNOTES

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