

THROUGH THE VEIL OF SILENCE – CHILDREN ON LIFE UNDER OCCUPATION



In 2014, the Russian Federation waged an armed aggression against Ukraine. Today, more than 1.6 million children are living under occupation — children who remain unseen and unheard.

At the same time, these children face daily pressure, indoctrination, and militarisation. The Russian Federation systematically seeks to erase their Ukrainian civic identity. During lessons and extracurricular activities, children are encouraged to support the war waged by the Russian Federation against Ukraine and to link their future after school with the Russian armed forces.

But what do these children think? What do they have to say?

Through this exhibition, we want to give a voice to children who have experienced occupation in different ways. Some have lived under occupation for 11 years, others for 3. Some managed to leave, while others remain in the occupied territories. These children come from various cities and regions. Some of their words were conveyed by teachers from Ukrainian schools (we are grateful to the online school SchoolToGo), who are among the few still maintaining direct contact with children in occupation. Sadly, due to fear, many of these children are afraid to speak directly with anyone else.

In this exhibition, names have been changed and only regions are mentioned, as for security reasons we cannot disclose the children's real names or the cities they come from.

Each story reflects a personal experience of life under occupation — a childhood stolen by the Russian Federation. A childhood we must return to them.



British Embassy
Kyiv

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The Centre for Civic Education "Almenda" (CCE "Almenda") is a public organisation registered in Yalta in 2011. Until 2014, its priority area of activity was human rights education. In 2014, due to the occupation of Crimea, the organisation was forced to relocate to Kyiv. Currently, the organisation's priority is to ensure the systematic collection of accurate, timely, and verified data on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict.

Statistics



Over

1 600 000*

children aged 0 to 18 live in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine



At least

590 900

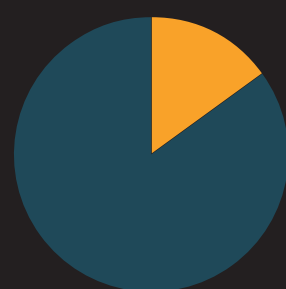
children are attending schools in the occupied territories that have been aligned with Russian standards.



There are

1988*

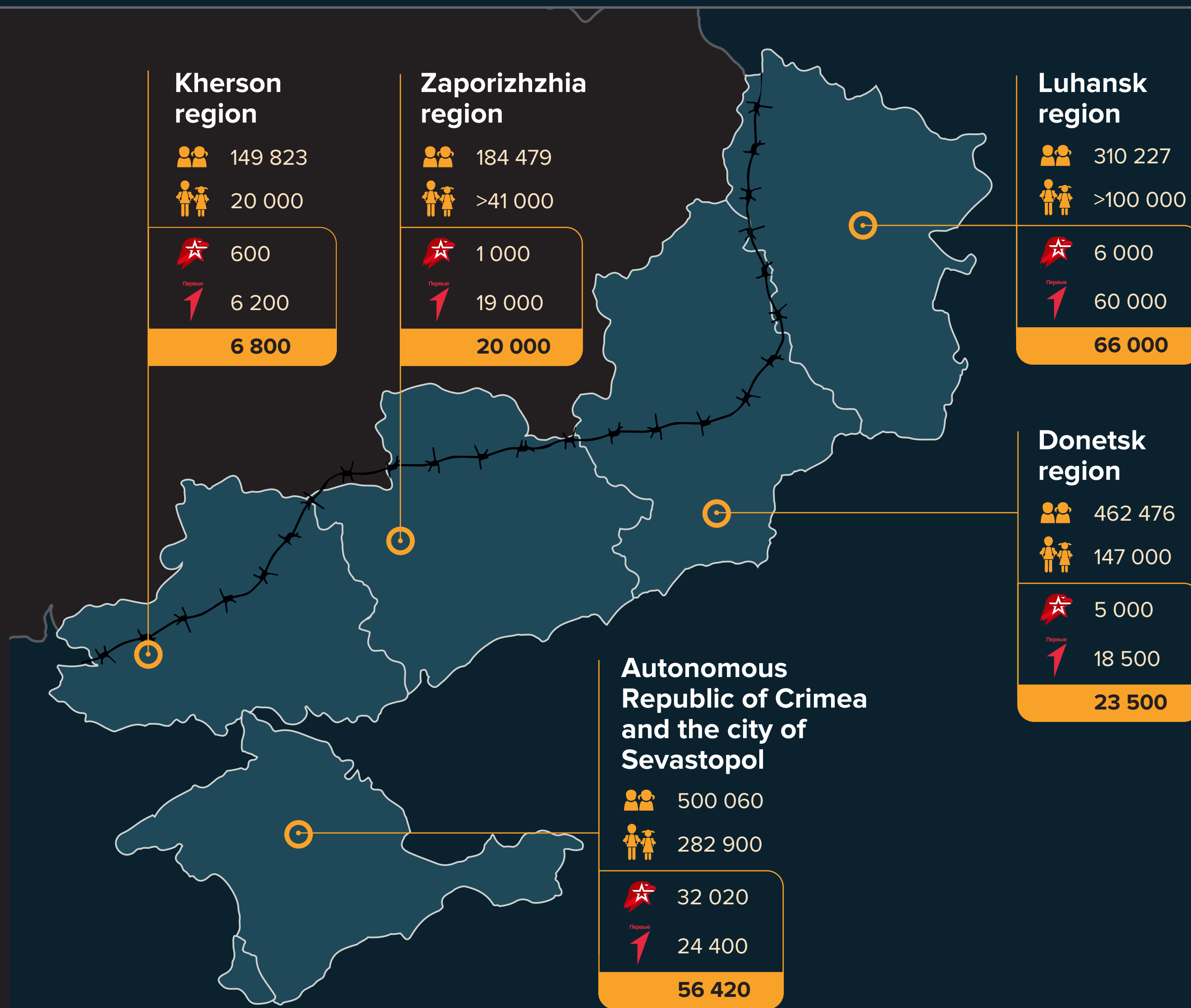
schools located in the temporarily occupied territories, which accounts for



14 %

compared to the number of schools in government-controlled areas of Ukraine.

*Due to limited access to the occupied territories, the statistical information is based on open sources and data from the Russian Federation. The actual number of children may differ.



At least

172 720

have been involved in the youth movements “Young Army” and “Movement of the First”, which are aimed at the militarisation and indoctrination of children.

THE ACTIONS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION CONSTITUTE, AT THE VERY LEAST, VIOLATIONS OF:

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, namely:

Article 8

“...the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality.”

Article 14

“...the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.”

Article 29

“The education of the child shall be directed to: ...(d) the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin.”

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, namely:

Article 26

“2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.”

The Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention), namely:

Article 50 ...

“The Occupying Power shall under no circumstances change their (note: the children’s) personal status, nor enlist them in formations or organisations subordinate to it.”



Ayshe

last seen online: recently

I was 14 when in my city and many others, they started holding campaigns for Crimea joining Russia. My young mind couldn't understand how it was possible to be born and live in one country, and then suddenly "separate". After all, you don't choose your homeland! Then the nightmare began: at school, teachers started replacing lessons with lectures on the topic "how wonderful it is to live in Russia".

It's so frightening to think back on all of this...

There were times when, for completing the same number of correct tasks in independent work, I received fewer points than my classmate. How could this happen? It's simple. First, I'm Crimean Tatar. Second, the school knew about my pro-Ukrainian stance. And so, it's no surprise that for this, my points could be reduced.

Only now do I realize the lasting impact these events have had on me and how they have shaped my perception. As a result, I have many problems that I try to deal with, but honestly, it's very difficult.

But I was 14 when the occupation began. What will happen to the children who were 12, 8, or 6 at that time...



From correspondence with a girl from occupied Crimea, who, after finishing school in Crimea, was able to enrol in a higher education institution in Ukraine.



Anna

last seen online: recently

“Today, the military came to our school, showed us guns, and let us hold grenades” – this is what my child says about school life...



From correspondence with the mother of a Year 2 pupil from occupied Crimea. According to the mother, the meeting included Russian military personnel who had undergone rehabilitation after losing limbs. The pupils are also asked to collect “aid” for participants in the so-called “special military operation”, and parents are told how much money they are required to contribute. During lessons, the pupils are given assignments to draw pictures on the theme of the “special military operation” and write letters to soldiers. It is impossible to keep the child from attending school.





Masha, a pupil of Year 10
ВОСТАННЄ В МЕРЕЖІ: НЕДАВНО

Hi Masha. How are you? Would you be able to tell me about your experience studying at a Russian school?

Good afternoon! Thank you, I'm doing okay.

Here, in the Russian school, we are forced to study. If you leave school and don't enrol anywhere else, the "guardianship authorities" come to you and ask what you're doing. It's against the law not to study until you're 18.

And how is the schooling going?

Most of the teachers, probably around 95%, are pro-Russian. Almost all of them. In our schools, there can be "Homeland History" classrooms, plaques at the entrance with the faces of dead soldiers, and soldiers who were once students at our school come to visit us. Something like that...



From correspondence between the teacher of the online school SchoolToGo and a secondary school pupil from temporarily occupied Crimea.



Yehor, class
last seen online: recently

Yehor, greetings! How are you? Could you share your experience of studying in a Russian school?

Greetings. Yes, of course.

We moved from Kyiv to Sevastopol to live with my grandmother — she needed care. Everything at school was in Russian. At first, everything seemed normal, but after the full-scale war began, everything changed.

My classmates started mocking me, throwing phrases like “Go back to where you came from!”

It was difficult, I couldn’t take it anymore and asked my parents to transfer me. We found the only solution: my parents “got” a certificate saying I was studying at another school and took my records from the school.

Now I’m studying in a Ukrainian online school. I don’t see any of my old classmates, and the teachers act like they don’t recognize me. Some of the teachers even said directly before: “You’d better go back to Ukraine”.

It’s very hard to feel like an outsider in your own class. But I know who I am. And I know where my home is.



From correspondence between the teacher of the online school SchoolToGo and a pupil from the temporarily occupied city of Sevastopol.





From correspondence between the CCE “Almenda” and a graduate from temporarily occupied Crimea.



Nadiya

last seen online: recently

Can you tell me how you decided to apply to a Ukrainian university?

Honestly, I’ve wanted to leave Crimea since I was about 13. I’ve always liked Ukraine, so I decided that one day I would go to apply to a Ukrainian university.

I’m nervous about the exams. I know some things from the school curriculum because before 2014 we studied Ukrainian language, and I learned some more from the textbooks that my acquaintance brought me, since it’s impossible to buy textbooks here. So, I’m more confident in the language than in Ukrainian history. I don’t know history very well.

It’s difficult and dangerous to find and keep Ukrainian history textbooks in Crimea.

None of my acquaintances know that I’m preparing for the exams.