

Education in the occupied territories of Ukraine

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As a result of the full-scale invasion of Russian troops into the Ukrainian territory, a number of Ukrainian cities, towns and villages have been occupied (particularly in Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson, Zaporizhia, Kyiv, Chernihiv, Sumy, and Kharkiv Regions). Some of these territories [were de-occupied](#) in early April 2022.

In this paper, we have recorded the main evidence of education in the occupied territories based on personal contacts and reports in official sources, media, and social media. The paper consists of several parts: an overview of the organization of studies and the working conditions of educators in the territories occupied as a result of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022; reports on the education of children deported to the Russian territory; a brief overview of the situation with education in the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions as well as Crimea after 2014; and photos of Ukrainian education institutions where Russian invaders made their bases.

● Organization of studies

Since Ukrainian communities were or have been under Russian occupation for different periods of time and under different conditions, the situation with education developed according to several scenarios which can either be alternatives or coexist.

- 1) Education institutions continue working remotely according to Ukrainian standards and curricula: children study, and teachers work from home or from their temporary places of residence; local government bodies responsible for education work remotely. In some cases, the Ukrainian authorities and educational institutions decide to end the school year early.
- 2) The occupation government tries to resume the education process under its management, in Russian and with Russian textbooks for certain subjects, possibly according to Russian standards. In some cases, the leadership of local education administrations or certain schools collaborates with the occupiers; in other cases, headmasters and teachers hide or leave the occupied territories, and other individuals are appointed to their positions.
- 3) The education process does not take place at all due to intense hostilities and the absence of the participants of the education process who have evacuated from the city, town or village.

Even though the information we receive from the occupied territories is unreliable, as of late April, it is safe to assume that Russia's education policy in the newly occupied territories is to resume studies as soon as possible while [switching](#) it to the Russian language and Russian standards.

Cases have been described (in [Energodar](#), [Melitopol](#)) when the occupation authorities appoint new education administrators who contact educators and demand that they resume working; they also appoint new school headmasters.

In some cases (there are testimonies from Starobilsk, [Volnovakha](#), [Mariupol](#)), some educators obey the demands of the occupiers and resume teaching. New subjects are introduced in these schools—Russian Language and Literature, Social Studies, History—which are taught according to Russian textbooks and in Russian. In Mariupol, the only school that resumed its work after most of the city was occupied by the Russian army began the classes with the Russian national anthem, according to Russian media.

Russian media and the media of the so-called “LPR” and “DPR” described this as a school opening ceremony, which likely involved a crowd of students, parents and educators. According to these media, military units of the so-called “LPR” and “DPR” are dislocated in these schools, supposedly to

provide security for education institutions. This poses a threat to the safety of students and educators.

In addition to the forced switch to Russian curricula in the education process, there is also [mandatory militarization](#) of underage students in the occupied territories in Luhansk and Donetsk Regions. Under the guise of “national-patriotic education,” they are likely being prepared for participation in the war. Liudmyla Denisova, the Ukrainian Ombudsman, reports that the occupation administration plans to launch cadet corps and classes as a part of “supporting and developing the Cossack component in the education system,” particularly in Lysychansk and Severodonetsk.

Meanwhile, in the occupied cities, towns and villages which still have internet access and are able to study (there are no intense bombings, there is electricity), Ukrainian educators continue working remotely. For instance, in [Kherson](#), schools work without changes, the teachers create video classes and contact their students on social media or by phone.

According to [the recommendations](#) of the Ministry of Education and Science, heads of educational institutions can independently determine when to end the academic year 2021/2022. Therefore, in some occupied territories, summer vacations start earlier to reduce the risks for teachers and children. In particular, in 4 districts of Zaporizhia region, local authorities [decided](#) to do so in early May.

A significant number of children who were not able to evacuate from hotspots or temporarily occupied areas did not study at all during the occupation. This applies to the residents of Kyiv, Sumy, Chernihiv, Donetsk and Luhansk Regions. There was no education process in these regions due to the danger it posed to the life and health of students and educators, and due to the lack of technical conditions required for studying (electricity, cell connection, internet).

As the de-occupation of towns and villages began, particularly in Kyiv Region, we started seeing photos of education institutions where Russian soldiers were present. The photos illustrate not only the ruined buildings, but also messages and inscriptions left by the occupiers on school walls for Ukrainian students. The Russian military had their command posts in some schools. For instance, one of the schools in Katiuzhanka, Kyiv Region, had a Russian command post in it.

● Working conditions of educators

Educators in the occupied territories are under significant pressure and threat due to their professional activities.

The official position of the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science (MES) is that the teachers who are not able to continue working (particularly because they are under occupation or they do not have the technical means for work) can [keep](#) their job and salaries; they are paid according to downtime rates, at least $\frac{2}{3}$ of their salaries or more. Assurances that educators in the occupied territories will keep their salaries [have been expressed](#), in particular, by the leadership of Zaporizhia Region.

The MES does not allow any collaboration of education workers with the occupation authorities. The [position](#) of the Minister of Education and Science and the Education Ombudsman is to view teaching according to Russian curricula as a type of collaboration for which teachers can be held accountable and punished.

Since the law on the responsibility for collaboration was adopted, the Criminal Code of Ukraine was amended with a paragraph on establishing punishment (community service for up to 2 years, arrest for up to 6 months, imprisonment for up to 3 years without the right to work in education in the future) for propaganda in education institutions with the goal of assisting the Russian army and for actions aimed at introducing the education standards of the aggressor state in education institutions.

At the same time, the occupation authorities put pressure on educators and school managers to resume work and switch to teaching in Russian and according to Russian standards and textbooks. There is [evidence](#) of mandatory retraining for educators who have been deported to Crimea or Russia in order to make them teach in Russian in the future. There are also [testimonies](#) of threats against educators and their families in case they refuse to collaborate.

For example, in one of the occupied communities in Zaporizhia Region, the head of the Education Department has [agreed](#) to collaborate with the occupiers and forces teachers to resume teaching starting on May 2 according to Russian curricula. Some of the educators resigned to avoid working with the occupiers. But the head of the Education Department blackmails and threatens them, saying that if they do not agree on their own, they will be “taken to the commandant’s office” (which may threaten their lives).

The Ukrainian Education Ombudsman recommends that educators in the occupied territories who are able to do so continue working remotely according to Ukrainian curricula while hiding it from the occupation authorities, because there have been recorded threats against educators for teaching according to Ukrainian curricula.

● Deportation of children to Russia

[According to the data obtained by the UN](#) from the Russian government, as of April 20, 563,266 Ukrainian citizens had been displaced to Russia. About 121,000 of them are children. Most of these people were displaced by force, i.e. deported from the occupied territories of Ukraine. Many people, possibly children among them, are currently in filtration camps organized by the occupiers. For example, according to an [advisor to the mayor of Mariupol](#), as of April 18, at least 20,000 people were detained along the Manhush-Nikolske-Yalta route.

Russia intends to introduce forced teaching of Russian for the deported people. Lilia Humerova, the head of the science, education and culture committee of the Federation Council of Russia, [said](#) that it was a problem that the deported Ukrainian children do not speak Russian “at a sufficient level,” which will prevent them from mastering the Russian education curriculum. According to her, there is a plan to organize summer language courses for these children. There was no mention of whether attendance of these courses would be voluntary.

There are also reports of plans to adopt Ukrainian children who have been illegally deported. For this purpose, Russia intends to [simplify the adoption procedure](#) and [sign agreements](#) with the so-called “LPR” and “DPR” which would allow the transfer of orphaned children from these territories directly into Russian families. According to the Ukrainian law, any adoptions by foreign citizens can only take place with approval of Ukrainian official bodies. The Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs believes that such actions can be categorized as kidnapping.

● Context: situation in the territories of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions and Crimea which have been occupied since 2014

With the Russian occupation of parts of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions as well as the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol, the education system in these regions was changed.

In the occupied territory of Donetsk Region, school subjects were taught according to Ukrainian curricula until the end of 2014. In 2015, education institutions had to switch to new curricula and textbooks. Teaching was almost completely switched to Russian. According to a study by the UHHRU titled [The field of education in the temporarily occupied territories](#), the teaching of the Ukrainian language and literature in the temporarily occupied territory was reduced to the minimum, although it formally existed in the school curricula.

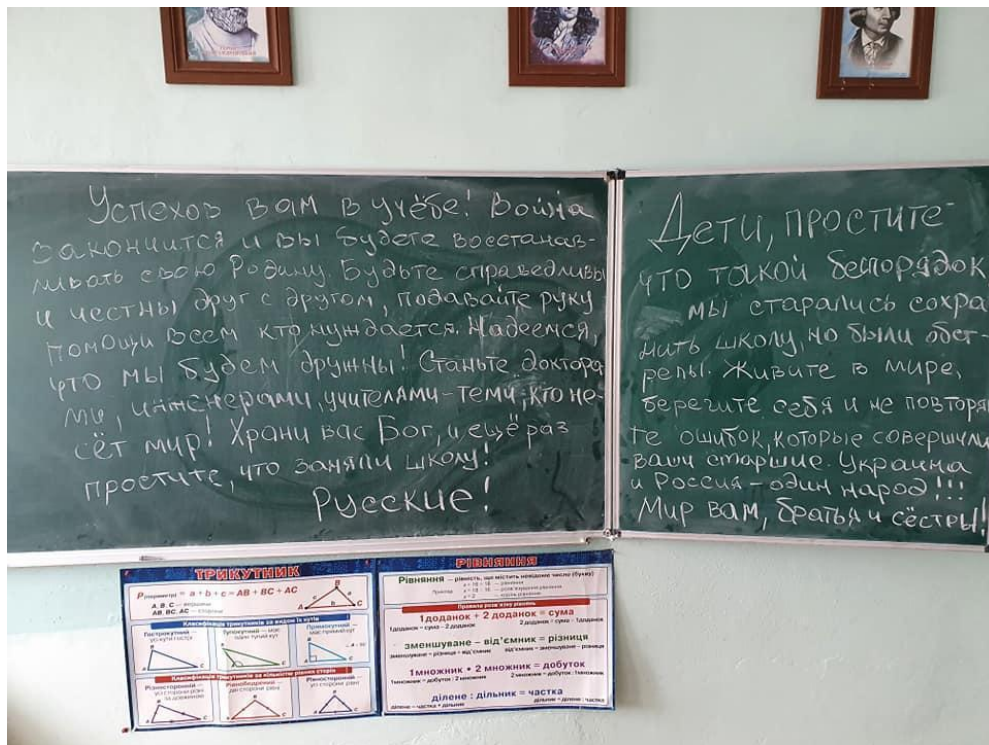
History of Ukraine was replaced with History of Homeland, based on the history of the Russian empire and the history of Donbas. 9,270 (Donetsk Region) and 5,105 (Luhansk Region) people [graduated](#) from high school in 2021.

Certain universities continue operating in the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions, but their degrees are not recognized anywhere in the world, which is why some candidates enroll in Russian universities. In 2021, the Security Service of Ukraine [reported](#) that Russia started recognizing degrees obtained in the so-called “DPR.”

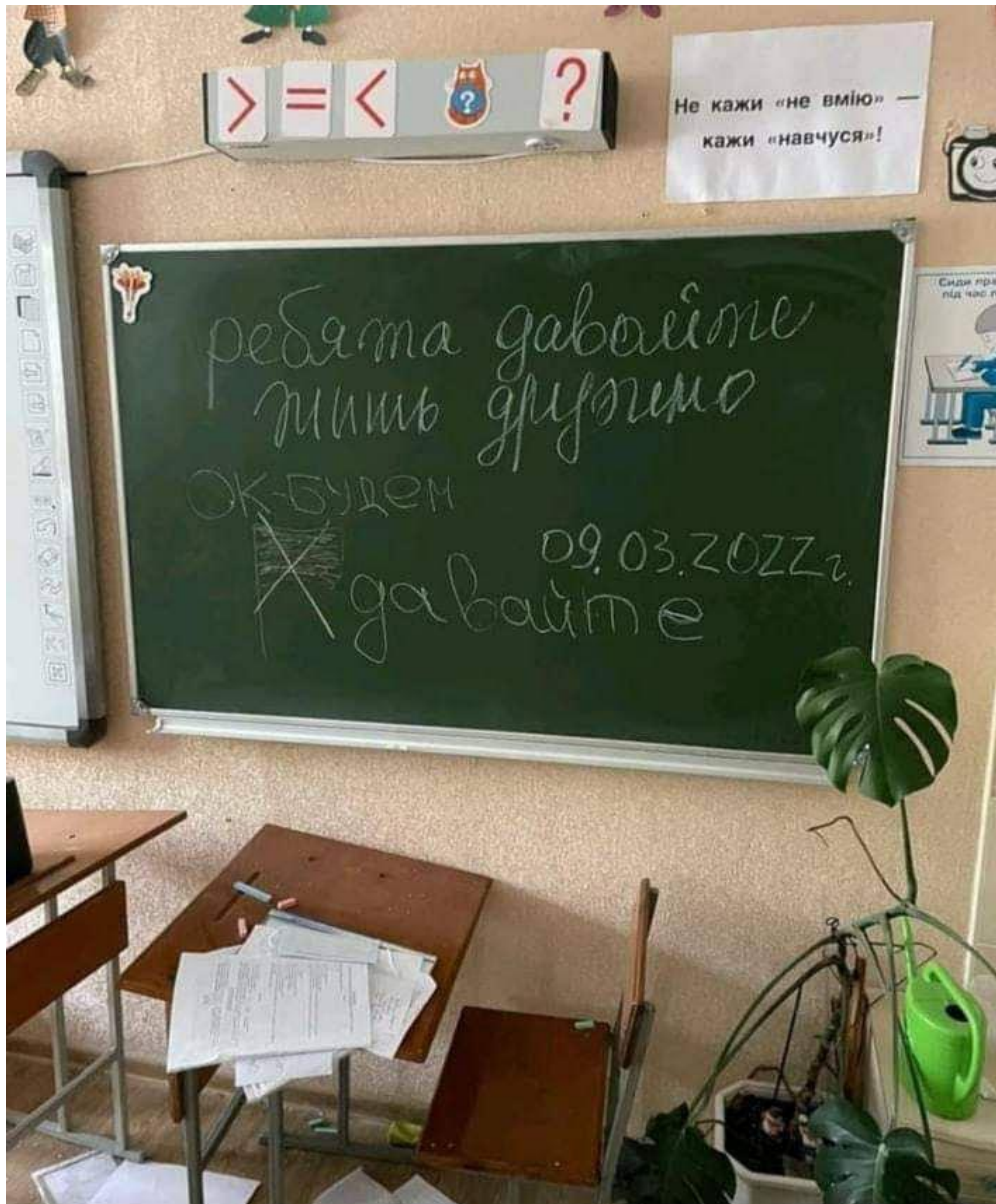
In the occupied Crimea, the education system was supposed to switch to Russian standards already in 2014. Ukrainian Literature and History of Ukraine were also [removed](#) from the curriculum. In addition, the education system switched from the 12-grade system of evaluation to the 5-grade system. Ukrainian textbooks were removed from use and Russian textbooks were introduced instead. History of Ukraine was replaced in the occupied peninsula with History of Russia taught according to the unified textbooks approved in Russia. 10,500 people [graduated](#) from high school in Crimea in 2021.

Higher education was also transformed in Crimea. In particular, the Vernadsky Federal University of Crimea [was established](#) in Simferopol in 2014 by merging 7 universities and 7 research institutions; the same year, the Sevastopol State University was also established by merging 7 universities. The curricula switched to Russian standards, and the graduates started [receiving](#) diplomas according to Russian state regulations.

● Annex. Photos of schools in territories liberated from occupation



The photo depicts a message written on a school blackboard: “Children, excuse us for this mess, we tried to preserve the school but there were shellings. Live in peace, take care, and don’t repeat the mistakes of your elders. Ukraine and Russia are one nation!!! Peace to you, brothers and sisters! We wish you success in your studies! The war will be over and you will restore your Homeland. Be fair and honest with one another, lend a helping hand to anyone who needs it. We hope that we will be friendly! Become doctors, engineers, teachers, people who bring peace! God help you, and sorry once again for occupying your school! Russians.” The school is located in the village of Katiuzhanka, Kyiv Region. Source: [Volodymyr Runets](#).



The photo depicts a writing on a school blackboard: “Guys, let’s all get along. 9/3/2022.” Hostomel Lyceum, the town of Hostomel, Kyiv Region. Source: [PARENTS SOS NGO](#).



The photo depicts the sign “Primary School Room,” corrected from Ukrainian to Russian. Hostomel Lyceum, the town of Hostomel, Kyiv Region. Source: [PARENTS SOS NGO](#).



The photo depicts writings on a school wall: “Ukrs are faggots” and “Azov sucks from the bottom,” as well as the letter “V” (the second most popular symbol painted on Russian military vehicles along with the letter “Z”). A school in the town of Borodyanka, Kyiv Region. Source: [Inna Romaniuk](#).



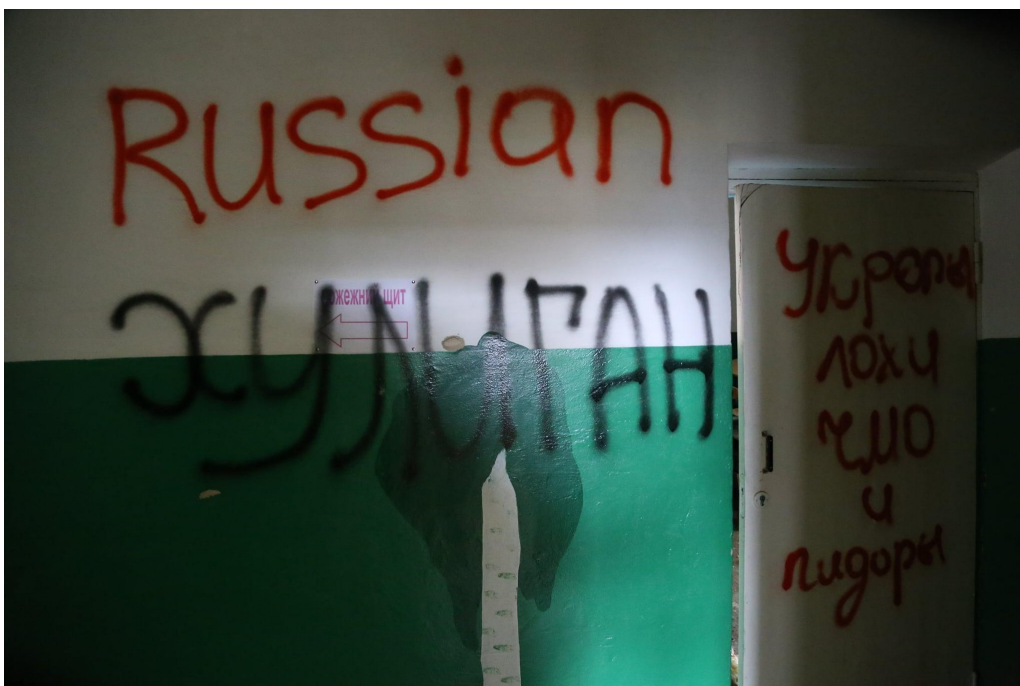
The photo depicts a writing on the wall reading “Bandera’s number is up” and the letter “V.” A school in the town of Borodyanka, Kyiv Region. Source: [Inna Romaniuk](#).



The photo depicts objects and furniture scattered around a classroom. A school in the town of Borodyanka, Kyiv Region. Source: [Inna Romaniuk](#).



The photo depicts a writing on a wall reading “Ruscists.” A defunct school in the village of Kropyvnia, Kyiv Region. Source: [Pavlo Smovzh](#).



The photo depicts writings on a wall, “Russian hooligan” and “Ukrops are losers, schmucks and faggots.” A defunct school in the village of Kropyvnia, Kyiv Region. Source: [Pavlo Smovzh](#).



The photo depicts a writing on a door, "Russia for Russians, no passage for Ukrops." A defunct school in the village of Kropyvnia, Kyiv Region. Source: [Pavlo Smovzh](#).

We ask you to support the approach of victory through donations to help [the Armed Forces of Ukraine](#) and [humanitarian initiatives](#). [The donations](#) we are currently receiving for our work will be used to research and analyse the impact of the war on a civilian population. We thank those who made donations, the Prague Civil Society Centre, the International Renaissance Foundation and the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Ukraine, for their assistance.