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The Reckoning  
Project

# ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE DEPORTATION OF UKRAINIAN CHILDREN TO RUSSIA AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Kherson, 23 march 2024

Photo by Ivan Antypenko [ [instagram.com/ivan\\_antypenko](https://www.instagram.com/ivan_antypenko) ]

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The views and opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views or position of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Government of Sweden.

**Attitude towards the deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia and its consequences. Results of the study** / Kharkiv Institute for Social Research. — Kyiv, 2024. — 59 pp.

The report contains the results of the study with respect to the people’s attitude towards and awareness about the deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia; the key fears associated with this topic; the deportation’s impact on the children, families, communities, economy and cultural identity. The ways to solve the problem of deportation of children and to bring them back to Ukraine were also analyzed.

The results of the study will be interesting primarily for state authorities and civil society representatives working on the issue of deportation of Ukrainian children, as well as for all parties concerned.



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# GLOSSARY

**Cultural assimilation** — the process of a certain people or community adopting the culture (language, values, customs) and self-identity (identity) of another people or community.

**Gross domestic product (GDP)** — one of the most important indicators of economic development which reflects the results of production activity of resident economic units (people) in the field of material and non-material production.

**Victimization** — the process or final result of turning a person into a victim of criminal activity.

**Deportation** — forced moving population out of their native country.

**Child** — a person under the age of 18.

**Forced displacement** — moving residents to occupied territories within their country.

**National identity** — a person's identification with a national community based on a steady emotional connection. This connection is formed as a result of understanding and accepting the community's traditions, culture, language, political views, as well as group norms and values.

**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)** — the world's largest regional intergovernmental security organization.

**United Nations (UN)** — a global international organization aimed at maintaining peace and international security and development of cooperation between the countries of the world.

**Psychological trauma** — a response to an event determined by a person's psyche as stressful.

**Temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine (TOT)** — territories of Ukraine captured by the Armed Force of the Russian Federation and/or illegal paramilitary or armed groups created, funded or controlled by the Russian Federation, which are de facto controlled by the Russian Federation through occupation administrations.

**Focus group interviews (FGI, focus group)** — a qualitative research method, a group interview organized in the form of conversation between several respondents, usually 6–10 people, on the topic set by the moderator (interviewer).

**School bullying (harassment)** — systematic persecution (including insults, harassment and prejudiced attitude) in educational institutions.

# METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the study is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods:

1. *A standardized quantitative survey of residents of Ukraine aged 18 and older by face-to-face (F2F) interviews conducted with the use of tablets and the Lemur (TAPI) computer platform.*

**General population:** adult population of Ukraine (aged 18 and older), except for the temporarily occupied territories, particularly the Luhansk region, certain districts of the Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions, as well as the Autonomous Republic of Crimea.

**Amount of the sampled population used:** 614 respondents.

**Duration:** data collection was performed in two 2 stages:

1. Pilot survey — 100 questionnaires from 20.08 to 25.08.2024.
2. Main survey — 514 questionnaires from 24.09 to 20.10.2024.

The pilot survey was introduced due to the topics of questions which were new for the Ukrainian society and allowed to find inaccuracies in wording and clarify the logic of the structure of the questionnaire. The pilot survey also allowed to avoid technical problems during data collection.

**Sample design:** according to the data for 2022 provided by the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, the amount of the general population is estimated at 28 029 773 people. The sample is stratified proportionally on the basis of macro-regions (Centre / North / East / West / South) and types of settlements (regional centres / other urban population / rural population) in each individual macro-region. Settlements (clusters) were stochastically selected from the list of all settlements of each strata with the consideration of the size of the clusters (number of residents of the settlements), i.e. a PPS (Probability Proportional to Size) selection was performed. A stochastic selection of initial addresses was performed in order to use route sampling. Sex and age quotas were calculated for the selection of respondents in households. Therefore, the sample is three-level by type, combined and probabilistic at the level of selection of settlements and initial addresses for survey routes, with quota screening at the level of selection of respondents in households. In general, the sample represents the adult population of Ukraine (aged 18 and older). The statistical error does not exceed 4% for one-dimensional distributions (the theoretical error without considering the selective design effect) with a probability of 0.95.

**Division into macro-regions:** Centre (Vinnytsia, Kirovohrad, Poltava and Cherkasy regions), North (Zhytomyr, Kyiv, Sumy and Chernihiv regions, the city of Kyiv), East (Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk regions, as well as certain districts of the Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia regions), West (Volyn, Zakarpattia, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, Rivne, Ternopil, Khmelnytskyi and Chernivtsi regions), South (Mykolaiv and Odesa regions, as well as certain districts of the Kherson region).

**2. Conducting 12 focus group interviews (FGI):**

- 8 FGIs with the residents of communities located in the North, South and East of Ukraine, of different age categories;
- 1 FGI with parents;
- 1 FGI with single women providing for their families;
- 1 FGI with social security workers;
- 1 FGI with teachers.

**Study ethics**

Special procedures aimed at ensuring protection of the respondents' rights and compliance with ethical standards were implemented in order to mitigate ethical problems during the survey. This implies application of the following:

- Explaining the purpose: the respondents were given clear explanations with respect to the purpose of the survey and how the data collected would be used.
- Voluntary participation: participation in the study was completely voluntary, without any pressure or coercion.
- Right to refuse: the respondents were informed that they could stop participating at any moment without any negative consequences.
- Anonymity: the respondents' personal data were protected, their response are anonymous.
- Data safety: the data is stored in secure systems to avoid any information leakage.
- Access restriction: only authorized persons have access to the information collected.
- Personnel training: all those involved in the data collection underwent training with respect to ethical aspects of surveys.
- Process monitoring: control over compliance with ethical standards by the interviewers was ensured during the survey.
- Using understandable language: questions are formulated in a way understandable for the target audience, without using any incomprehensible terms or professional jargon.

- Avoiding leading questions: the questions are formulated in a neutral way so as not to affect the responses.
- Considering sensitive topics: careful wording was used for questions which may be sensitive for the respondents.
- Pilot testing: a test survey was performed in order to identify any possible ethical problems.

These procedures allowed to minimize the ethical risks and ensure proper quality of the study.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia, as analyzed in this study, presents profound socio-economic and cultural challenges to Ukraine. This report reveals critical findings and explores the long-term consequences if these issues are not addressed effectively.

## Attitudes and Awareness

A significant majority (93%) of respondents hold negative or extremely negative attitudes toward the deportation of Ukrainian children. These attitudes are driven by the population's deep concerns about the long-term effects of such actions, including:

- The irreversible loss of Ukrainian identity
- The imposition of anti-Ukrainian ideology
- The severe psychological trauma inflicted on children

Respondents frequently expressed feelings of indignation, sadness, and fear when discussing the deportations. This emotional response underscores the widespread recognition of deportation as a critical humanitarian and national issue.

## Fears and Perceived Impacts

The study identifies several fears associated with the deportation of Ukrainian children:

- **Permanent Family Separation:** 73% of respondents fear that children deported to Russia will be permanently separated from their families, losing vital familial bonds and support systems.
- **Cultural Assimilation:** 59% are concerned about children being subjected to systematic anti-Ukrainian propaganda and losing their national identity. This concern is especially pronounced for younger children, who are more vulnerable to indoctrination.
- **Psychological Trauma:** 52% highlight the risk of severe psychological trauma, including the lasting effects of displacement, isolation, and exposure to hostile environments.



## Cultural and Psychological Implications

The deportation of children carries significant risks to Ukraine's cultural and psychological landscape. Children removed from their homeland risk losing their sense of Ukrainian identity, cultural heritage, and language. This issue is particularly acute for younger children who, with prolonged exposure to Russian environments, may grow up with little or no connection to their Ukrainian roots.

Failure to address these risks effectively could lead to long-term identity conflict among deported children, complicating their reintegration into Ukrainian society. The estrangement from cultural traditions and values also threatens to erode Ukraine's collective identity, weakening the cohesion necessary for national resilience.

## Long-term Socio-Economic Impact

The consequences of deportation extend beyond cultural and psychological domains, affecting Ukraine's socio-economic fabric:

- **Population Decline:** Ukraine's declining birthrate is further exacerbated by the deportation of children, leading to labor shortages and a diminished workforce. This demographic shift could impede economic recovery and long-term growth.
- **Economic Consequences:** Communities lose potential future contributors to GDP and skilled labor. Respondents noted fears that deported children, once assimilated into Russian society, may contribute to the aggressor's economy instead of Ukraine's.
- **Cultural Heritage Loss:** The erosion of national identity in deported children risks undermining Ukraine's cultural continuity. Over time, this loss could weaken societal resilience and cohesion, making recovery efforts more challenging.

## Quantitative Projections and Analysis

Projections based on existing demographic and economic data suggest that the deportation of children could reduce Ukraine's labor force by approximately 3–5% over the next two decades. This loss, combined with the psychological and cultural toll, could slow GDP growth by 1–2% annually. Furthermore, communities impacted by these deportations may experience a reduction in educational attainment and social mobility, exacerbating regional disparities.

## Psychological and Intergenerational Effects

The deportations' psychological impacts extend to families and communities, creating intergenerational trauma. Parents and siblings of deported children face prolonged emotional distress, often experiencing anxiety, guilt, and depression. These effects ripple through communities, undermining social cohesion and trust.

## Potential Consequences of Reintegration Failures

If reintegration efforts fail, deported children may experience a permanent identity crisis. Alienated from Ukrainian society and struggling to reconcile their upbringing in Russian environments, these individuals could face significant barriers to education, employment, and social integration. The societal implications of such outcomes include:

- Increased social stratification.
- Greater susceptibility to mental health issues.
- A reduced sense of national unity.

## Recommendations

To address these challenges, the report emphasizes the need for coordinated efforts to:

- Establish trauma-informed reintegration programs for deported children.
- Strengthen international advocacy to pressure Russia into halting deportations and facilitating the return of Ukrainian children.
- Implement educational and cultural initiatives to preserve and restore Ukrainian identity among affected children.
- Provide comprehensive support to families and communities impacted by deportations.

Failure to ensure effective reintegration of deported children may result in intergenerational psychological and social divides, undermining national recovery and cohesion in the post-conflict era.

## Study Limitations

This study faced several methodological and contextual limitations, which should be acknowledged to frame its findings appropriately:

1. **Access to Respondents:** Data collection was restricted to regions of Ukraine under government control. Individuals residing in occupied territories or those who had fled to other countries could not be included, potentially limiting the representativeness of the findings.
2. **Sensitivity of the Subject:** The deeply personal and traumatic nature of deportation led to some respondents withholding details or avoiding participation, introducing potential underreporting.
3. **Conflict-Related Constraints:** Active conflict zones posed logistical challenges, such as ensuring the safety of researchers and respondents, which restricted data collection in some high-impact areas.
4. **Reliance on Self-Reported Data:** The study's findings are based on self-reported attitudes and experiences, which may be influenced by biases such as social desirability or memory inaccuracies and the study attempted to address such biases and inaccuracies through correction after piloting the first sample of surveys.
5. **Temporal Context:** This study represents a temporally bound analysis, capturing a focused representation of public attitudes and perceptions during a specific phase of 2024. The dynamic and evolving nature of the conflict and associated deportation practices suggests that shifts in public opinion are likely over time, necessitating ongoing examination to ensure the relevance and accuracy of findings.

## Justification for the Study

This research is not merely an academic exercise but a vital tool for action. By shedding light on the devastating impacts of deportation, it underscores the imperative for immediate, coordinated efforts to protect Ukraine's children and future. The urgency and significance of this study stem from the following considerations:

1. **Unprecedented Scope:** No prior studies have specifically targeted the attitudes, fears, and socio-economic impacts associated with the deportation of Ukrainian children. This research fills a critical gap in understanding this complex and underexplored issue.
2. **Stakeholder Demand:** Many Ukrainian stakeholders, including activists, policymakers, and civil society organizations, have repeatedly raised questions about the impacts of these deportations. This study directly addresses their concerns, providing data-driven insights to guide decision-making and advocacy efforts.
3. **Human Rights Violations:** The systematic deportation of Ukrainian children constitutes a grave violation of international law, including the Geneva Conventions. Documenting these acts is critical for accountability and justice.

4. **National Security and Resilience:** The forced displacement of children poses a direct threat to Ukraine's demographic stability, national identity, and socio-economic recovery. Understanding these impacts is essential for crafting effective policy responses.
5. **Policy and Advocacy:** This study provides data-driven insights to inform national and international stakeholders, enabling targeted interventions to prevent further deportations and support the reintegration of affected children.
6. **Historical Record:** By documenting the experiences and attitudes of Ukrainian citizens, the study contributes to the historical record of wartime atrocities, ensuring that these events are not forgotten and serve as lessons for future generations.
7. **Psychological and Cultural Recovery:** The study underscores the need for trauma-informed approaches to help deported children reintegrate and rebuild their Ukrainian identity, ensuring long-term psychological well-being and cultural continuity.

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# SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENTS

A quarter of the respondents were in the age of 18–34 years, other categories were almost evenly divided: 38% of the respondents were in the age of 35–54 years, 37% were 55 years old or older.

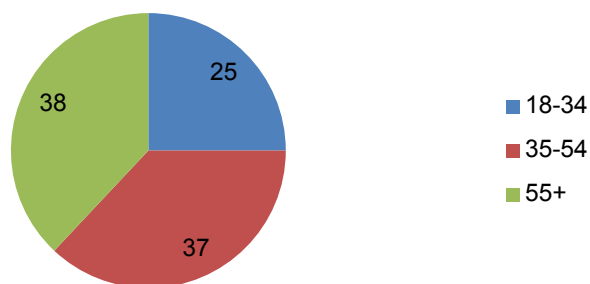


Fig. 1. Age of the respondents (% of the respondents)

45% of the respondents are male, 55% are female.

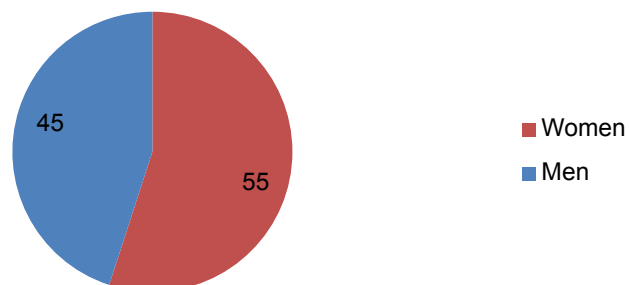


Fig. 2. Sex of the respondents (% of the respondents)

70% of the respondents have children.

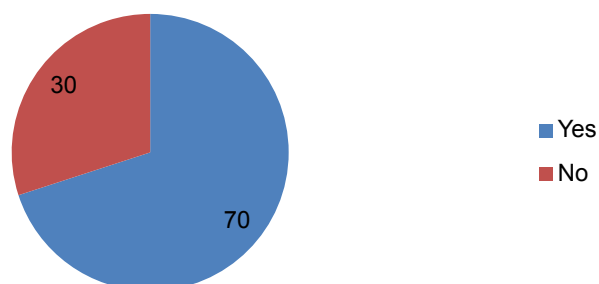


Fig. 3. Do you have a child/children? (% of the respondents)



11% of the respondents had to stay at the temporarily occupied territories. Hence, other 89% had no such experience.

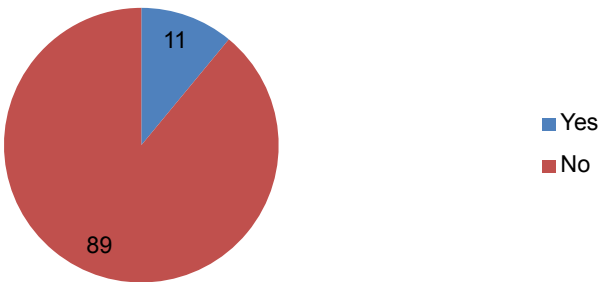


Fig. 4. Did you have to stay at the temporarily occupied territories? (% of the respondents)

28% of the respondents have experience of changing the place of residence due to the war.

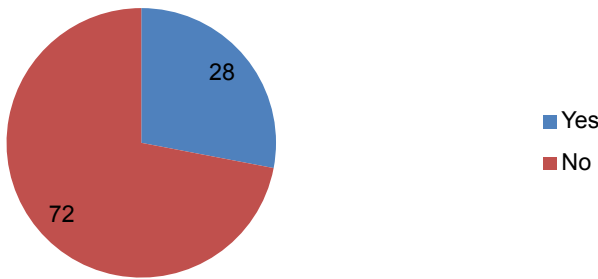


Fig. 5. Do you have experience of relocation due to the war? (% of the respondents)

Residents of regional centres, villages and cities in regions among the respondents were almost evenly divided: 35%, 33% and 32% respectively.

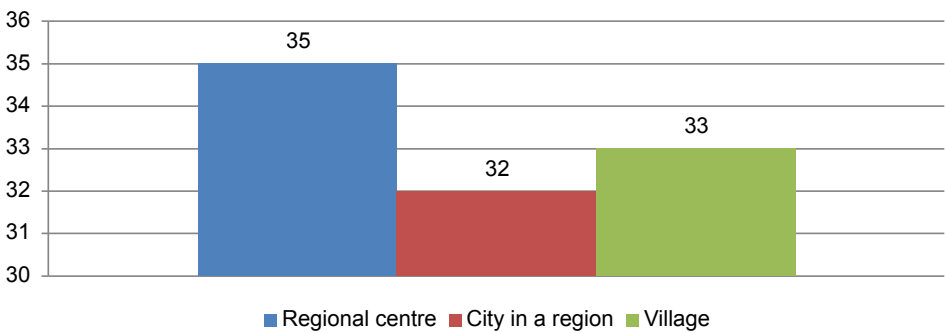
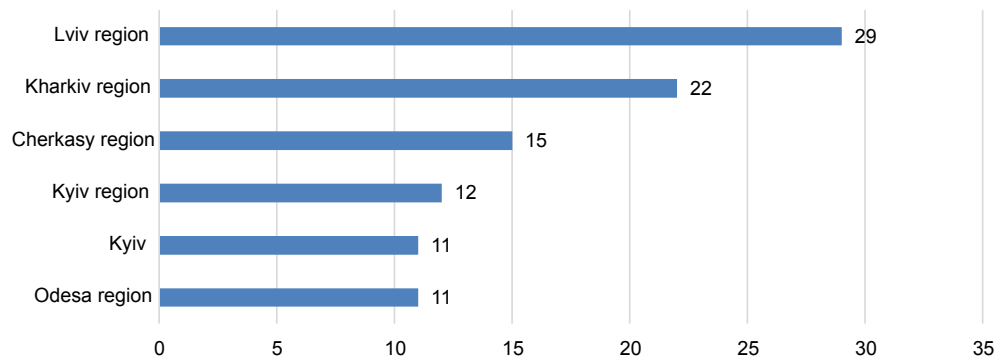


Fig. 6. Your settlement (% of the respondents)

Distribution of respondents by area of residence is as follows: Lviv region — 29%, Kharkiv region — 22%, Cherkasy region — 15%, Kyiv region — 12%, Odesa region — 11% and the city of Kyiv — 11%.



*Fig. 7. By Place of residence of the respondents (% of the respondents)*

# ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE DEPORTATION OF UKRAINIAN CHILDREN TO RUSSIA

93% of the respondents are negative or extremely negative about the deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia from the temporarily occupied territories. 0.7% of the respondents are positive about that.

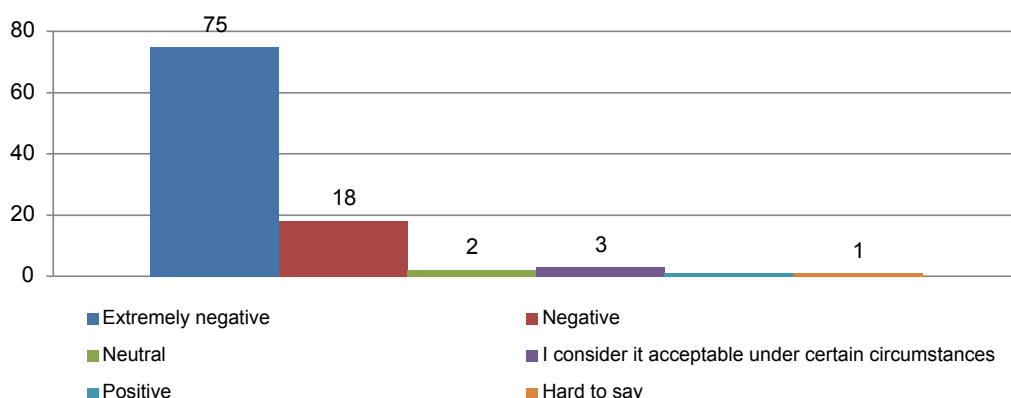


Fig. 8. How do you feel about deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia from the temporarily occupied territories? (% of the respondents)

When the respondents hear about the cases of deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia, they mostly feel resentment (70%). They also feel rage (48%) and sadness (35%) to a lesser extent. None of the respondents have positive emotions in connection with such news.

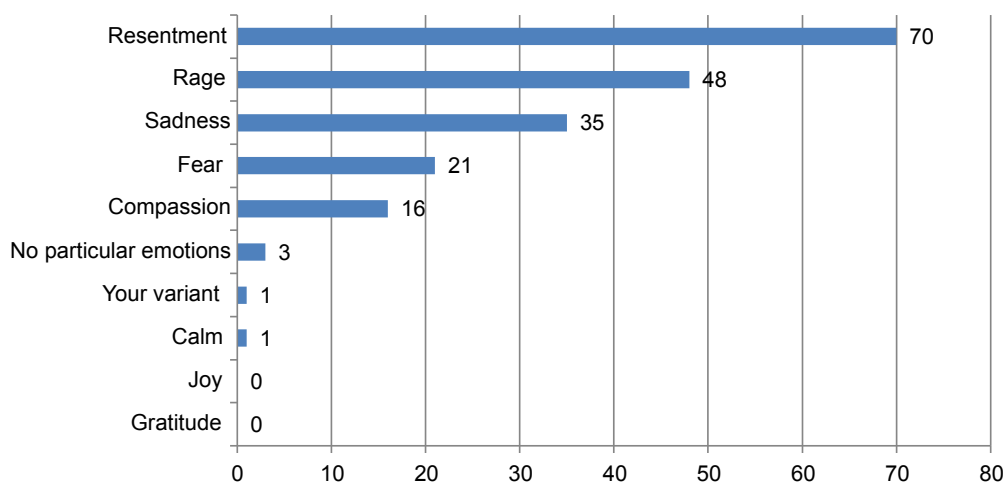


Fig. 9. What emotions do you have when you find out about the cases of deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia? (% of the responses)

The participant stated during the FGI that deportation is an undeniable war crime committed by Russia at the territory of Ukraine. During the conversations people expressed condemnation, pain and indignation at Russia's actions with respect to Ukrainian children and mentioned countless forms of the deportation's negative impact on the society, economy, culture and communities in the country.

*"Deportation is an accomplished fact, it can be seen even from official notifications that some children were returned with the help of some Arab countries, this means that the aggressor is implementing such a policy, and this policy is quite variegated and quite competent, in my opinion, because it is a war, a conflict, though it is called a low-intensity conflict, those who live in the middle of this conflict will probably disagree with me, war brings destruction and sorrow".*

*Focus group with the residents of the North, 35–49 years old*

*"What do I feel when I think about the fact that our children are being deported? It is probably natural, I feel what any adequate person feels — pain, horror at the fact that we have to face all this. Of course I feel pain, because these are our children, they are our future".*

*Focus group with the residents of the South, 35–49 years old*

# AWARENESS OF THE POPULATION AND COVERAGE OF THE PROBLEM OF DEPORTATION OF UKRAINIAN CHILDREN TO RUSSIA

Most of the respondents stated that they inquire about the issue of deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia from time to time (65%). 19% of the respondents regularly inquire about this issue and 13% are not interested at all.

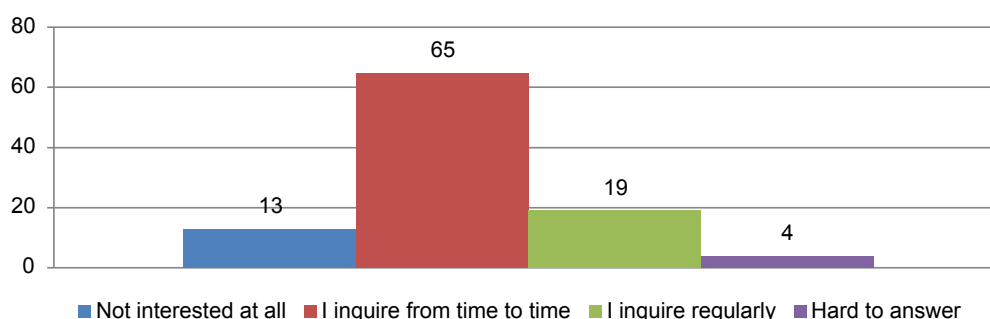


Fig. 10. *How interested are you in the issue of deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia? (% of the respondents)*

Almost all of the respondents (96%) think that it is important to highlight the problem of deportation of children.

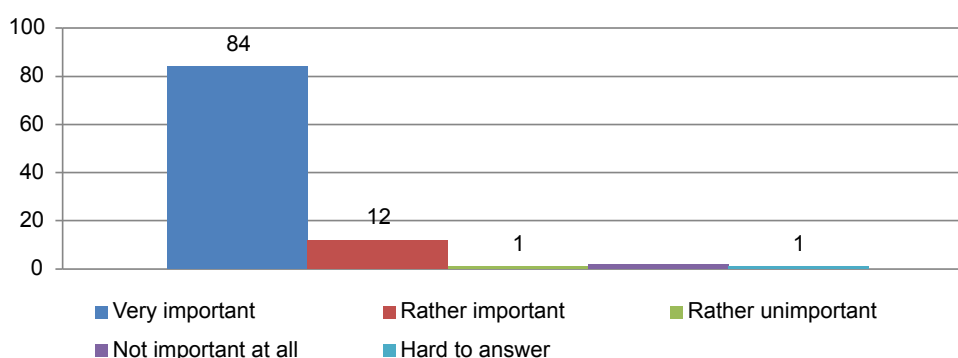


Fig. 11. *How important do you think it is to highlight the problem of deportation of Ukrainian children? (% of the respondents)*

More than half of the respondents (57%) think that the state is highlighting the problem of deportation of Ukrainian children very poorly or rather poorly. At the same time, 28% think that this issue is being highlighted very well or rather well. 15% found it difficult to answer this question.



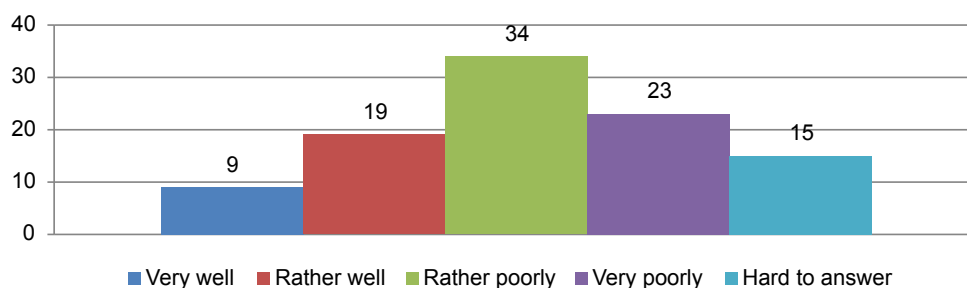


Fig. 12. How well is the issue of deportation of Ukrainian children being highlighted by the state? (% of the respondents)

The participants of focus group interviews representing various regional groups and age categories generally agree that information about the deportation of children is insufficient or this topic is highlighted insufficiently by the media, unlike other war crimes committed by Russia. There are also opinions that information is presented fragmentarily or its reliability is questionable.

*"Not too much information about this is presented, such as meetings or something like that. For example, there is a shelling somewhere and, unfortunately, someone is killed. But, if you search, you can find information. There is a lot of information".*

*Focus group with the residents of the East, 20–34 years old*

*"I only heard about on the social media, but the confirmation (unofficial) that children from orphanages are being moved away from the occupied territories, there is allegedly a way through Crimea to Russia, allegedly for adoption or in order to erase their national identity, where are those children, their fate is unknown, I know nothing more".*

*Focus group with the residents of the North, 35–49 years old*

*"The fact is that I've never heard about it personally from anyone, I only know it from Internet resources, and a lot of children are indeed taken there "on vacation" and never come back. However, in my opinion, too little time is dedicated to this issue".*

*Focus group with the residents of the North, 50 years of age and older*

Most of the respondents think that the invaders are deporting to Russia all children in a row (58%). however, 20% stated that children from orphanages are primarily being deported, and 16% mentioned children whose parents are dead or missing. Ukrainian also tend to think that the invaders are deporting more younger children (12%) than older children (4%).

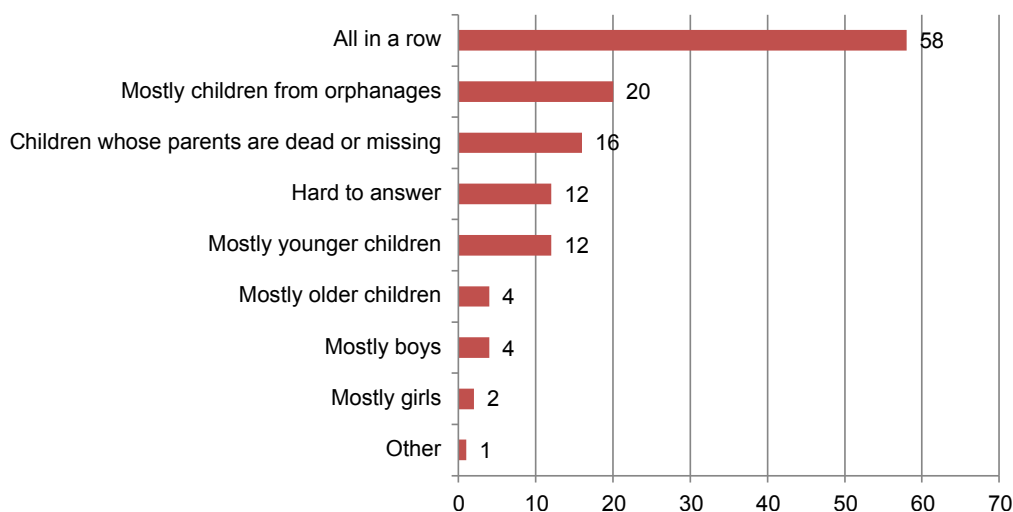


Fig. 13. Which children do you think are primarily being deported to Russia? (% of the responses)

Almost nobody of the respondents (95%) has personally encountered cases of deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia. 2% of the respondents stated that they encountered such cases once/a few times.

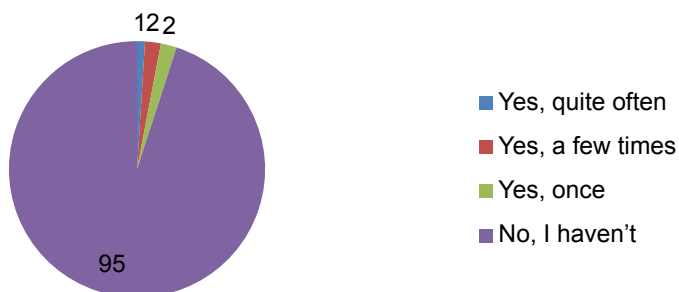
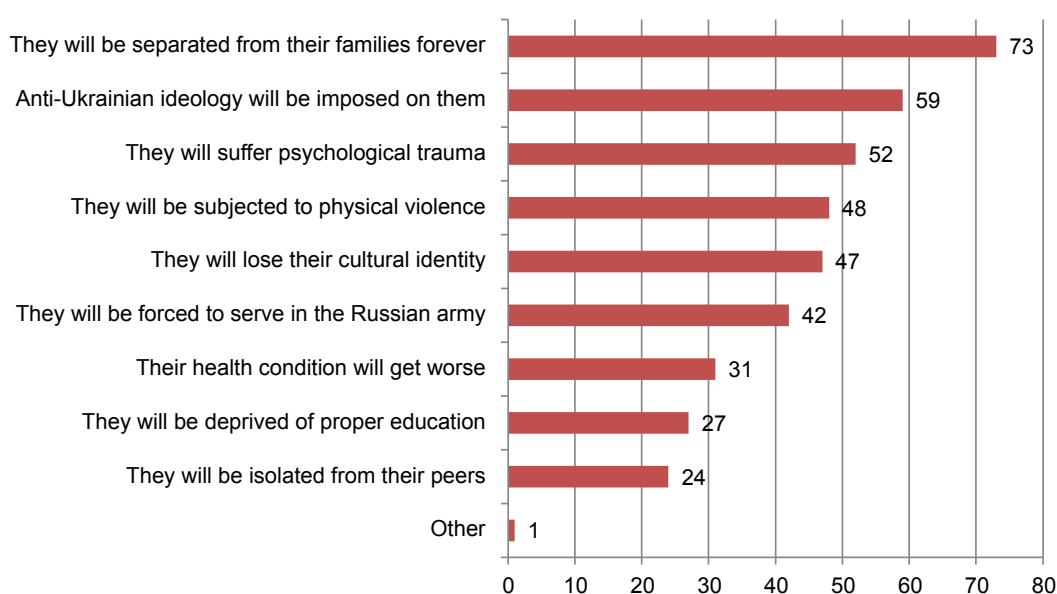


Fig. 14. Have you personally encountered any cases of deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia? (do you know such children, their parents or guardians) (% of the respondents)

# FEARS ASSOCIATED WITH THE DEPORTATION OF CHILDREN

The respondents have some fears with respect to the consequences of the deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia. The most popular of them are as follows: “they will be separated from their families forever” (73%), “anti-Ukrainian ideology will be imposed on them” (59%), “they will suffer psychological trauma” (52%).



*Fig. 15. What are you most afraid of with respect to deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia? (% of the responses)*

General anxiety and fear with respect to the deportation-related situation are observed among the participants of the focus groups, though the nature of such fear has some peculiarities in different groups. Young people and parents are afraid of the lack of information and an irreversible impact on the minds of the children. There are significant fears with respect to psychological and cultural assimilation of the deported children, as well as turning them into enemies of Ukraine. There are fears with respect to the influence of the Russian propaganda. Elderly people mostly emphasized the threats of psychological and physical violence which can form a negative attitude towards Ukraine in the children. The respondents from the South and East also mentioned their fears that the state will not engage in searching for the children and bringing them back, the lack of the necessary publicity causes people anxiety. In various groups there are fears with respect to the respondents' own children in the context of potential deportation.

*"Not only the fear about what Russia is doing with them, but also the fear about how it being done, how they are kidnapped. And basically there is a fear that there is no publicity which, along with other aspects of all these events... There is a fear that the state will not pay as much attention to this as, for example, the prisoners of war. That there is no such a movement related to this in European or Western countries. And there is a fear that these children will be forgotten".*

*Focus group with the residents of the East, 20–34 years old*

*"This is very scary that our Ukrainian children, and they will grow up in an environment which will instil in them a negative attitude towards anything associated with Ukraine. This is the worst thing".*

*Focus group with the residents of the East, 50 years of age and older*

*"I have animal fear when I think that my child can be taken away. We have such a situation here in the Sumy region that we don't know what will happen next.*

*Focus group with the residents of the North, 50 years of age and older*

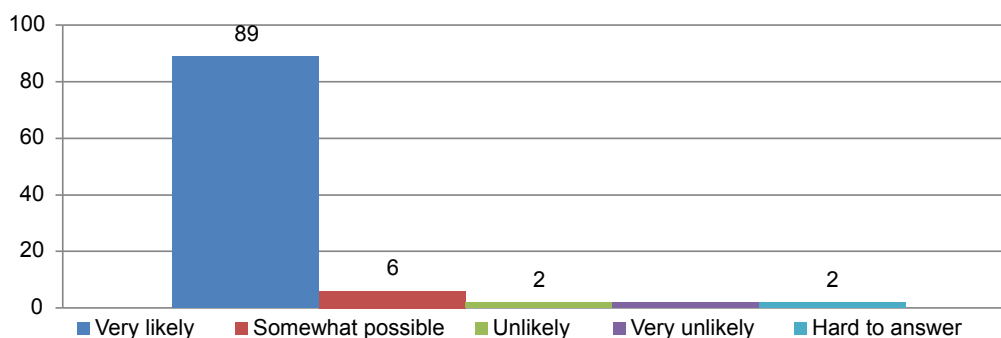
*"Children can lose their roots, because their minds are not strong enough. They can give a lot of information to these children, confuse them and use it later".*

*Focus group with single mothers*

*"I think, if we talk about fears, as I'm a father, I have two young children, my first fear is that my children can be included in these statistics, I really don't want this to happen, that's the first thing. Secondly, the situation is such that a child's mind can be easily influenced".*

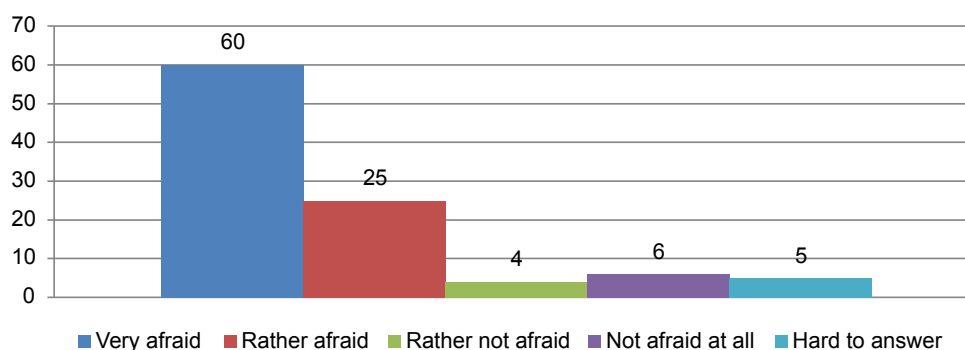
*Focus group with parents which have young children*

Almost all of the respondents (95%) think that Russia will likely impose anti-Ukrainian ideology on them.



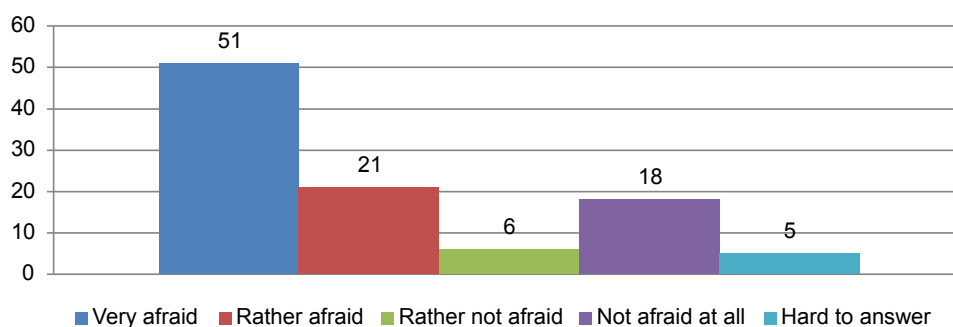
*Fig. 16. How likely do you think it is that Russia will impose anti-Ukrainian ideology on the deported children? (% of the respondents)*

Most of the respondents are very afraid or rather afraid (60% and 25% respectively) that education of the deported Ukrainian children in Russia will have an impact on the future generations. Only 6% of the respondents are not afraid of that at all.



*Fig. 17. How afraid are you that education of the deported Ukrainian children in Russia will have an impact on the future generations? (% of the respondents)*

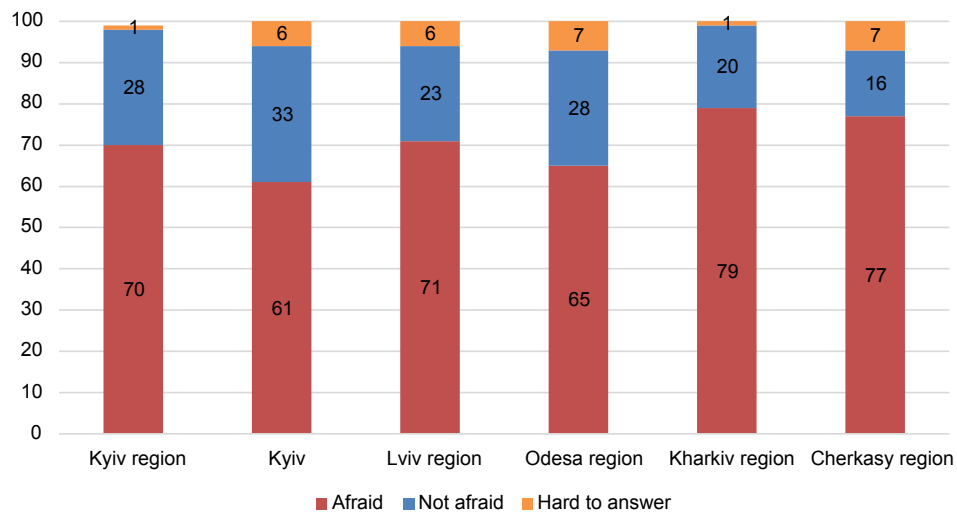
72% of the respondents stated that they are very afraid or rather afraid that their own children or some children they know may be deported to Russia. 18% of the respondents are not afraid of that at all.



*Fig. 18. Are you afraid that you own children or some children you know may be deported to Russia and be exposed to propaganda their? (% of the respondents)*



Respondents from the Kharkiv and Cherkasy regions are afraid of that the most (79% and 77% stated that they are very afraid or rather afraid).



*Fig. 19. Are the respondents afraid that their own children or other children they know may be deported to Russia and exposed to propaganda, depending on the place of residence (% of the respondents)*

# THE DEPORTATION'S IMPACT ON UKRAINIAN CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

## Impact on children

The respondents mostly stated that deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia can mental damage to them (78%), deprive them of their future in Ukraine (60%), expose them to propaganda (57%) and cause harm to their health (52%).

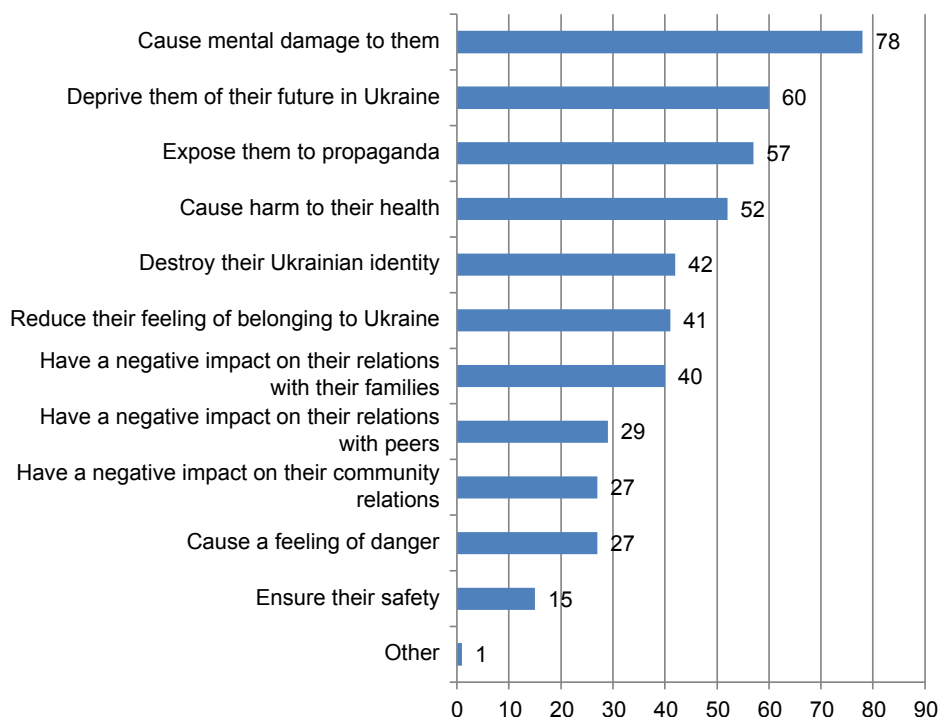


Fig. 20. How do you think deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia can influence these children? (% of the responses)

64% of the respondents believe that the fear of deportation and propaganda has a significant impact on the behaviour of children in Ukraine. 18% think that it has a moderate impact. 6% stated that this fear has no impact on the behaviour of children.

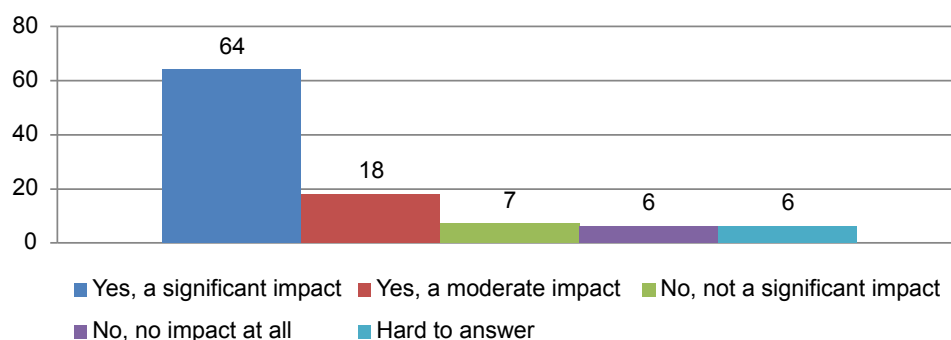


Fig. 21. Do you believe that the fear of deportation and propaganda has an impact on the behaviour of children in Ukraine? (% of the respondents)

When speaking about the deportation's impact on Ukrainian children, the participants of focus groups primarily spoke about the risk of losing the Ukrainian identity, especially with respect to small children. This is highly likely due to the Russian government's aggressive propaganda and turning the children against Ukraine.

*"I think the answer here is unambiguous, the next stage of the deportation is the destruction of national identity. This is how it works, and I think that, though the facts of deportation are not numerous, they are still making quite a significant contribution to the general blurring of national identity, this is one of the instruments or mechanisms which may be small, but they work in conjunction, this is their goal".*

*Focus group with the residents of the North, 35–49 years old*

*"I think that at the age when a child arrives there, there will be maximum influence. That means that the child can decide independently how he is treated, how his peers or adults speak to him. And here, so to say, the child will have Ukrainian DNA but his mind will not be Ukrainian. And he will consider Riazan or Penza his home and he won't even know that his home, his true place of birth, his family, etc. are in a different country".*

*Focus group with the residents of the East, 35–49 years old*

*"I think they will be turned against Ukraine. They will be considered Russians. They will receive Russian passports. They will learn the Russian anthem. They will not know Ukrainian language. Everything about them will be Russian. Our children will no longer be our children".*

*Focus group with the residents of the North, 20–34 years old*

FGI participants also mentioned the deportation's negative impact on the children's education and their need for all-round adaptation if they are brought back to Ukraine. In particular, according to the respondents, deported children may have a reduced motivation to study or may lose it completely. Concerns were expressed with respect to possible discrimination and bullying against children after their return to Ukraine. This may have a particularly negative impact on older children which may have serious psychological consequences in case if they are rejected by their peers.

## Impact on families

The respondents most often stated that the deportation of Ukrainian children can inflict moral suffering on their families (85%), traumatize them psychologically (54%) or even cause family disintegration (47%).

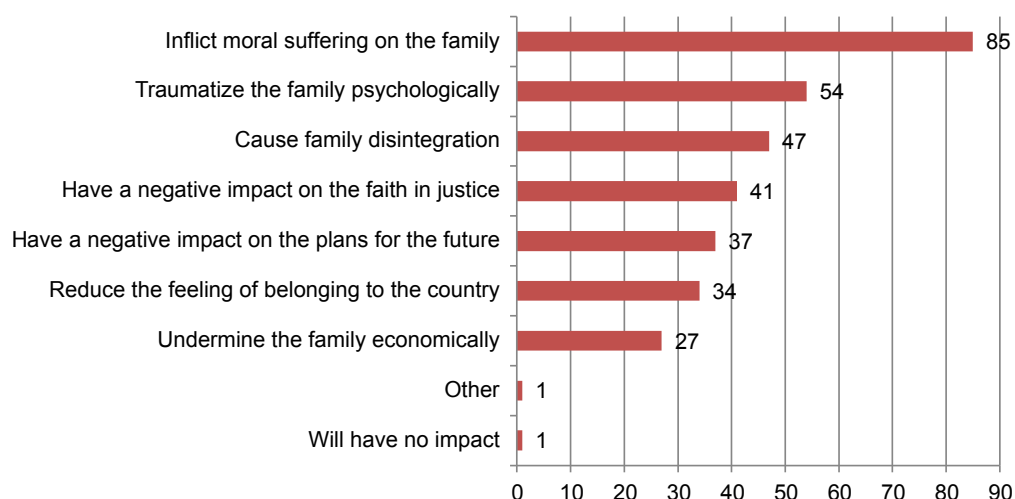


Fig. 22. How do you think deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia can influence Ukrainian families? (% of the responses)

Almost 80% of the respondents stated that deportation of children and exposing them to propaganda can cause emotional turmoil in their families. 40% stated that they could lose their family members.

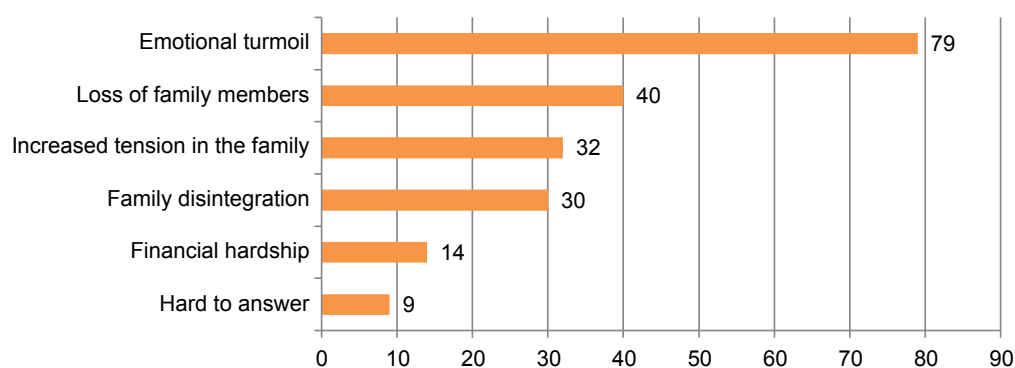
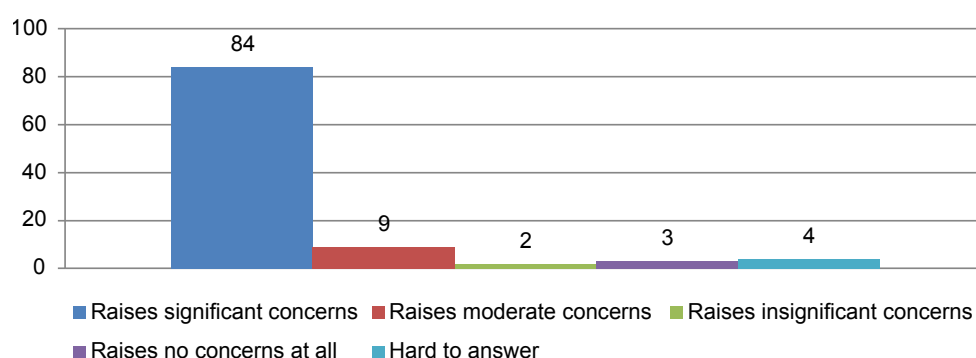


Fig. 23. What impact can the deportation of children and propaganda have on your family? (% of the responses)

According to the majority of the respondents (84%), the fear of deportation and propaganda raises significant concerns among parents and guardians in Ukraine. 9% stated that this raises moderate concerns. 4% of the respondents think that this raises no concerns at all.



*Fig. 24. How do you think the fear of deportation and propaganda influences the mental health of parents and guardians in Ukraine? (% of the respondents)*

The respondents from all focus groups emphasized primarily the psychoemotional consequences of deportation for the families, which may later result in the destruction of family ties and general deterioration of mental health of family members.

*"I want to say that there are no response options, except that this is a terrible tragedy... Can you imagine your child being taken away from your family? It is very difficult to get over such a tragedy... Later families will begin to fall apart. Because it is very difficult to live in such a situation. Someone will have addictions. Because they will not be strong enough to withstand all this".*

*Focus group with the residents of the South, 35–49 years old*

*"I also think that a normal caring family, which loves their child and is waiting for him back, will be constantly stressed. This is an emotional imbalance which will definitely affect their health, as well as relations within the family and with the relatives".*

*Focus group with the residents of the North, 20–34 years old*

*"I think that bonds between a husband and a wife can be broken in connection with the deportation of children, that is, families will be destroyed".*

*Focus group with parents which have young children*

The participants also stated that families can be exposed various risks in the process of bringing back their deported children, because in many cases they have to go to Russia for that. In case of separation with the child it's easy to manipulate the parents and dictate the terms for family reunification. Most of the respondents agreed that most of the parents will go to the aggressor country in order to bring back their child, despite the risks mentioned above. Only single mothers expressed different opinions. Most of them disagreed that families would go to Russia to search for their children, because that would make no sense and would not help them to bring their children back home.

*"Look, I think that if the parents are at the territory of Ukraine but their child gets deported, the parents won't give up, they will search for their child, they may even go to Russia to find their child".*

*Focus group with the residents of the North, 50 years of age and older*

*"For the majority, if a child is in the enemy's hands, the enemy can do anything... It's a very powerful anchor which can be used in many different ways".*

*Focus group with the residents of the North, 35–49 years old*

*It seems to me that it is easier to manipulate and control families which have lost their children. That is, the families whose children have been deported. I think this is why Russia is making bigger efforts in this field. To subjugate not only the child but also the family".*

*Focus group with the residents of the East, 50 years of age and older*

*"I think that every family understands that in our country they can do something to bring their child back. If they go there, they can't be sure that they will find their child and find a way to make sure that their child will live with them and not be sent to some camp or orphanage".*

*Focus group with single mothers*

The participants also emphasized the need to provide opportunities for contact for separated families, as it is done for the prisoners of war. For this we need to seek help from international organizations which work in both countries, for example, the Red Cross. Also, if possible, we need to communicate with our children via Internet.

*"Contact Europe, so that Europe would engage European organizations which work there, and they do work there... The Red Cross. It works there. Initiate the creation of contact groups which will be able to communicate with territorial communities in Russia. For example, there is an orphanage. We know that there is a child there. The representatives of the ECHR or the Red Cross come and initiate a dialogue through the local ombudsman".*

*Focus group with the residents of the East, 20–34 years old*

*"We live in a wonderful networked world... Contact can be maintained at least remotely, it may be ensured by some neutral country... by the Red Cross".*

*Focus group with the residents of the North, 35–49 years old*

*"I think, communication via Internet. I think there should be some websites, I don't know, to maintain contact. I think children communicate a lot via Internet. They spend a lot of time with their phones. They have more information than adults. And they can find help better and faster if they need. I think it is so. Internet is a great power".*

*Focus group with the residents of the East, 50 years of age and older*

Moreover, opinions were expressed with respect to establishing a direct dialogue with the places where the children are staying — recreation centres, orphanages, receiving families, etc. This can simplify communication with the family members, as well as make it easier to visit the children and bring them back.

*"Maybe you can come to the orphanage in some way, say that you want to help the orphanage, in order to see your child".*

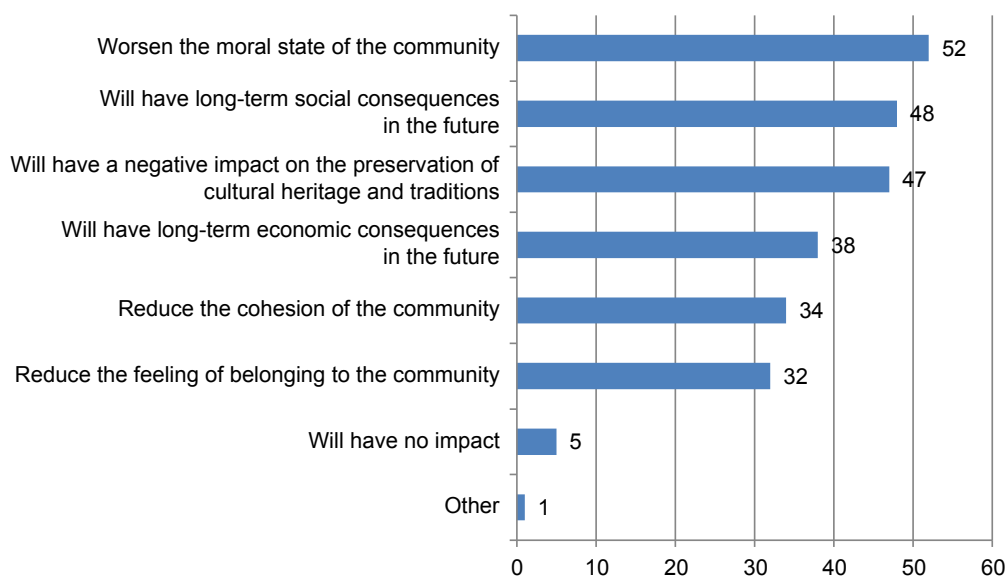
*Focus group with the residents of the North, 50 years of age and older*

*"Establish friendly contacts with the family where the child is staying, then there will be communication".*

*Focus group with the residents of the North, 50 years of age and older*

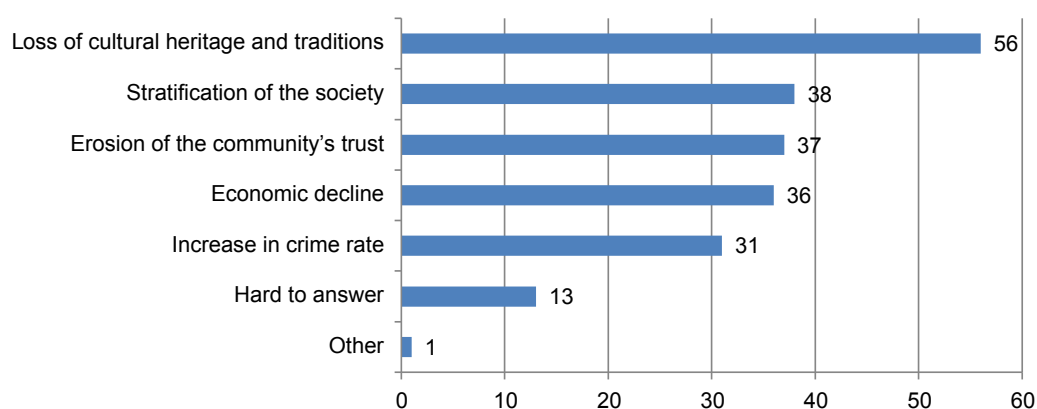
## Impact on communities

Half of the respondents think that deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia can worsen the financial situation of the communities (52%), will have long-term social consequences in the future (48%), as well as will have a negative impact on the preservation of cultural heritage and traditions (47%).



*Fig. 25. How do you think deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia can influence Ukrainian communities? (% of the responses)*

More than half of the respondents (56%) stated that the impact of deportation of Ukrainian children on their communities can take a form of a loss of cultural heritage and traditions. Almost equal numbers of the respondents said that this can result in the stratification of the society (38%), erosion of the community's trust (37%) and economic decline (37%).



*Fig. 26. What impact can the deportation and education of children have on your family? (% of the responses)*



FGI participants from all regions stated that deportation of children has a significant negative impact on Ukrainian communities. Representatives of all of the groups of respondents spoke about the risks of depopulation, loss of family ties, threats to the national gene pool, population ageing, etc. They also mentioned the possible disillusionment with the state due to the loss of children which would have a negative impact on the communities' development. Moreover, it was mentioned that deportation leaves the communities empty and deprived of prospects for the future.

*"I personally think that if I'm talking about the community, about such cases which happen and don't end in a positive way, this is a ground for disillusionment with the state. This is a ground to think that our state is powerless in this regard. This applies less to us as a community and more to our state. And in this regard we feel that we are powerless, we are not protected".*

*Focus group with the residents of the East, 20–34 years old*

*"I would like to say that we are looking at these children as at a mass phenomenon. If we look at the cases individually, communities can lose some future prominent figures, authors, scientists. And this is very important too. For example, we know that many bright minds and talented people left Ukraine in the early XX century. That's how it is. This can happen again. And then, 100 years later, it will be written in Wikipedia that there was someone of Ukrainian origin".*

*Focus group with the residents of the North, 20–34 years old*

Also an opinion was expressed that deportation has an impact on the need to maintain contacts with Russia which has a negative impact on the community.

*"There is a risk for the communities that we will have to maintain these contact, we will have to be attached... And this creates additional anchors to prevent us from isolating ourselves from them. And this will have a destructive impact on the communities, because we have been under the influence of those connections with Russia for a long time, and we see that the "Russian world" gives nothing good (culturally or materially). And we want to run away from here, and they are trying to bind us. And these local stories of specific people, specific children, will bring the general negative concept to particular families, to these small communities".*

*Focus group with the residents of the North, 35–49 years old*

The participants of the focus groups specifically spoke about the deportation's negative impact on the transfer of cultural values, in particular, it was noted that the children's separation from their native environment could result in them losing their national culture and language, as well as the general connection with the traditions of their people. At the same time the respondents stated that it depends on the age of the deported children: younger children can completely lose any knowledge they have with respect to Ukrainian traditions and values, older children can preserve their cultural code to some extent.

*"We are talking about direct imposing of cultural values of a different country. The child will consider himself a citizen of a different country. Or even a resident of a different country, not a citizen. In addition, I think that this aggressive imposing of the aggressor country's "cultural values" on a child can mean not only the child's formation as an individual but also subliminal perception of our country, the child's native country, as an enemy".*

*Focus group with the residents of the East, 20–34 years old*

*"They will simply forget everything they know. They will be taught things alien to them. An older child will not forget communicating with his grandmother, father, mother. You can't forget that. Younger children will be brainwashed".*

*Focus group with the residents of the East, 50 years of age and older*

*"Of course, the deported children, especially if they are in primary school age, if they are small children, it will be easy for Russians to deal with their minds and, of course, the children will forget Ukrainian traditions".*

*Focus group with the residents of the North, 35–49 years old*

An original opinion was also expressed that the problem of preservation of cultural heritage is not very relevant in the globalized world:

*"Look, unfortunately, we live in a globalized world. I am a culture expert by education. I think that all these traditions are at the level of embroidered shirts, pumpkins and sunflowers. Unfortunately, our people barely know our traditions, history and culture. That means that future culture will be more or less the same in Russia, in Ukraine and in Europe".*

*Focus group with the residents of the North, 20–34 years old*

The respondents from all focus groups had similar opinions with respect to the impact of the deportation of Ukrainian children on the country's economy, stating that in the future this could result in the loss of labour power, depopulation, GDP decline, etc., because there will be nobody left to work and consume goods/services, in particular, they talked about job cuts in the field of education due to the lack of children.

*"We will have less young people who will later study, obtain professions, then work, bring something to the society and pay taxes. This is like a big snowball in the long run... We may not be feeling it now. But we will feel it in the future, because our population will age. That is, we will have more adult people than young people. Now we understand, for example, that the deported children can't use the resources which are available in our country. That is, nobody buys clothes, toys or food for them. That is, we may not see or feel these reasons right now, but we will understand and feel them later, in the future".*

*Focus group with the residents of the East, 20–34 years old*

*"Like I said, our birth rate has not been very good for several decades. And now our children are being taken away and deported. This is a big minus. And we can't fill in this gap. And, considering how many fathers and sons have died... Let's say there is nobody left to be fathers. So this is a big crisis. This is our potential. Children are our potential. There may be future scientists, prominent people, or simply good people among them, and they are being taken away".*

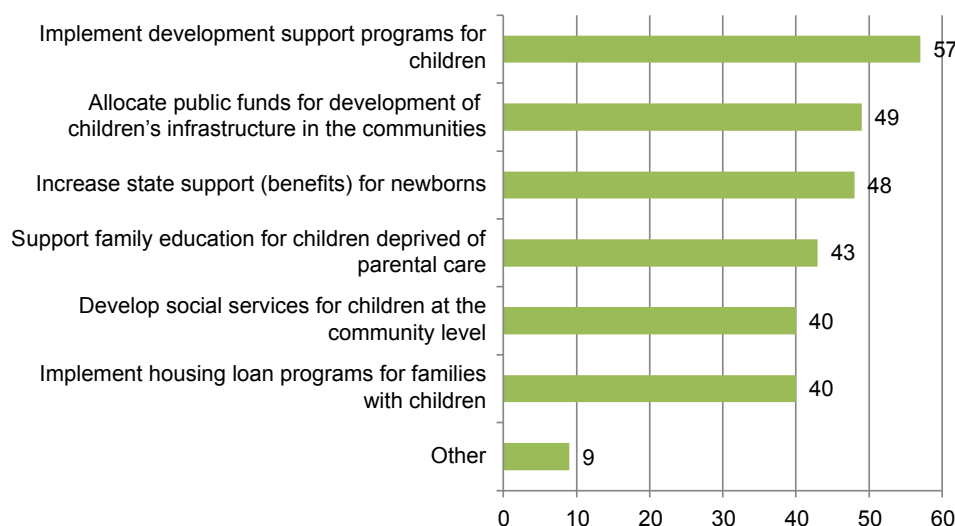
*Focus group with the residents of the East, 35–49 years old*

*"I think that those deported children will grow up. There may be good professionals among them, and our country is losing them. And this is important, because Ukrainian intelligence is highly valued. And this child will work for the aggressor country when he grows up".*

*Focus group with the residents of the North, 20–34 years old*

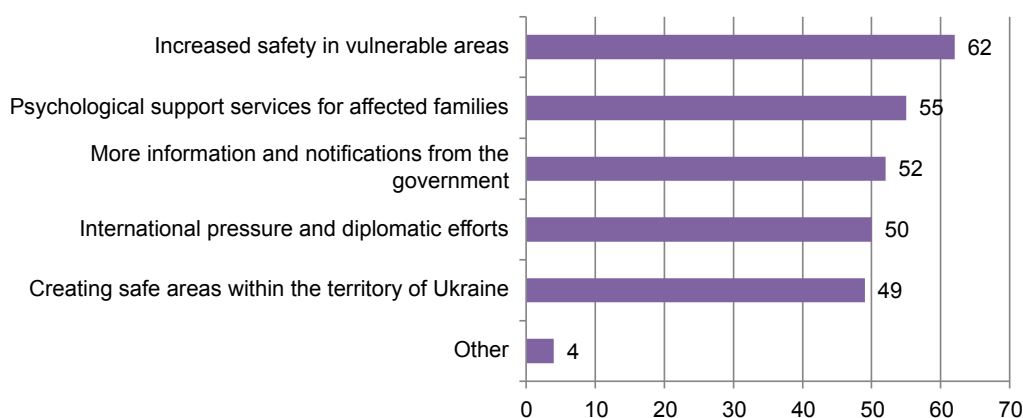
# WAYS TO PREVENT AND SOLVE THE PROBLEM OF DEPORTATION OF UKRAINIAN CHILDREN

Among the steps which can be taken to mitigate the consequences of the deportation of Ukrainian children, the respondent mostly mentioned the following steps: implementing development support programs for children (57%), allocation of public funds for development of children's infrastructure in the communities (49%), increasing the state support (benefits) for newborns (48%). As for other opinions, the respondents mostly stated that nothing will help, these children just need to be brought back home. Some of the respondents stated that we need to end (win) the war, destroy Russia, change the government.



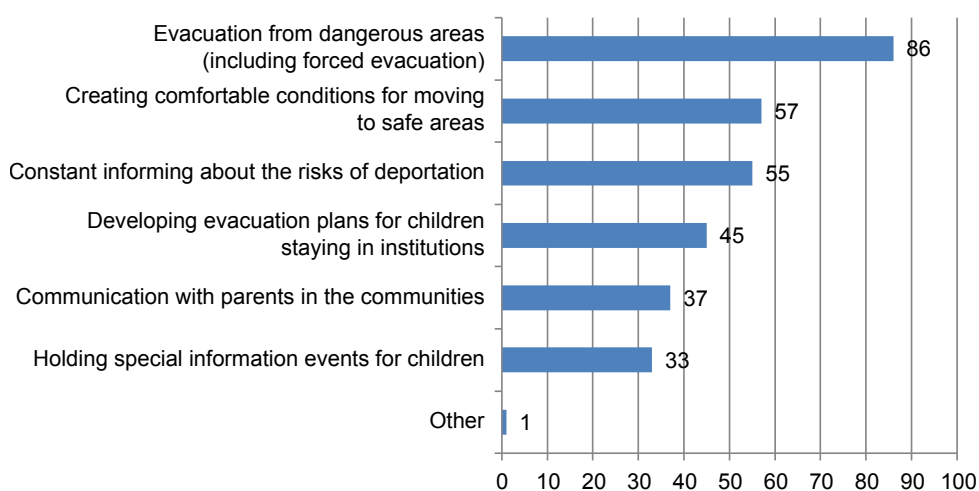
*Fig. 27. What steps do you think can be taken to mitigate the consequences of the deportation? (% of the responses)*

As for reducing the population's fears related to the deportation, most of the respondents (62%) indicated the improvements in security in the vulnerable areas. 55% stated that psychological support services for affected families may also be useful. Every second Ukrainian is sure that fears can be reduced by better informing by the government (52%), international pressure and diplomatic efforts (50%), creating safe areas within the territory of Ukraine (49%). Among other options, timely forced evacuation and ending the war were mentioned.



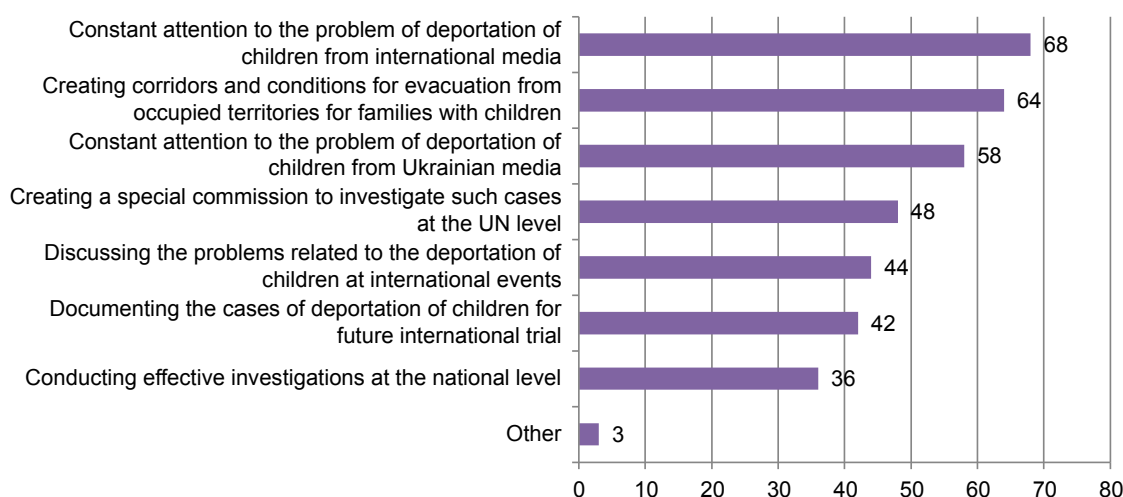
*Fig. 28. What steps do you think can be taken to reduce the fears related to the deportation? (% of the responses)*

Evacuation from dangerous areas (including forced evacuation) may also be an effective mechanism to prevent the deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia, according to the absolute majority of the respondents (86%). Moreover, among safeguards against deportation, the respondents mentioned creating comfortable conditions for moving to safe areas (57%) and constant informing about the risks of deportation (55%) as prevention mechanisms.



*Fig. 29. What mechanisms to prevent the deportation of children can be proposed on the territories at risk of occupation? (% of the responses)*

The respondents think that the following decisions could solve the main problems which result in deportation of children: constant attention to the problem of deportation of children from international and Ukrainian media (68% and 58% respectively), creating corridors and conditions for evacuation from occupied territories for families with children (64%), creating a special commission to investigate such cases at the UN level (48%).



*Fig. 30. What decisions you think could solve the main problems which result in deportation of children? (% of the responses)*

Among the measures which the state can take in order to mitigate the consequences for families with deported children, the participants of focus group interviews proposed the following measures:

- timely and full provision of information;
- systematized social and psychological work with such families;
- simplified document submission procedure;
- provision of financial aid;
- creation of a specialized state agency for searching and returning such children, like for prisoners of war;
- involving international organizations to exert pressure on Russia;
- data collection and search for deported children, ensuring contact with them and establishing contact with their relatives.

The participants especially often emphasized the need to provide information and psychological assistance to such families.

*"Only working with a psychologist, support of the family members, support of the Missing Children Search Service, providing information... Waiting, internal tension".*

*Focus group with the residents of the South, 20–34 years old*

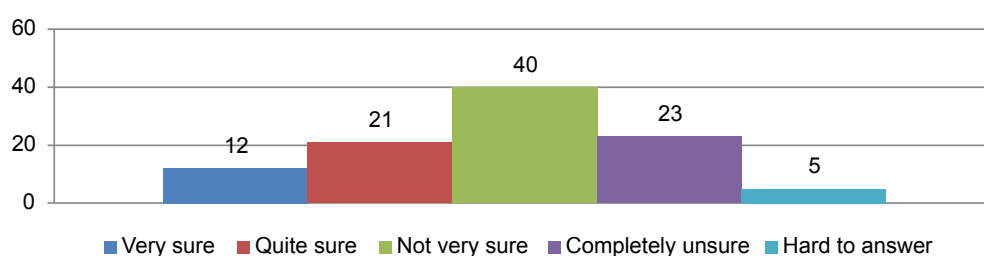
*"Don't give up, bring attention to this issue, search, make efforts to bring back all of the children through international foundations... Show them that the state considers them its citizens, that the state hasn't abandoned them".*

*Focus group with the residents of the North, 35–49 years old*

*"I think psychologists should work with such families, so that people would hold on and not despair. Because it is unknown how long this will last and what will be the consequences. Everyone will have their own story. A psychologist to help people maintain their mental health. And search for their children, of course".*

*Focus group with the residents of the East, 20–34 years old*

Most of the respondents are not very sure about the Ukrainian government's ability to protect children against deportation and propaganda on the part of Russia (40%), 23% of the respondents are completely unsure. Only one third of Ukrainian (33%) are very sure or quite sure.



*Fig. 31. How sure are you about the Ukrainian government's ability to protect children against deportation and propaganda on the part of Russia? (% of the respondents)*

Very few respondents (3–4%) consider any of the proposed authorities and institutions very effective in solving the issue of deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia. They are more likely to consider all of them ineffective, but the most ineffective authorities with respect to this issue, according to the respondents, are the Ukrainian government (as stated by 44%) and the US government (42%). The most effective or rather effective are Ukrainian public organizations (49%) and international organizations (43%).

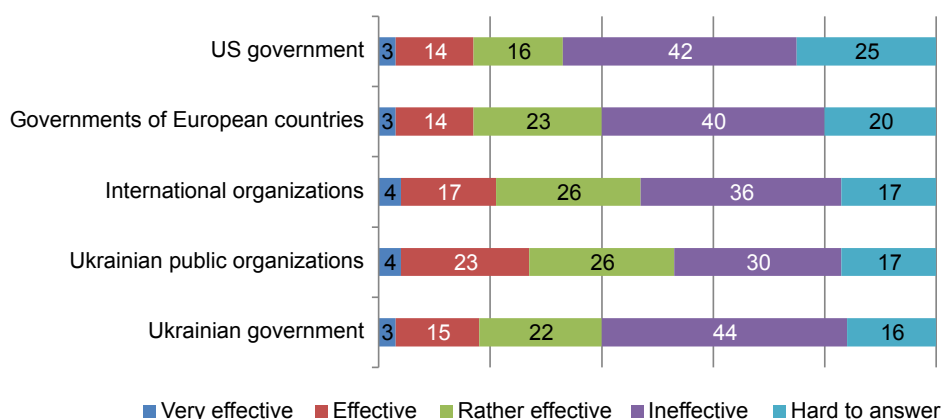


Fig. 32. What is your opinion on the effectiveness of the following authorities and institutions in solving the issue of deportation of children to Russia? (% of the respondents)

Most of the participants of focus group interviews are sure that not enough attention is paid to the problem of deportation of Ukrainian children at the international level. Governments of European countries and the US government, as well as international organizations, are doing a very poor job with respect to this issue.

*"I think that there is not enough information, because few people have information about the deportation of children, even on the social media. International organizations, such as UN, OSCE, the Red Cross, provide little data".*

*Focus group with the residents of the North, 35–49 years old*

*"It's not enough. And there is no efficiency. Nobody talks about it. All our topics can be overshadowed by other conflicts, like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And that's it. Everyone has forgotten about this. Two days of hype because Putin wasn't arrested, and then everyone forgets about it. And he can go to another country. And our children will stay somewhere in camps, and they will rot alive, they could be growing up happy here, but I don't think they can be happy there".*

*Focus group with the residents of the East, 35–49 years old*

*"No. Because nobody is interested in it, neither UN nor the Red Cross is interested. Yes, they do help — they provide medications and money, and this is where their help ends. Nobody wants to do anything else".*

*Focus group with the residents of the South, 20–34 years old*



According to the participants, we need to bring attention to this issue at the international level, suggest to bring back children through intermediaries: other countries, international organizations. It is also important to capture evidence of the deportation, to make sure that it is recognized at the international level.

*"I think this should be done not only by diplomats but also by politicians. I don't know, maybe they are doing this, prisoners of war are being brought back, but there is no publicity with respect to what is being done, the intelligence service is doing the right thing, exchanges are performed through some connections, but I don't know what's being done with respect to children. You see, prisoners are exchanged for prisoners, children can't be exchanged for prisoners, there must be some procedure, maybe we could pay money in order to bring them back, I don't know this, I don't think that nothing is being done about this. Maybe something is being done, but this is not being highlighted".*

*Focus group with the residents of the North, 50 years of age and older*

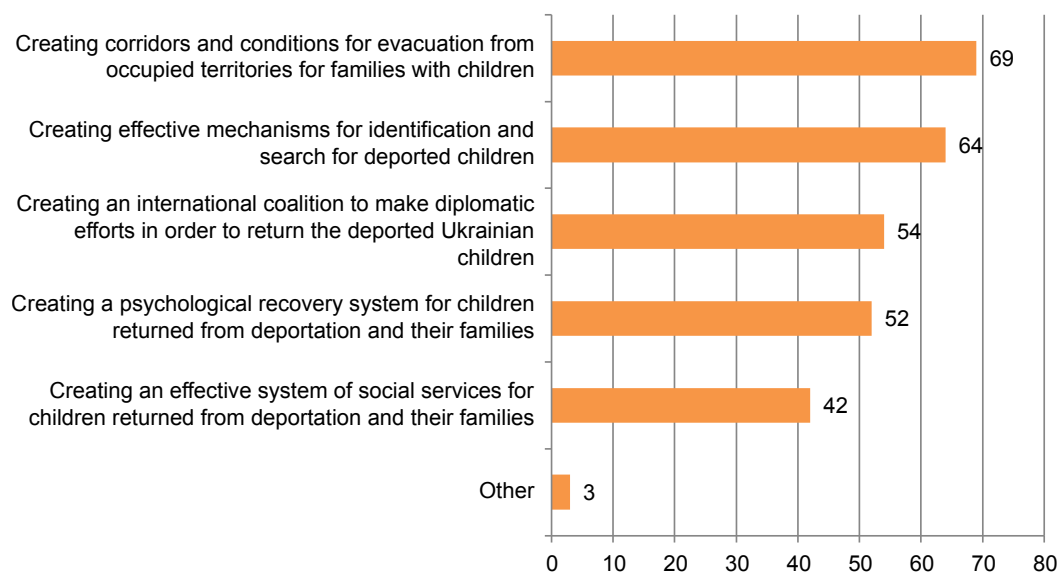
*"Raise the issue. Even if the UN isn't working. Raise the issue in the UN every day. All diplomats must hear this and work more. In the UN, in the OSCE. Even the Red Cross which isn't working. Talk about it, be vocal. This is my opinion".*

*Focus group with the residents of the East, 50 years of age and older*

*"First of all, I think that we must be vocal about this issue. On all possible platforms. I also think that, for example, we can create some trilateral contact groups. That is, an international organization is involved by us and by Russia. And this must be covered in the media the same way as Ramstein meetings are covered. We hear about this. Then we see what was discussed and what were the results".*

*Focus group with the residents of the East, 20–34 years old*

Most of the respondents would support the following initiatives to prevent deportation: creating corridors and conditions for evacuation from occupied territories for families with children (69%), creating effective mechanisms for identification and search for deported children (64%).



*Fig. 33. Which initiatives or policies would you support in order to prevent deportation? (% of the responses)*

A significant part of the FGI participants expressed a critical attitude towards the existing mechanisms for evacuation of people from occupied territories and territories which are exposed to shellings on a daily basis and are unsafe for children. According to them, the state does not take enough care of the population of these territories and does not create appropriate conditions for further accommodation and living in the receiving communities.

*"A child is just taken away. But there are no special centres for distribution. They are brought to a city and left to their own devices. I understand why many people refuse to evacuate. People remain there".*

*Focus group with the residents of the East, 20–34 years old*

*"In my opinion, evacuation is rated as 0, because even this meeting is held with the help of some international non-political organization, that is, without the participation of the state. I suspect that this study is aimed at bringing the state's attention to this, because this problem does exist".*

*Focus group with the residents of the North, 35–49 years old*

But there were also positive opinions with respect to the state's efforts in this field.

*"I think the state's efforts to prevent deportation are helping. They persuade people in the border areas to move to safe places with their children".*

*Focus group with the residents of the North, 20–34 years old*

*"I rate it as good. Because they suggest people to leave: "This area will be occupied". Evacuation is being performed, but the conditions are poor, and we need to explain to people why they should leave".*

*Focus group with the residents of the East, 20–34 years old*

None of the group participants were able to offer any mechanisms to prevent deportation other than evacuation. They consider evacuation the most effective method but emphasize the shortcomings of the way it is currently being done in the country.

# BRINGING BACK DEPORTED UKRAINIAN CHILDREN AND THEIR FUTURE

More than half of respondent (58%) don't believe that Russia will ever return all of the deported Ukrainian children. 24% think that Russia will return them in the long run. 11% believe that it will happen in the coming years.

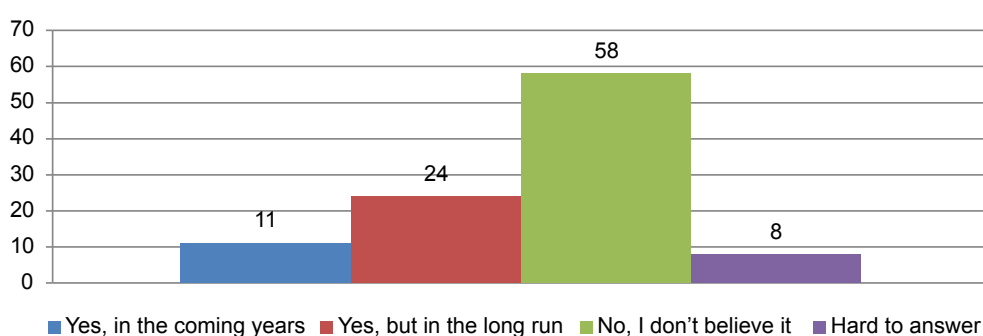


Fig. 34. Do you believe that Russia will ever return all of the deported Ukrainian children? (% of the respondents)

The focus group participants had various opinions with respect to the future of the deported children. The respondents mostly talked about their hard fate, but they emphasized that this will depend on the child, his aged and the conditions he finds himself in after the deportation. Concerns were expressed that deported children would stay in Russia and work for its economy, that they could join the Russian army and fight against Ukraine, that they could lose their Ukrainian identity. After the deportation, most of the children are probably sent to education institutions, they are exposed to propaganda and are given Russian citizenship, which makes it extremely difficult to bring the children back to Ukraine.

*"I think that most children which were deported will have two options. The first option includes developing Siberia, construction, etc. The other option is to serve in the Russian army in order to earn money".*

*Focus group with the residents of the East, 50 years of age and older*

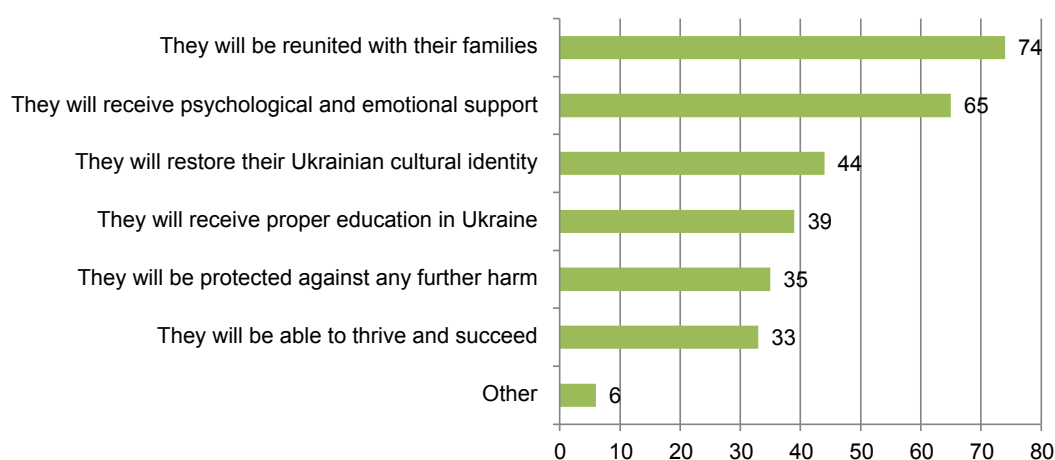
*"Anything can be instilled in these children, Russians can say, you see, your state has abandoned you... And now they should be grateful and help to fight against us".*

*Focus group with the residents of the North, 35–49 years old*

*"Most of them will stay in Russia and settle down there, they will work there, of course, if they don't come back to Ukraine or move to some European country. And if they stay there, of course, they will live and work in Russia, start families there, manufacture military equipment for a new offensive, maybe against some other country or something. So I think that most children will stay there if our state doesn't do anything to bring them back".*

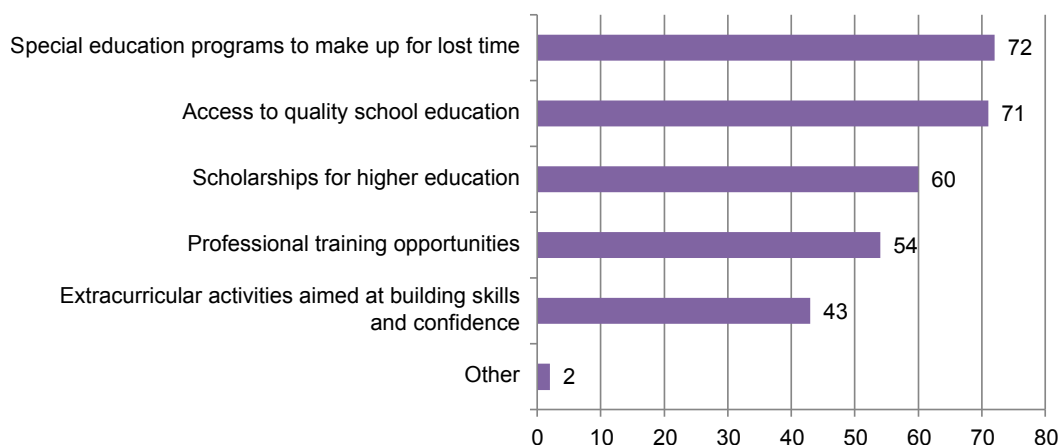
*Focus group with parents which have young children*

Most of the respondents hope that after the deported children's return to Ukraine they will be reunited with their families (74%) and will receive psychological and emotional support (65%).



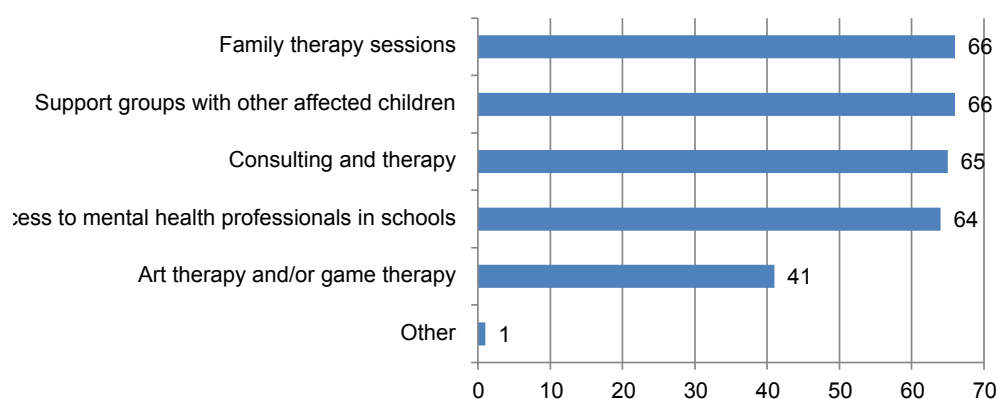
*Fig. 35. What hopes do you have with respect to the future of the children brought back to Ukraine after surviving deportation and being exposed to anti-Ukrainian ideology in Russia? (% of the responses)*

According to the respondents, the most important educational opportunities for the returned children include special education programs to make up for lost time (72%) and access to quality school education (71%).



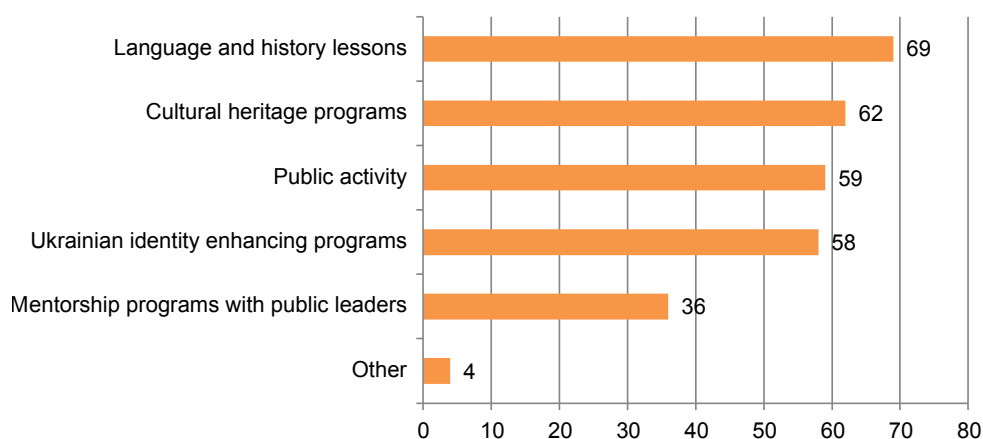
*Fig. 36. What educational opportunities do you think are important for such children after returning to Ukraine? (% of the responses)*

The majority of the respondents emphasized the importance of almost all of the proposed types of psychological support. These events include: family therapy sessions (66%), support groups with other affected children (66%), consulting and therapy (65%), as well as access to mental health professionals in schools (64%). 41% of the respondents mentioned the importance of art therapy and/or game therapy.



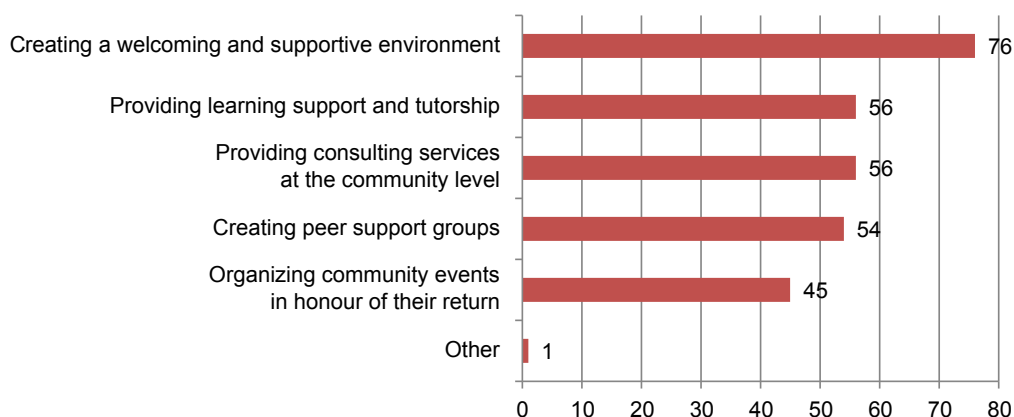
*Fig. 37. What types of psychological support you think are important for the children which were deported and then returned to Ukraine? (% of the responses)*

According to the respondents, the following cultural and social programs should be implemented in order to facilitate the children's return into the Ukrainian society: language and history lessons (69%), cultural heritage programs (62%), public activity (59%), Ukrainian identity enhancing programs (58%).



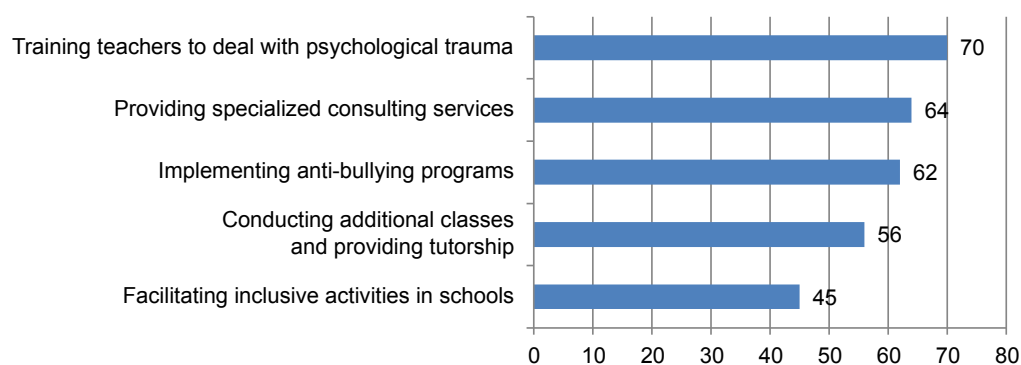
*Fig. 38. What cultural or social programs you think should be implemented in order to help these children return into the Ukrainian society? (% of the responses)*

The majority of the respondents (76%) think that communities can best support children returning after deportation and being exposed to Russian propaganda by creating a welcoming and supportive environment.



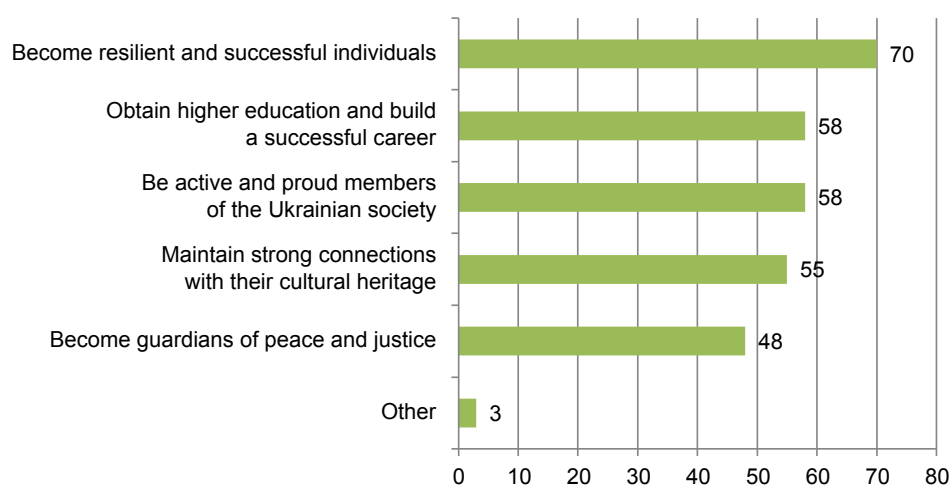
*Fig. 39. How do you think communities can best support children returning after deportation and being exposed to propaganda? (% of the responses)*

According to the majority of the respondents (70%), schools should support such children by training teachers to deal with psychological trauma. 64% stated that schools should provide specialized consulting services and 62% stated that anti-bullying programs should be implemented.



*Fig. 40. What role do you think schools should play in supporting such children? (% of the responses)*

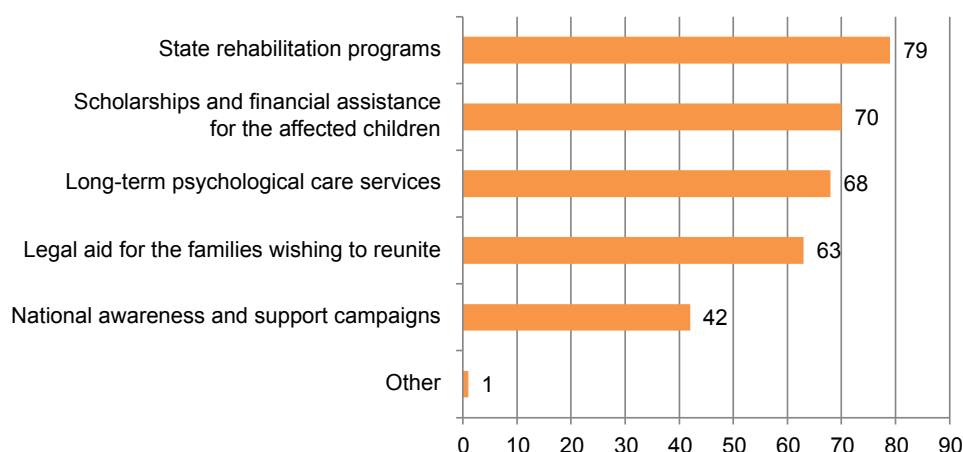
Most of the respondents think that a long-term goal for the returned children is to become resilient and successful individuals (70%). The respondents also stated that they should obtain higher education and build successful careers (58%), be active and proud members of the Ukrainian society (58%) and maintain strong connections with their cultural heritage (55%).



*Fig. 41. What long-term goals do you set for the children which survived deportation and propaganda? (% of the responses)*

Most of the respondents would support the following measures to ensure the well-being and success of such children: state rehabilitation programs (79%), scholarships and financial assistance for the affected children (70%), long-term psychological care services (68%).





*Fig. 42. What measures would you support in order to ensure the well-being and success of such children? (% of the responses)*

On the basis of the historical experience of resilience and resistance in the Ukrainian society, FGI participants expressed the following opinions with respect to overcoming challenges related to the deportation and displacement of children:

- Ukrainian throughout the country should be more united and provide support to families affected by the deportation of children;
- we need to thoroughly collect information and document all events related with the deportation of Ukrainians;
- when the time comes for negotiations to end the war, returning the deported children should be included in the list of Ukraine's demands to Russia;
- a clear mechanism for evacuation should be determined, readiness for evacuation should be ensured;
- psychological and physical support should be provided to all children affected by the war;
- modular towns should be built and housing should be provided to evacuated people for free or for a minimal fee;
- evacuated families should receive support with respect to finding jobs.

Also within the study the participants discussed the possibility of forming a community of people united around returning children to Ukraine. Many of the focus group participants agreed with the opinion that such a community can be formed, but the practical implementation may be difficult. According to the respondents, in addition to the families of the deported children, the community should also be joined by government officials, representatives of state authorities, deputies, the ombudsman, the Ministry for reintegration of the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, as well as by Olena Zelenska, the First Lady of Ukraine, who was mentioned by many of the respondents. Moreover, such a community should be joined by lawyers and psychologists.

*"Forming a group inside a community may remain at the community level. Creating volunteer groups to search for relatives. Such families prepare lists. But, if all this is prepared at the lowest level, I think it can be lost somewhere while going upwards. If it goes downwards, it can be more effective".*

*Focus group with the residents of the East, 20–34 years old*

*"The community must be joined by a representative of state authorities, or a deputy, or an assistant deputy, because these people are authorized to represent our citizens at the international level".*

*Focus group with the residents of the East, 20–34 years old*

*"Then the First Lady, as I said. This will be more effective. Some foreign organization should also be involved in order to provide assistance. Not an organization that would just be mentioned and that's it. Some changes are needed. We need to see that these children are being brought back. This is my opinion".*

*Focus group with the residents of the East, 50 years of age and older*

*"I think that such a community should be organized at the national level, because more than 10 or 20 children have already been deported, we need to have a database, because parents need to contact someone, because there is an issue related to the deported children, but we need to register these children, including their number, we need to have statistics and organization".*

*Focus group with the residents of the North, 50 years of age and older*

The respondents also suggested to involve some famous persons in such community's activities in order to ensure publicity.

*"We could involve Natalia Mohylevska, she adopted kids whose parents died".*

*Focus group with the residents of the North, 50 years of age and older*

*"If, for example, Oleksandr Usyk said after his victory: "Guys, do you know that 20 thousand children have been deported from Ukraine", many people would be surprised and raise this issue".*

*Focus group with parents which have young children*

# SPECIALISTS' WORK WITH CHILDREN AFFECTED BY THE WAR

Within the study, 2 focus groups were conducted for specialists working directly with children affected by the war — teachers and social security workers. The purpose of the FGI was to understand how traumatic events affected the children during the war and how relations should be built with such children when providing aid and support to them.

## Understanding the victims' experience

Specialists didn't report any first-hand experience of dealing with children which had been deported to Russia. However, they are constantly dealing with children traumatized by relocation, occupation and coercion during the war.

*"During the occupation those fiends came to the people's homes, made threats, children saw weapons, heard threats... Thank God, nobody was physically harmed, they I just scared. Anxiety, stress, of course".*

*Focus group with teachers*

*"It was hard for the child because he was harmed not only morally but also physically, his arm was injured... This child remained stressed for a long time. As soon as we hear an air raid siren, the child is just curled into a ball. A psychologist worked with the child, because the child couldn't even sleep".*

*Focus group with social security workers*

*"There is a boy in my class, his home was destroyed at the beginning of the full-scale war. His mother was nearby at that time, she suffered a traumatic amputation. The child was taken to a nearby village by his grandmother. The boy later shut himself in, he said: "I will not study, I will save money to buy a prosthetic device for my mother".*

*Focus group with teachers*

## Identification of the signs of trauma

The specialists mentioned during the discussions that the behaviour of children traumatized by war experience can manifest as insularity, anxiety and stress responses. Physical manifestations of stress can include sleep disorder, eating disorder, enuresis, etc. Children often have strong control over their actions and emotions due to traumatic experience. This can manifest as insularity or aggression (as a response to long-term stressful situation).

*"I think these are two radically opposite types of behaviour. Either the child becomes invisible, so that nobody would see or hear him, or the other way around, there are manifestations of deviant behaviour".*

*Focus group with teachers*

*"The child is afraid of sounds and noises. Something falls down, like a pencil pot, and the child grabs his head, he's scared. He doesn't know where to put his hands — physiological manifestations. He wants to hold something in his hands all the time".*

*Focus group with teachers*

*"I can say that we are now granting the status to children affected by military operations and the armed aggression, and parents come to us with these children, and we describe the problems faced by the child in the family need assessment report. For example, the parents complain about sleep disorders. Later children are afraid of loud noises in connection with shellings in the city".*

*Focus group with social security workers*

The teachers mention emotional barriers, communication difficulties, lack of trust, as well as insufficient awareness of the resources used for providing support among the problems faced by traumatized children.

*"Maybe children don't have enough information about the resources used for recovery".*

*Focus group with teachers*

*"Communication. Finding friends is a problem, they spend more time in social media. They join TikTok and Instagram. Parents are afraid to let their children go to the playground or to school, because when an air raid siren is heard, it's very scary and nobody goes anywhere. Therefore, they lack live communications, and they start to think what to do".*

*Focus group with teachers*

According to the social security workers, the main problem faced by the children is the lack of psychological aid and specialists which can work with them.

### **Assessing the need for support**

The specialists emphasized that the needs of the children traumatized by the war are mostly related to social support, communicating with peers, peaceful atmosphere at home and access to professional psychological aid. Support within the family is also important, because stable family relations help children to adapt more quickly.

*"If we are talking about communication, of course, there isn't enough interest clubs where they could go. Now it is impossible in most regions. Of course, live communication is impossible for this reason".*

*Focus group with teachers*

*"Family atmosphere has a very significant impact, because the way the parents cope with stressful situations influences the children".*

*Focus group with teachers*

Teachers and social security workers think that psychological assistance and social support services are critical for these children. At the same time, according to the teachers, social services are currently unable to respond to the needs in a timely manner and provide the full range of essential services to the children affected by the war. Social security workers often can't provide the necessary support to children due to understaffing and lack of funding and pass the responsibility to schools. Volunteers and public organizations also undertake to provide psychological and social services to children.

*"I think that this is psychological aid. Yes. Working with children and parents gives the most fruitful results".*

*Focus group with social security workers*

*"Social services pass the responsibility to schools and have to deal with it.*

*Focus group with teachers*

Collective events, as well as participation in the community's sporting, creative and cultural events, are also important. At the same time, the experts emphasized the parents' insufficient awareness of the available services and route lists where aid opportunities for children are listed. The lack of leisure centres, playgrounds and events for children in the communities located far from regional centres is also a problem.

*"I also think that we shouldn't forget about sport. Of course, there are competitions and sporting activities (if possible). And I also think that everything that you can do with your own hands is very comforting".*

*Focus group with teachers*

*"We now fight for every child, so that he would stay with us, with the teachers. Because nobody knows my children better than I do".*

*Focus group with teachers*

*"Creativity and contacts with the adults. Various celebrations. Emotions, travelling. Watching and discussing films together (if possible). Where these hormones of happiness begin to work.*

*Focus group with social security workers*

*"We have such safe spaces. These spaces are called Safe Towns. There are very few of such Safe Towns. And, therefore, children don't have enough contacts and communication with their peers. This is very important. It is also important that sometimes parents don't see such behaviour on the part of their children, and they can apply for social services. For example, if we receive a notice, we go to the family, we study, redirect, work, but the parents often don't come to us in a timely manner or don't come at all, if there isn't a notice from school, etc. It's the parents' timeliness and their application to the service".*

*Focus group with social security workers*

The specialists emphasize that children seek care, hugging, they want to hear words of support and love from adults. The experts also stated that due to the war many children are evacuated or isolated and can't see their family members.

*"Children want to be hugged more often. They want to be listened to more often. They want to hear "I love you" more often.*

*Focus group with social security workers*

*"Children lack communication... There aren't enough clubs. There are no mass events".*

*Focus group with social security workers*

## **Increasing resilience and healing**

Social support, involvement of communities and schools have a significant impact on the children's recovery after trauma. The experts state that these factors can ensure stability, sense of security and emotional support for the children to help them cope with their traumatic experiences.

*"An important role is played both by the communities and by individual teachers. Our children will exhibit the same behaviour in the street as we do. If we are aggressive, of course, they will be aggressive too".*

*Focus group with social security workers*

*"Firstly, a child spends more than half of the day in school. That's why the support of the school is a very important factor which helps to support the child. As for the experience of our city, we have a lot of opportunities for children. Children can work, there are sports clubs and theatrical clubs. They are all working. Children are involved".*

*Focus group with social security workers*

The specialists also discussed particular therapeutic approaches which allow to achieve success in dealing with traumatized children. Among them, special attention is drawn to art therapy, breathing exercises, aromatherapy, physical activities and organizing leisure. Not only do these methods reduce the level of anxiety, but they also help children to burn off the accumulated energy and cope with the emotional consequences of the traumatic experience.

According to the teachers, they actively use game forms of work to maintain the comfortable psychological state of the children. The teachers also emphasized the importance of the unobtrusive approach which provides a choice to the child and takes his interests into account. This allows the child to choose the optimal way for healing and development.

*"Circle time. Yes, circle time. And how did we start it? At the beginning of the war, when the class was formed, we asked the children in the morning, what is your mood today, are you offended, why? I didn't sleep enough, I was scared, I was in a bomb shelter. They think that mood can be bad, good and so on. And we also analyze the bad mood with the children, why are you in a bad mood, what bad things happened to you. And the children open up in this way. They remained silent at first. Work wasn't going well. And it was very difficult to make displaced persons open up".*

*Focus group with teachers*

The experts emphasize the importance of systemic and regular application of therapeutic approaches for maximization of their efficiency. Involving various community resources, such as creative studios, sports club and other activities, must be a permanent element of rehabilitation in order to provide support to children in the long run.

*"Celebrations and events are organized for children, because children stay at home, shut themselves in, go into the world of gadgets. We need to get them out of there".*

*Focus group with social security workers*



*"Physical activity. We help the children burn off energy a little, give them a physical load, then proceed to fine motor exercises and then to breathing exercises.*

*And so they calm down and come back to normal".*

*Focus group with social security workers*

## **Preventing repeated victimization of the victims due to coercion in the process of education**

The specialists consider it necessary to create an environment ensuring safety and stability for each child in order to prevent repeated victimization of children affected by coercive education. It is important to create such an environment at home and at school, as well as to involve parents, class leaders, teachers, school psychologists, etc. It is necessary to establish clear boundaries and rules for all participants of the educational process in order to avoid situations related to coercion.

*"So that the child isn't alone. So that the child can find some advice and tactile sensation. Secondly. Fully involving children in the educational process. This involves the class and peers. Involving children in the extracurricular life. By the way, extracurricular life is highly developed in our city. Therefore, we have such opportunities. And studying the child's desires. What the child himself wants. How the child can reveal himself. Without imposing any opinions. Communicating constantly. And finding common points of contacts".*

*Focus group with social security workers*

*"I think that in such a case we need to be very careful in order to avoid putting an excessive load on the child out of our desire to help him. Too much help is a heavy burden. The child may refuse to accept it. So this should be done step by step. Communication with the psychologist. But the parents, the child and parents should know where they can go. Where they are always welcome. Who can help them. And everything should be done step by step".*

*Focus group with social security workers*

The experts state that emotional literacy training should be provided in order to help the children to detect coercion and manipulative tactics, as well as to counter them. Such training should include understanding one's own emotions and needs, developing critical thinking skills, detecting the signs of manipulation.

*"Probably developing critical thinking. Receiving information, developing, checking where it comes from".*

*Focus group with teachers*

*"There is such a concept as developing critical thinking. We as adults and teachers should teach children to think critically. There won't be a one hundred percent result. Even adults can't achieve such a result. But we need to work on this. And then, of course, the child will detect manipulations or selfish intentions against him. And the child will defend himself to some extent. But then again, the child must trust the adult person. Regardless of who it is: parents, teachers, friends of the parents, grandfathers, grandmothers. The child should be able to talk about this. If the child doesn't tell us about it, then later someone will jump from the ninth floor. Some people already jump under the wheels. If there is no trust, there will be no result".*

*Focus group with social security workers*

In order to effectively provide aid to the children traumatized by the war, the experts suggest to create interdisciplinary teams, ensure information exchange between different services and clearly delineate the role of each service.

Some teachers supported the opinion that over-discussing the child's traumatic past can worsen the child's condition. It is also important that the children don't feel any additional pressure after their return, which will make it easier for them to adapt to the new conditions. The teachers emphasized the importance of preparing the students to accepting an affected child in order to avoid isolation or any potential conflicts.

*"I think that if any child came to me, I would see him as a child coming from another Ukrainian city or village, or from another part of the city of Odesa. I would not focus on this. I would not ask, how was it there, how do you feel here. I would not raise this issue. I would accept such a child the same way I would accept any local child".*

*Focus group with teachers*

*"We need to work with the children, with the collective accepting this child. We need to gain their support. We need to involve them in this cooperation, so that they would not be offended, so that they would have the right reaction, we need to teach them to communicate with this child in order to avoid escalating the conflict and to do everything possible to help this child feel at home".*

*Focus group with teachers*

## **Ethical considerations and professional boundaries**

The experts emphasize the importance of the careful and delicate approach to the children which survived traumatic events, in particular, we need to accept the child unconditionally, ensure the child's autonomy and show empathy. It is important not to ask questions which may be painful or undesirable. We should watch the tone of the communication and always give the freedom of choice to the child within the predetermined options.

*"Always respect personal boundaries. This applies to both children and adults. Don't ask any unnecessary questions if you understand that this may be uncomfortable for the child. And we as teachers should study the situation from the inside, analyze family circumstances. That is, we should collect all information. And we should collect information about the child in such a way so as to avoid harming or offending him".*

*Focus group with teachers*

*"The tone of communication has a significant impact. Even if you're in a bad mood, you should never show it. The child can think that is related to him, so we always need to watch our tone when we are answering questions".*

*Focus group with teachers*

*"Unconditional acceptance with all the pros and cons. And I'm going parallel to you, I'm helping you, you're helping me. This is a partnership, but it must be unconditional".*

*Focus group with social security workers*

*"We need to be careful when communicating with the child, study the child and understand the boundaries which shouldn't be crossed".*

*Focus group with social security workers*

The experts emphasize the need to detect and develop the competencies of the specialists which are dealing with traumatized children. It is important to prepare, to have a good reputation, to control the quality of the specialists' work and their interaction with the children and to monitor the child's willingness to work with a particular specialist.

The experts use various strategies in order to maintain professional boundaries in complicated situations, including:

- taking care of your own mental health;
- sharing experience with colleagues in order to prevent emotional burnout;
- an ability to stop, if the situation is getting out of hand, and take a break in order to avoid making impulsive decisions.

# CONCLUSION

- Almost all of the respondents are negative or extremely negative about the deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia from the temporarily occupied territories. The news about the cases of deportation make people feel resentment, rage and sadness.
- More than half of Ukrainians inquire about the issue of deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia and think that it is important to highlight this problem. At the same time, many people criticize the state for its insufficient activity in this area. The respondents emphasize that information is presented fragmentarily in the media and the coverage of the topic is inconsistent with its importance both at the national and international levels.
- The main fears related to the deportation include severance of family ties, imposing anti-Ukrainian ideology on the children and possible psychological trauma. People also express concern that children can lose connection with their national identity and even become a tool of Russia's propaganda or military aggression, and in the future they can return to Ukraine to fight against their homeland.
- Deportation of Ukrainian children has serious consequences for the society. Most of the respondents state that this undermines Ukrainian national identity, has a negative impact on the preservation of cultural heritage and traditions, worsens the demographic crisis and creates long-term challenges for the country's economy related to the loss of the future labour power.
- As for the ways to prevent and solve the problem of deportation of Ukrainian children, prevalent are the opinions about the need for forced evacuation from dangerous areas, cooperation with international organizations and increasing state support for the affected families. The respondents emphasize the importance of informing the population and providing psychological assistance, especially for the families separated from their children.
- Most of the respondents are not sure about the Ukrainian government's ability to protect children against deportation and propaganda on the part of Russia. Most of the respondents also doubt the possibility of bringing back all of the deported children, but believe in the importance of the work aimed at their reintegration into the Ukrainian society. The main priorities in the work after the return of the children include education programs to make up for lost time, psychological assistance and cultural initiatives to enhance Ukrainian identity.

- According to specialists working with children, the needs of the children traumatized by the war are mostly related to social support, socializing with peers, participating in the collective and leisure activities and access to professional aid. Support within the family is also important, because stable family relations help children to adapt more quickly after the events experienced by them.
- Therefore, the participants of the study are mostly concerned about the existing situation with respect to the deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia and the state's efforts to prevent it. One of the most significant opinions is that the state should pay more attention to this problem, work at finding a solution, in particular, actively involve international organizations which can act as intermediaries between Russia and Ukraine with respect to bringing back the deported children and provide any support, as well as highlight this problem.