Controversy in Russia, Child Soldiers

Russia offers a range of military-style training programs for children, starting as young as eight, including summer camps, school courses, youth organizations, and specialized drone training.

Overview of Programs

Youth Military Camps: Children aged 8 to 17 participate in summer camps that simulate battlefield conditions. Activities include marching in camouflage, throwing grenades, firing rifles (real or replicas), crawling through sand and water, and completing route marches under the supervision of combat veterans. Older teens are encouraged to consider military careers and develop loyalty to the state through these programs. BreezyScroll.

School-Based Military Education: From first grade, Russian students attend classes such as “Conversations About Important Things,” which teach patriotism and readiness to defend the nation. Teenagers aged 15–18 can enroll in the Foundations of Security and Defence of the Motherland program, which includes 68 teaching hours covering combined arms combat, small arms familiarization, and physical and mental preparation for military service. Forces News.

Youth Organizations: The Yunarmiya (Young Army) is a government-backed patriotic youth group in which hundreds of thousands of children participate. Members engage in military and technical training, including drone operation, paratrooper exercises, and war correspondence. The organization also hosts forums, competitions, and specialized programs for children aged 12–16, often linked to career preparation in the armed forces. Posle Media.

Modernized Military Games: Zarnitsa 2.0, a digitalized version of a Soviet-era military game, is open to children from the age of eight. Teams of ten compete in simulated military scenarios, including drone piloting and tactical exercises, blending gaming with military skills. Posle Media.

Drone and Technical Training: Russia is actively training a “drone generation” of children aged 8–15. Schools, technical institutes, and youth organizations teach drone assembly, piloting, and military applications. By 2030, the government aims to train one million drone specialists, integrating these skills into school curricula and extracurricular programs. United24 Media.

Specialized Camps and Artek/Orlyonok Shifts: Famous Soviet-era camps like Artek and Orlyonok host Yunarmiya shifts, where children aged 12–16 receive mandatory basic military training. Some sessions are explicitly designed to prepare high school students for military careers, combining patriotic education with physical and technical development. Posle Media.

Objectives and Context

These programs are part of a broader Kremlin-backed effort to militarize youth, instill patriotism, and prepare children for future military service. Activities are framed as discipline-building and civic duty, but they also expose children to combat skills, weapons handling, and war narratives from an early