



CENTRE FOR STRATEGIC
COMMUNICATION
AND INFORMATION
SECURITY

“UKRAINIAN CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN”:

STRUCTURE OF RUSSIAN NARRATIVES
AND INFORMATIONAL OPERATIONS

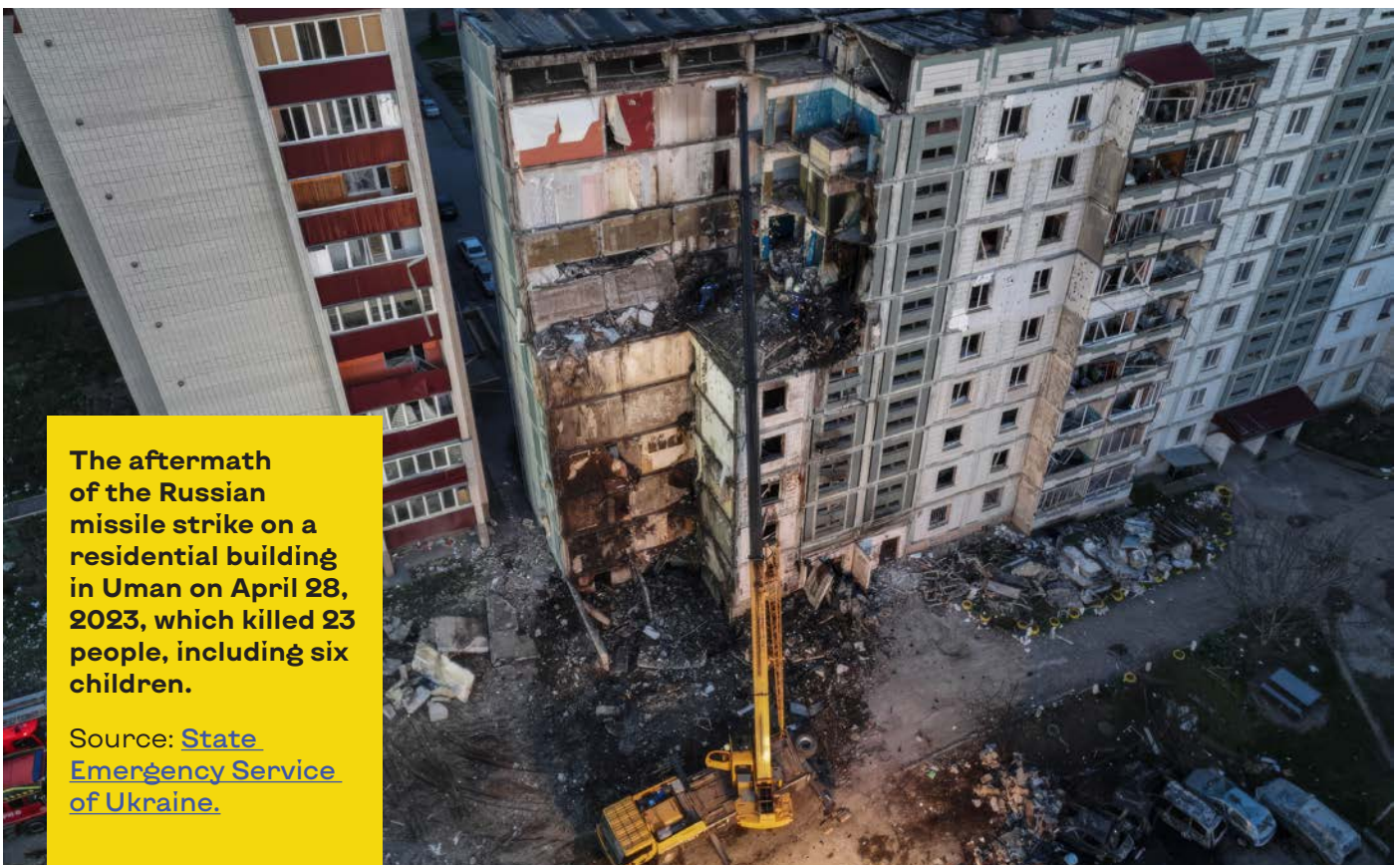


I. INTRODUCTION

In 1999, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1261 established six types of serious crimes against children during armed conflicts. These include:

- Recruitment and use of children;
- Killing and maiming of children;
- Rape and other forms of sexual violence against children;
- Attacks on schools, hospitals, and protected persons associated with them;
- Abduction of children;
- Denial of humanitarian aid access.

Since the start of armed aggression in 2014, and especially following the full-scale invasion in 2022, the Russian Federation (hereinafter referred to as the RF) has committed [all of these crimes](#) against Ukrainian children. In particular, [according](#) to the Office of the Prosecutor General, as of November 12, 2024, since the onset of the full-scale war, at least 589 children have been killed, and another 1,681 children have been injured. It is currently impossible to determine the exact number of victims and those affected due to the lack of access to occupied territories. Additionally, nearly 20,000 children forcibly deported to the RF have been identified by name, though the total number may reach hundreds of thousands of children.





On March 17, 2023, the Pre-Trial Chamber of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague issued arrest warrants for Russian dictator Vladimir Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova, the Russian Presidential Commissioner for Children’s Rights. They are suspected of war crimes involving the unlawful deportation and transfer of population, including children, from occupied Ukrainian territory, occurring at least since February 24, 2022. This ICC decision is not exhaustive, as crimes against Ukrainian children form part of Moscow’s broader genocidal policy toward the Ukrainian people.

Propaganda and disinformation are integral components of Russian aggression, directed not only against Ukraine but also against the international community as a whole. Among the primary objectives of the Russian special services in this domain are the denial, justification, or minimization of their own crimes committed against Ukrainian children, which, in the context of this study, can be reasonably considered a strategic goal of Russian propaganda.

The main tactic of propagandists lies in promoting the narrative that crimes against children are allegedly committed by Ukraine itself. This narrative, in its current form, began taking shape as early as 2014. Following the start of the full-scale invasion, it acquired consistent characteristics and has been implemented as part of a long-term disinformation campaign, within which regular information operations are conducted.

This study is dedicated to a substantive analysis of the narrative about “Ukraine’s crimes against children,” its sub-narratives, and the examination of typical information operations. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of the informational threat and the methods employed by Russian propagandists.



II. SUMMARY

The subject of this study is the Russian propaganda narrative that holds Ukraine responsible for systematic crimes against children. Its conceptual framework began to develop in 2014, and since the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022, it has been an important element of the overall narrative architecture of Russian propaganda.

Moscow's strategic goal in this case is to deny, downplay, justify, or informationally overshadow the real crimes committed by the Russian Federation against Ukrainian children. Additionally, the narrative of "Ukraine's crimes against children" serves to justify aggression against Ukraine and is a component of Moscow's genocidal rhetoric regarding Ukrainians.

The analysis of typical information operations was conducted by the Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security based on monitoring data using the Osavul platform, which relies on artificial intelligence to assess information and the impact of narratives.

During the analysis, it was found that the primary entry point for Russian special services targeting the Ukrainian audience is the Telegram platform, which hosts an extensive network of propaganda channels. To mislead Western audiences, Russian propaganda actively employs narratives from the QAnon conspiracy theory, amplifying them with its own disinformation about Western and Ukrainian political figures.

To counter the Kremlin's disinformation efforts, the Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security emphasizes the need for: widespread coverage of the Russian Federation's crimes against Ukrainian children, including at the international level; prompt identification of hostile information operations and debunking of fake reports, particularly in coordination with foreign specialized institutions; and the development of sustainable and effective strategic communications both within Ukraine and on the international stage.

III. SUBNARRATIVE ANALYSIS AND INFORMATION OPERATIONS REVIEW

1. “UKRAINE SELLS CHILDREN ABROAD FOR ILLEGAL ADOPTION”

General Description of the Sub-Narrative

The theme of protecting children from foreign adopters has been a component of the Putin regime’s propaganda since 2012. That year, the Russian Federation adopted Federal Law No. 272-FZ, primarily aimed at restricting the activities of United States citizens. Specifically, it imposed a ban on Americans adopting orphans from Russia. This was the Kremlin’s response to the Magnitsky Act, passed in the United States, which imposed financial and visa sanctions on Russian officials involved in the death of Sergei Magnitsky, a lawyer for the Hermitage Capital fund, in a detention center, as well as other human rights violations.

To stir anti-American sentiment within Russian society, the Russian law was positioned as being enacted in memory of

Dmitry Yakovlev, a 2-year-old boy from Russia who died in 2008 in the United States due to the negligence of his adoptive father. The adoption of this law was accompanied by [accusations](#) against the U.S., alleging inaction regarding crimes against children adopted from Russia.

The sub-narrative of “unscrupulous Western adopters” gradually evolved in the context of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. It was used not only to fuel anti-Western sentiment within Russia itself but also to stoke baseless fears in Ukrainian society.

On the international stage, the Kremlin employs this tactic to “mirror” accusations leveled against Russia concerning the [practice of illegal adoption](#) by Russians of children unlawfully removed from Ukraine.



In 2023, Maria Lvova-Belova, the Russian Presidential Commissioner for Children’s Rights, illegally «adopted» a child abducted from Mariupol.

INFORMATION OPERATION “SALE OF 85 CHILDREN FROM BAKHMUT”

NOTE. The propaganda trope about “85 orphans” can be traced back to 2015. At that time, representatives of the “DNR” group [accused](#) Ukraine of “Kyiv holding 85 orphans” who had been removed from the territory of the so-called “people’s republic” in 2014.

This information operation unfolded in several stages between June 2023 and August 2024. It began in June 2023 when Russian propaganda spread a fake story claiming that in April 2022, Ukrainian social services, under the pretext of evacuation, sent 85 minor students from the Paraskoviivka Specialized General Education Boarding School No. 40 in the Bakhmut district of Donetsk region to Spain.

The source of the fake was a publication on the website of the “Foundation for Combating Repression,” an organization founded in March 2021 by Yevgeny Prigozhin. The organization’s website actively disseminates anti-Ukrainian fakes under the guise of “investigations.”

In July 2023, several propaganda outlets published a statement by Mira Terada, the head of the “Foundation for Combating Repression,” in which she reiterated the content of the fake. Notably, the outlet Baltnews, part of the state-owned Russian media group “Rossiya Segodnya,” was among those spreading the claim.

NOTE. Mira Terada is a citizen of RF (real name - Oksana Vovk). Lived in the US for several years. In 2018 was deported from Finland to the USA where she was sentenced for 46 months in prison for money laundering. After returning in the RF in 2021, she began actively working in propaganda, particularly Prigozhin’s media structures.

26 августа 2015, 07:21 Кризис на Украине

Детский омбудсмен: ДНР настаивает на возвращении Киевом детей, вывезенных из детдомов

В на настоящий момент Киев удерживает 85 детей-сирот. Всего же на территории Украины в данный момент остаются более 400 детей из провозглашенной ДНР

МОСКВА, 26 августа. /ТАСС/. Донецк на переговорах в Минске будет настаивать на возвращении детей-сирот, вывезенных из провозглашенной Донецкой народной республики (ДНР) на Украину в прошлом году. Об этом Донецкому агентству новостей заявила советник главы ДНР по правам ребенка Яна Чепикова.

Screenshot from tass.ru

ФОНД БОРЬБЫ С РЕПРЕССИЯМИ ПОЛУЧИЛ ЭКСКЛЮЗИВНЫЕ ДОКАЗАТЕЛЬСТВА ТОРГОВЛИ ДЕТЬМИ-ИНВАЛИДАМИ ИЗ УКРАИНЫ В ИСПАНИИ

85 детей с умственными отклонениями и инвалидностями были насильно вывезены из ДНР в Испанию испанским военным самолетом и помещены в государственный приют, где они подвергаются сексуальному насилию, вовлекаются в торговлю наркотиками и продаются по всему миру. Несовершеннолетние с особыми потребностями живут в неподобающих условиях, а любые попытки вернуть их на родину намеренно пресекаются испанскими и украинскими властями.



Screenshot from fondfbr.ru

Глава Фонда борьбы с репрессиями Мира Тэрада: США и ФРГ помогают Украине торговать детьми

20 июля 2023 | 09:05



© Sputnik / Нина Зотина
Анастасия Гудима

Кто помогает Киеву похищать детей, по каким схемам и в какие страны их вывозят, рассказала Baltnews глава Фонда борьбы с репрессиями Мира Тэрада.

Screenshot from tass.ru



Украина превратилась в "черный рынок" по торговле детьми на Запад: Их крадут из семей и продают педофилам и трансплантологам

Мира Терада: На Украине процветает бизнес по нелегальной торговле детьми

Юлия АНДРИЕНКО



На Украине процветает бизнес по нелегальной торговле детьми
Фото: Юлия АНДРИЕНКО / Перевірка фотоблогів ЕПІ

Screenshot from kp.ru

In August 2024, Russian propaganda sources, citing Mira Terada, disseminated information claiming that children from the Paraskoviivka boarding school had been put up "for auction" for "expedited adoption" in Spain and Argentina. The original source of the fake was an [interview](#) with Mira Terada published by Komsomolskaya Pravda, an outlet that systematically spreads disinformation and propaganda messages.

Throughout August 2024, the fake news was disseminated by at least 34 sources, of which 3 were identified as state-affiliated (Russian Federation) and 4 as known distributors of disinformation.

| | | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| ДЖЕРЕЛА 34 | ПУБЛІКАЦІЇ 35 | ПЕРЕГЛЯДИ 373k | РЕАКЦІЇ 1.88k |
| НЕАВТЕНТИЧНІ 0 | ПОВ'ЯЗАНІ З ДЕРЖАВОЮ 3 | РОЗПОВСЮДЖУВАЧІ ДЕЗІНФОРМАЦІЇ 4 | ІНФОРМАЦІЙНІ ОПЕРАЦІЇ 10 |

The fake was most actively spread on the Telegram platform (29 sources) and on websites (5 sources). The majority of the sources (19) were identified as Russian, including those created in the temporarily occupied territories (TOT) of Ukraine (7) or those mimicking Ukrainian outlets.

| ПЛАТФОРМИ | КРАЇНИ | ДЖЕРЕЛА ПОВ'ЯЗАНІ З ДЕРЖАВОЮ | | |
|--------------|----------------|------------------------------|---|--|
| Telegram: 29 | Russia: 19 | Усього джерел: 3 | Поділ за країною афіліації: Russia: 3 | Топ джерел пов'язаних з державою: Komsomolskaya Pravda, Захар Прилепин, Латвійская кочка |
| Web: 5 | Ukraine TOT: 7 | Загальна аудиторія: 84М | | |
| | Ukraine: 3 | | | |
| | Belarus: 1 | | | |
| | Latvia: 1 | | | |
| | | СКОМПРОМЕТОВАНІ ДЖЕРЕЛА | | |
| | | Усього джерел: 14 | Поділ за типом: Дезінформація: 4, Інформаційні операції: 10 | Топ скомпрометованих джерел: "LIFE.RU", dnr-news.ru, Захар Прилепин, Inr-news.ru, news-kiev.ru |
| | | Загальна аудиторія: 35.6М | | Інформаційні операції, Дезінформація, Дезінформація, Дезінформація, Дезінформація |

2. “UKRAINE ORGANIZES CHILD SEX TRAFFICKING”

General Description of the Sub-Narrative

During the full-scale invasion, a distinct sub-narrative emerged from the Russian propaganda trope of “trafficking Ukrainian children”—accusations that Ukraine’s leadership is organizing child sex trafficking to Western countries. These information operations intensified starting in November 2023 and were primarily [aimed at discrediting Ukraine’s First Lady, Olena Zelenska](#), as well as various political and public figures in Ukraine’s partner states.

The origin of this sub-narrative is evidently linked to the spread of the QAnon conspiracy theory in the United States and other Western countries. This theory posits that the U.S., or even the entire Western world, is controlled by a cabal of pedophile Satanists. It clearly resonates with the ideology of “Rashism,” which holds that Russia opposes not only the “aggressive NATO bloc” but also defends “traditional values” against the supposed “[Satanism](#)” and “[pedophilia](#)” normalized in the West.

However, the Kremlin’s connection to QAnon runs deeper. Research indicates that since at least 2019, Russian internet trolls—including those affiliated with the Internet Research Agency (founded by Yevgeny Prigozhin), RT, and others—have been promoting QAnon across various online platforms. Moscow viewed this conspiracy theory and its associated movement as a tool to undermine citizens’ trust in state institutions, media, and political figures, particularly targeting the U.S. Democratic Party.



A person with the flag of QAnon symbolics. Source: [nbcnews.com](#) / Scott Olson / Getty Images file

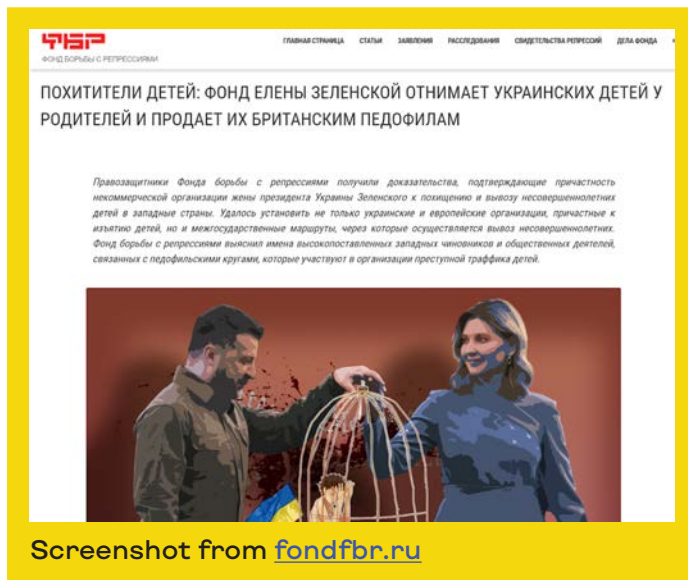
Following the start of the full-scale invasion, this sub-narrative was adapted for use against Ukraine, portraying it as a supplier of children to the West’s “elite pedophiles.”

Moreover, by peddling false accusations of Ukraine organizing child sex trafficking, Russian propaganda seeks to informationally overshadow the real crimes committed by the Russian Armed Forces during the full-scale invasion. [According](#) to the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine, at least 316 cases of conflict-related sexual violence have been documented, with victims including 200 women, 114 men, and 15 minors (14 girls and 1 boy).

INFORMATION OPERATION “UKRAINIAN CHILDREN SOLD TO BRITISH PEDOPHILES”

NOTE. Similar information operations have been systematically conducted since 2023. According to these fake reports, various prominent figures—such as French philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy and former U.S. Democratic vice-presidential candidate Tim Walz—are implicated in child sex trafficking from Ukraine. This tactic is designed not only to discredit specific individuals but also to facilitate the viral spread of the fake within targeted segments of the global information space.

In June 2024, Russian propaganda disseminated a fake story alleging that the Olena Zelenska Foundation was involved in trafficking Ukrainian children, who were supposedly being sent to “European pedophiles,” primarily to “high-ranking pedophile networks in London.” This criminal scheme was allegedly established in December 2022, following Olena Zelenska’s official visit to the United Kingdom. The British “curator” of this child trafficking operation was claimed to be Hugh Grosvenor, the 7th Duke of Westminster.



The source of the fake was a so-called “[investigation](#)” by the “Foundation for Combating Repression.” The material was simultaneously published on the website [Rupor News](#) under the byline of Thomas Röper, a German-born blogger who has lived in Russia for 20 years and [actively works](#) within the Russian propaganda system.

Throughout June 2024, the fake was disseminated by at least 187 sources, including 2 identified as inauthentic, 14 linked to the state (Russia), and 35 known as disinformation spreaders.

| | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| ДЖЕРЕЛА 187 | ПУБЛІКАЦІЇ 231 | ПЕРЕГЛЯДИ 255k | РЕАКЦІЇ 18.1k |
| НЕАВТЕНТИЧНІ 2 | ПОВ'ЯЗАНІ З ДЕРЖАВОЮ 14 | РОЗПОВСЮДЖУВАЧІ ДЕЗІНФОРМАЦІЇ 35 | ІНФОРМАЦІЙНІ ОПЕРАЦІЇ 37 |

The fake was most actively spread on the social platform X (Twitter), the Telegram messenger, and various websites. The majority of sources were identified as Russian (104), created by occupiers in Ukraine’s temporarily occupied territories (23), or mimicking Ukrainian outlets (36). Among the state-affiliated sources were the Russian state media outlet [Ukraina.ru](#), as well as several other publications and Telegram channels linked to the Russian state.



ПЛАТФОРМИ

| | |
|----------|----|
| Twitter | 85 |
| Telegram | 78 |
| Web | 18 |
| Facebook | 3 |
| VK | 3 |

КРАЇНИ

| | |
|-------------|-----|
| Russia | 104 |
| Ukraine | 36 |
| Ukraine TOT | 23 |
| Belarus | 1 |
| Canada | 1 |

ДЖЕРЕЛА ПОВ'ЯЗАНІ З ДЕРЖАВОЮ

[ДОКЛАДНІШЕ](#)

Усього джерел

14

ЗАГАЛЬНА АУДИТОРІЯ: 3.97М

Поділ за країною афіліції

| | |
|--------|----|
| Russia | 14 |
|--------|----|

Топ джерел пов'язаних з державою

| | | |
|--|----------------------|------------------------|
| Украина.ру | Державне медіа | Russia |
| ANNA-NEWS | Пов'язане з державою | Russia |
| Голос Мордора | Пов'язане з державою | Russia |
| ПолитНавигатор. Новости и а... | Пов'язане з державою | Russia |
| Донбасс решает | Пов'язане з державою | Russia |

3. “CHILDREN IN UKRAINE BECOME VICTIMS OF BLACK TRANSPLANTOLOGISTS”

General description of subnarrative

The propaganda sub-narrative claiming that black market organ trafficking thrives in Ukraine began taking shape shortly after Russia’s hybrid invasion of Ukraine in 2014. [One of the earliest fakes](#) on this topic emerged in May 2014: it alleged that in one of Kyiv’s morgues, members of the 24th Maidan Self-Defense Hundred were burning bodies after extracting their organs. Presented as a “journalistic investigation,” the material claimed that leaders of pro-European political forces (Oleh Tyahnybok, Yulia Tymoshenko, Petro Poroshenko) were linked to this “black market organ transplantology.”

With the onset of the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO), the intensity of information operations on this theme significantly increased. Starting in September 2014, [fakes](#) began circulating about the “Kyiv junta” running a large-scale business trafficking the organs of its own soldiers as well as captured “militia” fighters.

In December 2015, Russian propaganda published an alleged “[confession of an SBU employee](#)” claiming that organs were being systematically extracted from wounded Ukrainian soldiers—often without consent—and sent abroad. Organs were also supposedly harvested from injured civilians, including children. The criminal scheme allegedly involved a “Dutch transplantologist, Elisabeth Debru,” and Sandra Roelofs, the wife of Mikheil Saakashvili.



Screenshot from [versia.ru](#)

Following the start of the full-scale invasion, this propaganda sub-narrative resurfaced. As early as April 2022, Yelena Ponomaryova, president of MIRNaS (International Institute for the Development of Scientific Cooperation), [declared](#) that

“the Ukrainian Armed Forces and nationalist battalions use people both as human shields and as living incubators for organs and blood.” By December 2022, [fakes emerged](#) about “black transplantologists” operating near Bakhmut, supposedly led by the same “Dutch woman Elisabeth Debru” and fighters from the American private military company Mozart Group.

The sub-narrative about children allegedly becoming victims of “black transplantologists” gained significant traction during the full-scale war. Overall, this sub-narrative is designed not only to discredit specific institutions or individuals associated with the Ukrainian state but also to contribute to a broader **narrative portraying Ukraine as a failed state plagued by rampant corruption and lawlessness.**

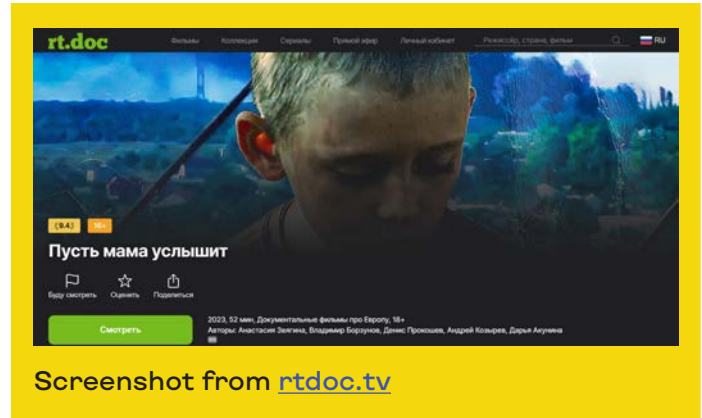


Screenshot from [segodnia.ru](#)

INFORMATION OPERATION “UKRAINE SELLS CHILDREN’S ORGANS TO THE EUROPEAN UNION”

This complex information operation began on June 1, 2023, with the release of the documentary film “[Let Mom Hear](#)” produced by the Russian state propaganda channel RT. The film, dedicated to “Ukraine’s crimes against the children of Donbas,” contained a series of fake claims within the broader narrative of “Ukraine’s crimes against children.”

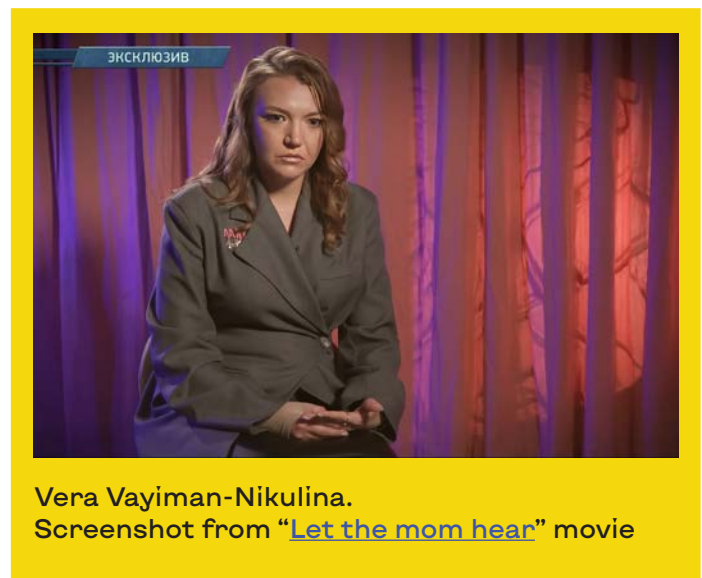
NOTE 1. In May 2023, RT released another documentary, “Tanks for Kidneys” which also promoted the narrative of “rampant black market transplantology” in Ukraine.



These fakes were voiced by the film’s speakers, including: Maria Lvova-Belova, the Russian Presidential Commissioner for Children’s Rights; a fake “Polish human rights activist” Ioanna Pakhvitseвич; filmmaker and astrologer Tatyana Borshch; and Vera Vayiman, presented as a “former observer of a UN humanitarian monitoring mission.”

NOTE 2. Vera Vayiman (maiden name Vayiman, married name Nikulina) never worked as an OSCE observer. In 2013, she chaired the youth chamber at the Vladivostok Duma. In 2019, she visited [Syria](#) and occupied [Donetsk](#) as a member of the Primorsky Krai branch of the Russian organization “Combat Brotherhood” (Boevoe Bratstvo). “Combat Brotherhood” is an all-Russian organization of veterans of local wars and military conflicts. Its official leader is Boris Gromov, an 81-year-old former State Duma deputy and ex-governor of Moscow Oblast. The de facto leader is Dmitry Sablin, a State Duma deputy from the United Russia party, who is under sanctions from Ukraine, the U.S., the EU, and several other countries due to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

In particular, Vayiman claimed that Ukrainian commanders were allegedly killing children in Donbas, after which their organs were extracted in underground laboratories and exported to the EU under the cover of grain shipments. The film and Vayiman’s statement were widely disseminated by propaganda sources.












Vera Vayiman-Nikulina.
Screenshot from “[Let the mom hear](#)” movie

Throughout June 2023, the fake was spread by at least 44 sources, of which 1 was identified as inauthentic, 14 were linked to the Russian state, and 13 were known disinformation spreaders.



| | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
|  ДЖЕРЕЛА 44 |  ПУБЛІКАЦІЇ 48 |  ПЕРЕГЛЯДИ 103k |  РЕАКЦІЇ 2.48k |
| НЕАВТЕНТИЧНІ 1 | ПОВ'ЯЗАНІ З ДЕРЖАВОЮ 14 | РОЗПОВСЮДЖУВАЧІ ДЕЗІНФОРМАЦІЇ 13 | ІНФОРМАЦІЙНІ ОПЕРАЦІЇ 18 |

The fake was most actively disseminated on the Telegram platform and various websites. The majority of sources (26) were identified as Russian, including those created in Ukraine's temporarily occupied territories (TOT) (7) or mimicking Ukrainian outlets (5).

| | | |
|--|----------------------|----------------|
| ПЛАТФОРМИ | | |
|  Telegram | | 39 |
|  Web | | 3 |
|  Facebook | | 1 |
|  VK | | 1 |
| КРАЇНИ | | |
| Russia | | 26 |
| Ukraine TOT | | 7 |
| Ukraine | | 5 |
| Belarus | | 2 |
| ДЖЕРЕЛА ПОВ'ЯЗАНІ З ДЕРЖАВОЮ ДОКЛАДНІШЕ | | |
| Усього джерел | | |
| 14 | | |
| ЗАГАЛЬНА АУДИТОРІЯ: 5.82M | | |
| Поділ за країною афліації | | |
| Russia | | 13 |
| Belarus | | 1 |
| Топ джерел пов'язаних з державою | | |
|  SB Belarus (BLR) | Державне медіа | <u>Belarus</u> |
|  Александр Семченко | Пов'язане з державою | <u>Russia</u> |
|  КОРНИЛОВ | Пов'язане з державою | <u>Russia</u> |
|  Крымская Z прачка 🍷🍷 | Пов'язане з державою | <u>Russia</u> |
|  ⚡ Z Правда Шурави. | Пов'язане з державою | <u>Russia</u> |

4. “CHILDREN IN UKRAINE ARE BEING INDOCTRINATED WITH NAZI IDEOLOGY”

General Description of the Sub-Narrative

The modern Russian narrative claiming that “fascism/Nazism/neo-Nazism” flourishes in Ukraine began forming in the early years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It was particularly aggressively promoted during the Revolution of Dignity. At that time, Russian special services conducted information operations aimed at inciting internal chaos in Ukraine and spreading panic among the populations of Ukraine’s southern and eastern regions, as well as the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. The “Pravyj Sector” movement became a long-standing symbol of “Kyiv fascism” in this narrative.

Later, the focus of Russian propaganda shifted to the “Azov” battalion, which soon replaced “Pravyj Sector” in the propaganda narrative system. Russian propaganda heavily **exploited** fakes about “Azov” for international audiences as alleged evidence of “Nazism” thriving in Ukraine. Additionally,

Russian propaganda labeled the protection of the Ukrainian language, decommunization, and virtually any actions by the Ukrainian government or society aimed at breaking away from Moscow’s cultural and political orbit as “fascist/Nazi” practices.

Fakes about an alleged network of “**Nazi camps**” for children in Ukraine have been circulating since at least 2015. The promotion of fakes claiming that Ukrainian children are systematically indoctrinated with “Nazi ideology” intensified after the full-scale invasion. Such fakes are intended not only to discredit Ukraine but also to justify the **Russian authorities’** efforts to forcibly alter the identity of children and youth in temporarily occupied territories (TOT) or those deported to Russia.

«"Правый сектор" — это современный СС» Исповедь американского наемника о службе в рядах украинских радикалов

Игорь Ротарь



Часть изображения была размыта, чтобы не нарушать законодательство Российской Федерации. Фото: Сергей Харченко / NARPhoto / ZUMA / Globallookpress.com

Screenshot from lenta.ru

Боевики "Азова" открыли под Киевом нацистский детский лагерь

Будущих националистов с 9 лет учат жить в походных условиях и владеть оружием

Александр БОЙКО ПОДПИСАТЬСЯ

ПОДЕЛИТЬСЯ



Screenshot from kp.ru

NOTE. The militarization, Russification, and ideological indoctrination of Ukrainian children are carried out through their involvement in all-Russian movements such as “Yunarmiya” (Youth Army), “Movement of the First,” and “Znanie” (Knowledge). For instance, “Yunarmiya” was established by the Russian Ministry of Defense in 2016 and has a distinctly militaristic character. This movement has actively expanded its activities in occupied Crimea and the TOT of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia regions. Children and teenagers aged 8–18 can join, being groomed for participation in the Kremlin’s wars. Numerous cases have already been documented of “Yunarmiya” members dying in the war against Ukraine.

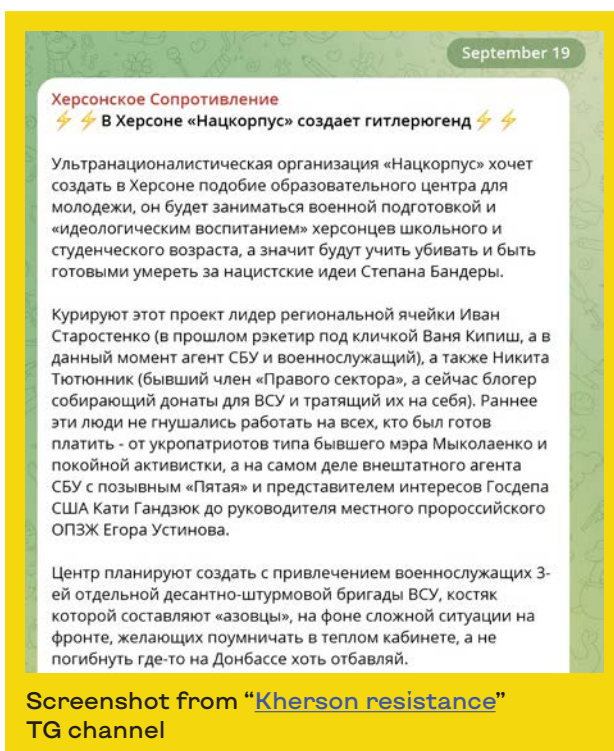
Also there are already recorded cases of joining the RU army of teenagers-members of the “Youth army” from Crimea and Donetsk regions.

INFORMATION OPERATION: “IN KHERSON, THE NATIONAL CORPS IS CREATING A HITLER YOUTH”

On September 19, 2024, Russian propaganda spread a fake claiming that the “National Corps” party, founded by “Azov” veterans, was allegedly planning to open an “educational center for youth” in Kherson. This center would supposedly engage in military training and ideological indoctrination of school- and university-aged children, preparing them “to kill and be ready to die for the Nazi ideas of Stepan Bandera.” The source of the fake was the Telegram channel “[Khersonskoe Soprotivlenie](#)” (Kherson Resistance).



Screenshot from [chita.ru](#)



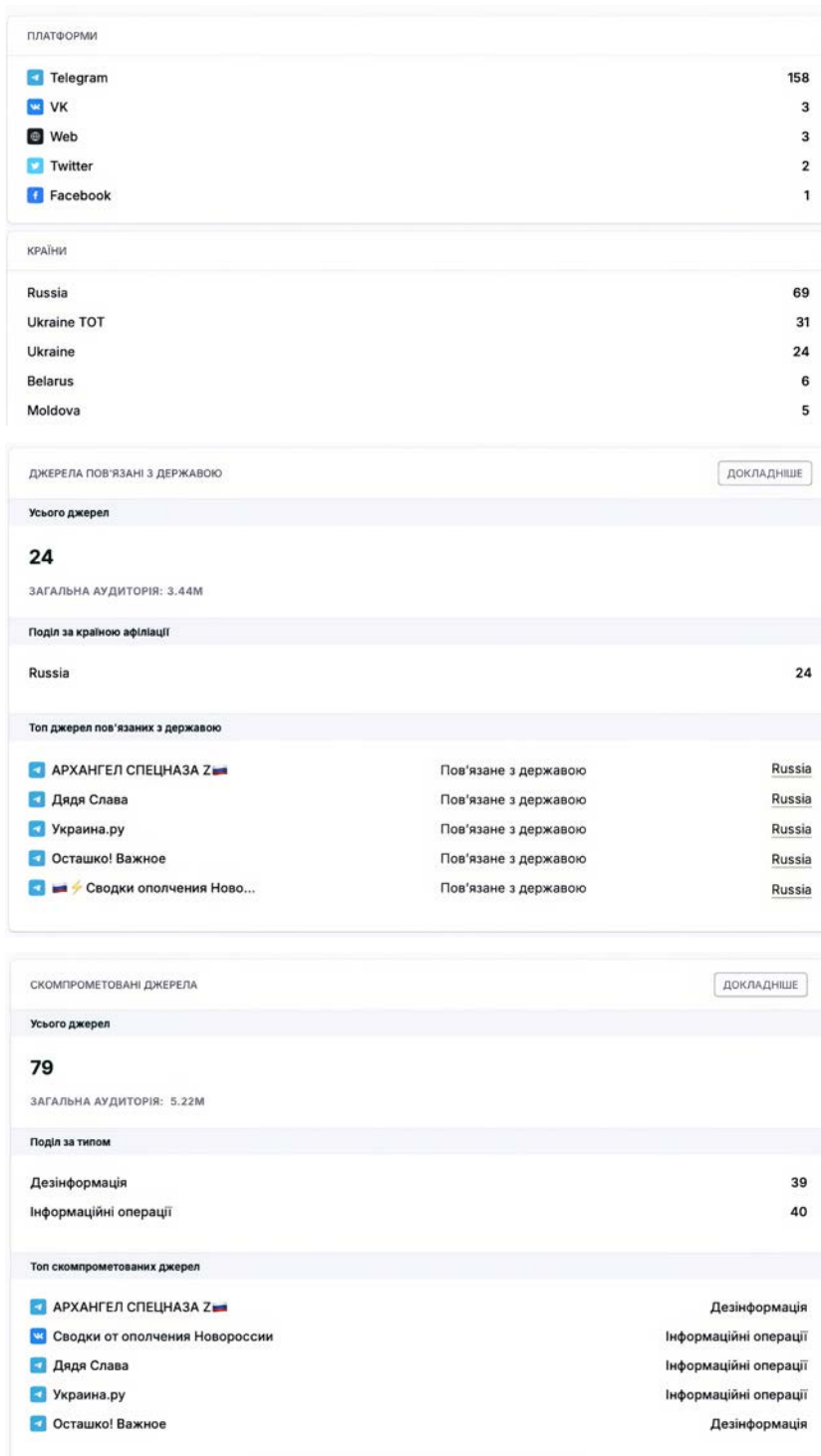
Screenshot from “[Kherson resistance](#)” TG channel

NOTE. The Telegram channel “Khersonskoe Soprotivlenie” is likely operated by Russian special services under the guise of a pro-Russian “resistance movement” supposedly active in Kherson. The channel’s pinned message, posted by its administrator, contains calls for collaborationism and the overthrow of the state order.

Throughout September, the fake was disseminated by at least 167 sources, of which 9 were identified as inauthentic, 24 were state-affiliated (Russia), and 39 were known disinformation spreaders. According to data from the Osavul platform, 40 of these sources had previously been involved in other information operations.



The fake was most actively spread on the Telegram platform (158 sources). The majority of sources were identified as Russian (69), including those created in Ukraine's TOT (31) or mimicking Ukrainian outlets (24).



5. “UKRAINE IS MOBILIZING TEENAGERS”

General Description of the Sub-Narrative

Fakes claiming that Ukraine is preparing or already conducting the mobilization of teenagers are part of a [broader propaganda narrative](#) aimed at disrupting mobilization efforts in Ukraine. These fakes are designed to sow panic among Ukrainians (especially parents whose children have reached the relevant age) and to convince them that, due to the intransigence of Ukraine’s leadership and its Western allies, the war will continue “until the last Ukrainian.”

A key target audience for this sub-narrative is the residents of temporarily occupied territories (TOT), whom propagandists constantly intimidate with “horrific realities of Ukraine” to foster their loyalty to the occupation authorities. Another priority target audience is the residents of frontline areas, whom the aggressor state’s propaganda seeks to persuade against evacuation, partly by instilling fears of mobilization into the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

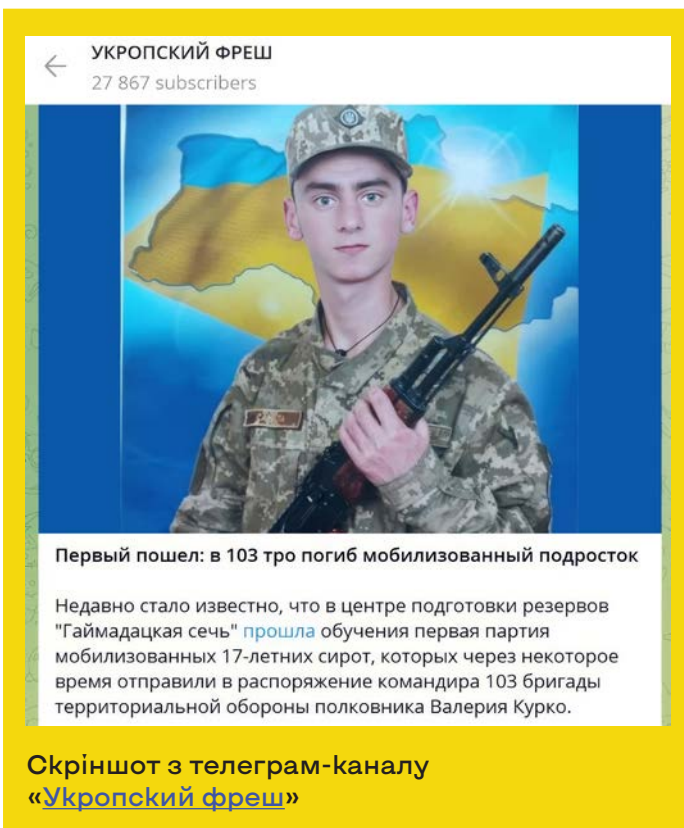
Additionally, this sub-narrative is intended to justify and/or informationally overshadow the systematic [militarization of Ukrainian children](#) carried out by occupiers in the TOT.



INFORMATION OPERATION: “DEATH OF A TEENAGER MOBILIZED INTO THE UKRAINIAN ARMED FORCES

On December 3, 2023, Russian propaganda spread a fake claiming that the 103rd Territorial Defense Brigade had received “the first batch of mobilized 17-year-old orphans.” Among them was allegedly 17-year-old Volodymyr Sachala, an orphan from a children’s home, who supposedly died during combat operations near the village of Novoselivske in Luhansk Oblast.

The source of the fake was the Telegram channel “Ukropsky Fresh” part of a network of Russian propaganda Telegram channels that has previously been repeatedly involved in information operations by Russian special services.

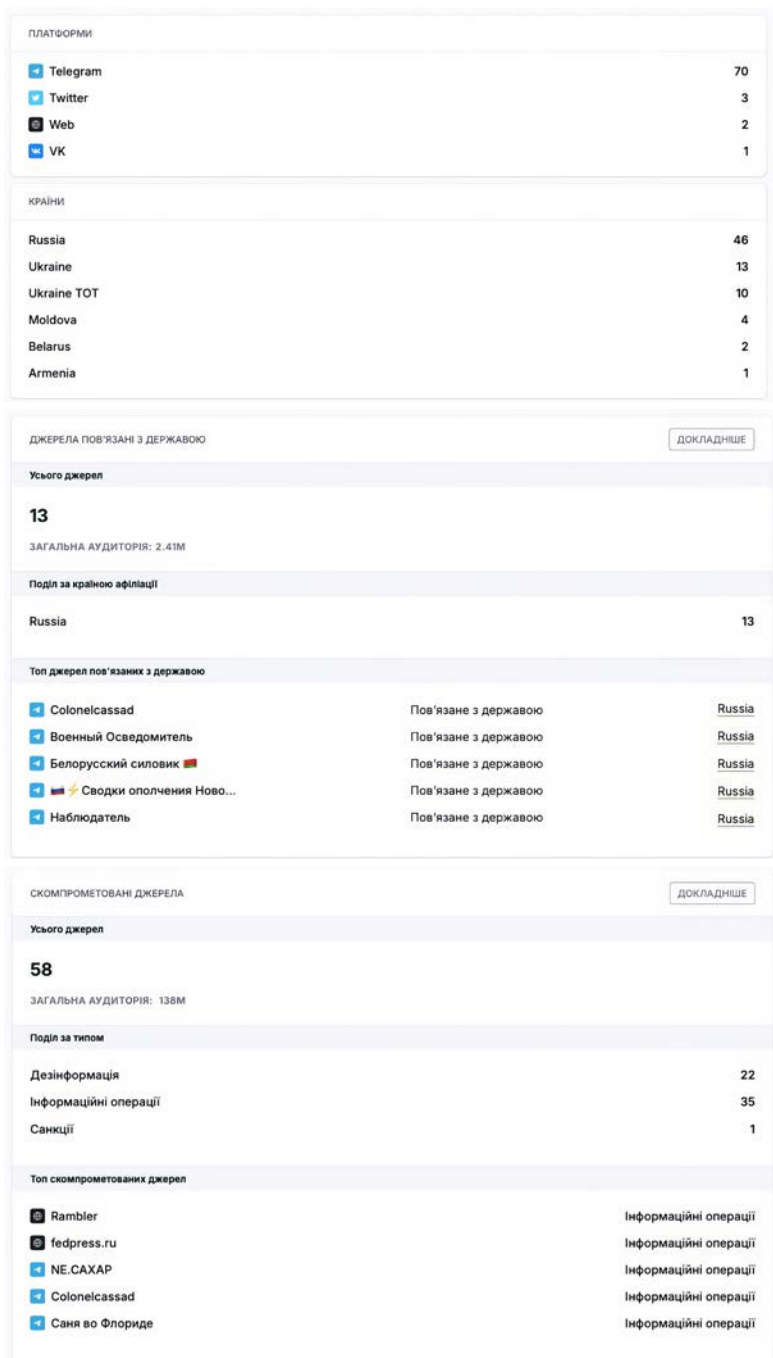




Throughout December, the fake was disseminated by at least 76 sources, of which 13 were identified as state-affiliated (Russia) and 22 as known disinformation spreaders.



The fake was spread almost exclusively on the Telegram platform (70 sources). The vast majority of sources were identified as Russian (46), including those created in Ukraine's TOT (10) or mimicking Ukrainian outlets (13).





IV. CONCLUSIONS

The subject of this study is the Kremlin's information operations conducted within the framework of promoting a Russian propaganda narrative that falsely holds Ukraine responsible for systematically committing crimes against children. The conceptual framework of this narrative began forming in 2014, and since the start of the full-scale invasion, it has become a critical element of the broader narrative architecture of Russian propaganda.

As evidenced by the analysis from the Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security, this narrative comprises several distinct sub-narratives, namely:

1. "Ukraine sells children abroad for illegal adoption";
2. "Ukraine organizes child sex trafficking to the West";
3. "Children in Ukraine are victims of black market transplantologists";
4. "Children in Ukraine are being indoctrinated with Nazi ideology";
5. "Ukraine is mobilizing teenagers."

A review of information operations conducted by Russian special services from February 2022 to November 2024 suggests that Moscow's strategic goal in this case is to deny, downplay, justify, or informationally overshadow the real crimes committed by the Russian Federation against Ukrainian children. Additionally, the narrative "Ukraine's crimes against children" is designed to:

- Discredit Ukraine in the eyes of the international community as a failed state;
- Undermine the trust of Ukrainians in their senior military-political leadership;
- Justify the "special military operation" (SVO) and dehumanize Ukrainians in the eyes of the Russian population;
- Amplify anti-Western sentiments among Russians and sow corresponding doubts among Ukrainians;
- Foster loyalty to Russia among the population of Ukraine's temporarily occupied territories (TOT);
- Discredit Ukraine's Defense Forces and other state institutions.

This study, conducted by the Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security, is based on narrative analysis (including prior work by the Center) and monitoring data collected using the Osavul platform, an artificial intelligence-based tool for assessing information and the impact of narratives.



The results of the analysis of narratives and information operations lead to the following conclusions:

- “Ukraine’s crimes against children” is one of the central themes of Russian propaganda, targeting domestic Russian, Ukrainian, and global audiences.
- The primary entry point for Russian special services into the Ukrainian audience is the Telegram platform, which hosts an extensive network of propaganda channels.
- To mislead Western audiences, particularly in the U.S., Russian propaganda actively exploits narratives from the QAnon conspiracy theory.
- The domestic Russian audience is no less a priority for Russian propaganda, as the narrative under study serves as a tool to mobilize support for the “special military operation.” This narrative is a component of the Kremlin’s genocidal rhetoric concerning Ukraine and Ukrainians.

In light of this, the Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security emphasizes:

- The importance of investigating Russia’s crimes against Ukrainian children;
- The need for widespread coverage of these crimes and Russia’s criminal practices, particularly at the international level;
- The necessity of promptly identifying hostile information operations and debunking fake reports;
- The importance of coordinating efforts between state and non-state actors, as well as Ukrainian and international institutions and other stakeholders involved in countering disinformation;
- The importance of developing and implementing effective mechanisms to combat the spread of disinformation on online platforms;
- The need to build sustainable and effective strategic communications both within Ukraine and on the international stage.