



# Norwegian Defence University College

## **THE MILITARY-PATRIOTIC INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE RUSSIAN PROXY REPUBLICS IN EASTERN UKRAINE (2014–2022)**

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# CONTENTS

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Chapter 1. Key Documents and State Programmes .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1.1. Umbrella Programmes• .....</b>	<b>9</b>
1.1.1. Russian Donbas Doctrine (2021).....	9
1.1.2. Humanitarian Programme for the Reunification of the Donbas People (2017).....	10
<b>1.2. Overview of DNR Legislation on Patriotic Infrastructure• .....</b>	<b>11</b>
1.2.1. DNR Education Law (2015).....	11
1.2.2. Concept of Patriotic Education of Children and Students of the Donetsk People’s Republic (2015) .....	11
1.2.3. Decree on the ‘Ready for Labour and Defence’ State Sports Complex of the Donetsk People’s Republic (2016).....	12
1.2.4. Concept of Development of Continuous Education of Children and Students of the Donetsk People’s Republic (2017).....	13
1.2.5. Standard Programme of Additional Education for Students of Military-Patriotic Sections, Sports Clubs and Associations of the Donetsk People’s Republic (2018).....	13
1.2.6. Republican Programme of Patriotic Education of the Donetsk People’s Republic Citizens for 2020–2022 (2020) .....	14
1.2.7. DNR State Educational Standards (GOSTs).....	14
<b>1.3. Overview of LNR Legislation on Patriotic Infrastructure .....</b>	<b>15</b>
1.3.1. Law on the System of Patriotic Education of Citizens of the Luhansk People’s Republic (2015).....	15
1.3.2. LNR Education Law (2016) .....	16
1.3.3. State Target Programme Patriotic Education of the Younger Generation of the Luhansk People’s Republic for 2016–2020 (2016) .....	16
1.3.4. Republican Programme of Spiritual and Moral Education of LNR Students for 2016–2020 (2016) .....	16
1.3.5. LNR State Educational Standards (GOSTs).....	16
1.3.6. Programme of Patriotic Education for 2022–2024 (2021) .....	18
1.3.7. Regulations on the Republican Physical Culture and ‘Ready for Labour and Defence’ Sports Complex (2020) .....	18
<b>Chapter 2. Institutions and Organisations• .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>2.1. DNR Patriotic Agents• .....</b>	<b>19</b>
2.1.1. Donetsk Republic Public Movement (Obshchestvennoe Dvizhenie ‘Donetskaia Respublika’) .....	19
2.1.2. Young Republic NGO (Obshchestvennaia organizatsiia ‘Molodaia Respublika’).....	21
2.1.3. Young Guard – Young Army Military-Patriotic Movement Public Organisation (Obshchestvennaia organizatsiia ‘Voenno-patrioticheskoe dvizhenie “Molodaia Gvardiia-Yunarmiya”’).....	23
2.1.4. Young Guard of United Russia representative office in the DNR (Predstavitelstvo Molodoi Gvardii Edinoi Rossii v DNR).....	24
2.1.5. Russian Centre (Russkiy tsentr) .....	26
2.1.6. Volunteers of Victory DNR (Volontery Pobedy) .....	27
2.1.7. The Timur Movement (Timurovskoe dvizhenie) .....	27
2.1.8. Official Structures, Information Channels, Minor Initiatives .....	28
2.1.9. Failed Initiatives .....	30

<b>2.2. LNR Patriotic Agents</b> .....	<b>31</b>
2.2.1. Peace to the Luhansk Region Public Movement (Obshchestvennoe dvizhenie 'Mir Luganshchine') .....	31
2.2.2. Young Guard Public Movement (Obshchestvennaia organizatsiia 'Molodaia Gvardiia') .....	33
2.2.3. Young Guard – Young Army Republican Military-Patriotic Public Movement (Respublikanskoe voenno-patrioticheskoe dvizhenie Molodaia Gvardiia-Yunarmiya) .....	34
2.2.4. Patriotic Association of Donbas Public Organisation (Obshchestvennaia organizatsiia 'Patrioticheskaia assotsiatsiia Donbassa') .....	35
2.2.5. Academic and Educational Centre for the Donbas Russian Culture Studies (Nauchno-prosvetitel'skii tsentr po izucheniiu russkoy kultury Donbassa) .....	37
2.2.6. Centre for the Development of Children's and Youth Movement (Tsentr razvitiia detskogo i molodezhnogo dvizheniia) .....	37
2.2.7. Children's Guard (Yunaia Gvardiia).....	38
2.2.8. Young Guard of United Russia Representative Office in the LNR (Predstavitel'stvo 'Molodoy Gvardii Yedinoy Rossii') .....	39
2.2.9. Volunteers of Victory Luhansk (Volontery Pobedy Luhansk).....	39
2.2.10. Official Structures, Initiatives and Information Channels.....	40
<b>Conclusions</b> .....	<b>41</b>

## PREFACE

‘Military-patriotic education’ can teach us much about the non-governmentally controlled areas (NGCAs) of Ukraine’s Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. The region’s political future has been persistently uncertain since 2014, and the national identities of its inhabitants have likewise been in flux. In periods of upheaval, society itself can become a battleground. When social identities are contested, different actors may vest power in efforts to pull the ‘nationality question’ in one direction or the other – to find symbolic grounds for inventing a new nation, or even by claims that previous identities were ‘false’.

To a large extent, the ability to push a specific identity policy depends on political clout. Politicised ideas of national belonging, as well as Russia’s involvement in this, have undergone rapid shifts, making the years between 2014 and 2022 an exceptionally dynamic period in identity policy. Within the NGCAs’ identity policy, military-patriotic education is a realm of its own – with its own laws, institutions, traditions and practices.

As an integral part of Russia’s society-centric warfare in Ukraine, this process of identity formation certainly goes far beyond philosophical treatises. In the Donbas, strongly authoritarian political machines have been set up with access to state-like tools such as legislation and educational systems. These have been put to use to transform the values, perceptions and world-views of its inhabitants. Patriotism is most often defined as a feeling of love and devotion to your ‘Fatherland’ or ‘Motherland’, and a willingness to defend it. In the context of 2014, however, it became policy for Russia-backed militants and their patrons to turn the tables and define a new Fatherland. Whether the role of a new Fatherland should be played by Russia or something more regional, was for many years unclear. What remained relatively consistent, however, was the othering and degradation of everything Ukrainian.

Hardly giving a quick pay-off, systematic ideological pressure on children bears witness to long-term strategies. Scrutinising attempts to construe new identities by military example in these areas thus gives us a glimpse into the strategic interests and ambitions of key

players, and how these are changing over time. As this report shows, there is no lack of initiatives to shape the Donbas youth by militaristic means. The methods and activities are often well known from Russia, and in part from the Soviet Union before it. Symbolically, they represent a mishmash of Soviet nostalgia, Russian imperialism, regional history and new homegrown inventions. But all educators, formal and informal, seek to influence *who* the children are to become several years from now – so to alter the long-term possibilities for their ideological seeds to survive and bear fruit.

The occupied Donbas can also teach us much about military-patriotic education. In the Donbas, much is at stake – since control over the Ukrainian territories are contested by Russia, and the parties have starkly different visions of their future. In most of the world, youth policy tends to be conservative – an effort to reproduce the current political and ideological order. In the borderlands of Eastern Ukraine, however, the *de facto* powerholders have actively sought to reforge the existing order to underpin the formation of a new territorial arrangement. For many years, it was unclear whether the NGCAs were being prepared for annexation or for independence. While the military-patriotic institutions and forms take many of the same forms as in Russia, they have different basic characteristics. Asserting one’s belonging in a land of contested belonging is never banal.

The emphasis on the military in the Donbas identity formation project is of course not by chance. All nation-building in part intends to provide the necessary social cohesion to defend *us* from *them*, including by military means. The political entity that appeared in the conflict from 2014–2022, however, never knew peace. In this area, we can assume that expectations to join armed formations after reaching adulthood are higher than in the remaining post-Soviet space. The dual promotion of military skills and psychopolitical orientation is fundamental to all military-patriotic orientation. On both axes, the situation in the Donbas has been acute. As I argue elsewhere, the NGCAs have often favoured perception of themselves as *antemurale* Russians – as a particular hardened brand of front fighters, part of Russian and Soviet culture, yet also unique.

This online report does not delve on all of these questions, but it provides useful material to start doing so. It has been prepared as a pilot mapping study for the project *Contested Ukraine: Military patriotism, Russian influence*

*and implications for European Security.* The report has no scholarly references but contains a vast amount of empirical detail and links to explore.

Håvard Bækken, editor, 10 January 2023



*In August 2022, members of the Young Guard – Young Army organised a guard of honour event at the monument to the Soviet pioneer partisan Anatoly Balabukha. As can be seen in the photo, the memorial and surrounding buildings are significantly damaged as a result of the Russian siege of Mariupol.*

## INTRODUCTION

In 2014, using the moment of Ukrainian political crisis after the Revolution of Dignity, Russia annexed the Crimean peninsula. Russia-backed militants in Donetsk and Luhansk managed to suppress local pro-Ukrainian protests, captured key administrative buildings and local security services' offices, conducted sham referendums and proclaimed the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (Donetskaia Narodnaia Respublika – DNR and Luhanskaia Narodnaia Respublika – LNR, respectively).

After what officially was called an 'anti-terrorist operation', Ukrainian armed forces managed to regain control of many but not all Russian-occupied areas. The Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts became divided into Ukrainian and Russian-held territories, and as of the beginning of 2023, neither side has been able to control these oblasts entirely. Due to the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and further attempts to occupy the whole oblasts' territory, many cities and villages in the region were severely destroyed and some [ceased to exist](#). At the moment of writing this report, heavy fighting continues in the Donbas region.

In the report, we do not consider DNR and LNR as legitimate entities and, referring to the European Court of Human Rights decision on the 'Ukraine and the Netherlands v. Russia' case (application nos. 8019/16, 43800/14 and 28525/20), we recognise their proxy character given their functioning under the control of the Russian Federation (2022, p.20). Yet, for readability, we refer to these formations and related institutions by their stated names. For instance, we review 'laws' and mention 'ministries', although we do not recognise their official status.

Both the DNR and LNR started state-building processes soon after their creation. Particularly, the DNR and LNR had to address a need to educate new citizens who would be ready to defend the new political entities. Thus, the first patriotic education concepts and programmes appeared in both the LNR and DNR in 2015. A closer analysis of the military-patriotic system in the occupied territories contributes to understanding internal identity and nation-building processes on the ground and helps

to analyse the youth militarisation practices implemented in the so-called republics.

This report provides an overview of the key 'legislative' documents that form the military-patriotic policy in both republics. Also, it shows the network of key organisations and movements engaged in the upbringing of new citizens. At the same time, some republican initiatives that were officially announced, but were not widely implemented, are also included in the overview. Each mentioned organisation is accompanied by a brief description of its activities and contains links to examples of implemented projects.

The report also discusses the school system and educational standards, which determine how patriotic citizens should be educated inside and outside the classroom. The school system has a comprehensive programme of extracurricular activities, which are de facto mandatory. Such activities include thematic lessons, lectures on 'lessons of courage', trips to museums and military sites. Among the latest innovations is the all-Russian patriotic initiative [Talks about What's Important](#) (Razgovory o vazhnom) conducted every Monday. The overview character of this report does not allow us to dwell in detail on analysis of the processes in the school education system. Still, it sets the directions for further research.

In addition, the report presents various military-patriotic clubs that operate in the republics. Such clubs are present (at least nominally) in almost every educational institution, and the report is far from exhaustive in this regard.

An array of multimedia data was used to create the report. It was collected on such sources as websites of the 'official bodies' of the quasi-republics ('heads', 'governments', 'ministries', 'parliaments'), websites of organisations and political movements, their pages in social media networks (mainly VK<sup>1</sup>) and Instagram, and local online media. The description of the activities is accompanied by links to the relevant media coverage. In case of disrupted links and removed webpages, copies are retained by the editor under guidelines set by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data. Methods of data collection include monitoring the local 'official' websites and media, utilising the keywords search tool and snowball sampling.

The analysis covers the period from 2014 up until the first half of 2022, before the attempted annexation of the occupied territories (September 2022). Some updates for particular organisations from early October 2022 are included, but these are rare exceptions. The chosen time frame allows us to trace how Russia changed the agenda of proxy republics over eight years.

For the reader's convenience, the overview of legislation and military-patriotic initiatives in each republic are presented in separate sections. It is worth noting that both republics often implement similar (if not the same) initiatives and projects. In many cases, local initiatives are part and continuations of projects implemented in Russia.

**Note on translations and transliterations:**

The Library of Congress romanisation criteria (minus the prime and diacritics) were followed for all of the transliterations from Ukrainian and Russian into English in this report.

Geographical transliterations such as names of settlements or regions located in Ukraine are done according to the rules on transliteration from the Ukrainian language (including for the settlements located on the temporarily occupied territories). Thus, we use Donbas, not Donbass and Luhansk, not Lugansk.

Names of the settlements in the occupied parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts are provided in accordance with the Ukrainian legislation and can differ from the names used

in the proxies. Thus, a number of settlements has been renamed in Ukraine since 2015 due the 'decommunisation' reform in Ukraine. The list of some renamed settlements located in the occupied territories can be viewed [on this link](#). In the text we provide old names in parentheses.

Names and titles of organisations originally given in Russian are transliterated according to the transliteration rules from Russian language. Thus, many organisations in the proxy republics are named in Russian and transliterated accordingly.

To aid the reader's understanding, we translate names of organisations, movements or military-patriotic clubs into English and provide transliteration from the original language in parentheses.

In some cases we preserve customary spelling in transliteration (such as Yunarmiya, not Yunarmiia).

The structure of the report is the following: Chapter 1 introduces key legislative documents and programmes influencing the military-patriotic system. It starts with an overview of umbrella documents related to both republics and then provides a separate analysis for the DNR and LNR documents. Chapter 2 summarises and briefly describes different institutions and organisations and their activities in the republics. The second chapter is also divided into several sections for specific documents or organisations. A short conclusion sums up the report.



# CHAPTER 1. KEY DOCUMENTS AND STATE PROGRAMMES

## 1.1. Umbrella Programmes

### 1.1.1. Russian Donbas Doctrine (2021)

The Russian Donbas Doctrine is a strategic vision document presented in January 2021 (document PDF). According to the authors, 'the Doctrine is a system of views officially accepted in the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, which determine their ideology, the vector of development and the basis for socio-political forecasting' (p.5). It claims the 'restoration of historical justice' as its main aim. The authors argue that Donbas is a part of the Russian world and Russian civilisation with a Russian population which became a part of Ukraine after the dissolution of the USSR by mistake, 'as a result of artificially defined borders' (p.3). Among its listed tasks is: 'strengthening Russian national identity'; 'countering Ukrainian nationalism'; 'testifying the fact of its historical, spiritual, cultural and socio-economic unity with Russia'; and 'returning Donbas to the sphere of Russian historical space' (p.5).

Summary (key points):

- DNR and LNR are 'heirs to Novorossiiia' and 'successors of the Donetsk Kryvyi Rih Republic' (p.10).
- 'The Russian language is native to the Donbas' and the only official language for 'L/ DNR' (p.12). Other languages in the Donbas are 'varieties of the Russian national language' (p.12).
- The Donetsk region is a 'pillar of Orthodox civilisation' (p.13).
- The 'Donbas people', alongside the Russians from the Russian Federation and the 'Novorossiiia population', are a 'core part of the Russian nation' (p.15).
- The 'Novorossiiia identity type' is a 'Russian person' who has 'Russian imperial self-consciousness that prevails over local interests' (p.22).
- In the early 1920s, the Donbas population represented a new type of the 'Russian urban proletariat similar to people in Central Russia', but as a result of political disturbances, 'received an artificial border with Russia' and further 'suffered from the violent Ukrainisation' (p.28).
- The 'formation of the Russian nation was completed by the end of the 20th century within the framework of Soviet self-consciousness' (p.33).
- The modern flag of the Donetsk People's Republic goes back to the red-blue-black tricolour created by the activists of the 'International Movement of Donbas' organisation, whose main task was the preservation of the USSR (p.34).
- In the 1990s, 'Donbas suffered from forceful Ukrainisation, just as in the 1920s' (p.35).
- A full-scale 'ideological war was waged against the Donbas' (p.37).
- The 'Russian Spring' is (1) an answer to the 'bloody coup in Kyiv supported by Western countries' and (2) 'countering the attempts to humiliate and destroy Russian identity in Donbas' (p.40).
- DNR and LNR are 'part of historical Russia' (p.3–4), within the borders of the Ukrainian Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts (which need to be fully 'liberated' from Ukraine) (p. 6).
- Russian 'historical national territory' also includes 'Novorossiiia lands': the Zaporizhzhia, Kharkiv, Dnipro, Kherson, Mykolaiv, and Odesa oblasts (p.7). Their inhabitants also 'belong to the Russian nation'.
- Ukraine 'declared the war against the entire Russian population of the former USSR' (p.8).
- DNR and LNR is a 'continuation of the Russian statehood tradition' (p.9).
- The goal of the 'Donbas Republics' is the 'preservation of Russian national statehood on the originally Russian territory', and 'the subsequent reunification with other Russian territories' (p.9).

- 'Kyiv unleashed a civil war', and at the same time, 'Donbas started a liberation against Kyiv's desire to tear it away from its Russian roots', 'forcibly impose Ukrainisation' and a pro-Western path of development (p.44).
- Military 'resistance' was conducted by 'local forces' (p.44).
- All these years, 'Ukraine kept shelling the Donbas population' (p.45).
- 'The future of Donbas is in unity with Russia' (p.45).
- The most desired scenario for the future development of Donbas is the 'exit of the Novorossia regions from Ukraine, the liquidation of the Ukrainian state in its modern form, and its replacement by a Russian state' (p.46).

Later in 2021, the 'Head of the DNR', Denis Pushilin, [ordered](#) the introduction of the main points of the Doctrine into the republic's legislation. The 'Head of the LNR', Leonid Pasechnik, [announced](#) a number of follow-up events aimed at applying the document in the LNR.

### **1.1.2. Humanitarian Programme for the Reunification of the Donbas People (2017)**

[The Humanitarian Programme for the Reunification of the Donbas People](#) was launched on [17 February 2017](#) to 'support socially vulnerable residents of the Ukrainian-controlled Donbas'. The declared main priorities of the programme were: (1) to assist the civilian population, (2) to develop and strengthen cultural and spiritual traditions, and (3) to provide socially significant services.

As an example of activities within the programme, people from the non-occupied territories were invited to participate in different cultural-ideological activities on the territory of the L/DNR, and university students were provided with scholarships for studying at the educational institutions on the Russia-occupied territory of Donbas. Also, coordinators of the programme reported about providing some [medical](#) and [financial help](#) to pensioners.

The last activity on their [Facebook page](#) was dated early 2018. Other links lead to websites that are no longer in service as of October 2022.

In 2021 Pushilin [announced](#) that from now on, the Humanitarian Programme would also support 'all Russians and Russian-speaking people from the rest of Ukraine', for instance by providing additional help for the teachers of Russian language and literature.

## 1.2. Overview of DNR Legislation on Patriotic Infrastructure

Date	Document name
19 July 2015	<a href="#">DNR Education Law</a>
17 July 2015	Concept of Patriotic Education of Children and Students of the Donetsk People's Republic
16 September 2016	<a href="#">Decree</a> of the Head of the DNR on the 'Ready for Labour and Defence' State Sports Complex of the Donetsk People's Republic Related documents: 1) <a href="#">Resolution 1332 of the DNR Council of Ministers</a> on the approval of laws to implement the above decree (17 December 2016) 2) <a href="#">Order 470</a> of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Donetsk People's Republic on the approval of the plan to implement the above decree (2 May 2017)
16 August 2017	Concept of Development of Continuous Education of Children and Students of the Donetsk People's Republic
2018	<a href="#">Standard Programme</a> of Additional Education for Students of Military-Patriotic Sections, Military-Patriotic Sports Clubs and Military-Patriotic Associations of the Donetsk People's Republic
2015/17–2022	DNR State Educational Standards (GOSTs)
30 April 2020	<a href="#">Republican Programme of Patriotic Education of the Donetsk People's Republic Citizens for 2020–2022</a>

### 1.2.1. DNR Education Law (2015)

The [law](#) was adopted on 19 July 2015. It specifies educational policy and gives a general framework for the organisation of studies in the DNR.

Article 3 specifies 'education in citizenship [and] patriotism' (*vospitaniyegrazhdanstvennosti i patriotisma*) among the key principles for educational policy (Clause 4; p.8). Clause 7 of the same article prepares the ground for further integration of the DNR educational system with the systems of other states on an 'equal' and 'mutually beneficial' basis.

### 1.2.2. Concept of Patriotic Education of Children and Students of the Donetsk People's Republic (2015)

The [Concept of Patriotic Education](#), first adopted in 2015, is a document that represents 'a set of officially accepted views on state policy in the field of patriotic education' (p.1).

The creation of the Concept is conditioned by the need to 'search for an idea that could help overcome a spiritual crisis'; education of the new generation to build the republic; and involvement of citizens in 'maintaining security from external and internal threats in

the context of the fight against international terrorism'.

Its stated tasks are to cultivate the DNR civic identity, love for the Motherland, respect for the history, traditions and national symbols of the DNR, to form moral and psychological readiness to defend the republic, and increase the prestige of military service, as well as the need to counter 'anti-patriotism' and distortions of the Motherland's history.

Summary (key points):

- Patriotic education is defined as a part of the general education process and as systemic work conducted by governmental, non-governmental and educational institutions in order 'to form high patriotic consciousness, a sense of loyalty to the Fatherland, readiness to fulfil a civic duty to protect the interests of society' (p.1).
- Patriotism is the basis for the statehood existence and development' (p.2).
- The goal of patriotic education is to cultivate the feeling of patriotism in citizens,

which is defined as love and devotion to the Motherland 'to the point of readiness of self-sacrifice' defending it (p.1).

- The Concept is called 'to correct all inconsistencies between the society demands and a state and individual's features' (p.2).
- The ideal patriotically educated citizen is a person who accepts the fate of the Fatherland as his or her own (p.6).
- Historical-patriotic education should include the search for historical justice, 'debunking the myths about the history of the region imposed by nationalistic forces', the study of the 'centuries-old history of the Fatherland', development of the idea of continuity between the Donetsk Kryvyi Rih Republic (February—March 1918) and the DNR (p.6).
- Patriotic education should be present in the content of the school curriculum through the ideo-political character of the study materials as well as through the general mode and atmosphere of the educational process of a school (p.10–11).
- Extracurriculars play an important role in patriotic education and contribute to the formation of a deep understanding of civic duty in children. Named examples of extracurricular activities: Young Patriot, Native Land, Local History, etc. (p.11).
- At parent-teacher meetings, the main task should be to train parents to raise law-abiding citizens (p.11).
- 'Defence of the Fatherland is the sacred duty of a citizen, and it is necessary to prepare for the fulfilment of this duty from childhood' (p.13).
- Informational support for the processes of patriotic education should include the creation of museums and rooms of military glory in all DNR educational institutions; military-patriotic games; meetings with veterans of the 'Great Patriotic War' (Russian ideological name for the Second World War); establishment of memorable dates; engaging with popular blogs and platforms for promoting patriotic education (p.16–17).

### **1.2.3. Decree on the 'Ready for Labour and Defence' State Sports Complex of the Donetsk People's Republic (2016)**

The [document](#) started the restoration of the Soviet tradition of the 'Ready for Labour and Defence' (*Gotov k trudu i oborone* – GTO) programme in the region. The Soviet GTO programme was aimed at developing physical culture and promoting military-patriotic activities. The goal of Zakharchenko's Decree was defined as the development of the 'unified state policy in the sphere of physical education, culture and sport' as well as creating an effective system of physical education for the DNR population' (p.1).

Since then, a number of other documents have been issued – such as plans and programmes for the implementation of the GTO complex. Thus, the DNR government in December 2017 issued a [decree](#) about the programme's introduction and implementation, including the plan of events and standards for each age group. Among the declared goals is 'patriotic education' (p.4). Tasks include 'mastering the skills and abilities vital for labour activity and military service' (p.4).

In May 2017, the Ministry of Education issued an [order](#) about the implementation of GTO programmes in educational institutions 'as part of educational work' (p.1).

Later, state educational institutions, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, issued [tutorials](#) on how to prepare oneself for GTO. Apart from standards and methods of preparation, the [tutorial](#) includes an extensive overview of the importance of GTO in the history of Soviet and DNR development.

The [plan of educational work](#) on implementing the GTO programme in the education of school students includes their participation in sport and military-patriotic clubs and the 'creation of school propaganda teams' (p.4) for popularising GTO events.

The Republican Programme of Patriotic Education (2020) indicates that 2,000 individuals participated in GTO events during 2016–2018 and 7,193 participated during 2019 (p.8).

#### **1.2.4. Concept of Development of Continuous Education of Children and Students of the Donetsk People's Republic (2017)**

The Concept was adopted on 16 August 2017. It is a framework document 'for consolidating efforts of different state institutions aimed at education and upbringing' (p.2). One of the key declared goals is to increase the effectiveness of upbringing work in the system of education.

The Concept covers 'the increasing demand for highly educated and spiritually rich people in the DNR' who can take the initiative, 'judge adequately' everything that is going on in the world and be 'involved in the Fatherland's fate' (p.1).

Thus, one of the main outcomes of the Concept, as outlined in the document, should be the formation of civic, cultural and national identity for the DNR's rising generation: 'New times demand us to understand upbringing as the main condition of societal development and blossoming' (p.1).

Key points: support and development of traditional family values, increasing respect for the culture and national traditions, supporting the need to honour the deeds of Second World War veterans.

The document includes a broad range of general statements – such as a need to ensure access to educational resources, support children's development and respect children with disabilities.

Also, the authors mention language policy: educational institutions should work on creating circumstances for increasing children's proficiency in 'the Russian language and native languages'.

The Concept does not include any specific activities or plans for implementation but rather serves for addressing the need to work in various directions for the proper civic education of future 'DNR citizens'.

#### **1.2.5. Standard Programme of Additional Education for Students of Military-Patriotic Sections, Sports Clubs and Associations of the Donetsk People's Republic (2018)**

The [Standard Programme](#) was issued in 2018 by the DNR Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism. Later that year, this programme was recommended by the DNR Ministry of Education and Science to use in the system of

extracurricular education (Republican Patriotic Education Programme 2020, p.8).

Authors of the programme note that military-patriotic education should give citizens a deep understanding of their role and place in 'serving the Fatherland', high personal responsibility for fulfilling the requirements of military service, and 'conviction of the need to develop the necessary qualities and skills to perform military duty' (p.5). One of the main goals of the programme is to 'educate physically developed children and teenagers, boys and girls, always ready to socially useful work, fulfilling life and the defence of their Fatherland' (p.6).

The target audience is 12–18 year-olds involved in military-patriotic activities in their educational institutions. It is indicated that the programme can be recommended to the managers of patriotic military organisations who work with 14–22 year-olds.

The tasks of the Standard Programme are to:

- increase awareness about the 'history of the Fatherland and the deeds of the older generation' (p.11).
- form respect to the historical past of the Donetsk region.
- prepare youth for service in the DNR Armed Forces.

The study-thematic plan includes an overview of military service in the times of Kyivan Rus, a study of the development of military forces on the eve of and during the Great Patriotic War, preserving the memory of the Afghanistan war 1979–1989 and explaining that soldiers were executing their international duty, studying the history of the DNR (the lesson starts with an overview of the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine, presented as a 'coup' which was followed by the DNR referendum) and development of its armed forces.

Other lessons aim at practical experience – explaining techniques and approaches in various martial arts, basics of military topography, methods of surviving in extreme circumstances, and basics of engineering, fire and tactical training. Also, students are supposed to learn the basics of radio communications, participate in reconnaissance

and parachute training and learn first aid. Among the expected results, authors see increased respect for the history and culture of the DNR as well as the increasing prestige of the republic's military service.

### **1.2.6. Republican Programme of Patriotic Education of the Donetsk People's Republic Citizens for 2020–2022 (2020)**

The [document](#) was adopted on 30 April 2020 as a plan for implementation of the mentioned earlier Conception of Patriotic Education (2015). It was signed in 2020 and planned for implementation during the following two years.

The programme's goal is 'to create conditions for increasing civil responsibility in society and education of a citizen who loves his Motherland and family' (p.11).

Document authors note that the system of patriotic education is one of the key tools for state management.

The programme mentions the following figures as of 2019:

- 452,700 people in the DNR are considered youth (20% of the total population).
- there are 62 military-patriotic clubs/organisations in the DNR.
- 2014 persons are members of military-patriotic clubs.
- 14,000 12–20 year-olds took part in the military-patriotic games in 2017–2019.

Among the tasks of the Patriotic Education Programme are the formation of 'a sense of respect and pride in the historical and heroic past, the preservation of the memory of the exploits of our defenders, and deepening the knowledge of citizens about the events that became the basis of the DNR public holidays and memorable dates' (p.11). The text mentions the need to improve military units' patronage of educational organisations (p.12) and to increase the prestige of military service.

The programme includes detailed figures of planned events and indicators to measure success. Thus, the plan includes military-patriotic games, training and competitions;

activities dedicated to commemorate the Great Patriotic War, DNR memorable dates and Liberation of Donbas Days; events in preparation for military service; thematic conferences, concerts, round tables, lessons of courage and citizenship.

The document also assigns responsibility for events to both governmental and non-governmental actors. Its planned budget is about 59 million Russian rubles (approx.. 807,000 US dollars).

### **1.2.7. DNR State Educational Standards (GOSTs)**

The first standards for general education were [adopted back in 2015](#) to cover the 2015–2017 period. Later, educational standards were updated regularly (in [2019–2020](#), [2020–2021](#), and [2022–2023](#)).

The standards are compulsory in the state educational programme. All these standards underline that the education system should be based on the principles of patriotism and that raising patriotic citizens with a strong civic identity is one of the main outcomes of education. Even GOSTs for primary education suggest that the formation of basic civic identity and pride in the history of the DNR and Russia are main expected results of education.

The standards for the 2020–2021 academic year were developed in order to ensure the unity of educational spaces in the DNR and Russia. Thus, the content of school programmes should include information about Russia alongside the DNR (culture, history, traditions, legal system, Constitution, state symbols, etc.). A new lesson on Russia in the World is introduced (as part of the Social Sciences curriculum). One result of learning this subject should be a 'well-formed view of the modern world from the point of view of Russia's interests, understanding of its past and present' ([GOST Secondary General Education](#), 2020, p.23). Children in the primary education system are expected to have lessons on The World where they need to learn about the 'special role of Russia in world history and the place and role of the Donetsk region history in the system of Russian history'. ([GOST Primary Education](#), p.12, 2020).

GOSTs include the lessons in the Citizenship and Spirituality of Donbas as a separate course for all grades, taught once a week, to teach

school students how to be proper DNR citizens.

The GOST for secondary education issued in 2018 included Ukrainian language and literature, while the GOST for 2020 does not mention the Ukrainian language or history at all. The 2018 GOST already included references to Russia: thus, ‘national’ history had to be presented in connection with the ‘history of Russian civilisation’ (GOST Secondary Education, p.19, 2018).

In December 2021, DNR officials [reported](#) that DNR completely switched to Russian educational standards.

Note: The ‘patriotic component’ in education goes far beyond GOSTs and has an abundant list of thematic lessons and other extracurricular activities, introduced by the Ministry of Education on an ad hoc basis.

### 1.3. Overview of LNR Legislation on Patriotic Infrastructure

Date	Document name
30 July 2015	<a href="#">Law on the System of Patriotic Education of Citizens of the Luhansk People’s Republic</a>
30 September 2016	<a href="#">LNR Education Law</a>
27 December 2016	<p><a href="#">State Target Programme</a> on Patriotic Education of the Younger Generation of the Luhansk People’s Republic for 2016–2020</p> <p>Related documents:</p> <p>1) <a href="#">Resolution 450/17 of the LNR Council of Ministers</a> on approval of the procedure for using a system of objective criteria that act as generalised evaluation indicators of the system of patriotic education effectiveness (18 July 2018)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Note</a>: In December 2021, the LNR government <a href="#">announced</a> the adoption of new programmes for patriotic and spiritual-moral education for 2022–2024, but they were not available online at the time of writing</li> </ul>
12 October 2016	<a href="#">Republican Programme</a> for the Spiritual and Moral Education of LNR Students for 2016–2020
2018, 2021	<a href="#">LNR State Educational Standards</a>
2 June 2020	<a href="#">Regulations</a> on the Republican Physical Culture and ‘Ready for Labour and Defence’ Sports Complex (approved by LNR Government Resolution №346/20)

#### 1.3.1. Law on the System of Patriotic Education of Citizens of the Luhansk People’s Republic (2015)

This [law](#) was adopted on 30 July 2015. It gives a general framework and sets directions for developing the patriotic education infrastructure. Patriotism is identified as ‘love for the Motherland, devotion to one’s Fatherland, the desire to serve its interests and readiness to protect it up to self-sacrifice’ (p.1). From a patriotic perspective, ‘state’ and ‘societal’ should be prioritised over ‘individual’.

Mentioned tasks of patriotic education

include: fostering patriotic feelings among citizens, fostering love and respect for the history, culture and traditions of the republic, increasing the prestige of military service, instilling in citizens a sense of pride, deep respect and reverence for the symbols of the state.

‘The institutions that ensure the organisation and functioning of the entire system of patriotic education are the state, public organisations, labour collectives and the family’ (p.5).

The law does not mention any specific events or plans.

### **1.3.2. LNR Education Law (2016)**

This [law](#) was adopted on 30 September 2016. It defines the republic's educational policy and sets general rules for the education system.

'Development of patriotism and citizenship' is mentioned among the key principles of educational politics. Also, it is noted that pedagogical workers 'have to form a civic position in the students' (Article 46, Clause 1.4.).

Similar to the DNR Education Law, the LNR version mentions the 'creation of favourable conditions for the integration of the LNR education system with the education systems of other states' as one of the state political principles (p.6).

### **1.3.3. State Target Programme Patriotic Education of the Younger Generation of the Luhansk People's Republic for 2016–2020 (2016)**

The [LNR Patriotic Education Programme](#) was adopted in 2016, one year after the adoption of a similar one in the DNR. The programme repeats the main points stated in the earlier law on patriotic education, setting the need to develop patriotism in the younger generation, defining patriotism as a devotion to the Fatherland and readiness to defend it 'up to self-sacrifice' (p.3).

The declared goal of the programme is 'to strengthen socially significant values and norms, such as family, caring for others, work and the value of human life' (p.2).

The programme suggests developing a network of clubs and activities for youth where they are supposed to learn the history of the LNR and information about its heroes, 'defenders of the Fatherland' and sacred places. The desired results of such activities are pride, readiness to defend the interests of the republic and increased prestige of military service.

The programme also calls for the involvement of religious institutions in the life of LNR citizens 'traditional for the LNR' to instil a sense of duty to serve the Motherland and defend it as one's highest spiritual duty (p. 4). Another aim is to create conditions for patriotic coverage of civil life by the media.

The set timeframe for implementation was 2016–2020, but the implementation plan does not include any specific suggestions on what

to do. As such, it is a plan to create a plan, rather than the road map for actions.

### **1.3.4. Republican Programme of Spiritual and Moral Education of LNR Students for 2016–2020 (2016)**

The goal of the [programme](#) is to create a 'united system of spiritual and moral education' for all students of the republic. This education is defined as 'the transfer of the knowledge to children that forms their morality based on the homeland's traditional qualities of spirituality' (p.1).

The programme's declared tasks include:

- spiritual and moral development of school and university students who have good values and qualities and who are capable of applying them in the interests of society and the state;
- preservation and enhancement of moral, cultural and scientific values of the society;
- increasing the educational and cultural level of LNR students.

The document emphasises that now more than ever, it is essential to form in students 'the beliefs and views that reflect the interests of the state and society in order to instil a sense of pride and respect for military service' (p.2).

This programme does not mention any specific events, but rather gives a general framework about the need to work in this direction. The indicated budget for the programme is about 2 million Russian rubles (approx. 35,000 US dollars). The institution responsible for coordinating the programme is the LNR Ministry of Education and Science.

### **1.3.5. LNR State Educational Standards (GOSTs)**

The LNR [GOSTs](#) are [a set of documents](#) establishing the standards for education at different levels (see links to [standards for different educational levels](#)).

Similarly to the DNR GOSTs, they include 'patriotic components'. Apart from the results that students need to achieve in different study disciplines (such as maths or philology), there is a list of personal results that students are supposed to get during the educational



process. Making them into 'conscious citizens' is one of the priorities. The [Basic General Education Standard](#) specifies that students have to be educated as patriots and get a sense of responsibility and duty to the Fatherland (2018, p.5). The latest version of the Standard (2021) expands the list with points such as 'increasing the prestige of the state and military service, readiness to serve the Fatherland and defend it'. The ideal graduate of basic education loves their region and Fatherland, its culture and spiritual traditions. A graduate has to be aware of their involvement in the fate of the Fatherland ([Basic General Educational Standard](#) 2018, p.4).

Cultivating a 'proper citizen' is also an outcome listed for different study disciplines. Thus, philology subjects are expected to form civic, ethnic and social identity, and instil an attitude 'towards the Russian language as a bearer of culture' ([Basic General Educational Standard](#) 2018, p.7).

In July 2022 LNR officials [announced](#) that the educational process is being switched to Russian educational standards.

First Deputy Minister of Education of the LNR Olha Dolzhenko [reported](#) that starting from 1 September 2021, a new Exemplary Educational Programme would be introduced in all preschool educational organisations of the LNR, called Country of Childhood and aimed at 'comprehensive education in patriotism'. Methodological didactic materials, called 'My Fatherland', were being prepared.

The 'patriotic component' in school curriculums goes far beyond GOSTs and has an abundant list of thematic lessons and other extracurricular activities, introduced by the Ministry of Education on an ad hoc basis. One of the latest examples is that the LNR Ministry of Education [announced](#) a competition for school students on the topic 'My Heart is With Russia'. Another example is [organising](#) the Republican United Hour of Aesthetic Education on the theme 'Feat of the Young Guard'.



Republican United Hour of Aesthetic Education 'Feat of the Young Guard'. Source: Luganskii Informatsyonnyi Tsentr (Lug-info), 2 February 2022

### **1.3.6. Programme of Patriotic Education for 2022–2024 (2021)**

In December 2021, the LNR government [announced](#) the adoption of new programmes on patriotic education for 2022–2024, but they have not been published online as of October 2022.

From the information available on the LNR Ministry of Education's VK [page](#), we can expect the following updates in the system of patriotic education:

- Adoption of the Russian standards of patriotic education ('accumulated knowledge and experience of the Russian Federation').
- 'Revival of cadet educational organisations with experience in training and educating cadets in the spirit of love for the Motherland, devotion to the Fatherland and the formation of a sense of duty'.
- Improvement of the elective course on the History of the Great Patriotic War presented as a continuation of the main course on the history of the Fatherland in the tenth grade. Textbooks for the elective course are provided for each student.
- Publishing and introducing the new textbook, *The History of the Lugansk People's Republic* into the school curriculum with 'new conceptual approaches to the presentation of the region's history'.
- Increasing the number of hours for studying the Russian language and the history of the Fatherland in primary and secondary schools.

- Development of an exemplary programme for the academic discipline the History and Culture of Donbas.
- Continuation of such activities as [Victory Banner](#), [Guards of Victory](#), the military sports game Lightning ([Zarnitsa](#)), military sports event [Voroshilov's Sniper](#), and the open forum for university students [Young Patriots of the Fatherland](#).
- Continuation of the practice of organising meetings with veterans, participants in the Russian Spring and military events, which started in 2014.
- Organising 'museums of military glory' in schools.
- Continuation of the GTO programme as a part of patriotic education.

### **1.3.7. Regulations on the Republican Physical Culture and 'Ready for Labour and Defence' Sports Complex (2020)**

Regulations on the GTO programme in the LNR were approved by LNR Government [Decree №346/20](#) on 2 June 2020. Thus, similarly to the DNR, the LNR restored the Soviet tradition of a physical culture programme with patriotic implications.

The regulations state that GTO 'establishes state's requirements for the level of physical conditions of the population' (p.1). 'Education in patriotism' is mentioned among the programme's goals alongside the development of the culture of sport (p.2).

## CHAPTER 2. INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANISATIONS

### 2.1. DNR Patriotic Agents

The following section provides an overview of the activities of key organisations involved in the military-patriotic infrastructure of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic. Information is supported by links to primary sources. They mainly include organisation websites and social media pages, local media websites and local official platforms.

#### 2.1.1. *Donetsk Republic Public Movement (Obshchestvennoe Dvizhenie 'Donetskaia Respublika')*

Formally a movement, Donetsk Republic (DR) serves de facto as a local political party, led by the Head of the DNR (currently Denis Pushilin).

Website: <http://oddr.info/>

VK page: [https://vk.com/od\\_dr](https://vk.com/od_dr)

Telegram channel: [https://t.me/oddr\\_info](https://t.me/oddr_info)

Most of the work with young people is implemented by the party's youth branch – the Young Republic, described in the following section – but some events are organised by the main office, particularly military-patriotic projects.

At the time of writing (October 2022), DR [claims](#) to have 37 local branches and more than 235,000 activists 'interested in the DNR as a strong state' and who want 'to come together within the great Russian world'. Its [anthem](#) declares unity with Russia – 'Our movement is only with Russia'. Many events held by DR are organised with the support of United Russia, Putin's political party. On 23 July 2022 DR [signed](#) an official memorandum of cooperation with United Russia. In September 2022, along with its information materials, DR distributed the [registration forms for joining United Russia](#).

One of the major youth projects is the [Young Guard Socio-Political Festival](#), which the movement characterises as a place to spread its influence on the youth and form future personnel for the republic. The festival programme includes [meetings](#) with local political figures, sports games, and [patriotic evenings of memory](#) dedicated to the Great Patriotic War and 'current defenders of the



One of the festival's thematic sections, Points of Sense. Invited guests: Aleksei Muratov, Andrei Kramar, Sergei Kondrykinskij. Source: Obshchestvennoie Dvizhenie Donetskaia Respublika (ODDR), 5 August 2019.



Local politicians give talks to participants in the Young Guard festival. Source: ODDR, 5 August 2019.



The festival actively exploits Soviet nostalgia in its programme. Source: ODDR, 7 August 2019.



Physical Exercise\_RF (Zariadka\_RF) sports festival, Donetsk, 2021. The event was held on the Day of Workers in Physical Culture and Sports. This is an annual Russian celebration that was organised in the LNR and DNR for the first time in 2019. Source: ODDR, 7 August 2021.

republic'. The most active participants [are being invited to work](#) in the [DR movement and the DNR Head Administration](#).

One of the paramilitary projects is [The People's Retinue \(Narodnaia Druzhyna\)](#) targeted mainly at young people. The [purpose](#) of the Retinue is 'to help law enforcement agencies protect public order': the curators of the project position it as a programme of patriotic education of youth and training for future employment in the 'power structures of the DNR'.

The organisation has 33 headquarters in various cities of the occupied Donbas. The scope of the events, a lot of outdoor advertising and the abundance of merchandising materials that accompany each event indicate more than sufficient funding for the programme.

Many events are organised in collaboration and with the financial support of United Russia.

DR conducts information campaigns with the involvement of children and youth – such as actions dedicated to the memory of the Great Patriotic War. Examples include the [Street of Heroes](#) campaign in which people are expected to decorate their house with ribbons

of St George (commemorating veterans of the Great Patriotic War) and other symbols and send a photo to DR, and [flashmob](#) or video messages on the topic of Our Grandfathers Fought ('Voevali nashi dedy').

### **2.1.2. Young Republic NGO (Obshchestvennaia organizatsiia 'Molodaia Respublika')**

Website: <https://mrespublika.ru/>

VK page: <https://vk.com/mrespublika>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/mrespublika/>

The Young Republic (YR) was founded on 25 January 2015 – the day Russia celebrates Student's Day. It is the youth wing of the DR (see previous section).

YR's coordinators describe it as the largest youth organisation in the DNR, indicating the following figures (as of 15 September 2022):

- 37 local headquarters in all cities and regions of the DNR;



Star of the Hero sign installed in honour of Oleg Mamiev, Russian militant in the Donbas. Source: ODDR, 21 May 2019.

- 338 primary cells in schools and secondary vocational educational institutions;
- 9,000 activists.

Among the key directions of its work, the organisation indicates patriotism (fostering a love for the Motherland and respect for history), volunteering, artistic development, healthy lifestyle and 'public relations'. It works with young people, organising various events, projects, festivals and commemorative actions. It also [collaborates](#) with official DNR structures and local administrations.

Examples of YR's activities include:

- [Donbas Student Spring](#) festivals (an analogue of Russian Student Spring), branded as cultural festival, but with the support and involvement of local officials. Supposedly, the most active participants in Student Spring are later employed in governmental structures or in the organisation itself. Updates on Student Spring events are published [here](#).
- [DNR Youth Parliament](#) – youth consultative and advisory body functioning at the DNR Parliament (see [VK page](#) and [website](#)).

- [Donbas Youth Forum](#) is organised in collaboration with United Russia. The [forum](#) has thematic sections, from sports activities to political lectures and meetings with politicians.
- Commemorative actions to honour 'defenders of the republic' – such as [The Star of the Hero](#) – installing signs with a short biography of the killed militants in different places.

Notably, many people chosen for public commemoration are not actually Donbas residents but Russians who arrived to fight in the Donbas, such as [Oleg Mamiev](#), — a citizen of the Russian Federation who in 2014 came to fight in the Donbas and was the commander of the Fifteenth (Piatnashka) armed formation, formed mainly from ethnic Abkhazians. Another example is the Russian [Aleksai Grushko](#) from Taganrog, who also arrived to participate in the war against Ukraine.

Other events included:

- Organising regular [commemorative actions](#) dedicated to the Great Patriotic War (among many, these included the Candle of Memory, which was organised in [all towns](#) of the DNR with the financial [support](#) of United Russia).

- Joining the Russian annual Ribbon of St George campaign and disseminating [ribbons](#) with explanations of how to wear them properly.
- Participating in the republican commemoration ceremonies such as laying [flowers at the stone memorial](#) to the victims of the 'Odesa tragedy'<sup>2</sup> or to Aleksandr Zakharchenko's monuments, as well as in regular requiem meetings for the victims of the 'Bosse shelling'.<sup>3</sup>
- Coordinating the [Volunteering Centre](#) (Tsentri Dobrovolchestva) project (volunteering for Great Patriotic War commemorative actions, support for current militants etc.).

YR activities include many sporadic initiatives. Just a few examples include:

- Producing informational materials about the 'killed defenders of Donbas'.
- Organising a [drawing competition](#) for youth living in frontline towns to cultivate an interest in 'current historical events'.
- Organising [sports events](#).
- Organising commemorative actions to honour the 'victims of Ukrainian aggression' (such as the actions [Angels](#) or [Paper Boats](#)).

Coordinating Student Republic [festivals](#).

- Organising the celebrations of Russian state holidays (such as the [Day of Russia](#)).
- Publishing constant updates about United Russia [party news](#).
- [Campaigning](#) to vote in the elections to the Russian State Duma.
- Producing and disseminating informational materials about procedures for [getting Russian passports](#) and explaining how to register for Russian exams for school graduates.
- [Supporting](#) and participating in the Russian Donbas forum (the event called to justify the possible future annexation of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts).

YR openly [states](#) that many events are financed by United Russia. YR activists regularly attend festivals and conferences in Russia. Also, organisations such as the Russian Centre (described below) help organise trips and cover other logistical issues for YR members to participate in such events.

After the full-scale invasion of Ukraine began, YR held [rallies](#) in the newly occupied settlements in Donbas in collaboration with United Russia in support of the Russian occupation.

### **2.1.3. Young Guard – Young Army Military-Patriotic Movement Public Organisation (Obshchestvennaia organizatsiia 'Voenno-patrioticheskoe dvizhenie "Molodaia Gvardiia-Yunarmiya")**

VK page: [https://vk.com/youngguard\\_youngarmy](https://vk.com/youngguard_youngarmy)

[Founded](#) on 5 April 2019 'on the initiative of the leaders and members of patriotic clubs of the DNR'. It de facto serves as a regional branch of the Russian military-patriotic movement, the Young Army (Yunarmiya), launched in 2016. The members range from 8 to 35 years old. As of April 2021, the DNR branch [declared](#) to have 2,500 members, 14 territorial offices and 98 patriotic military clubs.

The main directions of its work as [reported](#) are:

- organising activity for practising military applied sports;
- holding tourist and local lore rallies, military field training, military sports competitions, games, excursions, demonstration performances, military internships;
- researching to perpetuate the memory of the defenders of the homeland, heroes of labour, participation in search expeditions, establishing the names of the fallen soldiers, recording the memories of eyewitnesses of memorable events 'in the history of the homeland' (p.4);
- participating in the construction and maintenance of monuments to history, culture and military glory;

- assisting veterans, law enforcement agencies and families of those killed in military service;
- holding events related to memorable days of the DNR, events related to its history, military glory and military traditions.

The organisation involves children and teenagers in [military-patriotic activities](#) (many in [Russia](#)), training camps (even in the recently occupied parts of Donetsk oblast – such as the [Young Paratrooper](#) military sports camp in Melekine settlement), Russian [military-historical forums](#) and other [events](#) dedicated to Russian [military glory](#), [Russian Immortal Regiments marches](#) and so on.

Within the [Russian military-patriotic game](#) Girls in Uniform, in which female teenagers from the DNR took part, the participants competed in [sections](#) such as: Military ranks of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation; Assembly and disassembly of the Kalashnikov assault rifle; Equipment of the Kalashnikov assault rifle store with 30 cartridges; Disassembly, assembly of the Makarov pistol; Imitation shooting from a Kalashnikov assault rifle. The organisation indicates in their posts that various Russian organisations are supporting its events.

Among local events, the organisation [underlines](#) the following: the military-patriotic competition Race of Young Patriots (thematic military field camps where children were taught how to survive in the forest and in winter conditions); the Young Combatant and Young Paratrooper games; Post 1 (guard of honour on dates commemorating the Great Patriotic War); the Walk of Glory patriotic event at Savur-Mohyla memorial complex.

As was mentioned, Young Guard – Young Army has offices in different cities and towns of the DNR: [Donetsk](#), [Snizhne](#), [Makiivka](#), [Horlivka](#), [Torez](#), [Novoazovsk](#), [Zugres](#), [Khartsyzsk](#), [Yasynuvata](#) and others. Additional military-patriotic clubs are created on local level, mostly based on local schools. For example, in Donetsk, there are [Search \(Poisk\)](#), [Donbas](#), [Sword \(Mech\)](#), and other military-patriotic clubs. In Makiivka there are [Northern Wind](#) (Severnyi Veter) and [Guardsman-37 \(Gvardeets-37\)](#). In Snizhne are MPC Stronghold (Oplot), [Dawn \(Zaria\)](#). In Kalmiuske (former

Komsomolsk renamed by Ukraine as a part of the decommunisation process) there is Heirs of Victory (Nasledniki Pobedy). In Torez is [MIUS](#). In Shakhtarsk is [Patriot](#). In Amvrosievka is [Knight \(Vitiaz\)](#). In Horlivka are [Patriot](#), [KORSA](#), and [Defender \(Zashchitnik\)](#).

Horlivka also has a Young Guard Cossack regional office called the [Cossack Youth Public Non-Profit Organisation](#) Young Guard of Donbas, branding themselves as a legal successor to the Young Guard – Young Army regional office.

Among other things, the members of the Young Guard – Young Army conduct thematic patriotic events in schools – such as [lectures and excursions](#) about ‘fallen defenders of the republic’. One of the members of the Donbas military-patriotic club [explained](#) that he decided to join the organisation after listening to the content of the thematic hour held in his school about patriotic movements in the republic.

In 2021 Young Guard – Young Army launched an initiative called Call of the Ancestors (Zov Predkov) dedicated to the Russian Day of National Unity – a Russian state holiday, also celebrated as a day of military glory. Members of the movement prepared [essays](#) on the importance of the Day of National Unity.

Over the two years, Young Guard – Young Army founded almost 100 military-patriotic clubs (MPCs), and the list of MPCs can be extended with many names. The shortened name of an additional branch is the [Centre for special training of pre-conscription youth](#) of the Young Guard – Young Army. The main functions of this Centre mirror the functions of the core office (Young Guard – Young Army). But it has its own branches and network of MPCs, including [Suvorovets](#) in Donetsk (provides military training) and Outpost ([Zastava](#)) in Makiivka. There is also a range of [MPCs](#) established by other organisations and branches.

#### **2.1.4. Young Guard of United Russia representative office in the DNR (Predstavitelstvo Molodoi Gvardii Edinoi Rossii v DNR)**

Website (general): <https://mger.ru/>

VK page (general): <https://vk.com/vmgere>





Members of Young Guard – Young Army, 2021. Source: VK page of the Central Office of the Young Guard – Young Army.



In August 2022, members of the Young Guard – Young Army organised a guard of honour event at the monument to the Soviet pioneer partisan Anatoly Balabukha. As can be seen in the photo, the memorial and surrounding buildings are significantly damaged as a result of the Russian siege of Mariupol.

## «Молодая Гвардия Единой России» и «Волонтерская Рота» развернули в Мариуполе 2100-метровую Георгиевскую ленту



«Молодая Гвардия Единой России» и «Волонтерская Рота» из 15 тысяч зажженных свечей создали на «Саур-Могиле» изображение памятника «Родина-Мать»

Главное

22.09.2022

Волонтеры «Молодой Гвардии Единой России» и «Волонтерской Роты» передали ноутбуки и мобильные телефоны жителям и сотрудникам соцучреждений Мариуполя

Главное

15.09.2022

Волонтеры «Молодой Гвардии Единой России» и «Волонтерской Роты» прибыли на пункт пропуска «Логачёвка» для помощи жителям Харьковской области

Главное

11.09.2022

«Молодая Гвардия Единой России» и «Волонтерская Рота» развернули в Мариуполе 2100-метровую Георгиевскую ленту

Главное

10.09.2022

Photo: screenshot from the [organisation's web page](#) on 1 October 2022.

The representative office [was opened](#) in the DNR on 7 May 2022. Kirill Makarov, the head of the DNR organisation Young Republic, was appointed as the head of the newly opened representative office (Makarov also serves as a member of the People's Council of the DNR).

Among the declared aims for the representative office were to help with 'restoring' the republic, strengthen ties between the DNR and Russia, and involve young people in development programmes implemented in Russia. The Head of the Young Guard of United Russia also [stated](#) that they have started to work in Mariupol.

The Young Guard of United Russia supports the occupation of Ukrainian territories; it organises and participates in celebrations in destroyed and occupied Ukrainian cities.

### 2.1.5. Russian Centre (*Ruskiy tsentr*)

Website: <https://russian-center.ru/about/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CRWFIU3JFTq/>

VK page: [https://vk.com/russian\\_center](https://vk.com/russian_center)

The [Russian Centre was established](#) in 2017, led by the Head of the DNR, Denis Pushilin: its main [declared aim](#) is 'strengthening the

processes of integration of Donbas with the Russian Federation in humanitarian, social and cultural aspects, creating strong and stable relationships between the DNR and Russian NGOs', and also the 'improvement of the patriotic education system'.

Among the key projects is curating the Integration Programme, which appears to be intended to prepare the ground for annexation of the region by Russia.

Among many projects in 2021, the organisation coordinated the following:

- The Integration Forum ([2021](#); [2022](#) was supposed to happen in January but was re-scheduled for the spring and did not seem to happen either)
- The Unity of Russians: Protection of Rights and Freedoms [forum](#) (April 2021)
- The Academic and Practical [Forum](#) on The Russian Word in the Modern World, with the involvement of Russian language teachers from different parts of the occupied Donbas (June 2021)
- The Russia – Donbas: Unity of Priorities [Fo-rum](#) at which locals were told about 'the achievements of modern Russia in politics, culture, medicine, science, sports and education' (July 2021)

- The [Festival of Russian Culture](#), Days of Russia, in Donbas (June 2021)
- The open-air symphony [concert Music of War and Victory](#) (June 2021)
- The [Defenders of Russia Veterans Congress](#) dedicated to the Day of the Liberation of Donbas, which was attended by ‘veterans’ of the war in South Ossetia and in Donbas (September 2021)
- The ‘[Russian Donbas](#)’ [school competition](#) (January 2022)
- Advanced training courses (in collaboration with Russian universities) for teachers from occupied Donbas (who teach history, social studies, Russian language and literature)

Elena Evseeva, a representative of the Russian Centre, presenting the broad activity of the organisation in the occupied parts of Donetsk oblast, [acknowledged](#) the role of United Russia in the development of the Integration Programme and activities.

Evseeva underlined the importance of the work with youth ‘as a part of the integration process’. Thus, in 2021, the Russian Centre organised participation for youth from the occupied Donbas in such forums as ‘I am a citizen of the Moscow Region’. Also, they supported organising and conducting the youth educational forum in Donbas called [Sea and Forest](#) (*More i les*), many speakers of which were from Russia, which is coordinated by Young Republic.

The Russian Centre [recruits](#) talented children from the occupied parts of the Donetsk oblast to participate in Russian patriotic projects. Thus, in 2021, 65 gifted children took part in the annual cultural and educational project Hello, Russia!, which took place in Moscow.

### **2.1.6. Volunteers of Victory DNR (Volontery Pobedy)**

VK page: [https://vk.com/zapobedu\\_dpr](https://vk.com/zapobedu_dpr)

The Volunteers of Victory is a DNR branch of the [all-Russian initiative](#) dedicated to commemoration.

Main activities include visiting veterans, organising information campaigns, events

about the Great Patriotic War and other commemorative projects.

Examples of the projects:

- Gardens of Victory / Gardens of Memory (Sady Pobedy / Sady Pamiati): [tree planting](#) dedicated to the memory of the Great Patriotic War.
- [Participation](#) in the official celebrations commemorating the Great Patriotic War.

On this [video](#), members of the organisation are congratulating Putin on his anniversary.

### **2.1.7. The Timur Movement (Timurovskoe dvizhenie)**

The Timur Movement is a one-time initiative rather than a widespread movement (despite the Young Republic [announcement](#) in 2017 to ‘revive’ the Timur Movement on the whole republic’s territory).

One such initiative was [launched](#) in 2016 in the village of Zuivka, where the local group is named Leader.

The Timur Movement is a Soviet children’s movement that emerged after Arkady Gaidar’s book *Timur and His Team*. The idea of the book is that the children organised themselves to help the families of the Red Army soldiers and older people in their village.

The movement in Zuivka was launched by the director of one of the local enterprises, Valery Sidelnikov. He [explained](#) the emergence of this movement as ‘a response to the decommunisation campaign in Ukraine’. As it was voiced, the members of the Zuivka movement can be from 6 to 35 years old. Their activities include handing out leaflets about saving the environment and some actions to help older people.

The movement has an ideological layer — the founder says that he instils in the movement’s members a sense of patriotism and respect for the Soviet past, using the example of Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya (a prominent figure in the Soviet Great Patriotic War propaganda who was supposedly killed by Nazi). Thus, there is a monument to her near the local school, and members of the movement maintain the territory around it. Members of the movement



Poster of the Leader Timur group in Zivivka. Source: Donetskoe Agentstvo Novostei, 3 June 2021.

organised a series of thematic lessons in her memory and were going to 'create a film and patriotic lecture'.

### 2.1.8. Official Structures, Information Channels, Minor Initiatives

**The Ministry of Youth, Sports and Tourism of the DNR** is responsible for developing and implementing official youth politics in the republic. This ministry also administers a Coordinating Centre for Patriotic Education of Citizens of the DNR, created on 11 February 2019.

Webpage: <https://xn--h1aheeehel.xn--p1acf/>

VK page: [https://vk.com/mmst\\_dnr\\_group](https://vk.com/mmst_dnr_group)

Telegram channel: <https://t.me/minmolsportturizmDNR>

Other (more informal) VK pages for youth covering news for youth and promoted by the ministry: [DNR Youth, Yours from Donetsk](#) (tvoi donetskii).

**The Ministry of Education and Science of the DNR** coordinates patriotic activities within the school curriculum: thematic lessons, school hours, content for the lessons in citizenship and spirituality, etc. The volume

of patriotic events in the official school curriculum and extracurricular activities are more than abundant and require separate research. One example, among the latest, is a series of thematic talks in schools called [Talks about What's Important](#) 'where children on the occupied Ukrainian territories are taught about eternal unity with Russia'.

Webpage: <http://mondnr.ru>

VK page: [https://vk.com/mon\\_dnr](https://vk.com/mon_dnr)

Telegram channel: [https://t.me/minobrнауки\\_dnr](https://t.me/minobrнауки_dnr)

**A new Ministry of Youth Policy**, [created](#) on 29 September 2022, will be responsible for youth politics in the DNR and take over the work of the Ministry of Sports and Tourism related to youth ([decree about establishing the ministry and its functions](#)).

The **DNR Revival Leaders competition** aims to recruit future personnel for the key republican institutions and was [launched on Vladimir Putin's initiative](#). The project mirrors a similar Russian governmental initiative Leaders of Russia.



On 3 October 2022, the DNR declared the introduction of Talks About What's Important events in schools, dedicated to the sham referendum and 'joining the Russian Federation'. Source: official VK page of the DNR Ministry of Education and Science, 3 October 2022.



Talks about What's Important. Source: official VK page of the DNR Ministry of Education and Science, 3 October 2022.

## **Volunteer Society for Cooperation with the Army, Aviation, and Navy (DOSAAF)**

Website: <https://dosaafdnr.ru/>

This GONGO was originally created in the USSR and relaunched in the DNR in 2020. It declares military-patriotic education and assistance in strengthening the country's defence capability as its key mission but does not conduct extensive work in the DNR. It has five regional offices located in Donetsk, Makiivka, Horlivka, Yenakiieve and Khartsyzk.

DOSAAF has a network of driving schools in the republic, and also indicates that it provides training of citizens in various military specialties alongside ideological, military-patriotic work, preserves traditions and provides comprehensive coverage of the history of the Armed Forces and other military formations.

## **DNR Patriotism (Patriotika DNR) information channel**

Serving as an official informational source on patriotic education in the DNR, this is 'an [official page](#) of the Youth Policy Department (patriotic education) of the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Tourism of the Donetsk People's Republic'. Lately, it was mostly reposting posts from the Young Guard – Young Army official VK [page](#).

### **2.1.9. Failed Initiatives**

In December 2015, the launch of Zakharchenko's (Zakharovtsy) initiative for children aged 10–14 was [announced](#) to honour the Head of the Republic, Aleksandr Zakharchenko. Children aged 7–10 were supposed to be called eaglets (orliata). Its logo was created in the style of the pioneer pin, but instead of Lenin, there was a portrait of Zakharchenko. Zakharchenko himself did not appreciate the initiative in his name and asked initiators to rename it.

## 2.2. LNR Patriotic Agents

The following section provides an overview of the activities of key organisations involved in the patriotic/military-patriotic infrastructure in the so-called Luhansk People's Republic. Information is supported by links to primary sources.

### 2.2.1. Peace to the Luhansk Region Public Movement (*Obshchestvennoe dvizhenie 'Mir Luganshchine'*)

Website: <https://mir-lug.info/>

Official VK page: <https://vk.com/mirlug>

Peace to the Luhansk Region is de facto the main political party in the region. It describes itself as the most numerous movement (approx. 110,000 members). It was founded in autumn 2014, and participated in the elections on 2 November 2014 and later. The current head of the movement is the Head of the LNR, Leonid Pasechnik, who replaced Igor Plotnitskii. In September 2022, the movement [signed](#) an official declaration about cooperation with United Russia.

The movement actively exploits local youth in its projects. One of the key youth projects implemented by Peace to the Luhansk Region is the [Young Guard](#) (Molodaia Gvardiia). Presented as a movement project, for young people's 'intellectual, spiritual and physical development', it de facto works as a youth branch of a political organisation. Although it is coordinated by Peace to the Luhansk Region, it positions itself as a separate organisation. In February 2021, it [reported](#) having 982 members. More information about the [Young Guard](#) subprojects is provided in the following section.

Other youth projects of the Peace to the Luhansk Region movement:

- [Volunteer](#) (Volonter) unites people to deliver humanitarian aid to the local population (usually handed over in bags with the logo of the Peace to the Luhansk Region movement).
- [Volunteer \(Fighter\)](#) (Dobrovolets) focuses on military-patriotic and 'moral and spiritual' education, and provides free sports training. One of the declared tasks of the project



A Lesson of Courage presented for the local administration in the Perevalskiy region. Source: Luganskii Informatsyonnyi Tsentr, 9 September 2022.



Peace to the Luhansk Region volunteers clear snow from the monument to the Great Patriotic War. Source: Lug-info, 31 January 2022.

is increasing the prestige of military service in the Republic. One of the project's key activities is a Volunteer [Club of Initial Military Training](#) (the former head of the Club was mobilised by Russia to participate in the war against Ukraine and [died](#) in March). Members of the project also participate in different [military-patriotic games](#) and other military-patriotic [activities](#).

- [LNR Youth Parliament](#) is a youth consultative and advisory body functioning at the LNR Parliament. VK page: <https://vk.com/molparlamlnr>
- [Care for Veterans](#) (Zabota o veterahakh) unites veteran organisations (Second World War, Afghanistan war veterans, current combatants) and conducts various events for their members.
- [We Remember](#) (My pomnim!) is one of the patriotic projects aimed at spreading the message about 'the Ukrainian crimes' to an international audience through 'preserving a memory about the people who died as a result of military conflicts'.
- [Never forget! Never forgive!](#) (Ne zabudem! Ne prostim!) is similar to We Remember. The project [installs](#) monuments and organises

commemoration actions to the 'fallen defenders of the republic'.

- [Memory](#) (Pamiat) is part of the Never Forget, Never Forgive project – installing monuments to the local militants who died as a result of the military conflict. Thus, only in 2017, 105 monuments were expected to be installed. The youth had to take care of the burial places. See link for [more information](#) about monuments installed in the republic.
- [Retinue](#) (Druzhina) focuses on sport and patriotic youth education; young people are provided with free physical training.
- [Leaders of the Luhansk Region](#) (Lidery Luganshchiny) recruits future employees for the LNR political structures; the project is implemented under the patronage of the Head of the LNR, Leonid Pasechnik. The best participants, after the completion of the project, go to work in the structures of the republic.
- The [World of Cinema](#) (Mir kino) is a mobile cinema that sets up free screenings of Russian fiction and documentary films and cartoons (usually with political and ideological implications).



Examples of other sporadic activities:

- [Events](#) on the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Fascism, such as the [Lessons of Courage](#) and thematic hours, talks about 'Kyiv's aggression', watching a 'documentary about the victims of fascism' and creating exhibitions.
- Commemorative events dedicated to the [anniversaries of the liberation](#) of the Luhansk oblast from the Nazis (as a part of the We Remember! project); commemorative events 'to honour the memory of the [fallen defenders](#)' or [Russian journalists](#) who died in the Russia-occupied Ukrainian territories.
- Laying flowers on [miners'](#) graves as a tribute to regional specifics.
- Self-promotional initiatives such as cleaning monuments in vests with the movement's logo. For example, in January 2022, volunteers dressed in such vests [cleared](#) the snow near the monument to the Great Patriotic War in the Liubymivka (former Dzerzhinsky) urban-type settlement.

During the first years of its existence, the movement was encouraging different small initiatives supposed to instil 'love of the republic' and cultivate local self-identification. Some initiatives initially lacked ideological implications and were quite modest. In 2017, the movement organised a [competition for the best Christmas toy](#) and an [online contest for an autumn selfie](#) on the theme 'Love the Luhansk Region'. Also, there were [charity events](#) to support children with tuberculosis. Over the recent years, the movement focused mostly on military-patriotic themes – Great Patriotic War events, commemorative actions dedicated to the 'victims of Kyiv Nazism' and 'fallen defenders' etc.

### 2.2.2. Young Guard Public Movement (Obshchestvennaia organizatsiia 'Molodaia Gvardiia')

VK page: <https://vk.com/mglglnr>

Instagram: [https://www.instagram.com/molodaya\\_gvardiya.lpr/](https://www.instagram.com/molodaya_gvardiya.lpr/)

As mentioned earlier, Young Guard is one of



Youth Anti-Fascist Forum Young Guard. Generation Z. Source: Official VK page of the Public Movement Peace to the Luhansk Region, 29 August 2022.

the Peace to the Luhansk Region projects and the description of Young Guard's key functions includes: 'involvement of young people in the implementation of the goals and objectives of the Public Movement Peace to the Luhansk Oblast'.

Young Guard also positions itself as a separate public movement, has a network of territorial offices in most towns of the Luhansk oblast and conducts many subprojects on its own. They organise ideological events, conferences and seminars for youth. Thus, the organisation [reported](#) that in 2019 they organised more than 250 events. The head of the organisation is Daniil Stepankov.

Examples of the many events and activities:

- Youth Anti-Fascist Forum [Young Guard. Generation Z](#), organised in August 2022 in collaboration with Russian military-patriotic organisations (such as [Monolith](#) club from Russian Kursk). The programme included discussions on how to fight Nazism in the 21st century, and the role of youth in the republic's development (with the participation of Russian and LNR politicians). Participants in the forum dressed up in t-shirts with Z symbols and ribbons of St George, and listened to the discussions about information wars and how to debunk fakes in the modern world.
- The [School of the Young Politician](#) is presented as an [opportunity](#) to get a political education and meet in person with local politicians. The most active participants are promised to get the chance to work in political institutions. The project [School of the Young MP](#) was launched a year later, with similar objectives. The School's organisers announced that such educational projects are supposed to prepare future candidates for the LNR youth parliament, which functions as a permanent advisory body for the LNR Parliament.
- Commemorative actions, such as [Young Guards Heroes](#) or [Requiem](#) for the Young Guard; commemorations of the [victims of fascism](#) (with parallels to the modern war); hours of memory about [the Leningrad siege](#); [commemorations of the Great Patriotic War](#);

[commemorations](#) of Russian soldiers fallen in the First World War; propagandistic [film screenings](#).

- The [Beauty of Donbas](#) girls' competition.
- Spreading information about the [Russian Federation Constitution](#).

On 16 February 2022, the LNR Young Guard and the Young Guard of United Russia signed an [agreement](#) on cooperation. In June 2022, LNR Young Guard signed a [memorandum of cooperation](#) with the Russian Youth Union.

Pasichnyk [announced](#) 2022 to be the year of the Young Guard (i.e. the Soviet underground partisan organisation) in the LNR. The LNR Young Guard planned to hold educational and military-patriotic events about the history of the organisation and the importance of passing the memory of them to future generations. The modern LNR Young Guard is one of the key actors responsible for the activities within the Young Guard year commemorative programme.

### **2.2.3. Young Guard – Young Army Republican Military-Patriotic Public Movement (*Respublikanskoe voenno-patrioticheskoe dvizhenie Molodaia Gvardiia-Yunarmiya*)**

VK page: <https://vk.com/public190093287>

Young Guard – Young Army is a military-patriotic movement that mirrors the Russian Young Army (Yunarmiya). It was created on 18 February 2019 by the People's Militia with the support of the LNR Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and the Ministry of Education and Science. As of December 2021, it [included](#) 5,000 members. The organisation reported that they have three regional headquarters (in Luhansk, Alchevsk and Khrustalnyi) and five city headquarters (in Luhansk, Alchevsk, Kadiivka, Bryanka and Khrustalnyi).

The movement's members are involved in military-patriotic [training](#) and other activities, including [joint](#) events with local and [Russian](#) law enforcement [agencies](#). Also, they regularly visit different military [events](#) in [Russia](#). Children from the newly occupied territories are also being recruited for participation in the Young Guard – Young Army.

In May 2022 the LNR Young Guard – Young



Luhansk oblast, Bilovodsk, occupied by Russia in 2022. Local children have been recruited into the Young Guard – Young Army. Source: Lug-info, 20 August 2022.

Army signed a memorandum of [cooperation](#) with the Russian Young Army, during the military-patriotic forum in [Moscow](#).

#### **2.2.4. Patriotic Association of Donbas Public Organisation (Obshchestvennaia organizatsiia 'Patrioticheskaiia assotsiatsiia Donbassa')**

YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@user-li8gy1rm4u>

VK page: [https://vk.com/patriotika\\_lugansk](https://vk.com/patriotika_lugansk)

The Patriotic Association of Donbas (PAD) was founded in 2018, [declares](#) its mission to be 'multivector patriotic work', and collaborates with local law enforcement agencies.

PAD has announced the following directions of work:

- Propaganda work and opening territorial branches of the organisation on the 'Ukrainian-controlled territories';
- Disseminating material with 'objective assessments of events happening in Donbas' etc.;
- Countering the 'Nazi ideology' and 'attempts to popularise it' on the territory of Ukraine;

- Creating a 'rapid response group' called [Media Guard](#) to counter 'Ukrainian propaganda'.

The association unites the MPCs of the republic. One of the leaders, [Aleksei Selivanov](#), was also an the LNR police major and Head of the Centre for Public Relations of the LNR Ministry of Internal Affairs. After the further invasion of Russia into Ukraine in 2022, he moved to Zaporizhzhia oblast (occupied part) to serve in the occupation militia. Some [media](#) reported later that Selivanov had some disagreements with Russians, and they imprisoned him.

PAD organises the LNR annual Festival of East Slavic Culture and Martial Arts, [Cossack Unity](#), where members of various territorial MPCs perform. Selivanov commented that children who are participating in the MPCs are preparing themselves for the defence of the republic. As an example, he [mentioned](#) the Youth of Novorossii MPC, of which eleven graduates went to serve in the LNR People's Militia (Narodnaia Militsiia) and two graduates joined the Russian army.

Another project – the annual military-patriotic [St George's Gatherings](#) (Georgievskie sbory) for children and teenagers – was [initially launched](#) by the LNR Ministry of Internal Affairs. One of the organisers commented



Participants in one of the military-tactical games at the St George's Gathering. Source: Lug-info, 1 October 2017.



An Orthodox priest blesses participants in the St George's Gathering. Source: Lug-info, 1 October 2017.

that children with 'deviant behaviour' also participated in the event. The programme of St George's Gatherings includes sports training, discipline and patriotic education, ideological lectures and discussions. OMON (Russian Special Purposes Mobile Unit) and Berkut (the former Ukrainian special police force, which was utilized for politically motivated state violence; it was dissolved after the Revolution of Dignity) were giving practical master classes.

St George Gatherings have been held since 2017 (more links: [2021](#), [2020](#), [2020 \(autumn\)](#), [video 2021](#)).

Traditionally, the organisation participates in [commemorative actions](#) and [events](#) dedicated to the Great Patriotic War and [current military conflict](#). Also, it organised a [media forum](#) on 'countering Ukrainian propaganda'.

#### **2.2.5. Academic and Educational Centre for the Donbas Russian Culture Studies (Nauchno-prosvetitel'skii tsentr po izucheniiu russkoy kultury Donbassa)**

Website: <https://rus-center.lgaki.info/>

The Academic and Educational Centre was established in 2020, based on the Luhansk State Academy of Culture and Arts, named after Mikhail Matusovsky, with the support of the LNR Ministry of Culture, Sport and Education.

##### Key declared aims:

- development and support of educational and cultural ties with Russia;
- research and assertion of the 'archetypal affiliation of the people of Donbas to the Russian world';
- 'countering anti-LNR propaganda';
- implementing comprehensive educational programmes for students of different levels, scholars, teachers, cultural workers, etc.;
- developing and implementing research programmes for the study of Russian culture;
- a 'study of the socio-cultural space of the Luhansk oblast in the context of belonging to the Russian world'.

Types of activities:

- Patriotic song [contest](#) named after Mikhail Matusovsky: Where Does the Motherland Begin?
- Students creative writing competition, [My Native Language is Russian](#) (students were invited to submit different works – essays, poems, journalistic reflections).
- #ForFatherland ([#ZaOtechestvo](#)) information campaign 'to explore the origins of Russian identity' in the LNR (includes discussions, film screenings and informational coverage of the events from the frontline).
- [Events](#) to commemorate the Great Patriotic War.

#### **2.2.6. Centre for the Development of Children's and Youth Movement (Tsentrazvitiia detskogo i molodezhnogo dvizheniia)**

Official VK page: <https://vk.com/crdmd>

The Centre was officially [registered](#) in 2015 but started active work only in 2020. Copies of founding documents can be viewed [here](#).

The Centre declares that its main tasks are: education of patriots;

- 'creation of a new society' aimed at developing the future LNR;
- youth personal development;
- cultivating a love to work;
- organising leisure for children and adults.

The Centre's activities include:

- military-patriotic [games \(such as Lightning \(Zarnitsa\)\)](#);
- ideological [forums](#) for students (such as Credit ([Zachet](#)));
- video [requiems](#) in honour of 'LNR defenders';
- military glory [conferences](#);

- [Orthodox](#) youth celebration days;
- patriotic education [lectures](#);
- online [campaign](#) #RussianWord (#Slovo-Rossii) dedicated to the Day of Russia. Participants were invited to submit a video with the following content: a solo or collective performance of the Russian anthem, talks about Russia, elaborating the thought: 'For me, Russia is...' (with the flag of Russia in each video scene), unique features of the local region.

One of the key projects is the [Children's Guard](#) (Yunaia Gvardiia). The direct translation is 'Young Guard', but unlike the other LNR organisation with the same name described above, this organisation includes mostly school students. The Children's Guard is registered as a separate organisation; thus, more information about it is given in the following section.

### 2.2.7. Children's Guard (Yunaia Gvardiia)

VK page: [https://vk.com/ug\\_lpr](https://vk.com/ug_lpr)

Instagram page: <https://www.instagram.com/yunaya.gvardiya/>

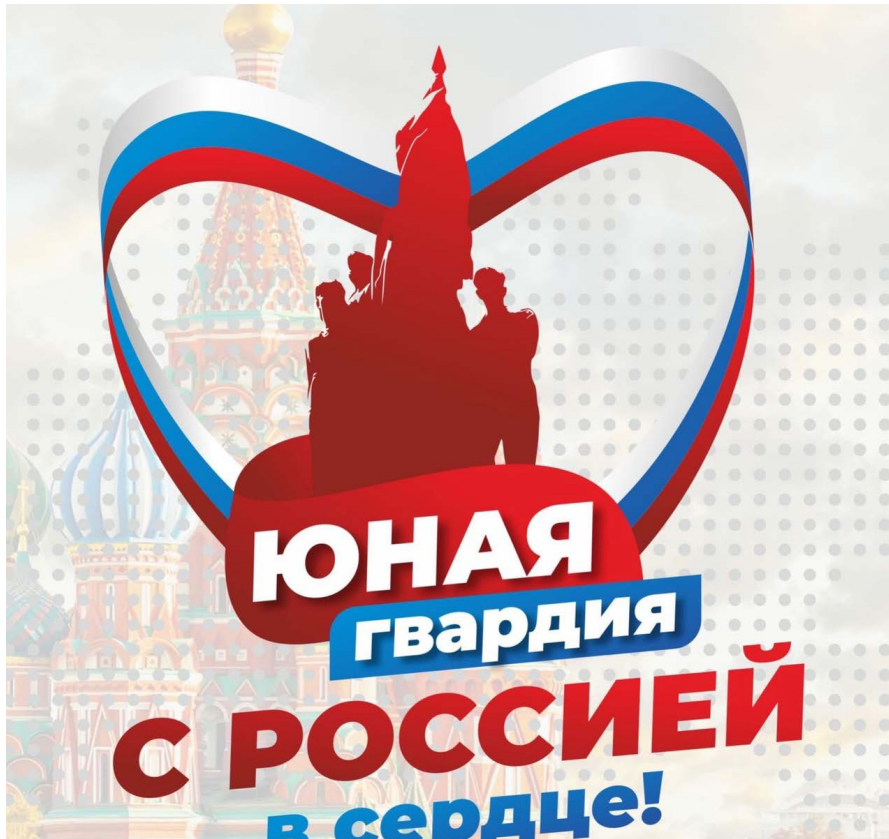
The Children's Guard provides military-patriotic education for school-age children in the occupied part of Luhansk oblast. It was [founded](#) in May 2018 by the Centre for the Development of Children's and Youth Movement on the initiative of the LNR Ministry of Education and Science. As of December 2018, as [reported](#), it included 700 school students. As of 2021, local officials [announced](#) that Children's Guard unites more than 40,000 12–17 year-olds.

The organisation follows the Soviet pioneer style – members of the Children's Guard even wear red pioneer scarves.

Activities include lectures, seminars, performances and participation in Great Patriotic War commemorations. Members of the Children's Guard are also involved in the activity of the LNR Young Guard – Young Army, which was created one year later (see next section).



Children's Guard conference. September 2022. Source: official VK page of the Centre for the Development of Children's and Youth Movement.



Updated logo of the Children's Guard. Source: official VK page of the Centre for the Development of Children's and Youth Movement, 20 September 2022.

### **2.2.8. Young Guard of United Russia Representative Office in the LNR (Predstavitelstvo 'Molodoy Gvardii Yedinoy Rossii')**

Website (general): <https://mger.ru/>

VK page (general): <https://vk.com/vmgere>

This office [was opened](#) in the LNR on 5 May 2022. Ilya Prygeba, a student at Luhansk State University, was appointed as the head of the representative office. He is currently mobilised by Russia to fight in the war against Ukraine.

The Young Guard of United Russia website [reports](#) that local activists are helping to unload humanitarian aid from Russia.

New activists started their activity by laying flowers at the monument to employees, teachers and students who went to the frontline in the period from 1941 to 1945 (monument is located in Luhansk). Then activists went to Sorokyne, where they laid flowers at the monument to the Young Guard.

### **2.2.9. Volunteers of Victory Luhansk (Voluntary Pobedy Luhansk)**

VK page: <https://vk.com/vsezapobedulugansk>

Luhansk regional branch of the [all-Russian public movement](#) Volunteers of Victory, dedicated to commemoration of the Second World War.

Apart from commemorative initiatives, the volunteers participate in other patriotic projects. Thus, in July 2022, local activists took part in the intensive training of volunteer fighters, In the Name of Tomorrow (Vo Imia Zavtra). Activists [commented](#) that they were taught how to conserve and restore objects of cultural and historical value related to the Great Patriotic War.

In April 2022, the creation of a female branch of the initiative was announced – [Sisters of Victory](#) (video). Members of the initiative, as [reported](#), are wives and girlfriends of the mobilised militants.

### **2.2.10. Official Structures, Initiatives and Information Channels**

#### **LNR Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth:**

VK page: <https://vk.com/mksmlnr>

Website: <https://mklnr.su>

#### **LNR Ministry of Education and Science:**

official VK page: <https://vk.com/monlnr>

website: <https://minobr.su>

**LNR Revival Leaders** is a competition that aims at recruiting future personnel for key

institutions. It is organised in collaboration with the All-Russian People's Front (Obshcherossiiskiy Narodnyi Front), headed by Vladimir Putin. The project mirrors a similar Russian governmental initiative called Leaders of Russia.

VK page: <https://vk.com/lnr.lideryvozhzhdeniya>

In July 2022, the United Russia Support Centre for Civil Initiatives in Luhansk [opened](#).



## CONCLUSIONS

The abundant military-patriotic infrastructure in the occupied territories suggests the presence of generous funding. Its rapid development contrasts with a general deterioration in the living standards of the local population in these areas. [Fischer et al. \(2019\)](#) argue that the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Luhansk are politically and financially dependent on Moscow, and many organisations in the DNR and LNR openly state that many of their projects have been implemented with the support of various Russian organisations.

Both republics have extensive legislation that regulates the patriotic agenda, ranging from the general concepts and programmes of such education to the inclusion of 'patriotism cultivation' in sports programmes and school curriculums. Patriotism is often defined as willingness to defend the Motherland up to the point of self-sacrifice. The LNR also has a separate 'spiritual-educational programme', which is aimed at encouraging 'traditional regional values' in the educational process. An overarching Russian Donbas Doctrine presented in 2021, which defines the key points of the republics ideological landscape, deserves special attention. The doctrine explicitly expresses the vision of Donbas history in particular and Ukrainian history in general, which should be stressed on the local 'official' level.

The main political forces in the republics — Donetsk Republic in the DNR and Peace to the Luhansk Region in the LNR — are directly involved in the development of patriotic networks as a part of their activity, and have separate youth wings, which are responsible for providing patriotic education. In the DNR, the youth wing is the NGO Young Republic, and in the LNR it is the public movement called the Young Guard. Both youth wings organise regular patriotic meetings, festivals and other activities.

The republics often mirror Russian military-patriotic projects and initiatives. In 2019 both the LNR and DNR launched local Young Army movements — a copy of the Russian military-patriotic movement established in 2016. In both republics, this is called the Young Guard — Young Army. Its members are engaged

in military training and participate in state celebrations and commemorations. Also, they regularly take part in all-Russian events, which aside from the sport and military games, include an ideological aspect — such as a need to demonstrate knowledge about Russian (official) history and military glory. Both republics report that they have thousands of members in the Young Guard — Young Army and dozens of military-patriotic clubs, usually located in schools. Moreover, the LNR has an additional Children's Guard movement for teenage school students, which was launched one year before the Young Guard.

The Russian cult of the Great Patriotic War is widely reflected in the DNR and LNR. It is combined with the current military conflict and framed in communication as a renewed war against fascism. Thus, military-patriotic activities are filled with references to the Second World War alongside with the negative othering of 'official Kyiv' as a neo-Nazi regime. Young people are involved in different projects and initiatives to commemorate the fallen defenders. The Great Patriotic War is present in almost every patriotic project.

Following the Russian restoration of the Soviet sport-patriotic physical training programme called Ready for Labour and Defence (GTO), both republics also launched this programme and included it in the complex of patriotic education. In some cases, Russian organisations openly locate their offices in the DNR and LNR — such as the Russian Centre in the DNR or Young Guard of United Russia representative offices, opened in both republics in May 2022. Russian entities provide finance for young people from the occupied territories to travel to Russia to participate in various military-patriotic events. Furthermore, Russian officials are frequent guests at events in the occupied territories.

Currently, it is difficult to accurately calculate the numbers — how many young people are involved in military-patriotic organisations or projects. Some officially announced figures are probably nominal and do not reflect the actual level of engagement. For example, the reported 40,000 Children's Guard members in the LNR is a rather unlikely figure in terms of active participation in Children's Guard activities.

Despite the fact that both republics follow the same patterns in their military-patriotic infrastructure, some differences can be noticed. The LNR often plays the role of a 'younger sibling': new initiatives, offices or documents usually appear first in the DNR and then in the LNR. The DNR usually manages to host regionwide events and has a broader network of information resources to reach a youth audience. A distinctive feature of the LNR is the creation of the cult of the former Young Guard (the Soviet partisan youth organisation whose existence is being debated by scholars) and the wider exploitation of the Cossack heritage in various military-patriotic activities.

Last but not least, an analysis of the military-patriotic activities and their content in the republics helps us to trace some changes in the Russian geopolitical agenda. Thus, during the first years of the republics' existence, local 'authorities' were mainly searching for

internal identity in order to self-legitimize their creation. This period was characterised by attempts to invent a statehood tradition, find predecessors and create new history, holidays and heroes. An extensive network of military-patriotic activities was called to contribute to these processes and catalyse them. Notably, during this period, republics did not entirely reject the Ukrainian background and tried, at least, to nominally keep some Ukrainian elements (such as the nominal existence of Ukrainian as a second official language). At the same time, the military-patriotic agenda excluded any positive Ukrainian dimensions. Since 2019, both republics have focused more on integration with Russia and less on their presumably 'autonomous' position. This shift in focus was reflected in the new versions of the patriotic education programmes, school educational standards and in the general communication of local officials.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 VK, VKontakte, is a Russian social media network popular in the occupied territories.
- 2 On 2 May 2014, violent clashes occurred in Odesa, Ukraine, between the 'Anti-Maidan' movement and pro-Ukrainian demonstrators, which started at Greek Square in the city centre. As a result of the gunfire started by 'Anti-Maidan' members, two pro-Ukrainian protesters died, and several others were wounded. Tensions escalated further at Kulykove Pole, where 'Anti-Maidan' tent city was located. A tragic fire unfolded at the Trade Unions House, resulting in the death of at least 42 individuals, mostly pro-Russian activists. For more information about the chronology of the events, visit the '2nd of May Group' website: <https://2mayodessa.org/>.
- 3 In January 2015 a mine hit the bus stop and killed eight people; most likely, the shelling was done by a local military group due to the internal fight for power but was presented as an act of 'Ukrainian aggression' by the local officials and widely commemorated since then on the republican level. .

