

# Who are the Russian oligarchs' 'Kremlin kids'? Children of elite face sanctions over Ukraine.

*Oligarchs in Vladimir Putin's inner circle condemn Western countries while sending their children to live in those nations.*

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**Chelsey Cox**

USA TODAY

- The 'Kremlin Kids' are the children of Russia's elite.
- The parents in Putin's inner circle send their children to live and study in Western countries.
- The families have been sanctioned by various countries over the Russia-Ukraine War.

Nations around the world have levied sanctions against Russian President Vladimir Putin and the oligarchs in his close circle as the war between Russia and Ukraine rages on.

The sanctions are designed to punish the kleptocracy behind the two-month war by cutting off access to wealth, property and luxury hiding places. But the families of Putin's closest allies have also felt the heat as the lifestyles of the "Kremlin kids," or the children of the elites, are revealed to the public. The phrase was used by analysts Agnieszka Legucka and Bartosz Bielszczuk of the Polish Institute of International Affairs to describe the second generation of Kremlin-connected oligarchs.

In February, the U.S. Treasury Department announced sanctions against Putin, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and other Russian security council members for the war in Ukraine. Switzerland and the United Kingdom also announced sanctions against the Russian oligarchs this month.

In all, 21 members of the Russian Security Council and other Putin associates have been sanctioned, along with the 140 oligarchs and Kremlin officials.

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The oligarchs' offspring are often educated and live in Western countries without losing any of the perks lavished on their influential parents, despite Russia's condemnation of Western values. The dichotomy is "one issue that clearly illustrates the hypocrisy of Russian political elites," according to Dinissa Duvanova, a professor of international relations at Lehigh University who specializes in Russia.

"The anti-Western propaganda is a convenient tool for brain-washing used by ideological state apparatus to justify Russia's rejection of democracy, foreign aggression, and denial of human rights and other values associated with Western liberal democracies," said Duvanova,

who added that the oligarchs wish to continue plundering Russia so their families can live safe, privileged lives outside of the country.

"Russians are asked to support Putin's corrupt regime because, according to the propaganda, the West undermines Russia culturally, economically, and militarily," Duvanova said.

But Usha Haley, Barton distinguished chair in international business at Wichita State University in Kansas, said Russian autocrats are practicing risk aversion by sending their kids out of Russia.

"Sending their kids to Western countries demonstrates the oligarchs' practical side," Haley said. An expert on emerging and transitional markets, Haley emphasized that Putin's allies cannot speak freely.

"It's not just that the kids can escape to some extent from Putin's grip, but they could also become conduits for investment and information. For example, they could pass on information regarding ways to hide money abroad and opportunities to make further investments in case the oligarch and his family ever need to leave Russia in a hurry," Haley said.

Despite the strategy, some of the "kids" – now adults – have recently been sanctioned.

Who are the "Kremlin kids" that have been sanctioned? Here's what we know about a few of them:

**Elizaveta Peskova**

Peskova is the daughter of Dmitry Sergeevich Peskov, Putin's deputy chief of staff and chief spokesman, from his second marriage. The 24-year-old also goes by "Lisa" on social media, where she has publicly come out against the war on her well-curated Instagram page. Peskova has tens of thousands followers on social media.

Peskova began attending the Ecole des Roches outside of Paris in 2010, according to the Washington Post, and interned at luxury fashion brand Louis Vuitton and for Aymeric Chauprade, a far-right lawmaker in European Parliament, in 2019. She earned a marketing degree from a French business school.

The Anti-Corruption Foundation, founded by Putin foe Alexei Navalny in 2011, found that Peskova and her mother bought an apartment in one of Paris' most expensive neighborhoods worth nearly \$2 million in 2016, according to reporting by CNN.

Peskova was briefly engaged to French businessman Louis Waldberg.

## **Nikolay Choles**

The life of Peskov's oldest son, Nikolay Peskov, or Nikolay Choles, was documented on Navalny's blog in 2017. Choles moved to live in the U.K. with his mother, who was also Peskov's first wife, in the early '90s, but returned to Russia about a decade ago to serve in the army, according to the Treasury Department. He uses the surname of his English stepfather.

In his blog entry, Navalny wrote that Choles "is an example of how in Russia, where 20 million people live below the poverty line, where

70% of the inhabitants dream of a salary of 45,000 rubles, you can live perfectly to your heart's content. At the highest level. And while doing NOTHING. And if you do, then sitting on the neck of the taxpayer."

The son of Peskov is reportedly unemployed, but travels in private jets, according to CNN. He has racked up at least 116 traffic violations, according to Navalny's blog.

Navalny wrote that Choles also failed to pay child support for his daughter, but owned a 25-30 million ruble apartment in the center of Moscow in 2017.

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## **Polina Kovaleva**

Kovaleva is Lavrov's "stepdaughter." Her parents never married. At age 21, Kovaleva bought a \$5.8 million apartment in the Kensington neighborhood in London, according to Navalny's blog.

Kovaleva enrolled in Imperial College in London, according to CNN.

## **Ekaterina Vinokurova**

Lavrov's 39-year-old daughter Ekaterina Vinokurova lived in New York City for 17 years and attended Columbia University, according to

CNN. Vinokurova holds a graduate degree from the London School of Economics.

## **Ksenia Frank and Natalya Browning**

Frank and Browning are the daughters of Gennady Timchenko, a close ally of Putin and owner of Transoil, the largest private railway operator in the transportation of oil and petroleum products in Russia.

Frank, 37, Timchenko's youngest daughter, is a citizen of Finland and lives in Switzerland with husband Gleb Frank, according to Bloomberg.

Frank graduated from the University of Edinburgh, where she studied French and philosophy and sat on the board of Transoil. She received an MBA at the European Institute of Business Management INSEAD, the alma mater of her husband, Bloomberg reported.

Frank now heads the supervisory board named after her father and his wife, Elena.

Browning, 43, is the eldest of Timchenko's three children (a son, Ivan, escaped sanctions, according to Insider.) She is a graduate of Oxford University in England, where she reportedly studied English literature, according to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

Browning uses her former married surname. She wed an Oxford student named Peter Browning in 2002, according to RFE/RL.

Browning reportedly founded a film production company, Step Productions LLC, in 2010. It was transferred to another person in 2020, according to RFE/RL.

## **Putin's daughters**

Katerina Vladimirovna Tikhonova and Maria Vladimirovna Vorontsova are the adult daughters of Putin. Tikhonova, 35, is a tech executive whose work supports the government of the Russian Federation and the defense industry, according to the Treasury Department.

Vorontsova, 36, is a medical professional who leads state-funded programs personally overseen by Putin. The programs have received billions of dollars from the Kremlin toward genetics research, according to the Treasury Department. She is listed as a pediatric endocrinologist at the Endocrinology Research Center Moscow.

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Vorontsova reportedly lived in a \$3.3 million apartment in the Netherlands with her husband, Dutch businessman Jorrit Joost Faassen. The BBC identified her as co-owner of a company planning to build a large medical center.

An eight-bedroom villa in Biarritz, France, said to have been purchased by Tikhonova's former husband, Kirill Shamalov, has been raided by activists and offered as a safe house to Ukrainian refugees, CNN reported. A 2015 Reuters investigation found

Tikhonova and Shamalov's corporate holdings were worth about \$2 billion.

In 2015, the BBC reported that Putin said, "My daughters live in Russia and studied only in Russia, I am proud of them ... They speak three foreign languages fluently. I never discuss my family with anyone."

Putin is rumored to have more children out of wedlock stashed in Western countries, according to CNN.

## **Who has been sanctioned?**

Tikhonova and Vorontsova have been sanctioned by the U.S. and United Kingdom, along with Putin's ex-wife, Lyudmila Shkrebneva Putina.

"We believe that many of Putin's assets are hidden with family members and that's why we're targeting them," a senior Biden administration official said in a call with reporters on April 7.

The family is also subject to travel bans and asset freezes under U.K. sanctions.

Kovaleva and Vinokurova were also sanctioned by the U.K. and Peskova and Choles were sanctioned by the U.S. in March along with their father and Peskov's wife, Tatiana Aleksandrovna Navka.

The State Department announced sanctions against Browning and Frank on March 24.



Howard Stoffer, professor of national security at the University of New Haven in Connecticut, said Russian oligarchs and their families have benefited from wealth accumulated on the backs of Russian taxpayers for at least 23 years.

"One-hundred-seventeen to 120 oligarchs, collectively, have taken about \$1 trillion out of the wealth of Russia," Stoffer said. "They should be hunted down vigorously by the Department of Treasury's task force, the (U.K.government) and other countries that are doing the same."

Stoffer said he doesn't believe the sanctions will change policy in Russia, but some of the money Putin has hidden away with the oligarchs might eventually be recovered.

"There have been reports that some of the oligarchs, through their lawyers, are saying, 'If I can keep just one quarter of my assets, then I'll tell you where I put Putin's money.' So, I don't know if that's a deal our government or other governments will follow. But that might be worthwhile considering the extraordinary criminality, cruelty and immorality of Putin and those who are following," Stoffer said.

*Reach out to Chelsey Cox on Twitter at @therealco.*

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