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U.S. Exchange Program FLEX Expands in Ukraine Following Russia's Rejection

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Since 1992, more than 8,000 Russian students have taken part in the FLEX program, which provides high school students from across the former Soviet Union the opportunity to study in the U.S. for a year.

The FLEX student exchange program has expanded its reach in Ukraine, following Russia's decision last week to withdraw from the program over an alleged custody issue involving a Russian student a same-sex U.S. couple.

Several new cities in Ukraine have been added to the list of locations where students can test for the FLEX program, according to the American Councils for International Education, the non-profit organization that organizes the exchange program.

Notably, testing centers in Luhansk and Donetsk have not yet beed added to the list. "We do not know if testing will take place in Donetsk and Luhansk regions due to the current situation. The date and format of the test in those regions is still being determined," the ACIE announcement explained.

The U.S. State Department's top official for European and Eurasian affairs, Victoria Nuland,

said earlier this week that Russia's suspension of its participation in the program would open more than 100 additional spots for Ukrainian students.

Last week, Russian children's rights ombudsman Pavel Astakhov told the press that the country was suspending its participation in the FLEX — or "Future Leaders Exchange" — program because a Russian student had remained in the U.S. after the end of the academic year, instead of returning to Russia as per the program's terms.

Astakhov subsequently said that the student in question had been staying with a same-sex couple that had filed to take custody of him, despite the fact that the teenager's mother lived in Russia.

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