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Ukraine Says Returned 37 Children 'Deported' to Russia

October 11, 2022

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Kyiv has returned home dozens of Ukrainian children who had been taken to Russia amid Moscow's invasion, Ukraine's ministry for reintegrating temporarily occupied territories said Tuesday.

The 37 children were "forcibly removed" from the Kharkiv region of northeastern Ukraine at the end of August and taken to the southern Russian town of Kabardinka, the ministry said on Telegram, "despite the fact that they all have parents."

The children have been reunited with their families in Ukraine and are now staying in shelters for internally displaced people in the Zakarpattia region.

"The return process was difficult, but ended successfully," the ministry wrote. "In order to pick up their children, the parents traveled a long way through several European countries."

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The reintegration ministry said it worked with the state migration service, the SOS Children's Villages Ukraine NGO and transporters to secure the children's return.

According to Russia's state-run TASS news agency, more than 4.5 million people, including 690,000 children, have arrived in Russia from Ukraine since the beginning of the invasion in February.

Russia says it is providing humanitarian aid to Ukrainian adults and children fleeing the war.

In June, the independent Russian media outlet Verstka reported that more than 2,000 Ukrainian orphans and children separated from their parents by war were taken to Russia without Kyiv's approval and that some were placed into adoptive families.

In September, Moscow's children's rights commissioner claimed that children taken to Russia from the occupied Ukrainian city of Mariupol initially showed negative attitudes toward Russia, but now have "love for Russia" and don't wish to return home.

The forcible deportation of children is considered an act of genocide under international law when it is "committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group."

Kyiv prosecutors have been working to build a genocide indictment against Moscow in the International Criminal Court over the alleged forced deportations of Ukrainian children.

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